



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on January 8, 2024

## FOIA Docs: NIH Held Meetings With Wuhan Lab Scientists to Discuss Coronavirus Experiments

New revelations have intensified the debate surrounding the origins of Covid-19 and the role of the United States government in it. Documents obtained by Freedom of Information campaigners suggest that Shi Zhengli, the senior scientist at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) known as “Batwoman,” held a secretive meeting with officials at the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) to seek support for her work on emerging bat viruses. The meeting took place in June 2017, shortly before NIH lifted its moratorium on gain-of-function research in December 2017.



According to the document obtained by [U.S. Right to Know](#), a nonprofit public health research group, the meeting was arranged by Peter Daszak, president of EcoHealth Alliance, an American-based nonprofit that partnered with the WIV and subcontracting funding from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) to the lab. The report says,

NIAID/flickr

Daszak arranged the meetings at NIH with the program officer overseeing his research there, Erik Stemmy, who managed coronavirus research at NIAID’s Division of Microbiology and Infectious Diseases.

At that meeting, Zhengli and Daszak performed “a double act,” as put by the head of EcoHealth, and made a presentation titled “SARS, MERS and the risk of novel viral emergence from bats.”

After the event, Daszak thanked Stemmy via email, saying that it was “nice to have a chance to introduce our collaborators to you personally.”

Apparently, the co-presenters made a compelling case. According to an exclusive report by the [Daily Mail](#) published on Sunday, the viral research at the WIV on bat coronaviruses “was supported, and often funded, by America.”

In addition to that, the report states, “US researchers [at EcoHealth] seeking funding for work to engineer ‘spike proteins’ — making it easier for the bat viruses to infect human cells — misled the authorities about the risks of the experiments in order to maximize the chance of receiving grants.”

Further adding to the controversy, the documents point out, was a critical order from Chinese intelligence on January 3, 2020, instructing WIV staff to share or destroy all their samples “on the spot.”



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Last but not least, it is highly likely that both the United States and Chinese military and intelligence circles were involved in the viral research in Wuhan. U.S. Right to Know reports:

Highly redacted State Department cables obtained by U.S. Right to Know last year [show](#) that the U.S. possesses “cyber evidence” of military “shadow labs” at the Wuhan Institute of Virology....

A 2021 State Department [fact sheet](#) stated that “despite the WIV presenting itself as a civilian institution,” it has conducted classified research on behalf of the Chinese military “since at least 2017.”

PLA [People’s Liberation Army] researchers conducted virological research at the Wuhan lab, and the lab’s civilian scientists have worked alongside scientists associated with the PLA, according to a declassified assessment released by the [Office of the Director of National Intelligence](#) last year.

The new revelations come as Dr. Anthony Fauci, the now-retired director of the NIAID, is set for a [two-day written testimony](#) to Congress on his knowledge of the pandemic origins, his involvement in the apparent cover-up of the lab leak theory, and the government pandemic response. Dr. Fauci has been repeatedly downplaying the significance of NIH funding to WIV, including in a [2022 deposition](#) and [Senate testimony in 2021](#). During numerous media appearances (such as [this](#)), Fauci defended the outsourcing the of the “necessary” but potentially dangerous research to China.

[Previous reports](#) indicate that before securing the NIH funding, EcoHealth Alliance approached the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), the technological branch of the Department of Defense, to finance Zhengli’s research on bat virus experiments and vaccine development. This research included the synthesis of spike proteins with furin cleavage sites aimed at enhancing the ability of the viruses to bind to human receptors. However, DARPA declined the proposal, citing explicit concerns regarding its gain-of-function aspects and the potential for dual-use applications.

The United States intelligence community remains split on the origin of SARS-CoV-2, the virus causing Covid-19. Last February, the [Department of Energy](#) and the [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) (FBI) asserted that the virus “likely” originated from a lab leak. However, on June 26, 2023, the Director of National Intelligence declassified a [10-page report](#) on Covid origins, which stressed that “Almost all IC [intelligence community] agencies assess that SARS-CoV-2 was not genetically engineered” and “was not developed as a biological weapon.” The most prominent of them, the CIA, was said to “remain unable to determine the precise origin” of the pandemic. Last September, the agency was [accused](#) of bribing its scientists to reject the lab-leak theory.

Last March, the World Health Organization (WHO) shelved its investigation into the pandemic origin over the “ongoing challenges over attempts to conduct crucial studies in China,” as quoted by [Nature](#).



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