



PERSPECTIVES

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The China-Led WHO Report on Coronavirus Is Deeply Suspect

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The WHO's China-led international investigation into the origins of COVID-19 did not trace either its genomic derivation or the initial contraction of the virus that generated the pandemic. This could be because it did not look for an unnatural scenario or because a natural scenario did not in fact occur. China appears to have essentially dictated the proceedings of the investigation, the findings of which are deeply suspect.

From January 14 through February 10, 2021, a joint international investigative team made up of 17 Chinese experts, 10 international experts from other countries, and other individuals and support staff conducted an investigation into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic. The investigation was headed jointly by Dr. Peter Ben Embarek of WHO, a specialist in food safety and zoonotic diseases (a fitting choice in the eyes of the Chinese, who contend that the virus entered China via shipments of frozen meat), and Prof. Liang Wannian, a senior official at the National Health Commission of China, which oversaw China's virus response (this commission is a cabinet-level executive department of China's State Council).

A sharp conflict of interest marks another senior Chinese participant, Dr. Feng Zijian, who was identified as one of four people copied on an internal memo sent out in February 2020 by China's Center for Disease Control and Prevention. The memo ordered China's scientists not to share any data, documents, or specimens related to the pandemic and to "prioritize the interests of the country." The memo, labeled "not to be made public," warned that anyone violating this request would be "dealt with severely in accordance with discipline, laws, and regulations."

A salient anomaly about the makeup of the team is that China was granted veto power over all scientists selected to participate. Thus, the American selected for the team was Dr. Peter Daszak, who for many years collaborated closely with the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) in the problematic context of gain of function research and practices of coronaviruses.

The report issued by the China-led WHO team after the investigation seems at first glance to be informative and to contribute new insights. Yet it is grossly inadequate in its searching into the two core aspects of the inquiry: the genomic origin and direct source of the virus that infected Patient Zero. Patient Zero is mentioned in the report as a sporadic case appearing on December 8, 2019. This person was not, in all likelihood, Patient Zero but a much later patient.

The report did not find any non-laboratory animal infected in China with a virus that could be regarded as the direct source of the initial contagion leading to the pandemic. It nevertheless dismissed any unnatural scenario as an alternative, particularly the lab-leak scenario. With respect to the paramount distinction between natural contagion and accidental lab leakage, the report merely cites what the head of the WIV P4 facility said about the ostensible impossibility of a lab-leak scenario. (Did anyone expect that he of all people would do anything other than flatly dismiss such a scenario?)

More specifically, the report categorized several cardinal issues as “conspiracy theories,” including the following events and scenarios:

- a SARS-like illness among WIV workers in fall 2019, prior to the declared initial outbreak in Wuhan;
- consequent COVID-19 cases in the city of Wuhan before December 2019;
- the disappearance of a WIV worker claimed to be Patient Zero;
- the disappearance of vital databases from the WIV inventory of bat viruses;
- the presence in the WIV of a bat coronavirus that had been isolated in 2012 (and later altered) from diseased miners; and
- an accidental leakage of a coronavirus held in the WIV that sparked the initial COVID-19 outbreak.

Poor explanations were provided by China for these key issues, all of which remain entirely unsettled.

The investigative team was given a tour of the P4 (highest biosafety level) facility of the WIV. The P4 laboratories have 3,000 square meters of space.

Strikingly, the P4 labs are located in the same building as, and are physically close to, two co-functional P3 labs as well as 20 P2 labs (in other words, labs with significantly lower biosafety levels).

It was inevitable that formal responses contradicting the WHO's report and underlying investigation would materialize following the report's publication. Some might claim these responses are antagonistic to China and the WHO because they contain serious accusations, either explicitly or implicitly. But the fact that they contain accusations does not mean they are unsound. On the contrary: these responses were constructed with great care and with but one purpose, to uncover the real genomic origin and direct source of the virus contracted by Patient Zero.

The following are highlights taken from several responses to the report.

Statement by US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan (February 13, 2021):

We have deep concerns about the way in which the early findings of the COVID-19 investigation were communicated, and questions about the process used to reach them. It is imperative that this report (being prepared by the investigative team) be independent, with expert findings free from intervention or alteration by the Chinese government. To better understand this pandemic and prepare for the next one, China must make available its data from the earliest days of the outbreak.

Joint Statement on the WHO-Convened COVID-19 Origins Study (issued by the Governments of Australia, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Israel, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Slovenia, the UK, and the US, March 30, 2021):

Together, we support a transparent and independent analysis and evaluation, free from interference and undue influence, of the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, we join in expressing shared concerns regarding the recent WHO-convened study (the discussed investigation) in China, while at the same time reinforcing the importance of working together toward the development and use of a swift, effective, transparent, science-based, and independent process for international evaluations of such outbreaks of unknown origin in the future...

Going forward, there must now be a renewed commitment by WHO and all Member States to access, transparency, and timeliness... It is critical for independent experts to have full access to all pertinent human, animal, and environmental data, research, and personnel

involved in the early stages of the outbreak relevant to determining how this pandemic emerged. With all data in hand, the international community may independently assess COVID-19 origins...

US Congressional Committee on Energy and Commerce letter to the Director of the US National Institutes of Health (March 18, 2021):

Recently, the WHO attempted to investigate the origin of COVID-19. The WHO said that this investigative mission would be guided by the science, be “open-minded,” and “not exclude any hypothesis.” Unfortunately, China did not provide complete access or independence for the critical WHO mission...

The NIH, as a premier scientific institution, must lead in order to foster a transparent, independent, and science-based investigation into the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic. Such an effort must meet the WHO’s stated goals of an open-minded investigation that does not exclude any plausible hypothesis. In addition, the NIH is well-positioned to gather and provide information through oversight of its grants and other federal awards. Thus, the NIH is in a unique position to investigate the possibility that the pandemic stemmed from a laboratory accident or leak, especially regarding the WIV.

Open Letter: Call for a Full and Unrestricted International Forensic Investigation into the Origins of COVID-19 (issued by 26 scientists from various countries, March 4, 2021)

Although the joint team investigation was a significant opportunity for the international community to gain some limited and highly curated information, it has unfortunately proven opaque and restrictive, greatly compromising the scientific validity of the investigation. Because we believe the joint team process and efforts to date do not constitute a thorough, credible, and transparent investigation, we call on the international community to put in place a structure and process that does.

Why China and the WHO Will Never Find a Zoonotic Origin For the COVID-19 Pandemic Virus (A scientific paper by Dr. Jonathan Latham and Dr. Allison Wilson, February 16, 2021):

...Our prediction, however, simply based on assessing the probabilities, is that no convincing natural zoonotic origin for the pandemic will ever be found by China, or the WHO, or anyone else—for the simple reason that one does not exist. There are four distinct lab origin theories and these, unsurprisingly, are getting increasing attention.

Two are published in the scientific literature (Sirotkin and Sirotkin, 2020; Segreto and Deigin, 2020). A third proposes that SARS CoV-2 was [an outcome of] a failed attempt to develop a vaccine... The fourth is our own: Mojiang Miners Passage theory [passaging of a SARS-like virus that infected miners in China in 2012].

Bayesian Analysis of SARS-CoV-2 Origin (a 140-page study conducted by Dr. Steven C. Quay, March 29, 2021):

This [study] uses Bayesian inference, a common statistical tool in which Bayes' theorem, a well known statistical equation, is used to update the likelihood for a particular hypothesis as more evidence or information becomes available. It is widely used in the sciences and medicine and has begun to be used in the law.

The starting probability for [the] origin of SARS-CoV-2 was set with the zoonotic or natural hypothesis at 98.8% likelihood, with the laboratory origin hypothesis set at 1.2%. The initial state was biased as much as possible towards a zoonotic origin, with the starting point selected as the upper bounds of the 95% confidence interval for the mean and standard deviation of three independent estimates... The outcome of this [study] is the conclusion that the probability of a laboratory origin for CoV-2 is 99.8%, with a corresponding probability of a [natural] zoonotic origin of 0.2%.

It is notable that Dr. Dominic Dwyer, the Australian member of the WHO-China investigation team, said subsequent to the investigation: "It was actually very complicated and very tense. There is certainly Chinese political pressure."

And finally, WHO Director General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said, after the investigation report was issued, "Although the team has concluded that a laboratory leak is the least likely hypothesis, this requires further investigation, potentially with additional missions involving specialist experts, which I am ready to deploy. Let me say clearly that as far as WHO is concerned, all hypotheses remain on the table..."

It appears very clear that during the investigation, China was able to push the team to focus on the response to the crisis rather than its origins. It was also able to place excessive limits requiring international investigators to solely review the work of their Chinese counterparts and not undertake an impartial investigation. Thus, China essentially orchestrated a complete whitewash by the WHO of an investigation that looked under every rock except the most likely one.

If there was nothing to hide, why should limitations of any kind have been imposed in the approach to, during, or after the investigation? This question is especially relevant considering that critical records, data, and specimens were removed by the Chinese authorities, apparently to foil the exposure of the way the initial outbreak occurred.

On April 2, 1979, spores of anthrax were accidentally released from a Soviet military facility near the city of Sverdlovsk (now Yekaterinburg) in Russia. The strain of anthrax held at the military compound was the most powerful in the Soviet arsenal (Anthrax 836). The ensuing outbreak of the disease resulted in approximately 100 deaths in the area, though the exact number of victims remains unknown.

The cause of the outbreak was denied for years by the Soviet authorities, which blamed it on tainted meat. All the victims' medical records were removed so as to hide serious violations by Russia of the Biological Weapons Convention, which had already come into effect. Later on, years after intelligence work had uncovered the truth, President Boris Yeltsin admitted that "our military development was the cause" of the anthrax outbreak. The accident is sometimes referred to as a Biological Chernobyl.

Unlike the anthrax germ, the SARS-CoV-2 virus is contagious, which is why it brought about a global pandemic. Still, the two cases share some meaningful common denominators. Although it has not yet been publicly certified that SARS-CoV-2 was present in the WIV prior to the initial coronavirus outbreak, this fact will be established sooner or later.

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