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The Wuhan lab lie: “Weapons of mass destruction” redux

In an uncanny instance of history repeating itself, the script used to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq based on false claims about “weapons of mass destruction” is being used to promote the United States’ aggressive military buildup against China.

On Sunday, the *Wall Street Journal* published an article entitled, “Lab Leak Most Likely Origin of Covid-19 Pandemic, Energy Department Now Says,” which was used to launch a campaign by the entire US media to legitimize the false claim that COVID-19 was a man-made virus created at China’s Wuhan Institute of Virology.

None of the media coverage noted the fact that the person who wrote the *Wall Street Journal*’s report, Michael R. Gordon, is the most notorious liar in the American media, whose fabrications were so enormous that even his former employers at the *New York Times* had to repeatedly distance themselves from him.



Left: Secretary of State Colin Powell holds up a vial he said could contain anthrax as he presents evidence of Iraq's alleged weapons programs to the United Nations Security Council on Feb. 5, 2003. Right: Republican Senator Rand Paul, who claims COVID-19 was created at the Wuhan Institute of Virology during a Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee hearing on COVID-19. [AP Photo]

But in the tradecraft of the American media, this problem is easily solved. Media accounts of Gordon's reporting simply did not refer to the fact that the author has a record of lying. If anyone notes this basic fact, he is referred to, in the quasi-racist language that has become accepted in the US media, as "Chinese."

Gordon wrote the September 8, 2002 article falsely asserting that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was seeking to build a nuclear weapon. That article, entitled "U.S. says Hussein intensifies quest for a-bomb parts," cited anonymous Bush administration sources to promote the claim that the Iraqi government was seeking to build "weapons of mass destruction."



A screenshot of the September 8, 2002 New York Times article by Michael Gordon: U.S. Says Hussein intensifies quest for A-bomb parts.

On May 26, 2004, the *Times* published a letter from its editors acknowledging that it repeatedly “fell for misinformation” in its reporting on the Iraq war, citing Gordon’s reporting in particular.

Gordon’s claims were part of a pattern of false reporting that had to be publicly retracted. In 2014, he published what he claimed were photographs of Russian soldiers operating in Ukraine, which the *Times*’ public editor since had to admit were “discredited.”

The retraction by the *Times*’ public editor quoted reporter Robert Parry, who explained the pattern in Gordon’s reporting:

All these stories draw hard conclusions from very murky evidence while ignoring or brushing aside alternative explanations. They also pile up supportive acclamations for their conclusions from self-interested sources, while treating any doubters as rubes.

And, indeed, this is the pattern of the *Wall Street Journal*’s latest article, which is, in the words of the late Parry, “Another Michael Gordon Special.”

Like so much of Gordon’s reporting, his latest article consists of hearsay about a secondary source ascribing a view to a section of the US government.

It is based on what anonymous officials told him were the contents of a report summarizing the views of different sections of the US government, which allegedly notes that the US Energy Department has changed its conclusion on the origins of COVID-19.

The article, based entirely on anonymous sources, was soon “confirmed” within hours by other strategically placed articles, also based on statements by “U.S. officials” in the *New York Times*, CNN, and NBC News, who also claimed to have knowledge about the secret document about a document.

Out of this agglomeration of nothings, of nothing piled on top of nothing, the US media concocted a supposed sea change of views about the origins of COVID-19, whose intended effect is to make a typical person believe the lab leak theory is “credible.”

Thus, a lie, the claim that COVID-19 was made in a laboratory, was magically transfigured into the truth, all without anyone going on the record to assert it or give any facts to back it up.

But the fact that Gordon’s reporting violates the most basic journalistic principles does not mean that his writing does not reflect the aims of the White House.

Time and time again, the Bush, Obama and now Biden administrations have used Gordon to launder lies to the public while preserving some degree of deniability. In this case, too, the Biden administration is seeking to promote the Wuhan lab conspiracy theory in order

to promote anti-Chinese hatred and xenophobia to justify the US military build-up in the Pacific.

The virus that causes COVID-19 was not created in a laboratory. It, like every pandemic before it, has been shown to have spread from animals to humans. In the words of Dr. Peter Hotez, “There’s an overwhelming feeling in the scientific community regarding the natural origin of COVID-19.”

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