



**United States Department of State**

*Washington, D.C. 20520*

May 24, 2022

Case No. FL-2021-00033

Gary Ruskin  
4096 Piedmont Ave. #963  
Oakland, CA 94611

Dear Mr. Ruskin:

As we noted in our letter dated April 25, 2022, we are processing your request for material under the Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”), 5 U.S.C. § 552. Since our last letter, the Department of State (“Department”) has processed in excess of 2,000 pages of material potentially responsive to your request. The Department has identified an additional three responsive records subject to the FOIA. We have determined the three records may be released in part.

An enclosure explains the FOIA exemptions and other grounds for withholding material. Where we have made redactions, the applicable FOIA exemptions are marked on each document. All non-exempt material that is reasonably segregable from the exempt material has been released, and is enclosed.

We will keep you informed as your case progresses. If you have any questions, your attorney may contact Laurel Lum, Trial Attorney, at [laurel.h.lum@usdoj.gov](mailto:laurel.h.lum@usdoj.gov) or (202) 305-8177. Please refer to the case number, FL-2021-00033, and the civil action number, 20-cv-08415, in all correspondence about this case.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeanne Miller".

Jeanne Miller  
Chief, Programs and Policies Division  
Office of Information Programs and Services

Enclosures: As stated.

## The Freedom of Information Act (5 USC 552)

### FOIA Exemptions

- (b)(1) Information specifically authorized by an executive order to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or foreign policy. Executive Order 13526 includes the following classification categories:
- 1.4(a) Military plans, systems, or operations
  - 1.4(b) Foreign government information
  - 1.4(c) Intelligence activities, sources or methods, or cryptology
  - 1.4(d) Foreign relations or foreign activities of the US, including confidential sources
  - 1.4(e) Scientific, technological, or economic matters relating to national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
  - 1.4(f) U.S. Government programs for safeguarding nuclear materials or facilities
  - 1.4(g) Vulnerabilities or capabilities of systems, installations, infrastructures, projects, plans, or protection services relating to US national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
  - 1.4(h) Weapons of mass destruction
- (b)(2) Related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of an agency
- (b)(3) Specifically exempted from disclosure by statute (other than 5 USC 552), for example:
- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| ARMSEXP        | Arms Export Control Act, 50a USC 2411(c)                    |
| CIA PERS/ORG   | Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, 50 USC 403(g)      |
| EXPORT CONTROL | Export Administration Act of 1979, 50 USC App. Sec. 2411(c) |
| FS ACT         | Foreign Service Act of 1980, 22 USC 4004                    |
| INA            | Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 USC 1202(f), Sec. 222(f) |
| IRAN           | Iran Claims Settlement Act, Public Law 99-99, Sec. 505      |
- (b)(4) Trade secrets and confidential commercial or financial information
- (b)(5) Interagency or intra-agency communications forming part of the deliberative process, attorney-client privilege, or attorney work product
- (b)(6) Personal privacy information
- (b)(7) Law enforcement information whose disclosure would:
- (A) interfere with enforcement proceedings
  - (B) deprive a person of a fair trial
  - (C) constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy
  - (D) disclose confidential sources
  - (E) disclose investigation techniques
  - (F) endanger life or physical safety of an individual
- (b)(8) Prepared by or for a government agency regulating or supervising financial institutions
- (b)(9) Geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells

### Other Grounds for Withholding

- NR Material not responsive to a FOIA request excised with the agreement of the requester

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6) (Beijing) (b)(6)@state.gov>; OES-STC-China <OES-STC-China@state.gov>  
**CC:** (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** RE: 2018 Cable on Visit to the Wuhan Virology Institute  
**Date:** Tue, 10 Mar 2020 18:50:12 +0000

Sorry, should've also included IHB.

--  
 (b)(6) Ph.D.  
 Office of Science and Technology Cooperation (OES/STC)  
 U.S. Department of State  
 Phone: (b)(6)

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 10, 2020 2:38 PM  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov> (b)(6) (Beijing) (b)(6)@state.gov>; OES-STC-China <OES-STC-China@state.gov>  
**Cc:** (b)(6) (Beijing) (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** RE: 2018 Cable on Visit to the Wuhan Virology Institute

This is great. I've been thinking about this a lot (b)(5)  
 (b)(5)  
 (b)(5) (b)(6)

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 (b)(6) Ph.D.  
 Office of Science and Technology Cooperation (OES/STC)  
 U.S. Department of State  
 Phone: (b)(6)

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**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 10, 2020 2:35 PM  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov>; OES-STC-China <OES-STC-China@state.gov>  
**Cc:** (b)(6) (Beijing) (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** RE: 2018 Cable on Visit to the Wuhan Virology Institute

Thanks (b)(6)

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

**From:** (b)(6) (Beijing) (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 10, 2020 12:34 PM  
**To:** OES-STC-China <OES-STC-China@state.gov>  
**Cc:** (b)(6) (Beijing) (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Subject:** FW: 2018 Cable on Visit to the Wuhan Virology Institute

All,

See the attached 2018 cable out of Wuhan. (b)(6) has noted that all of the programs mentioned in the cable have since been canceled or defunded: NSF and USAID are gone; Predict was ended; and the NIAID position appears to have gone unfilled. (b)(5)

(b)(5)

Regards,

(b)(6)

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 10, 2020 8:13 AM  
**To:** EAP-CM-Office-DL <EAP-CM-Office-DL@state.gov>  
**Cc:** (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Subject:** FW: 2018 Cable on Visit to the Wuhan Virology Institute

(b)(6) thanks for digging this up. Flagging for others on the desk as well.

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**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 10, 2020 8:10 AM  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov  
(b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Cc:** EAP-J-Office-DL <EAP-J-Office-DL@state.gov>  
**Subject:** FW: 2018 Cable on Visit to the Wuhan Virology Institute

I actually forgot about this cable until very recently and just tracked down a copy.

1. ~~(SBU)~~ **Summary with Comment:** China's Wuhan Institute of Virology, a global leader in virus research, is a key partner for the United States in protecting global health security. Its role as operator of the just-launched Biosafety Level 4 (or "P4") lab -- the first such lab in China --

opens up even more opportunities for expert exchange, especially in light of the lab's shortage of trained staff (Ref A). (b)(5)

(b)(5)

(b)(5) **End Summary with Comment.**

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(b)(6)@state.gov>;  
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<b>From:</b>	(b)(6)@state.gov>
	Stilwell, David R (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>;
<b>To:</b>	(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6) (Beijing) (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6) (Shenyang) (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>
<b>Subject:</b>	Fwd: WP: State Department cables warned of safety issues at Wuhan lab studying bat coronaviruses
<b>Date:</b>	Tue, 14 Apr 2020 11:14:41 +0000

Rogin's piece is out.

## State Department cables warned of safety issues at Wuhan lab studying bat coronaviruses

Josh Rogin

Two years before the novel [coronavirus](#) pandemic upended the world, U.S. Embassy officials visited a Chinese research facility in the city of Wuhan several times and sent two official warnings back to Washington about inadequate safety at the lab, which was conducting risky studies on coronaviruses from bats. The cables have fueled discussions inside the U.S. government about whether this or another Wuhan lab was the source of the virus — even though conclusive proof has yet to emerge.

In January 2018, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing took the unusual step of repeatedly sending U.S. science diplomats to the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV), which had in 2015 become China's first laboratory to achieve the highest level of international bioresearch safety (known as BSL-4). WIV issued a news release in English about the last of these visits, which occurred on March 27, 2018. The U.S. delegation was led by Jamison Fouss, the consulate general in Wuhan, and Rick Switzer, the embassy's counselor of environment, science, technology and health. Last week, WIV [erased](#) that statement from its website, though it remains archived on the Internet.

What the U.S. officials learned during their visits concerned them so much that they dispatched two diplomatic cables categorized as Sensitive But Unclassified back to Washington. The cables warned about safety and management weaknesses at the WIV lab and proposed more attention and help. The first cable, which I obtained, also warns that the lab's work on bat coronaviruses and their potential human transmission represented a risk of a new SARS-like pandemic. "During interactions with scientists at the WIV laboratory, they noted the new lab has a serious shortage of appropriately trained technicians and investigators needed to safely operate this high-containment laboratory," states the Jan. 19, 2018, cable, which was drafted by two officials from the embassy's environment, science and health sections who met with the WIV scientists. (The State Department declined to comment on this and other details of the story.)

The Chinese researchers at WIV were receiving assistance from the Galveston National Laboratory at the University of Texas Medical Branch and other U.S. organizations, but the Chinese requested additional help. The cables argued that the United States should give the Wuhan lab further support, mainly because its research on bat coronaviruses was important but also dangerous.

As the cable noted, the U.S. visitors met with Shi Zhengli, the head of the research project, who had been publishing studies related to bat coronaviruses for many years. In November 2017, just before the U.S. officials' visit, Shi's team had published research showing that horseshoe bats they had collected from a cave in Yunnan province were very likely from the same bat population that spawned the SARS coronavirus in 2003.

"Most importantly," the cable states, "the researchers also showed that various SARS-like coronaviruses can interact with ACE2, the human receptor identified for SARS-coronavirus. This finding strongly suggests that SARS-like coronaviruses from bats can be transmitted to humans to cause SARS-like diseases. From a public health perspective, this makes the continued surveillance of SARS-like coronaviruses in bats and study of the animal-human interface critical to future emerging coronavirus outbreak prediction and prevention."

The research was designed to prevent the next SARS-like pandemic by anticipating how it might emerge. But even in 2015, other scientists questioned whether Shi's team was taking unnecessary risks. In October 2014, the U.S. government had imposed a moratorium on funding of any research that makes a virus more deadly or contagious, known as "gain-of-function" experiments.

As many have pointed out, there is no evidence that the virus now plaguing the world was engineered; scientists largely agree it came from animals. But that is not the same as saying it didn't come from the lab, which spent years testing bat coronaviruses in animals, said Xiao Qiang, a research scientist at the School of Information at the University of California at Berkeley.

"The cable tells us that there have long been concerns about the possibility of the threat to public health that came from this lab's research, if it was not being adequately conducted and protected," he said.

There are similar concerns about the nearby Wuhan Center for Disease Control and Prevention lab, which operates at biosecurity level 2, a level significantly less secure than the level-4 standard claimed by the

Wuhan Institute of Virology lab, Xiao said. That's important because the Chinese government still refuses to answer basic questions about the origin of the novel coronavirus while suppressing any attempts to examine whether either lab was involved.

Sources familiar with the cables said they were meant to sound an alarm about the grave safety concerns at the WIV lab, especially regarding its work with bat coronaviruses. The embassy officials were calling for more U.S. attention to this lab and more support for it, to help it fix its problems.

"The cable was a warning shot," one U.S. official said. "They were begging people to pay attention to what was going on."

No extra assistance to the labs was provided by the U.S. government in response to these cables. The cables began to circulate again inside the administration over the past two months as officials debated whether the lab could be the origin of the pandemic and what the implications would be for the U.S. pandemic response and relations with China.

Inside the Trump administration, many national security officials have long suspected either the WIV or the Wuhan Center for Disease Control and Prevention lab was the source of the novel coronavirus outbreak. According to the New York Times, the intelligence community has provided no evidence to confirm this. But one senior administration official told me that the cables provide one more piece of evidence to support the possibility that the pandemic is the result of a lab accident in Wuhan.

"The idea that it was just a totally natural occurrence is circumstantial. The evidence it leaked from the lab is circumstantial. Right now, the ledger on the side of it leaking from the lab is packed with bullet points and there's almost nothing on the other side," the official said.

As my colleague David Ignatius noted, the Chinese government's original story — that the virus emerged from a seafood market in Wuhan — is shaky. Research by Chinese experts published in the Lancet in January showed the first known patient, identified on Dec. 1, had no connection to the market, nor did more than one-third of the cases in the first large cluster. Also, the market didn't sell bats.

Shi and other WIV researchers have categorically denied this lab was the origin for the novel coronavirus. On Feb. 3, her team was the first to publicly report the virus known as 2019-nCoV was a bat-derived coronavirus.

The Chinese government, meanwhile, has put a total lockdown on information related to the virus origins. Beijing has yet to provide U.S. experts with samples of the novel coronavirus collected from the earliest cases. The Shanghai lab that published the novel coronavirus genome on Jan. 11 was quickly shut down by authorities for "rectification." Several of the doctors and journalists who reported on the spread early on have disappeared.

On Feb. 14, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for a new biosecurity law to be accelerated. On Wednesday, CNN reported the Chinese government has placed severe restrictions requiring approval before any research institution publishes anything on the origin of the novel coronavirus.



The origin story is not just about blame. It's crucial to understanding how the novel coronavirus pandemic started because that informs how to prevent the next one. The Chinese government must be transparent and answer the questions about the Wuhan labs because they are vital to our scientific understanding of the virus, said Xiao.

We don't know whether the novel coronavirus originated in the Wuhan lab, but the cable pointed to the danger there and increases the impetus to find out, he said.

"I don't think it's a conspiracy theory. I think it's a legitimate question that needs to be investigated and answered," he said. "To understand exactly how this originated is critical knowledge for preventing this from happening in the future."

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	(b)(6) (Shenyang)(b)(6)@state.gov>;
	(b)(6)@state.gov>;
	(b)(6)@state.gov>;
	(b)(6)@state.gov>

<b>From:</b>	(b)(6) (Beijing) (b)(6)@state.gov>
<b>To:</b>	Beijing ESTH Unit Chiefs <BeijingESTHUnitChiefs@state.gov>
<b>CC:</b>	(b)(6)@state.gov>
<b>Subject:</b>	FW: 2018 Cable on Visit to the Wuhan Virology Institute
<b>Date:</b>	Tue, 10 Mar 2020 16:14:35 +0000

ESTH,

(b)(5)

(b)(6)

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