

“Active suppression of witnesses”: CIA lied about "Havana Syndrome," whistleblower documents reveal

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EXCLUSIVE

Congress and the FBI were among the government institutions that were either lied to or misled

By [Brian Karem](#)

Columnist

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Palm Trees in Havana, Cuba | The CIA seal | Ear ache (Photo illustration by Salon/Getty Images)

The CIA has consistently lied to the American public about anomalous health incidents (AHI) for the last several years and may be guilty of obstruction of justice, according to documents recently released by the U.S. government.

Often referred to as “Havana Syndrome,” AHIs became widely known when American officials and their families living and working in the U.S. Embassy in Havana, Cuba, first reported symptoms which include balance and cognitive problems, insomnia and headaches. Salon reported in March 2023 that a then-newly obtained declassified report, prepared for the director of national intelligence by a panel of experts, appears to show conclusively that “Havana syndrome” — a cluster of unexplained symptoms experienced by diplomats and government personnel abroad — is not a naturally occurring health problem.

The new information verifies the former report. A whistleblower filed a complaint last year with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence’s Inspector General. We obtained the information via a FOIA request and subsequent lawsuit brought by the James Madison Project and attorney Mark Zaid.

“This whistleblower complaint represents the most significant and lawful disclosure of information that undermines the public posture of the Intelligence Community, and specifically the CIA, concerning AHIs,” Zaid said. “The information seen first-hand by this whistleblower directly contradicts the asserted conclusions that U.S. personnel, particularly within the IC, are not being attacked by a foreign power using some sort of directed energy. It asserts the existence of classified documents, which are specifically identified in the complaint, is being deliberately covered up, including being withheld from other investigating federal agencies.”

The government is hiding something about the “Havana syndrome”

Several members of Congress, when contacted, said they thought the “matter had been settled” and there “wasn’t anything to this,” prior to the release of the information. The information just released by the government, however, shows that Congress and the FBI were among the government institutions that were either lied to or had information withheld from them.

“The IC Inspector General investigated this complaint and deemed it to constitute an ‘urgent concern’ and forwarded it to the House and Senate Intelligence Committees. In fact, the formal HPSCI investigation that was initiated earlier this year was, in large part, because of the information that was presented by this whistleblower and others connected to the evidence,” Zaid explained.

“AHI victims are dedicated federal civil servants, military members and their families, and they deserve better than the treatment they have received for injuries sustained in the line of duty,” Zaid said. He represents more than two dozen current and former federal employees

who have been recognized as AHI victims, as well as the whistleblower whose complaint was released.

The White House responded to the latest release of information, vowing to protect federal workers who have suffered because of AHIs. NSC spokesperson Sean Savett said, "Speaking broadly, at the start of the Biden-Harris Administration and again following the 2023 Intelligence Community assessment, the White House directed departments and agencies across the federal government to prioritize investigations into the cause of AHIs and to examine reports thoroughly; to ensure that U.S. Government personnel and their families who report AHIs receive the support and timely access to medical care that they need; and to take reports of AHIs seriously and treat personnel with respect and compassion. That remains our priority."

The released documents accuse the agency of constantly lying to Congress and other agencies about the nature and scope of the problem.

"The CIA, with apparent assistance of elements of the DNI — notably the National Intelligence Council and the National Counter Intelligence and Security Center . . . is engaged in the active suppression of witnesses, and actions which may constitute obstruction of justice and witness tampering as define in federal statute," it states in the released documents.

A CIA spokesperson refuted the information released by the government.

"The notion that the CIA lied to US policymakers is absolutely false. CIA takes its responsibility to provide decision makers with impartial, fact-based intelligence and analysis with the utmost seriousness. The Intelligence Community Assessment on anomalous health incidents released by ODNI reflects years of rigorous, painstaking collection, investigative work, and analysis by IC agencies, including CIA. We applied the Agency's very best operational, analytic, and technical tradecraft to what is one of the largest and most intensive investigations in the Agency's history. The CIA remains committed to ensuring continued access to care for affected officers and to fully investigating any reports of health incidents," a CIA spokesperson told Salon.

"The facts are the facts," Zaid said in response. "History will not judge the CIA's role or those who helped cover-up the truth regarding AHIs in a positive light. Their actions and words betray the loyal employees and so many others who serve our country as dedicated public servants. I have attended classified meetings held by Congress and witness after witness undermines what the CIA claims. If it would declassify the evidence, then the public would know who was telling the truth."

AHIs have been controversial since first making news nearly a decade ago. Sounding like something out of a James Bond novel or science fiction, the accusation has been that the government has been aware of, or perhaps participated in, the use of microwave or other

energy weapons, which can confuse, sicken and even kill individuals from an acceptable range without being traced.

The NSA provided Zaid, as part of his representation of a pre-Havana AHI victim Michael Beck, a memorandum dated October 14, 2014, stating that it possessed “intelligence information from 2012 associating the hostile country to which Mr. Beck traveled to in the late 1990s with a high-powered microwave system weapon that may of the ability to weaken, intimidate, or kill an enemy over time and without leaving evidence.” The intelligence information in question remains classified.

The heavily redacted document released by the government points to a variety of duplicitous activities taken by the CIA to hide the cause of AHIs.

In January of 2023, Secretary of State Antony Blinken defended U.S. diplomats who had come forward to report suspected incidents. "Their pain is real," he said then. "I have no higher priority than the health and safety of each of you."

At that same time, Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said it was "very unlikely" that a foreign adversary was responsible for the AHIs reported. Some published reports have suggested that the symptoms were characteristic of "mass psychogenic illness." The declassified report rejects that, finding that the AHIs "do not fit criteria for mass psychogenic illness."

Of particular concern was the evidence that some of the cases occurred on American soil. In 2019 a White House official reported symptoms while walking her dog in a Virginia suburb of Washington, D.C.

The National Institute of Health through the Department of Health and Human Services began a protocol “created to contribute to the understanding of anomalous health incidents and their impact on U.S. Government officials and their family members,” in the wake of dozens of reports from government employees.

A letter signed by Dr. Leighton Chan, Acting Chief Scientific Officer to the participants in that study on August 27, 2024, announced that “due to concerns about this study raised by some participants,” the NIH was shutting it down out of “an abundance of caution.” Zaid confirmed that some of the concerns involved the CIA requiring its employees to participate in the study if they wanted to receive health care treatment, which is considered unethical.

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Free the Press."
