

# STRATEGIKA

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Conflicts Of The Past As Lessons For The Present

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## CHINA AND THE PANDEMIC

IN THIS ISSUE

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# Remedies for China's Role in the Pandemic

By John Yoo

The more we learn about the origins of the coronavirus, the more the case against China grows. Chinese doctors and scientists encountered COVID-19 patients as early as November 2019, but Beijing suppressed their efforts to research the virus and warn the world. While the emergence of vaccines holds hope for an end to the pandemic, the campaign to hold China to account, however, is only beginning.

The United States and other nations must hold China to account not because of anger or a desire for retribution. By making China pay, they can impose the incentives for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to improve its behavior the next time. Nations may well need to inflict even more forceful measures to compel China to realize the full costs of its recklessness.

China's desire to conceal the origins and virulence of the contagion result from a simple set of legal incentives. In domestic and international affairs, our legal systems are familiar with the problem of negative externalities. A factory in one nation, for example, creates a negative externality by polluting the water and air of a neighbor. The upstream nation realizes the benefits of the factory, while the downstream nation suffers the pollution costs. The polluter likely will not stop—indeed, it may well increase its activity—because it does not internalize both the benefits and full costs of its production. (A great deal of economic research, led by Nobel Laureate Ronald Coase, asks whether the downstream nation should pay the upstream nation to stop, whether the polluter instead should compensate the victims, and what clear property rights or liability rules should apply.)

Beijing already externalizes the costs of its rapid economic growth and authoritarian control in a variety of ways. Its factories regularly pollute the air not just of its own cities, but those of South Korea, Japan, and its other neighbors as well. It overproduces commodity products to maintain employment levels. It sends defective, even dangerous, products into world markets.

The coronavirus pandemic represents the deadliest form of Beijing's negative externalization of its economic and political system. China allows primitive "wet markets" to remain open for business, even though the close proximity of exotic wildlife in food markets encourages deadly viruses to jump from animals to humans. It attempts to operate first world virology and disease research laboratories, even though it lacks the skill and care necessary to run them safely. According to reports in the *Washington Post*, U.S. diplomatic officials who toured the Wuhan virology and CDC facilities left deeply concerned that the staff could not operate the labs safely. This is because the Chinese Communist Party governs through a hierarchical, authoritarian system that elevates the fiction of a supremely confident technocratic government over transparency, information sharing, and accountability. Local and regional officials continue to misrepresent the spread of the disease in Wuhan and its surrounding region, no doubt to preserve the CCP's reputation and to escape punishment from the central government. One British study argues that if China's government had transparently shared information on the outbreak and had taken immediate steps to quarantine Wuhan and

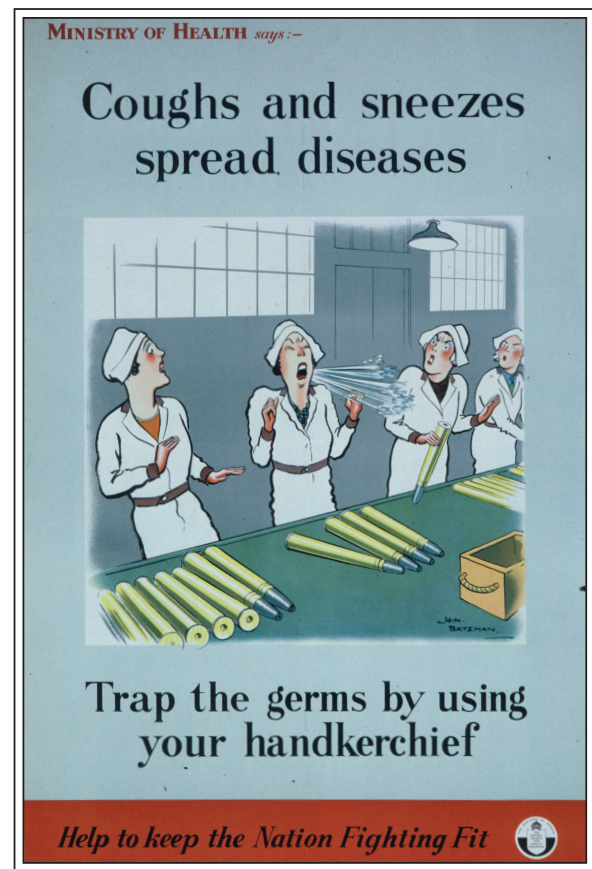


Image credit: Poster Collection, UK 2053, Hoover Institution Archives.



the surrounding region, the rest of the world could have avoided more than 90 percent of the subsequent deaths from COVID-19.

Some in Congress and the states have already launched the first salvos. Senators Marsha Blackburn and Tom Cotton recently introduced bills to strip China of its sovereign immunity, which could render Beijing liable to lawsuits in American courts. Some state attorneys general have filed suit against China for the harms caused by the virus. Members of the House of Representatives have asked Attorney General William Barr and Secretary of State Michael Pompeo to sue China in the International Court of Justice.

These proposals may fail on their own, however, because they rely on international law and courts. Despite its propaganda, China has long refused to observe international norms. It intervened to kill American troops in the Korean War, even though U.S. intervention had received the sanction of the United Nations Security Council. It has attacked most of its neighbors, including Russia, India, and Vietnam, in violation of international law. It has annexed unwilling territories, such as Tibet. And most recently, in the South China Sea, it has constructed artificial islands on the high seas and in the territorial waters of other nations. Beijing simply ignored an international court decision finding the islands a violation of the laws of the sea.

Legal remedies will only succeed if the United States and its allies consider more aggressive measures that do not rely upon international courts and organizations for Chinese compliance. First steps include measures that the United States has already taken against nations such as Russia, Iran, and North Korea. The United States could impose economic sanctions on Chinese officials responsible for the suppression of information about the coronavirus or on industries that have stood to benefit from the global response to the pandemic, such as medical equipment suppliers or pharmaceuticals manufacturers. U.S. policy makers could target sanctions against unrelated areas where Beijing is building national champions, such as aerospace, 5G networks, and AI. Washington might even impose general tariffs on Chinese imports or restrictions on Chinese investment in the U.S. as a way to increase the financial costs on China for its deliberate negligence toward the outbreak. Less opportunity may present itself here, however, due to the administration's existing use of tariffs to wage its trade war with China.

A more aggressive option could turn China's economic expansion abroad against itself. No longer content to remain a provider of low-cost assembly line manufacturing, China has rapidly increased its foreign investment both in the United States and abroad. China itself holds an estimated \$1.07 trillion in U.S. treasury debt; Chinese companies and nationals have spent the last decade snapping up billions in real estate in America's priciest cities. Chinese state-owned enterprises have endeavored to buy American high-tech companies with strategic value. Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative has directed even more money for a new "Silk Road" that will link China to Western markets—BRI has reportedly spent \$200 billion on infrastructure projects from Sri Lanka and Pakistan to Greece and Italy.

China's expansion in foreign property renders it vulnerable. The United States could expropriate Chinese property in the United States, even to the point of canceling Chinese-held treasury debt, and use the proceeds to compensate Americans harmed by the pandemic. While the United States usually stands in favor of property rights abroad, it has resorted to similar methods in the past during times of crisis. American states canceled British-held debts during the Revolutionary War, and under the Jay Treaty of 1796 the federal government ultimately paid compensation to those with claims against the British. In response to the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the United States froze foreign government assets and attempted to use them to compensate Americans who lost property or businesses.

The United States could further strike a serious blow to Chinese economic interests by encouraging its allies in the developed and developing worlds to follow suit. China has secretly been lending billions to African nations; the United States could encourage them to renege on their debts. China has allegedly sent aid to Venezuela and other Latin American countries; Washington could resolve civil wars and political disputes in its backyard while protecting them from Chinese efforts to collect. Washington could support these nations by making American lending facilities and foreign aid available and folding them into free-trade agreements.

It could agree with European and Asian nations to resist Chinese efforts to pursue compensation when they renege on loans, expropriate ports and other infrastructure, and seize property.

The attractive element of these measures is that their execution rests in the hands of each sovereign government. China has placed its assets within our control; it would have to throw itself on the mercies of our courts for their return—a possibility that Congress could eliminate by legislation. The main criticism of these options rests in tit-for-tat escalation: China could respond by seizing American-owned property within its own borders. The United States would have the superior legal and moral claim, in that its expropriations serve to settle China's debt to the world for its cover-up of the coronavirus outbreak. China's response would only amount to retaliation for the abrupt seizure of its property abroad.

While China could respond with its own expropriations, they might end up harming China more than the United States. The CCP keeps itself in power through a combination of ruthless oppression and broad, rapid economic growth. Seizure of foreign investment could lead to an end to the free trade and open markets that have facilitated China's remarkable economic rise. Beijing can seize the factories that assemble iPhones, but it cannot capture the human capital that invents the technology and designs the devices—those remain with the United States and its allies. If China cannot innovate, which the United States could make all the harder by blocking Chinese students and researchers from Western universities, it will only be left holding factories designed to mass produce cheap goods. Expropriations could trigger a rapid economic decoupling of China and the U.S. that could leave China stuck in the mass production forms of the twentieth-century economy while the U.S. and its allies advance toward a world where the information and communications revolution, decentralized 3-D printing, and AI can more quickly transform intellectual creativity into goods and services.

To be sure, U.S. expropriations could roil the postwar economic system that Washington has cultivated since the end of World War II, much to its own and the world's benefit. Nations might come to doubt the rule of law in the United States and Washington's strong defense of property rights, which have created the stability and predictability needed for the remarkable economic growth of the last seventy-five years. Canceling Chinese-held U.S. debt could trigger severe disruption in the market for U.S. treasuries, which could further undermine other financial markets. The United States would have to deploy political and financial leadership to assure other nations, and the markets, that it will limit these options solely to forcing China to pay for the greatest public health disaster in a century. It can then set about the work of constructing a new international order that takes greater account of the new great-power rivalry that may replace the peaceful U.S. hegemony of the last eight decades.



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# China Deliberately Spread the Coronavirus: What Are the Strategic Consequences?

By Gordon G. Chang

"It comes from the lab, the lab in Wuhan, and the lab is controlled by the China government," claimed Dr. Li-Meng Yan, the virologist who fled Hong Kong, in a *Loose Women* interview in September. "This virus is not from nature."

Virologists, many skeptical, are debating her now-famous claim, which she documented in a non-peer-reviewed paper soon after the widely circulated interview. Yan's view that the coronavirus was cooked in a lab has found growing support, perhaps most notably from Alina Chan, a microbiologist at the Broad Institute of Harvard and MIT.

Yet whether or not Yan carries the day on specific allegations, there are reasons to be concerned about the Wuhan Institute of Virology, the laboratory she referenced. That lab contains China's only Level 4 biosafety facility, and it is just a couple dozen miles from the location of the initial COVID-19 cases.

The lab once bragged it stored more than 1,500 strains of coronavirus, and it is known to have engaged in the dangerous engineering of chimeric coronaviruses, as documented in a 2015 article in *Nature Medicine*. Even if the Wuhan institute was not trying to create viruses designed to attack ethnic minorities—Bill Gertz of the *Washington Times* reported this inflammatory possibility—Beijing may have much to hide, such as an illicit biological weapons program.

It is especially troubling that Beijing in late January sent "China's top biowarfare expert," Major General Chen Wei, to head the P-4 lab there. Chen, many speculate, was dispatched to clean up evidence of a leak or the existence of a weapons program. That's a clear signal the disease was not, as Chinese authorities insist, the result of a natural mutation.

The case against China rests not only on how the coronavirus came to first infect humans—something scientists will argue about for years—but also what Chinese ruler Xi Jinping did once the pathogen crippled his country. In short, he took steps he knew or had to know would spread the disease beyond his borders.

His actions make the infections and deaths outside China deliberate, effectively a "biological weapon." His actions taken together constitute both a "genocide" and a "crime against humanity" under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Beijing, of course, has suffered reputational damage for the deliberate killing, at last count, of slightly more than a million people outside China. For instance, London's *Daily Mail* in April reported the Henry Jackson Society issued a report showing Beijing owes Great Britain £351 billion in coronavirus-related damages. The think tank also asked for a "rethink" of relations with Beijing.

Moreover, jurists in India that same month filed a case against China at the UN Human Rights Council and accused Beijing of "surreptitiously developing a biological weapon capable of mass destruction."

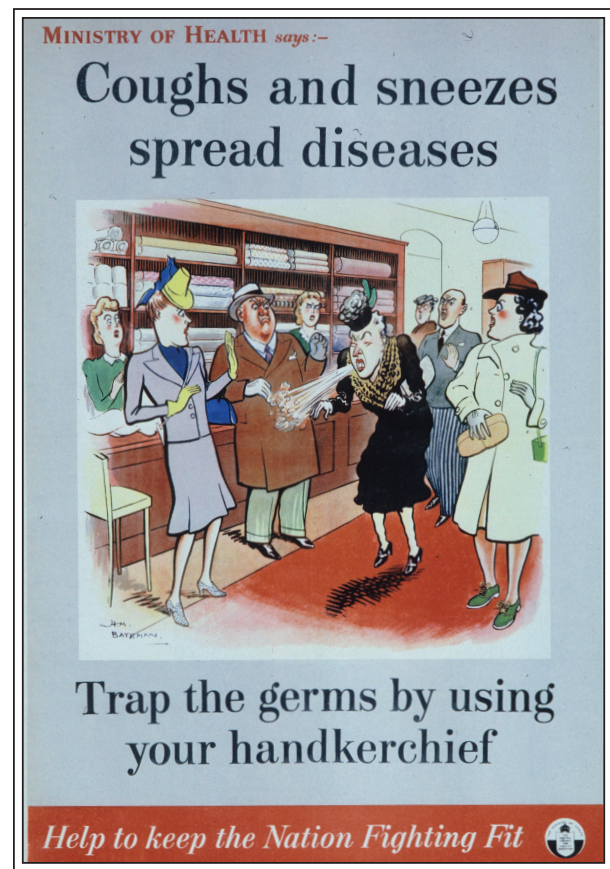


Image credit: Poster Collection, UK 2052, Hoover Institution Archives.

In the spring, American legislators, such as Senator Marsha Blackburn, filed legislation demanding compensation from the Chinese regime.

More fundamentally, there has been, as Cleo Paskal of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies notes in a soon-to-be published paper, a marked shift in perceptions among national policy makers about China. Before the disease hit, she says, nations were mainly hedging against Beijing but not actively opposing it. Afterwards, there was a move away from hedging strategies and a “stronger across-the-board willingness to push back on China.”

In this new environment, some countries summoned Beijing’s ambassadors to explain coronavirus misinformation. Moreover, the change in attitudes reduced inhibitions to call out the regime on other issues. After COVID-19 struck, for instance, African nations began challenging Beijing on the mistreatment of their nationals in China. Countries are now also reconsidering the installation of equipment from Huawei Technologies in their 5G backbones.

Furthermore, as Paskal told me this month, nations, after the coronavirus outbreak, are actively building alliances to contain Beijing. She pointed to the solidification of the “Quad,” the grouping of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States.

Of course, some change in attitudes is due to Beijing’s other ugly conduct—taking away Hong Kong’s autonomy, oppressing Muslim minorities, and attacking India, for example—so it is difficult to trace direct correlation, but reassessment of Beijing this year appears to have begun with white-hot anger over the spread of COVID-19.

In spite of everything, national leaders, with the glaring exception of President Donald Trump, are still reluctant to speak bluntly about Xi in public.

Why have presidents and prime ministers been reticent? Some cling to the belief that China will eventually integrate itself into the international system and become benign. The lure of economic benefits from China certainly plays a large part in decision making as does the fear of Chinese retaliation. There is also resignation: No one wants to take on the regime they believe will dominate the world. Finally, others are not particularly upset about the crippling of the Western democracies.

Yet one other factor stands out: The inability to comprehend the maliciousness of Xi Jinping’s actions. Minds rebel against the notion that the world now faces a monster. Democracies, although they have been attacked, have always had difficulty recognizing evil. Unfortunately, that is exactly what the world faces with communist China’s regime.

Outside the United States, the darkening of perceptions of China have yet to translate into significant shifts in policy, but such change should soon come.

When it comes, it will not be a moment too soon.



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# Will the COVID-19 Pandemic Confound or Enable China's Strategic Ambitions?

By Robert G. Kaufman

Will China's negligence unleashing the coronavirus and mendacity exploiting it catalyze a reckoning with the PRC, comparable in significance to the Czech Coup of 1948? And will it crystallize long-term American determination to contest China's scheme to supplant the United States as the world's preeminent power? Or will China ultimately emerge as the winner from the devastation it has wrought because of a deficit of strategic and moral clarity within the United States and among our allies?

The answer to these questions depends considerably on the policies adopted by the next president. Start with the good news. Negative views of China have soared to a record high of 73 percent of Americans, according to a Pew Foundation Poll released in late July 2020.<sup>1</sup> Chinese behavior during and since the coronavirus also has elicited strong negative reactions across the Indo-Pacific, especially in Japan, India, and Australia, where views of China's ambitions and behavior already trended strongly in a negative direction. Even in Western Europe, long committed to engaging and conciliating rather than confronting China, COVID-19 has generated an anti-China backlash, more muted on the continent but stronger in Britain where British prime minister Boris Johnson joined President Trump in imposing a complete ban on Chinese 5G vendor Huawei.

Even so, this contingent good news might prove ephemeral rather than enduring if the United States and our allies should waver in the reckoning with China that President Trump deserves credit for initiating. The reelection of President Trump would have offered the best practicable option for building and intensifying the administration's first term strategy of contesting China comprehensively and vigorously—a vital condition for bolstering deterrence, or defeating China at the lowest possible cost and risk should deterrence fail. Unlike his predecessor—who “welcomed China's rise,” who significantly shrank American defense spending while China armed prodigiously, and whose national security statements of 2010 and 2015 omitted naming China or any other great power as an adversary—the Trump administration designated China from the outset as our number one adversary. The President has not only increased the American defense budget substantially, but invested in threshold technologies such as strategic defense and created an independent Space Force. The President has pushed back hard against China's implacable economic warfare against us on trade and intellectual property that his predecessors rationalized away. The President's economic policies before COVID-19 intervened had generated prodigious economic growth on which American military preeminence depends. Trump began, too, the long overdue decoupling of the U.S. economy from China's, the imperative of which our inordinate dependence on China for essentials such as antibiotics exposed in high relief during this pandemic. President Trump strengthened relationships with a decent democratic India and Japan, vital, value-based allies who share our strategic priorities and alarm about the trajectory of China's policies at home and abroad—relationships his predecessor, with the support of Vice President



Image credit: Poster Collection, UK 2054, Hoover Institution Archives.



Biden, allowed to languish while courting China and other adversaries.

Trump's recalibration of our China policy that COVID-19 has broadened, deepened, and accelerated is a good start, but only the end of the beginning of what is necessary for the United States and our allies to prevail. For all the considerable merits of President Trump's approach towards China, the President would enhance the effectiveness of his policies by doing some recalibrating as well. The President's rhetoric has undervalued the importance of American ideals as well as self-interest in identifying friends, foes, threats, and opportunities. Many Americans who are increasingly alarmed by China rightly advocate calling out China with no pale pastels on human rights, stressing the tyrannical nature of the Chinese regime, while championing the importance of a value-based alliance system of fellow democracies in the Indo-Pacific, grounded firmly in geopolitics. The President's spokesmen—particularly Secretary of State Pompeo and Vice President Pence—have done much better articulating this dimension of the contest with China than the President, whose actual policies on this and many other issues are often better than he makes them sound. A greater emphasis on human rights also may elicit greater support for sterner policies towards China from our Western European allies, where resolve—especially in Germany—is fragile at best even now with disillusionment with China running much higher than usual.

A second term Trump presidency also would run the risk of undermining the significant progress the administration achieved in the first term if the President decided to settle for a deal rather than staying the course. This temptation is not only organic to President Trump's nature, but would loom large for whoever became president because of the huge budgetary deficits that COVID-19 has compounded. President Trump's salutary hectoring our allies to do more—yielding impressive results in Europe his predecessor failed to match—also ran the risk of reaching a culminating point counterproductive to forging a muscular strategic consensus that actively counters China's ambitions.

With President Trump's defeat, the odds diminish that China loses more than it gains by unleashing and exploiting COVID-19. Granted, the most recent Pew Foundation Poll found that many Democrats as well as even more Republicans advocate tougher policies toward China on human rights and trade. An increasing number of prominent Democrats have become rhetorically more willing to criticize rather than conciliate China. Even so, President-elect Biden has a long record of advocating engagement with China while downplaying the idea that the PRC has become a serious strategic rival. The leftward lurch of the current Democratic Party also does inspire confident that a Biden administration will follow through on President Trump's policy of robust resistance towards China's predatory behavior. On the contrary, Senator Biden had moved steadily in a more dovish direction on national security even before becoming President Obama's Vice President and cheerleading for Obama's Dangerous Doctrine President Trump has repudiated in its entirety. Neither Biden nor his surrogates said much of anything about China at the Democratic convention despite the urgency of addressing the paramount national security threat of our time.

## Poll: How and why did SARS-CoV-2 appear?

- ☐ We have no exact idea when, why, and where SARS-CoV-2 appeared, and China is largely blameless for the mystery.
- ☐ We should believe, as China says, that the disease likely arose from accidental contact with exotic animals in a wet market.
- ☐ The virus was created in a level-4 Chinese military-related virology lab and accidentally released.
- ☐ Whether the Chinese were lax or deliberate in the virus's release does not matter: China did the world terrible damage.
- ☐ China was experimenting with the virus for nefarious purposes and sought to capitalize on its spread after it was released.

Will a Democratic Party reluctant to condemn the breakdown of law and order in a growing number of municipalities its leaders have governed for decades—a party seriously considering deep cuts in law enforcement amidst the mayhem—pursue the types of muscular national security strategies essential for credibly reassuring our terrified real and prospective allies in the Indo-Pacific that it is safer to stand up to China rather than to capitulate? Will a party committed to a vast expansion of government domestically—with deficits cascading, taxes poised steeply to increase if President Biden has his way—have the resources much less the inclination to spend enough on defense to counter China’s relentless military buildup aimed at driving the United States out of the Western Pacific? Will a Biden administration also designate China’s grandiose ambitions and predatory behavior as danger number one? Or will the President-elect and his party revert instead to the default position of President Trump’s predecessor, who considered climate change the paramount gathering danger, envisaging China as a partner in fighting it?

Concluding with an optimistic plausible caveat about the consequences of a Biden victory for our struggle with China, history furnishes ample examples of policies confounding expectations. Recall the Truman administration’s decision to resist North Korea’s June 1950 attack on South Korea just six months after Secretary of State Dean Acheson seemed to exclude South Korea as a vital interest in his speech to the Washington Press Club in January 1950. Recall the strategic metamorphosis of heretofore isolationist Senator Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan into a stalwart supporter of President Truman’s policy of vigilant containment. In the immortal words of the Beach Boys, “Wouldn’t It Be Nice” if a Biden presidency underwent a similar metamorphosis in this direction. It would be a triumph of hope over experience, however, to count on it. This version of the Democratic Party has purged itself of all vestiges of the Truman/Scoop Jackson tradition of muscular Cold War liberalism congenial to the President’s hawkishness on China. The party’s political banishment of former senator Joseph Lieberman—the last of the Cold War Democrats—sadly attests to that.

May a Biden presidency, too, be better than it sounds. Otherwise, the COVID-19 pandemic may turn out to be a strange and stinging defeat for the United States instead of a defeat for its perpetrator.

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1 “Americans Fault China in its Role for Spreading the Covid-19,” *Pew Foundation*, July 30 2020, <http://pewresearch.org/global2020/7/30/americans-fault-china-for-its-role-in-the-spread-of-covid-19>.



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# Reckless and Rash: China and the Pandemic

By Edward N. Luttwak

In response to accusations that COVID-19 was deliberately made by protein transplantation, implying that the Wuhan Institute of Virology's safety-level 4 lab was engaged in biological warfare, virologists around the world vehemently protested its innocence. That they were right was amply proven by the lab's openness to the visits of foreign scientists, but when its foreign defenders also denied with equal vehemence that the virus might have escaped because of carelessness, no doubt in part because of their political antipathy towards the chief accuser, they protested too much: the virologists of the French *Centre International de Recherche en Infectiologie* that had designed and supervised the construction, fitting out, and initial operations of the Wuhan laboratory, withdrew their participation long before the 2020 outbreak, because of systematized if not criminal laxity. Instead of a maximum of two students per professional researcher, they had as many as twenty, making the required level 4 discipline simply impossible.

That is probably the ultimate explanation for the escape of a virus found 800 meters away in the Wuhan animal market in which bats are not traded—a virus only found in nature no nearer than 800 kilometers away in Yunnan province (*Le Monde*, April 26, 2020, “Dans la jungle des labos de Wuhan,” a headline that requires no translation).

It appears that public opinion around the world agrees with *Le Monde*, unless it is a mere coincidence that very high percentages of the respondents to the Pew favorability global polls have sharply turned against China. In Australia only 33 percent of the respondents had an unfavorable opinion of China in 2015, but in the 2020 Global attitude survey it is 81 percent. In the United Kingdom that percentage has increased from 37 percent to 74 percent. Even in Germany, still widely viewed as a country rather favorable to China—for the excellent reason that the Chinese are very partial to German products—the percentage has increased from 60 percent to 71 percent, with the U.S. numbers not very different, having increased from 54 percent to 73 percent. More surprisingly, in South Korea, where many used to envisage a future under Chinese suzerainty without much trepidation, the un-favorability rating increased from 37 percent to 75 percent, a greater change than in Canada (48 percent to 73 percent), itself very much in line with France (49 percent to 70 percent) and other developed countries, with only two outliers: Japan, where there is less disapproval of China than there was in 2015 when it reached 89 percent, as opposed to the latest 86 percent, that being a function of a bit of a respite in China's explicit claims to the Senkaku islands, though of course there is no political difference between 86 percent and 89 percent; and Italy where Chinese diplomacy assisted by gifts public and otherwise achieved its very best results with a 62 percent un-favorability rating.

It has been Xi Jinping's incessant claim in addressing the Chinese people that his extremely assertive leadership, so very different from Hu Jintao's deliberate *primus inter pares* demeanor; and his strong line with insubordinate Vietnamese in the Gulf of Tonkin, whose fishing boats are now sunk and not just shoved, with the uppity Indians on the Ladakh border, and with foreign critics everywhere, has changed the country's image in the world, evoking widespread admiration.

The first part of Xi's claim is certainly valid: the image of the People's Republic of China in the world has certainly changed. But it is hard to see how Chinese interests can be advanced by arousing hostile reactions in





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so many different countries at the same time, whose combined populations outnumber China's, whose GDPs are three or four times as large, and whose combined military capabilities are far greater. This is a dynamic that cannot persist without leading to the utter isolation of China in the world, if not an actual outbreak of armed conflict. It remains to be seen if Xi Jinping will persist in his policies, and in his Party and State and military offices even as Chinese students, scholars, investors, and investment-seekers are all paying the price of his triumphalist poses.

## Pandemic Impact on China's Global Expansion: Delayed, but Not Derailed

By Christopher O'Dea

Whatever the final verdict on China's intent with respect to coronavirus research and the nature of its complicity in the release and spread of SARS-CoV-2, the pandemic is likely to delay, but not derail, China's global initiatives to expand its economic leverage and political influence.

To be sure, the pandemic crystallized global discontent with China's heavy-handed diplomacy, one-sided economic dealings, and coercive, if formally legal, overseas investment practices. The world is aware that China tried to suppress key information about how the virus spread; bought up medical supplies and protective equipment before the rest of the world was aware of how infectious the new virus was; and in typically heavy-handed style, had its diplomats pressure foreign officials to make favorable statements about China as the virus spread, or accuse countries that criticized China's handling of the virus of racism and xenophobia. That left China with a credibility gap, and opinion polls now show record-high distrust of China around the world.

To ensure regime survival, the Communist Party of China had to show strength internally, and recent aggressiveness on the border with India, in the South China Sea, and with respect to Hong Kong likely helped create the impression that the pandemic had not weakened China on the world stage. Countries stood firm against China's aggressions, imposing sanctions, engaging troops in battle, and conducting military flyovers, and extended

freedom of navigation operations. The U.S. even announced unequivocal support—after a long silence—for the 2016 ruling that China’s claim to ownership of most of the South China Sea has no valid legal basis.

But these situations had deeper roots, and the reactions to China were not directly related to the pandemic. While time-consuming for the CCP leadership, these are tactical delays. Its authoritarian use of tracking technology enabled China to rapidly stem the outbreak at home, enabling China to recover its strategic sea legs more quickly than most other countries.

The most likely outcome is that countries will seek to ensure that any arrangements with China include terms to protect their own interests against Chinese coercion. China wasted no time showing it will flex its economic muscles to punish countries that criticize its handling of the pandemic. Since Australia in May called for a public investigation of the origins and spread of the coronavirus, China has levied an 80 percent tariff on Australian barley, suspended imports of Australian beef, and opened an investigation into Australian wine exporters.

Australia’s case holds a lesson: as things stand, China has sufficient economic leverage to prevent countries from taking meaningful actions to investigate its role in the pandemic, and even were China to be found negligent or criminally liable for the origination or spread of the virus, the U.S. and the Free West may not be able to compel China to pay any legal judgements or restitution.

China’s economic leverage rests on one major capability that other countries lack: logistics. Little noticed as China became the world’s manufacturing base, Chinese state-owned companies simultaneously built a global network of ports, shipping routes, container handling terminals, and transportation facilities, orchestrated by digital communications, security, and logistics software run on Chinese-operated networks.

Admiral Raymond Spruance once wrote that a sound logistics plan is the foundation for every successful military campaign. As the architect of the island-hopping campaign that led to the defeat of the Japanese Empire in the Pacific Theater of World War II, Spruance oversaw the creation of a seaborne logistics fleet that made innovations in vessel-loading and artificial harbor construction in order to prove the military with everything from food and medical supplies to fuel and ship repair services as Spruance captured one island chain after another.

Today China is engaged in its own island-hopping campaign, and Chinese superiority in commercial maritime logistics affords the Middle Kingdom a significant strategic edge over the Free West. The ongoing trade conflict between the U.S. and China is the first post-globalization conflict, and it differs from prior great-power conflicts in one critical respect: the economic domain is the primary battlespace. As it did in so many manufacturing industries, China has reverse-engineered the logic of conquest. Rather than seeking to subdue an adversary and its allies by military means as a prelude to imposing political control and reaping the economic rewards of the conquered territories, China has acquired the rights to control, and often to build and finance, the facilities that are essential to the ongoing operation of the globalized economy.

The post-globalization world consists of four major islands—Eurasia, Africa, North America, and South America—and Chinese port and shipping SOEs have established China’s commercial logistics network on each one of them. General William T. Sherman’s march to the sea used a standardized railroad network and telegraph wirelines in the first military campaign that employed new electronic communications in tandem with new transportation technology. China is using its twenty-first-century version of a standardized maritime transport network and wireless digital communications to march inland from the sea.

The pandemic illustrated the severe consequences that can result from disrupted supply chains. Australia is under economic attack, and China’s thinly veiled threat to cut off the supply of pharmaceuticals made almost exclusively in factories in China demonstrated the strategic folly of having outsourced essential manufacturing to an adversary’s territory. Moving production back to the U.S. will take time, and other countries may not be willing or able to become self-sufficient in medical, technology, or other key industries.

But the supply of many essential products is now based in China, and the supply chain that delivers those goods runs across a Chinese-controlled logistics system—countries in which China runs the critical ports and commercial logistics networks may hesitate to take any actions or support any policies that criticize China or challenge Chinese economic capacity.

China has built its supply-chain power opportunistically. Using coercive means, China has acquired long-term contracts that by nature bundle governance powers with the rights to operate infrastructure, often from countries unwilling or unable to afford the investments required to upgrade their ports to



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modern standards. The recent resistance to aggressive Chinese actions reveals growing awareness that doing business with China is a win-lose proposition.

The strategic question, then, is whether the U.S. can consolidate the incipient ill will towards China's coercive approach to international economic and political affairs into an organized alliance with a positive agenda suited to the long-term challenge of building a post-globalization supply chain for the Free West—and do so before China learns to adapt its approach, mend fences with wary countries, and start turning them from strategic economic holdings of the Chinese state into political allies of the Chinese people.

## China and the Wuhan Coronavirus: Strategic Consequences

By Paul A. Rahe

There is no reason to suppose that it might someday be discovered that China was experimenting in and before 2019 with enhancing the coronavirus that caused the pandemic of 2020, and that criminal laxity or worse on the part of the Chinese government explains its spread. Nor need we speculate about the strategic consequences of such a discovery for China's various global initiatives. We know that the Chinese engaged in such experimentation and were more than merely criminally lax, and we have a pretty good idea of the strategic consequences attendant on that knowledge. All that we have to do is to look around.

Here is what we know. First, the malady in question, sometimes called COVID-19, derives from a coronavirus found in bats in Yunnan province in southwestern China—more than a thousand miles away from Wuhan. In genetic structure, the two viruses are 96 percent identical.

Second, in 2013, a team led by a Chinese scientist named Shi Zengli, who is known in China as “the bat woman,” collected a sample of the pertinent virus from these bats and began studying it in her laboratories



at the Wuhan Institute of Virology some eight miles from the wet market in Wuhan, where many later contracted the disease. There is another institute—the Wuhan Center for Disease Control and Prevention—located just over three hundred yards from the wet market, and there another researcher also worked on the viruses found in bats.

Third, although the virus spread to visitors to the wet market, it did not originate there. Bats were not sold in the market. Studies of the feces of the animals that were sold in the market show no indication of the virus, and the earliest known victims had no contact with that market.

Fourth, the virus did not spread from Yunnan, and in its original form it was not susceptible to human-to-human transmission. Nor is there any evidence, despite speculation encouraged by the Chinese, that it passed through another animal, such as a pangolin, wherein it underwent the transformation that enabled human-to-human transmission.

Fifth, to this we can add that in 2018 American diplomats in China warned of “a serious shortage of appropriately trained technicians and investigators needed to safely operate” the Institute of Virology, which had higher biosafety standards than the Wuhan CDC. Shortly thereafter, the Trump administration shut down the Beijing office of the National Science Foundation, which had been exploring the possibility of collaboration with the Institute of Virology.

Sixth, once the disease began to spread, the local authorities—then, when they got involved, the national authorities—did everything within their power to suppress the news, lied shamelessly about the diseases’ contagiousness, and came down hard on medical doctors, scientists, and genetic-sequencing laboratories that spread the word. Until it became impossible to hide that an epidemic likely to turn into a pandemic was under way, mum was the word.

Seventh, Shi Zengli and the others associated with the two laboratories in Wuhan fiercely deny that they were working on the pertinent coronavirus and that a genetically altered version could have escaped from their facilities, and their friends and collaborators in the West have rallied to their support. But Chinese researchers would issue such a denial and their colleagues would accept it, wouldn’t they?

Eighth, the Chinese government with its “wolf-warrior” diplomats has angrily threatened and bullied those abroad who have suggested that Chinese scientists fabricated the disease and that the Chinese government was criminally negligent in the early stages of the epidemic—and in the West the news pages of the mainstream press have fallen in line.

It is an open question—as Holman Jenkins Jr. put it in his *Wall Street Journal* column on April 22—whether, once he figured out that the epidemic was going to wreak havoc in China, Xi Jinping “sought to make sure other countries weren’t spared so China wouldn’t be uniquely disadvantaged.” But this possibility is hardly unthinkable. As Jenkins went on to observe, “Your arrival in the world must have been recent if you think politicians not capable of such cynicism, especially when operating under an authoritarian, communist, one-party political system.”

This may, indeed, be an open question. But other questions are settled. I doubt that anyone in the intelligence community and that any halfway observant statesman in the Indo-Pacific world, the Middle East, Europe, or the Americas doubts that one or both of the research laboratories was seeing what could be done with the coronavirus collected from the bats of Yunnan; that due to sloppy biosafety procedures the reengineered coronavirus escaped from one of the two labs; and that the government of Wuhan and Xi Jinping were criminally negligent in their handling of the crisis, if not worse. If there are any skeptics in the group I identified, they should be made to watch the HBO docudrama *Chernobyl* and contemplate the first reaction of the Soviet authorities to the accident at Chernobyl and what they subsequently did.

If the Western press was as honest and discerning as it ought to be, and if the general public was as fully informed concerning this matter as it should be, there would have been an abrupt and dramatic shift in the foreign policy of the United States, the European countries, and those tolerably friendly to us in

Latin America, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific. But China has managed to muzzle that press (the owners of which have material interests that the Chinese could harm), and the subject has for the most part been dropped. Popular anger has dissipated, and nearly everyone has moved on.



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What is, nonetheless, going on—largely in response to the epidemic hatched in Wuhan—is a more gradual decoupling. Apart from North Korea, China has no allies. She has friends that she has bought—the leaders of various third-world countries as well as a host of elite figures in the U.S., Britain, and elsewhere—and they are rallying in support of their patron. But I doubt that things will ever be the same again. The character of the Chinese regime can no longer be hidden. It has become a problem for everyone, and misgivings about Chinese power and Chinese bullying will grow. Money talks, but, then, the same can be said about the fear that malice, swagger, and moral indifference engender. The Chernobyl catastrophe may have brought down the Soviet Union. I doubt that COVID-19 will bring down Xi Jinping and his minions. They are far more ruthless than was Mikhail Gorbachev. But, in the international arena, our experience with the Wuhan Coronavirus will impose constraints. It is already doing so.

## Responses to China and the Virus

By Barry Strauss

Li-Meng Yan, MD, and others have claimed that China manufactured the SARS-CoV-2 virus in a lab and that it suppressed information about the danger of human-to-human transmission. China's militarily controlled Wuhan Institute is said now to have the ability to manufacture additional pandemic viruses as well. These claims have been widely disputed, but if they hold up, they will increase opposition to China, even if the waters are muddied by support for China's virus research by the U.S. National Institutes of Health. That doesn't mean, however, that the consequences for China would be severe.

I wish I could say that I thought the world would rise up in righteous anger at the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s misbehavior, but I am skeptical. People do business with China because they want to make money. However guilty China might be for the virus, many if not most people would write it off as the cost of doing business. That is especially the case because the virus targets only a small segment of society, the elderly and those with certain preexisting conditions. People can see through China's brazen denials to date of any wrongdoing, but they are willing to live with what we now know, and they would probably be willing to live with worse.

China faces serious opposition abroad, but much less because of the virus than because of increased Chinese aggression. The CCP has moved insistently on several fronts in recent years, with activity stepped up in 2020. In addition to its long-standing effort to build island naval bases in the South China Sea, China has this year cracked down on Hong Kong, where it has rescinded freedoms guaranteed in its treaty with the UK. It has also initiated a five-month-long struggle with India over a disputed border region in Ladakh, which is part of Kashmir. At home, there has been the continuing brutal repression of Uighurs, while abroad, Chinese hard-line "wolf warrior" diplomacy has also stirred up opposition. As a result, Pacific nations have "bandwagoned," against a rising threat. They include Australia, India, Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, and the United States. These countries share intelligence and collaborate on defense plans. Ever since China's border clashes with India this year, India has upped its interest in purchasing weapons from the U.S. India has also retaliated economically against China by banning the popular Chinese app TikTok from use in India.

If the world does come to the conclusion that China was criminally lax or worse, then the informal coalition to stop China that has emerged in the Asia-Pacific region might increase ties of cooperation and harden its resolve. The EU might also harden its position. Europe has taken a softer line toward China than has either India or the U.S., which reflects both Chinese influence in certain EU countries but also a general European interest in trade with China and in balancing the power of the United States. Still, EU businessmen and politicians have expressed increasing distrust of Chinese investments in Europe as well as growing concern about human-rights issues. Chinese "mask diplomacy" and disinformation have stirred up opposition in Europe as well. If real Chinese malfeasance in regard to the coronavirus is demonstrated, and if that information becomes public, then it might push Europeans further against China, especially if there is fear of China unleashing additional pandemics.

Then again, if Chinese diplomatic and information operations manage to muddy the waters, if a vaccine is available soon or if herd immunity kicks in rapidly, if China relaxes its aggression on its borders, and if no new pandemic appears, then the world might witness a very different reaction. Cynical businessmen, politicians, and publics as a whole, might decide that SARS-CoV-2 was the price of doing business, shrug its soldiers, and move on. This might particularly be the case when there is a change of administration in the United States.



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# The Unseen Costs of the Coronavirus for China

By Bing West

Looking into my crystal ball, I do not see the world community imposing any overt, adverse strategic consequences upon China in response to its criminally irresponsible conduct in regard to COVID-19.

However, there are several layers to consider regarding the strategic consequences for China's various global initiatives. First, there is no "world community." The online Oxford Dictionary defines community as "a body of nations or states unified by common interests." The nine billion humans on planet earth are unified only by one common and inevitably ephemeral interest in staying alive. Beyond that, there is no world community. The "world community"—perhaps a euphemism for the UN—has never condemned any nationalistic movement, including those of Hitler, Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot.

Second, all nations on the globe know that COVID-19 originated in China. Chairman Xi's failures in regard to the coronavirus are not on a scale with the horrendous actions of previous dictators. Xi and his governmental apparatus had no intent of deliberately letting loose this deadly virus. However, due to their negligence and subsequent actions to escape blame, over a million people have died directly from the virus and many more will perish because of its disruptive economic effects. The citizens of every nation intuitively understand this.

Third, to date China has paid no overt price for deliberately hiding information about its virus and for allowing it to spread without issuing a warning worldwide. Indeed, no nation in response has even dared to use its legitimate name: "the China virus." The World Health Organization, played for a dupe, has continued to defend China. Worse, the Beijing thuggish apparatus took advantage of the world's focus on the virus to beat Hong Kong into submission and tear up the fifty-year terms of its 1997 treaty with Great Britain.

It is reasonable to conclude that the China virus has incurred no adverse strategic consequence for the Xi government. President Trump has spoken up, but he has no constant internal center or guiding compass; depending upon whim, he alternates between praising and condemning Chairman Xi. President-elect Biden is equally without a center. In fact, he is vague beyond comprehension. To judge from the surface, the Chinese totalitarian government has not been set back, either in terms of internal control or international respect.



**BING WEST** is a military historian who has written a dozen best-selling books about the wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. His most recent book, with co-author General Jim Mattis, is *Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead*. A graduate of Georgetown and Princeton Universities, where he was a Woodrow Wilson Fellow, he served in the Marine infantry in Vietnam and later as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. Among other awards, he is the recipient of the Defense Distinguished Public Service Medal, the Marine Corps Heritage Award, Tunisia's *Medaille de Liberté*, the Colby Military History Award, the Goodpastor Prize for Military Scholarship, the Marine Corps Foundation Award for Leadership, the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Media Medal, and the Free Press Award.

tarian government has not been set back, either in terms of internal control or international respect.

However—and fourth—I believe that beneath the Teflon patina of the daily news cycle, the image of China has been seriously damaged. Why? Because the China virus will linger for decades in the subterranean consciousness of billions of humans. This will not be reflected in overt statements from nation-state capitols, let alone in anti-Chinese alliances. But the China virus has caused justifiable suspicion and distrust that will persist around the globe for at least a decade.

In summary, the tyrannical government of Xi will pay an international price and be weakened by the global effects of the China virus.

## Discussion Questions

1. How has China capitalized on the global pandemic after it spread from Wuhan in late January?
2. Even if the release of SARS-CoV-2 was accidental, and regardless of its origins, did the coronavirus—or something like it in the future—serve as a Chinese biological deterrent in the strategic sense?
3. What should be the U.S. reaction in the future if a dangerous virus from China escapes and spreads throughout the Western world?
4. Should the U.S. return all strategic production of pharmaceuticals and protective medical equipment to U.S. shores?

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The U.S.–Russian Relationship



## Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of “War, Revolution, and Peace.” Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: “The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man’s endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life.” From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the “Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict” has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution’s dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

## Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

## Strategika

*Strategika* is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.



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