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FBI ‘found evidence Covid was lab leak but was not allowed to brief president’

‘I find it surprising White House didn’t ask,’ says doctor of microbiology Jason Bannan, who was ‘snubbed’ from Biden intelligence summit

The FBI found evidence suggesting that Covid-19 was [caused by a lab leak](#) but were not allowed to brief the president, it has been claimed.

Jason Bannan, a doctor of microbiology and former senior scientist at the FBI, has dedicated more than a year of his life to discovering the origins of Covid.

But despite being the only US national intelligence agency to conclude that a lab leak was likely, the FBI and Mr Bannan were snubbed from a National Intelligence Council briefing with Joe Biden, it has been claimed.

Mr Biden had ordered an urgent investigation in May 2021 by US intelligence agencies and national laboratories to identify whether the virus had been transferred from an animal to a human or had [escaped from a Chinese laboratory](#).

One of the most popular theories at the time was that it had been transferred from a bat at a [“wet market” in Wuhan](#), where the virus first emerged in 2019.

The National Intelligence Council (NIC), a body of senior intelligence officers that organised the review, had concluded with “low confidence” that Covid-19 had been [transmitted from an animal to a human](#), along with four intelligence agencies.

This was then presented by [Avril Haines, the director of national intelligence](#) (DNI), and two of her senior analysts, to president Biden and his top aides in August 2021.

The FBI had not only concluded a lab leak was likely but that it had “moderate confidence” in its assessment – more than any other agency – and had expected to make this case to the White House but no officials from the agency were invited to do so.

In his first interview, Mr Bannan told the Wall Street Journal: “Being the only agency that assessed that a laboratory origin was more likely, and the agency that expressed the highest level of confidence in its analysis of the source of the pandemic, we anticipated the FBI would be asked to attend the briefing.

“I find it surprising that the White House didn’t ask.”

A spokeswoman for the DNI’s office told the newspaper that the differing views among the intelligence community had been fairly represented and it wasn’t standard practice to invite representatives from individual agencies to briefings for the president.

The office of the DNI and the NIC’s work on Covid-19 origins “complied with all of the intelligence community’s analytic standards, including objectivity,” the spokeswoman said.

‘Cutting-room floor’

Mr Bannan, who joined the FBI as part of the agency’s efforts to bolster its expertise in [germ weapons, toxins and biological warfare](#) post 9/11, has since retired but is calling for the evidence backing a lab leak theory to be reassessed.

“What ended up on the intelligence community’s cutting-room floor needs to be re-examined,” he said.

The conclusion from the US review published in August 2021 was that it would be hard to confirm the origin without cooperation from China.

China's only cooperation has so far been a [joint report with the World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) in 2021 which said the virus most likely moved from bats to humans via another animal.

However, other US officials also suspected that Covid may have [leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology](#) where scientists that had genetically engineered coronaviruses worked, according to declassified US government documents.

Three scientists at the National Center for Medical Intelligence, part of the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), conducted a scientific study that concluded that Covid-19 was manipulated in a laboratory in a risky research effort.

John Hardham, Robert Cutlip and Jean-Paul Chretien conducted a genomic analysis that concluded that a segment of the "spike protein" that enables the virus to gain entry into human cells was constructed using techniques developed in the Wuhan lab that were described in a 2008 Chinese scientific paper.

This position contrasted with the view of the DIA, however.

More than three years on since the review was published, the debate about the origins of Covid is [still highly politicised](#) and continues among US agencies and departments, and in Congress where witnesses are being hauled in to give evidence.