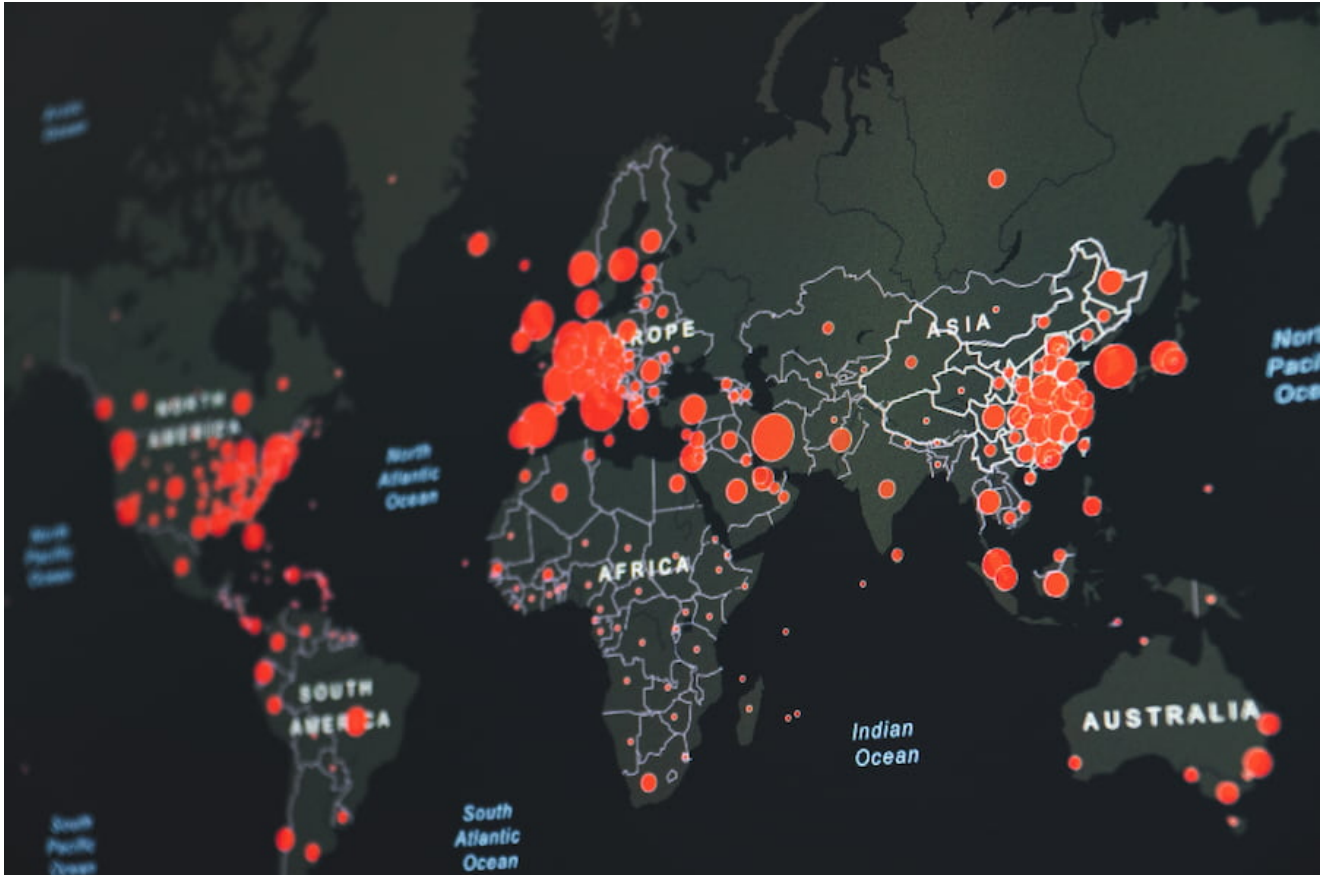


# How Fauci, scientists with ties to Wuhan lab persuaded the intelligence community COVID had a natural origin

[usrtk.org/covid-19-origins/how-fauci-scientists-with-wuhan-ties-persuaded-covid-natural-origin](https://www.usrtk.org/covid-19-origins/how-fauci-scientists-with-wuhan-ties-persuaded-covid-natural-origin)

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*Emails offer a glimpse into the outsized influence of a small group of scientists. (Photo credit: Unsplash)*

Scientists with connections to the Wuhan Institute of Virology — including Anthony Fauci — steered the U.S. national security state away from hypotheses about the origins of COVID-19 that could implicate their research, emails obtained through the Freedom of Information Act show.

Their sphere of influence spanned the intelligence community and the White House.

On February 3, 2020, scientists tied to high risk coronavirus research in Wuhan joined a call with national security officials about how to uncover how an exceptionally infectious virus had emerged from that city.

The call included officials with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the White House's Office of Science and Technology Policy, an email obtained by [U.S. Right to Know](#) shows.

The intelligence community's premature assessment that COVID-19 was a natural virus has in turn been wielded by Fauci and by other virologists to minimize the lab leak theory.

The call shows the apparent power of a small clique of scientists to cloud the public's understanding of the pandemic.

The Wuhan Institute of Virology's two closest collaborators, EcoHealth Alliance President Peter Daszak and University of North Carolina virologist Ralph Baric, were on the call.

Daszak runs the intermediary organization that shepherded funds from the National Institutes of Health to the Wuhan lab complex.

Baric is a coronavirologist who innovated engineering techniques and applied them to viruses prospected in the wild by the Wuhan lab. Baric — despite developing undetectable genetic engineering methods nicknamed “no see ‘um” after the barely perceptible flies found in the Southeast — apparently helped persuade the intelligence community that the novel virus betrayed no signs of engineering.

Facilitated by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, the purpose of the Feb. 3 call was to respond to “misinformation.”

“Thank you for participating in today's meeting of experts to discuss and identify what data, information and samples are needed to understand the evolutionary origins of 2019-nCoV and more effectively respond to the outbreak and resulting misinformation,” wrote Andrew Pope, director of the board on health sciences policy for the National Academies.

Fauci briefed the group on “NIAID's perspective,” the agenda shows. Fauci's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, or NIAID, had underwritten Daszak and Baric's work.

The agenda shows that the Feb. 3 call was prompted in part by a flawed and ultimately withdrawn preprint alleging similarities between the genome of SARS-CoV-2 and HIV, which had set off alarm bells in the infectious diseases community.

It's also clear that rumors about the Wuhan Institute of Virology had already begun swirling on Chinese social media.

The discussion was co-led by Fauci, director of the White House's Office of Science and Technology Policy Kelvin Droegemeier, and Chris Hassell, who in addition to serving as senior science advisor to the Department of Health and Human Services also serves as the chair of the secret committee that oversees gain-of-function research with pandemic potential.

Contemporaneous emails show that Fauci was discussing the apparent connections between NIAID and gain-of-function research in Wuhan with his boss, NIH Director Francis Collins. Fauci was routinely meeting with top national security officials at that time, including in the White House Situation Room, his schedule shows.

Two days prior, Fauci and Collins had discussed the matter with a small group of virologists in a confidential call. Those virologists went on to write a highly influential letter which prompted news organizations around the world to prematurely dismiss the lab leak hypothesis as a conspiracy theory.

One of those virologists, Kristian Andersen with Scripps Research Institute, also participated in the Feb. 3 call.

Emails previously reported by U.S. Right to Know show that Andersen dismissed the idea of an engineered virus to the National Academies group as “crackpot.” Yet days later he insisted in a separate email that the scientific evidence was not conclusive enough to have high confidence in either the natural or lab hypotheses.

Congress is investigating the matter.

Despite the complexity of the question at hand, the National Academies group had wrapped up its work within a few days.

The letter that resulted from the Feb. 3 call from the National Academies to the White House’s Office of Science and Technology Policy assumed a natural origin.

The possibility of the virus emanating from research — which scientific organizations and U.S. intelligence elements now believe to be possible — was subsequently dismissed, according to Daszak.

Daszak seemed to think that this National Academies letter – together with the letter coauthored by Andersen – were enough to dissuade the White House from exploring a possible lab origin.

“I don’t think this [National Academies] committee will be getting into the lab release or bioengineering hypothesis again any time soon — White House seems to be satisfied with the earlier meeting, paper in *Nature* and general comments within [the] scientific community,” Daszak told Baric.

### **State Department intelligence unit**

A few weeks later, Baric may have briefed the State Department’s analysts, another email shows.

Baric’s gain-of-function research was at the center of speculation about a possible lab origin.

Baric's research had privately alarmed Fauci and Andersen. Fauci met with Baric nine days after the Feb. 3 call, Fauci's schedule shows. They discussed "chimeras," or engineered viruses, according to virologists close to Baric.

Yet emails obtained from the State Department appear to show that Baric was asked to brief the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research about the pandemic's possible origins.

The briefing coincided with the premature letter "debunking" the idea that SARS-CoV-2 was engineered coauthored by Andersen, which published on March 17.

Baric apparently received several emails inviting him to participate in an "analytic exchange" between March 23 and March 25.

The Bureau of Intelligence and Research briefing occurred on March 26.

"U.S. scientists say available genomic evidence shows that the SARS-CoV-2 virus probably emerged naturally in an animal before crossing to humans and was not engineered in a lab," the write-up of the briefing read.

Baric's apparent inclusion on the call is remarkable because he innovated viral engineering techniques that do not reveal any scars or signs of engineering.

David Feith, former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, said in sworn testimony to Congress last month that concerns about conflicts of interest skewing the briefing were valid, but that he was precluded from naming which virologists participated.

Feith said that the experts on the call stressed the "good quality" and "robust biosafety and biosecurity programs" of China's virology labs.

Baric would later express concerns about coronavirus gain-of-function research occurring in BSL-2 conditions at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, lower than the BSL-4 conditions required for the most dangerous pathogens.

Feith described the State Department call as "diversionary" in his Congressional testimony.

"Officials and experts who could have helped equip their colleagues (and the public) with the appropriate background to understand a novel and grave situation and weigh probabilities accordingly instead overwhelmingly deflected and denied," Feith said.

## **Red Dawn**

Baric prematurely assured leading infectious diseases experts that COVID could not have been engineered through more informal channels as well.

The “Red Dawn” email chain in early 2020 consisted of speculation about the unfolding pandemic and included active and former officials from across several departments and agencies, including HHS, CDC, the Department of Homeland Security, the Veterans Affairs Department and the Pentagon.

Someone on the email chain asked whether restriction sites along the viral genome suggested the pathogen was artificial.

“There is absolutely no evidence that this virus is bioengineered,” Baric responded.

## **IC assessment**

In late April 2020, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence released an unusual statement that the intelligence community concurred with the “wide scientific consensus” that the virus was not engineered, a statement that appeared to echo the conclusions of the Feb. 3 and March 26 briefings.

“A majority of the views now is that it was natural, it was organic,” said Defense Secretary Mark Esper.

In fact, a scientific consensus on this matter did not exist then and does not exist now.

Even so, the idea that SARS-CoV-2 could not be engineered also found its way into the 90-day review that the intelligence community concluded in August 2021.

“Most agencies also assess with low confidence that SARS-CoV-2 probably was not genetically engineered; however, two agencies believe there was not sufficient evidence to make an assessment either way,” the declassified assessment reads.

U.S. Right to Know obtained documents reported in this article through Freedom of Information Act requests to the Department of Health and Human Services and the State Department. All of the documents obtained in the course of our investigation into the origins of Covid-19 can be reviewed here.

*With reporting by Hana Mensendiek*