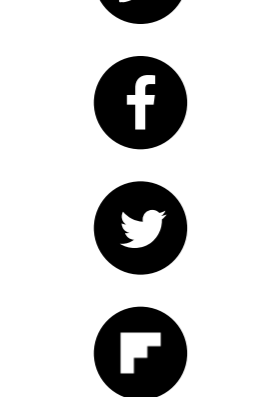




Security personnel stand guard outside the Wuhan Institute of Virology in Wuhan as members of the World Health Organization (WHO) team investigating the origins of the COVID-19 coronavirus make a visit to the institute in Wuhan in China's central Hubei province on February 3, 2021. (Photo by Hector Retamal/AFP via Getty Images)

What Might the US Owe the World for Covid-19?

A US-funded laboratory origin of Covid-19 would certainly constitute the most significant case of governmental gross negligence in history. The people of the world deserve transparency and factual answers on vital questions.



By JEFFREY D. SACHS
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Common Dreams



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The US government (USG) funded and supported a program of dangerous laboratory research that may have resulted in the creation and accidental laboratory release of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that caused the Covid-19 pandemic. Following the outbreak, the USG lied in order to cover up its possible role. The US Government should correct the record, find the facts, and make amends with the rest of the world.

A group of intrepid truth-seekers—journalists, scientists, whistleblowers—have uncovered a vast amount of information pointing to the laboratory origin of SARS-CoV-2. Most important has been the work of the *The Intercept* and *US Right to Know (USRTK)*, especially investigative reporter [Emily Kopp](#) at USRTK.

Based on this investigative work, the Republican-led House Committee on Oversight and Accountability is now carrying out an important investigation in a [Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic](#). In the Senate, the leading voice for transparency, honesty, and reason in investigating the origin of SARS-CoV-2 has been Republican Senator Rand Paul.

The evidence of a possible laboratory creation revolves around a multi-year US-led research program that involved US and Chinese scientists. The research was designed by US scientists, funded mainly by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Department of Defense, and administered by a US organization, the EcoHealth Alliance (EHA), with much of the work taking place at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV).

The US owes the full truth, and perhaps ample financial compensation, to the rest of the world, depending on what the facts ultimately reveal.

Here are facts that we know as of today.

First, the NIH became the home for [biodefense research starting in 2001](#). In other words, the NIH became a research arm of the military and intelligence communities. Biodefense funding from the Defense Department budget went to Dr. Anthony Fauci's division, the [National Institute for Allergies and Infectious Diseases](#) (NIAID).

Second, NIAID and DARPA (in the Defense Department) supported extensive research on potential pathogens for biowarfare and biodefense, and for the design of vaccines to protect against biowarfare or accidental laboratory releases of natural or manipulated pathogens. Some of the work was carried out at the [Rocky Mountain Laboratories of the NIH](#), which manipulated and tested viruses using its in-house bat colony.

Third, NIAID became a large-scale financial supporter of Gain of Function (GoF) research, meaning laboratory experiments designed to genetically alter pathogens to make them even more pathogenic, such as viruses that are easier to transmit and/or more likely to kill infected individuals. This kind of research is inherently dangerous, both because it aims to create more dangerous pathogens and because those new pathogens can escape from the laboratory, either accidentally or deliberately (e.g., as an act of biowarfare or terrorism).

Fourth, many leading US scientists opposed GoF research. One of the leading opponents inside the government was Dr. Robert Redfield, an Army virologist who would later be the Director of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) at the start of the pandemic. Redfield suspected from the start that the pandemic resulted from NIH-supported research, [but says that he was sidelined by Fauci](#).

Fifth, because of the very high risks associated with GoF research, the US Government added additional biosafety regulations in 2017. GoF research would have to be carried out in highly secure laboratories, meaning at Biosafety Level 3 (BSL-3) or Biosafety Level 4 (BSL-4). Work in a BSL-3 or 4 facility is more expensive and time-consuming than work in a BSL-2 facility because of the added controls against an escape of the pathogen from the facility.

Sixth, one NIH-backed research group, EcoHealth Alliance (EHA), proposed to move some of its GoF research to the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV). In 2017, EHA submitted a proposal to the US Government's Defense Advanced Research Projects (DARPA) for GoF work at WIV. The proposal, named DEFUSE, was a veritable "cookbook" for making viruses [like SARS-CoV-2](#) in the laboratory. The DEFUSE plan was to investigate more than 180 previously unreported strains of Betacoronavirus that had been collected by WIV, and to use GoF techniques to make these viruses more dangerous. Specifically, the project proposed to add protease sites like the furin cleavage site (FCS) to natural viruses in order to enhance the infectivity and transmissibility of the virus.

Seventh, in the draft proposal, the EHA director [boasted](#) that "the BSL2 nature of work on SARSr-CoVs makes our system highly cost effective relative to other bat-virus systems," prompting the lead scientist on the EHA proposal to comment that US scientists would "[freak out](#)" if they learned of US government support for GoF research at WIV in a BSL2 facility.

Eighth, the Defense Department rejected the DEFUSE proposal in 2018, yet NIAID funding for EHA covered the key scientists of the DEFUSE project. EHA therefore had ongoing NIH funding to carry out the DEFUSE research program.

Ninth, when the outbreak was first noted in Wuhan in late 2019 and January 2020, key US virologists associated with NIH believed that the SARS-CoV-2 had most likely emerged from GoF research, and said so on a [phone call with Fauci](#) on February 1, 2020. The most striking clue for these scientists was the presence of the FCS in SARS-CoV-2, with the FCS appearing at exactly the location in the virus (the S1/S2 junction) that had been proposed in the DEFUSE program.

Tenth, the top NIH officials, including Director Francis Collins and NIAID Director Fauci, tried to hide the NIH-supported GoF research, and [promoted the publication of a scientific paper](#) ("[The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2](#)") in March 2020 declaring a natural origin of the virus. The paper completely ignored the DEFUSE proposal.

Eleventh, some US officials began to point their fingers at WIV as the source of the laboratory leak while hiding the NIH-funding and EHA-led research program that may have led to the virus.

Twelfth, the above facts have come to light only as a result of intrepid investigative reporting, whistleblowers, and leaks from inside the US Government, including the leak of the DEFUSE proposal. The Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services determined in 2023 that [NIH did not adequately oversee the EHA grants](#).

Thirteenth, investigators have also realized in retrospect that researchers at Rocky Mountain Labs, together with key scientists associated with EHA, were [infecting the RML Egyptian fruit bats with SARS-like viruses](#) in experiments closely linked to those proposed in DEFUSE.

Fourteenth, [the FBI](#) and [Department of Energy](#) have reported their assessments that the laboratory escape of SARS-CoV-2 is the most likely explanation of the virus.

Fifteenth, [a whistleblower from inside the CIA](#) has recently charged that the CIA team investigating the outbreak concluded that SARS-CoV-2 most likely emerged from the laboratory, but that senior CIA officials bribed the team to report a natural origin of the virus.

The sum of the evidence – and the absence of reliable evidence pointing to a natural origin (see [here](#) and [here](#)) – adds up to the possibility that the US funded and implemented a dangerous GoF research program that led to the creation of SARS-CoV-2 and then to a worldwide pandemic. A [powerful recent assessment](#) by mathematical biologist Alex Washburne reaches the conclusion "beyond reasonable doubt that SARS-CoV-2 emerged from a lab..." He also notes that the collaborators "proceeded to mount what can legitimately be called a disinformation campaign" to hide the laboratory origin.

A US-funded laboratory origin of Covid-19 would certainly constitute the most significant case of governmental gross negligence in world history. Moreover, there is a high likelihood that the US Government continues to this day to fund dangerous GoF work as part of its biodefense program. The US owes the full truth, and perhaps ample financial compensation, to the rest of the world, depending on what the facts ultimately reveal.

We need three urgent actions. The first is an independent scientific investigation in which all laboratories involved in the EHA research program in the US and China fully open their books and records to the independent investigators. The second is a worldwide halt on GoF research until an independent global scientific body sets grounds rules for biosafety. The third is for the UN General Assembly to establish rigorous legal and financial accountability for governments that violate international safety norms through dangerous research activities that threaten the health and security of the rest of the world.

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