

# [***China Responds To Lab Leak Report Says U.S. Is Politicizing Search For Covid Origins***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67NC-6TS1-JBCM-F2JP-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Length:** 917 words

**Byline:** Robert Hart, Forbes Staff

**Highlight:** Beijing accused the U.S. of politicizing origin-tracing efforts in order to smear China following reports another intelligence agency believes the virus escaped from a Chinese laboratory.

**Body**

**Topline**

Beijing on Mondayrejectedreports that the U.S. Department of Energy has determined the Covid-19 pandemic was most likely the result of an accidental leak from a Chinese lab, accusing the U.S. of politicizing efforts to trace the virus origins as intelligence agencies remain divided on the issue and relations between the two global powers sour.

<figure>

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The U.S. intelligence community is divided on the origins of Covid.

VCG via Getty Images

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**Key Facts**

Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ningdismissedreports the Covid-19 pandemic was triggered by a pathogen escaping from a Chinese lab andsaidefforts to promote the theory over the idea that the virus emerged naturally are grounded in ***politics***, not science.

Mao, responding to reports that the U.S. Department of Energy has concluded the pandemic was the result of a laboratory leak,saidan investigation led by the World Health Organization determined it was extremely unlikely Covid originated in a lab.

The WHO s findings are far from universally accepted and China was widelyaccusedofobstructingthe investigation and of restricting experts access to raw information when they were finally allowed into the country, and even WHO head Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus conceded the work was not thorough enough.

Mao accused the U.S. of politicizing origin-tracing efforts and of rehashing the lab leak narrative in order to smear China.

**News Peg**

The**Wall Street Journal**on SundayreportedDepartment of Energy scientists had concluded the Covid-19 pandemic most likely stemmed from an unintentional laboratory leak in China. The agency, which was previously undecided on the origins of the virus, reportedly has low confidence in its determination, indicating the evidence used to make it was not robust, complete or credible enough to draw a firm conclusion. It is not clear what evidence prompted the agency, which drew insight from its nationwide network of biological laboratories, to alter its stance and the**New York Times** reportsthe evidence was relatively weak, citing briefed officials. The majority of scientists reject the lab leak hypothesis though they concede it is feasible and available scientific evidence strongly supports the idea the virus emerged naturally from animals and spread into humans.

**Contra**

The intelligence community is split on the pandemic s origins. The Department of Energy is one of several U.S. intelligence agencies working to trace the origins of the pandemic and its view is a minority position. None of the other agencies it reportedly shared its information with wereswayedenough to reach the same conclusion. The FBI, which is the only other agency supporting the lab leak theory, concluded with moderate confidence in 2021 that the pandemic resulted from a lab leak. Itreportedlyarrived at its conclusion for different reasons to the Energy Department. Four unidentified agencies and the National Intelligence Council, charged with long-term analysis, believe with low confidence that the virus emerged naturally by spilling into humans from an infected animal. Analysts at two agencies the Central Intelligence Agency and an unnamed agency have yet to coalesce around a single explanation for Covid s origins.

**What We Don t Know**

The**Journal s**report hasreignitedlong-simmering tensions over the origins of the pandemic and catapulted the issue back onto the international stage at a time when tensions between Washington and Beijing, inflamed by allegations of spy balloons and possibly assisting Russia in its war with Ukraine, are already high. Scientists have largely united around the idea that Covid emerged naturally through zoonosis, the process by which a disease spreads from animals into humans. This is how past pandemics have emerged and it could have happened directly or via an intermediary animal that then passed the virus on. Zoonotic transmission is considered by many to be the most likely explanation given the available evidence and scientific literature, though there are gaps, for example the failure to find an animal that could have passed the virus on. A lab leak whether accidental or, as some fringe theorists baselessly tout, deliberate is considered by most to be unlikely but feasible and worth investigating (it is not clear why some U.S. agencies support the theory). The idea Covid escaped from a lab was dismissed too rapidly by some experts early on in the pandemic and was similarly promoted too readily by proponents, who often had little evidence to back their claims and several veered into racist conspiracies. The debate became, and remains, heavily politicized. Without transparency from China, it is unlikely the issue will ever be settled completely. Cooperation does not look likely given political tensions and its criticized conduct over the WHO-led investigation. The WHO has alreadyquietly shelvedthe next phase of its study, reportedly due to political difficulties and struggles accessing China. Given the time that has elapsed and the nature of biological samples, it is possible it will never never be completely resolved.

**Further Reading**

US Energy Department assesses Covid-19 likely resulted from lab leak, furthering US intel divide over virus origin(CNN)

China Dismisses Latest Claim That Lab Leak Likely Caused Covid(NYT)

Meet the scientist at the center of the covid lab leak controversy(MIT Technology Review)

Timeline: How The Covid Lab Leak Origin Story Went From 'Conspiracy Theory' To Government Debate(Forbes)

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