



Is China Waging Warfare Against the United States?

A White Paper

22 April 2020

©2020 SMA, Inc. All Rights Reserved.



By James P. Farwell & J. David Patterson¹

Abstract

Having mishandled the COVID-19 virus at home, China's leadership pivoted from defense to offense. China's leadership—this is about China's leadership, not the Chinese people or the Chinese nation—sought to divert focus from their own fault and to blame the U.S, or to suggest the virus arose from unknown origins and made all nations victims. Their goal at home was to preserve regime legitimacy. They failed to disclose to the world what China learned. That cost the world 8–10 vital weeks during which other nations could prepare defenses against a pandemic. They covered up the facts. They forcibly silenced views that deviated from their narrative. China's leadership also saw strategic opportunity to advance their 2049 vision for global economic supremacy. China's notion of warfighting is rooted in its Three Wars concept, inspired by the teachings of Sun Tzu, and by its notions of unrestricted warfare. These notions emphasize deception and aim to achieve victory without armed conflict. Success is gaining relative advantage, not scoring military victory or a knock-out blow, as the West often conceives of warfighting. Instead of helping the world stamp out and recover from the virus, China's leadership has aggressively employed unrestricted warfare, and the media warfare and psychological warfare aspects of its Three Warfares concept, to divert focus from its fault. It has blamed the U.S. for the virus. China's leadership has refused to make medical supplies readily available to nations it has harmed. Its warfare has caused tens of thousands of deaths; infected 2 million people; cost jobs; cost trillions, and dislocated economies. Is China waging war against the U.S. and other nations? If so, what should be the response? Do Chinese actions present a unique historical opportunity to turn back its strategic plan to displace the U.S. as a world leader and establish global economic supremacy for China? What action for just compensation is actionable?

¹ Mr. Farwell is a national security consultant who has advised the U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Special Operations and other COCOM. He is the author of [Persuasion & Power](#) (Washington: Georgetown U. Press, 2012) and [Information Warfare](#) (Quantico: Marine Corps University Press, 2020) (forthcoming). He is an Associate Fellow in the Centre for Strategic Communication, Department of War Studies, King's College, University of London, a non-resident Senior Fellow at the Middle East Institute, Washington, D.C., and a member of the Board of Editors of the NATO peer-reviewed journal, *Strategic Defence Studies*.

Mr. Patterson is the Senior Vice President for Strategic Accounts, SMA, Inc., and the former Executive Director, National Defense Business Institute at the University of Tennessee. He served as the Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, Comptroller in the George W. Bush Administration. He is a frequent contributor to national security related publications.

Their views are their own opinions and do not represent the views of organizations with which they are affiliated.

All warfare is based on deception.

Sun Tzu

The skillful leader subdues the enemy's troops without any fighting.

Sun Tzu



INTRODUCTION

Historical experience tells us that war is violent, marked by the wholesale destruction of cities and the slaughter of people. Today, however, the United States must realize that war as we have always understood it is not what we face. Without declaring a state of war, is China now waging war against the United States and its partner nations?

We may never know exactly how the coronavirus pandemic started—wild animals in a wet market, or an accident in a Wuhan lab.² Regardless, Beijing's actions mirror key elements of Chinese notions of warfare. And if China's actions track a strategy rooted in Sun Tzu, its Three Warfares concept and China's notion of unrestricted warfare that employs deception, avoids armed conflict, and seeks to achieve its goals without firing a shot, shouldn't the United States view itself as at war and respond accordingly?

One recalls the 9/11 Commission's comment: Al Qaeda was at war with us long before we knew that we were at war with them.³ Not until Japan attacked Pearl Harbor did decision-makers timely connect the dots to recognize what was unfolding. Are we guilty of a failure of imagination today, as preceded those attacks?

American audiences may find this suggestion extreme. Traditional Western notions hold that armed conflict is a necessary element of war. Grotius famously stated that war is "a state of forcible contention; an armed contest between nations."⁴ China's notion of warfighting is differ-

² The origin of COVID-19 is not clear, but there is no conclusive evidence that the virus jumped from animals to humans and contrary evidence exists that it "leaked" from a laboratory in Wuhan, China. Lawrence C. Sellin, "China, coronavirus and the weaponization of medical science," *Wionews.com*, April 15, 2020: <https://www.wionews.com/opinions-blogs/china-coronavirus-and-the-weaponisation-of-medical-science-292585>; Lawrence C. Sellin, "Evidence Suggesting CoVid-19 is Man-Made," *Citizens Commission on National Security*, April 16, 2020: <https://ccnationalsecurity.org/evidence-suggesting-CoVid-19-is-man-made/>. Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases indicated the virus originated with animals. Dr. Sellin has pointed out the error in his reasoning and conclusion. See: Col. Lawrence Sellin (Ret), "Dr. Fauci Unintentionally Misleads on the Origin of CoVid-19," *Citizens Commission on National Security*, April 18, 2020: <https://ccnationalsecurity.org/dr-fauci-unintentionally-misleads-on-the-origin-of-covid-19/>

Josh Campbell, Kylie Atwood, and Evan Perez, "US explores possibility that coronavirus start in Chinese lab, not a market," *CNN.com*, April 16, 2020: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/15/politics/us-intelligence-virus-started-chinese-lab/index.html>. China's narrative is that the virus arose naturally in animals and jumped to humans. See: David Cyranoski, "Mystery deepens over animal source of coronavirus," *Nature*, February 26, 2020: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00548-w>

³ National Commission on the Terrorist Attacks on the United States, Comment of Mr. Kean, July 9, 2003: https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/archive/hearing3/9-11Commission_Hearing_2003-07-09.htm.

⁴ Gro. de Jur. B. lib. 1, c. 1.). We should understand that differs from Chinese precepts of warfighting.

ent. It does not require armed force. It seeks no knock-out punch. Playing the long game for relative gain over an opponent, in an incremental march to victory. The actions of the Chinese leadership—China’s decisions and actions are made exclusively by an illegitimate authoritarian ruling elite, not the Chinese people—have received wide criticism. Yet many portray them as reactive or defensive. What if these actions are deliberate, if opportunistic? What if they aim to accelerate President Xi Jinping’s 2049 vision?

The outbreak of the virus in December rattled the Chinese leadership. They have long worried about losing their legitimacy at home. Their notions of war aim first to preserve the regime’s survival. Everything else comes second. Xi and China’s leaders preside over a repressive dictatorship. It provides them with an elite, rich lifestyle, perks, and unlimited power while most Chinese struggle. To tamp down discontent, the government suppressed the truth about the nature, seriousness, and spread of the virus. It worried that the international community would blame China for mishandling what blossomed into a global pandemic. The leadership had tried, without success, to cover-up an earlier SARS outbreak. If Chinese governance and science failed again to control the spread of a dangerous virus, and if the new virus killed tens of thousands of people across the planet, infected millions, and wrecked global economies, the leadership did not need to spell out the consequences. So much for Xi’s vision. No one would accept Chinese leadership or sacrifice sovereignty and freedom to become a tributary to the Middle Kingdom.

Did Beijing devise a bold plan to pivot from defense to offense? Originally it had suggested the virus originated naturally in animals in the barbaric Wuhan wildlife “wet” market that cruelly slaughters endangered species such as koalas and pangolins and jumped to humans. It executed a bold pivot. China switched gears and argued that the virus originated in the United States or perhaps elsewhere, rendering China a victim too. China’s leadership made no apology. They accepted no responsibility. Their narrative diverted fault from China. That was vital to bolstering legitimacy at home. They moved to turn the setback into a “strategic opportunity.” The goal was to build Chinese credibility, undermine that of the United States, and gain relative economic advantage. Instead of losing ground, their strategy would accelerate realization of the 2049 vision.

Beijing’s ruthless strategy employed aggressive media warfare and psychological warfare. They refused to share scientific data. They concealed the truth—that this was a serious virus, highly infectious, deadly, and spread quickly. Maintaining secrecy and repressing publications that questioned its narrative, China’s leadership refused to share information or accept help from international public health organizations like the U.S. Center for Disease Control. It exploited praise from the World Health Organization, now widely criticized for parroting Beijing’s version of events, and becoming too reliant on Chinese financial support.

China might have warned the world. Instead, the leadership sealed off Wuhan and Hubei province to prevent the spread of the virus at home. It canceled flights and trains to other parts of China. It suspended bus and other transportation services in Wuhan to minimize the impact within China. For the world, the posture was different. Xi and his colleagues allowed over 430,000 people to fly from China to the U.S. during the height of the outbreak in China. As its own crisis

eased, it closed its own borders to foreigners. In the meantime, the world was asleep. China's leadership took no action on its own to awaken the planet.

Instead it solidified its own position. China hoarded billions of masks, as well as ventilators, personal protective equipment (PPE), and other items even after it no longer required them. It stopped exporting medical equipment and bought up equipment and supplies. It asked the Chinese diaspora to acquire supplies and send them to China. Certainly, it recognized that would leave other nations, including the US, critically short of supplies as the pandemic struck their populations. China's leadership has tried to spin an image as the nation leading global recovery. Its own actions mock that narrative. Here is one example. When the virus broke out in China, Italy donated medical supplies. As the crisis eased there, Italy requested their return. The Chinese leadership's response? It tried to sell back the donated supplies.

At this writing, COVID-19 has caused over 45,400 American deaths. The toll keeps rising. At Pearl Harbor, 2,403 people died.⁵ The 9/11 attacks claimed 2,977 victims.⁶ We went to war both times against the attacker. Should a nation drop a bomb on a major American city and kill over 45,400 people, infect over 825,000, put millions of Americans out of work, close numerous companies, dislocate our economy, cost the nation trillions of dollars, would we consider that an act of war? What reaction would seem reasonable? If China has engaged in warfighting, is it reasonable as well to suggest that in causing the deaths of tens of thousands of innocent civilians, under the Geneva Conventions, China has committed war crimes?

This white paper provides analyses of China's approach to war. It lays out evidence as how China has handled the COVID-19 crisis that is compelling that China is following its approach to war. It offers options for policy makers for an appropriate response. If we are at war, we can take comfort in one truth: we can win this war. We can discredit, de-legitimatize and eviscerate China's 2049 vision. The damage the Chinese leadership has caused is extensive.

⁵ Pearl Harbor Visitors Bureau: "How many people died at Pearl Harbor during the attack?:"
<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-lets-zoom-xi-he-has-questions-to-answer/>

⁶ Office of Chief Medical Examiner, "World Trade Center Operational Statistics:"
http://www.nyc.gov/html/ocme/downloads/pdf/public_affairs_ocme_pr_WTC_Operational_Statistics.pdf, cited in Connor Perrett, "New York City's coronavirus death toll officially passed the number of people killed during the 9/11 attacks," *Business Insider*, April 7, 2020: <https://www.businessinsider.com/new-york-city-CoVid-19-deaths-surpass-deaths-on-911-2020-4>

The Three Warfares Concept and Unrestricted Warfare: China's Notion of Warfighting

One must consider China's understanding of warfare to achieve national goals, and the implications for the United States. President Xi Jinping's address to the 19th Party Congress in 2018 called for the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."⁷

Xi's grand strategic vision seeks to place China in a position of economic global supremacy in which other nations are economic tributaries. It sees an end to a rules-based international order among sovereign nations, and rejects universal values such as human rights, the democracy, and free speech.⁸ The strategy is rooted in Chinese notions of unrestricted warfare and its Three Warfares concept. Initiatives like its Belt & Road Initiative and ambitions are integral to a unified strategic view, creating "debt traps" for nations that render them economically dependent upon China. Its ambition to persuade other nations to adopt its technology for fifth generation wireless communications (5G) is a part of that strategic view.

As Bradley Thayer and John Friend observe, in Xi's vision: "China will and should be the dominant force in international politics."⁹ Xi Jinping labels his vision "One World, One Dream," a modern form of *tianxia*, or "all under heaven."

Three Warfares embraces "legal warfare," "mediawarfare," and "psychological warfare."^{10,11} The Office of the Secretary of Defense's 2019 report to Congress on China notes:

"The [People's Liberation Army] PLA has emphasized the development of its Three Warfares strategy in its operational planning since at least 2003, which is comprised of psychological warfare, public opinion warfare, and legal warfare. Consistent with this strategy, China conducts influence operations against cultural institutions, media organizations, and the business, academic, and policy communities of the United States, and other countries."¹²

⁷ Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019:" https://media.defense.gov/2019/May/02/2002127082/-1/-1/1/2019_CHINA_MILITARY_POWER_REPORT.pdf, p. 1.

⁸ Jonathan D.T. Ward, *China's Vision of Victory*, supra, Kindle Loc. 247/6590, 6590.

⁹ See, e.g., Bradley A. Thayer and John M. Friend, "The World According to China," *Diplomat*, October 3, 2018: <https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/the-world-according-to-china/>

¹⁰ See: Larry M. Wortzel, "The Chinese People's Liberation Army and Information Warfare," U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, (2014): <http://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/pub1191.pdf>;

¹¹ Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019:" https://media.defense.gov/2019/May/02/2002127082/-1/-1/1/2019_CHINA_MILITARY_POWER_REPORT.pdf, p. 2.; and David Gitter, "Is China's Period of Strategic Opportunity Over?", *Diplomat*, May 28, 2016: <https://thediplomat.com/2016/05/is-chinas-period-of-strategic-opportunity-over/>.

¹² Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019:" https://media.defense.gov/2019/May/02/2002127082/-1/-1/1/2019_CHINA_MILITARY_POWER_REPORT.pdf, p. IV-V.

The Three Warfares approach has roots not only in Sun Tzu but also in “unrestricted warfare,” which, as articulated by Colonels Qiao Lang and Wang Xiangsu, respects no rules or limits.¹³ China practices that approach through its economic, trade, cyber, financial, and other policy strategies.¹⁴ These reflect China’s desire to maneuver for psychological advantage and to use information warfare as a tool in multi-dimensional spaces to paralyze an adversary, gain the upper hand in a game with no rules, and force an enemy to submit to one’s will.¹⁵

China’s Central Military Commission endorsed the Three Warfares approach in 2003, arguing that nuclear weapons are essentially unusable, and that kinetic force offers undesirable solutions. Much has been written on the Three Warfares, and this paper draws partly on a 2013 Pentagon study.¹⁶ The concept consists of three confluent thrusts:¹⁷

1. **Psychological Warfare** “seeks to influence and/or disrupt an opponent’s decision-making capacity, to create doubts, foment anti-leadership sentiments, to deceive opponents and to attempt to diminish the will to fight among opponents.” It employs diplomatic pressure, rumor, false narratives, and harassment to express displeasure, assert hegemony and convey threats. China’s economy is utilized to particular effect: China threatens to sell off the U.S. debt it holds; pressures US businesses invested in China’s market; employs boycotts; restricts critical exports (rare earth minerals); restricts imports; threatens predatory practices to expand market share.
2. **Media Warfare** (also known as public opinion warfare) is a ‘constant, on-going activity aimed at long-term influence of perceptions and attitudes’ of both domestic populations in target countries. It uses a range of media, including films, television programs, books, the internet, and the global media network (particularly Xinhua and CCTV) and is undertaken nationally by the PLA, locally by the People’s Armed Police. Media warfare aims to: preserve friendly

¹³ Id., p. 12. In their words: “it is likely that a pasty-faced scholar wearing thick eyeglasses is better suited to be a modern soldier than a strong young lowbrow with bulging biceps.” Id., p. 33. Information warfare encompasses a far broader spectrum than cyber (digital) domains but includes it. They refer to it as “network space,” a “technological space that is formed by a distinctive combination of electronic technology, information technology, and the application of specific designs.” Although writing in the 1990’s, Liang and Xiangsui were clear sighted in envisioning the longer-range potential for cyber engagement (including theft of intellectual property to ruthlessly loot an adversary’s military and strategic assets and degrade its strengths) or cyber conflicts. Id., p. 34.

¹⁴ Ying Yu Lin, “China’s Hybrid Warfare and Taiwan,” *The Diplomat*, January 13, 2018: <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/chinas-hybrid-warfare-and-taiwan/>.

¹⁵ Col. Qiao Liang and Col. Wang Xiangsui, Unrestricted Warfare, published by the People’s Liberation Army, Beijing (Natraj Publishers, Indian Ed., 2007). As with this book, its footnotes are important. The book was written in reaction to the U.S. success in Iraq during DESERT STORM. Some argue that it represents neither a revolution in military thought nor an executable doctrine for future warfare, but a collection of tactics, techniques, and procedures that have been used before and will be used again. See: Maj. Johan A. Van Messel, USMC, “Unrestricted Warfare: A Chinese doctrine for future warfare?”, a paper for the United State Marine Corps School of Advanced Warfighting (2005): <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a509132.pdf>.

¹⁶ “China: The Three Warfares,” for Andy Marshall, former Director, Office of Net Assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Prepared by Professor Stefan Halper (May 2013): *Cyber Silhouettes: Shadows Over Information Operations*. This report describes how the Three Warfares has been used as an offensive weapon through an asymmetrical approach.

¹⁷ Id., p. 12-13; 23-101.

morale; generate public support at home and abroad; weaken an enemy's will to fight and alter its situational assessment. It is used to gain 'dominance over the venue for implementing psychological and legal warfare.'

3. **Legal Warfare (or 'lawfare')** exploits the legal system to achieve political or commercial objectives. Lawfare ranges from conjuring law to inform claims to territory and resources, to employing bogus maps to 'justify' claims. In a distorted application of domestic law, for example, Beijing designated the village of Sansha on the Paracel Islands, as a Hainan Prefecture to extend China's administrative writ into the South China Sea. China also uses United Nations Law of the Sea provisions and other legal conventions for unintended purposes.¹⁸

How deeply rooted is China's Three Warfare concept in Sun Tzu's precepts? The PLA University of Science and Technology's motto is drawn from Chapter 5 of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*: "use the normal force to engage; use the extraordinary to win."¹⁹ The PLA has issued 100 examples each for psychological, media, and legal warfare, often citing Sun Tzu. The most cited phrase is "to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill," followed by "all warfare is based on deception."²⁰

Robert Ward observes that Xi and China's leadership seeks to establish China as economically supreme in the world, possessing the overwhelming share of global Gross Domestic Product. The Chinese system embraces an authoritarian model that functions through a vision of comprehensive social management. It talks about asserting sovereignty over its own territory, but the parameters of that territory keep expanding. It shows no respect for the intellectual property of other nations. Reportedly it is guilty of half the illegal fishing and half the human trafficking in the world.²¹ While eschewing military force, it employs economic coercion to force nations to submit to its will.²²

¹⁸ *Id.*, p. 12-13; 23-101.

¹⁹ Fumio Ota, "Sun Tzu in Contemporary Chinese Strategy," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 73, 2nd Quarter 2014: https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-73/jfq-73_76-83_Ota.pdf?ver=2014-03-26-120732-250.

²⁰ J.P. London argued in "Made in China," *US Naval Institute Proceedings* 137, no. 4 (April 2011), 59, that the Chinese concept of cyber-attack is based on that phrase. See: Fumio Ota, "Sun Tzu in Contemporary Chinese Strategy," *supra*, noting that point.

²¹ *Id.* Ward discusses this at length, but he is only one of many China experts that have cautioned about Chinese ambitions. See, e.g., Bradley A. Thayer and John M. Friend, "The World According to China," *Diplomat*, October 3, 2018: <https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/the-world-according-to-china/>; Graham Allison, "What Xi Jinping Wants," *supra*; Katsui Nakazawa, "Xi's overly ambitious goals triggered US-China trade war; talk of becoming world No. 1 backfired," *Nikkei Asiana Review*, July 12, 2018: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/China-up-close/Xi-s-overly-ambitious-goals-triggered-US-China-trade-war>; and Julian Baird Gewirtz, "China's Long March to Technological Supremacy: The Roots of Xi Jinping's Ambition to 'Catch up and Surpass,'" *Foreign Affairs*, August 27, 2019.

²² Ward, *China's Vision of Victory*, *supra*, Kindle Loc. 3900/6590.

China propagates a strategy that touts five principles: (i) respect for territorial integrity; (ii) mutual nonaggression; mutual noninterference in internal affairs; (iv) equality and mutual benefit; and (v) peaceful co-existence.²³ At the core of its national goals is, as Graham Allison sums up matters, “a civilizational creed that sees China as the center of the universe.”²⁴ The principles may sound reasonable on their face. China invokes them to justify its actions. It respects the notion of unrestricted warfare in which anything goes—including diverting to others the focus of fault in causing a global pandemic.

The outbreak of the virus may have been an accident, a puzzle this paper need not resolve. What matters is to understand the political, military, and diplomatic context in which China operates. The virus created a humiliating debacle that shattered the Chinese leadership’s claim to occupy the moral high ground. That perch is vital to its claim of legitimacy at home. Preserving that, it bears stressing, is the primary goal of Chinese security policy. Lose it, and the credibility of the government, led by its State Council and its Politburo, is undercut. It seems reasonable to infer that the government takes that threat seriously. But China is ably led. It has brilliantly pivoted to capitalize on its notions of warfare to survive the coronavirus debacle and to pursue its 2049 vision.

²³ “Principles of China’s Foreign Policy,” Asia for Education, Columbia University: http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china_1950_forpol_principles.htm#targetText=China%20says%20its%20decisions%20on,mutual%20benefit%2C%20and%20peaceful%20coexistence.

²⁴ Graham Allison, “What Xi Jinping Wants,” supra.

Does the Evidence Satisfy the Characteristics of China's Notions of Warfare?

This section adduces the evidence that shows that China's conduct reveals that it is consciously employing its Three Warfares Concepts approach to accelerate achievement of its 2049 goal of global economic supremacy. The following is a breakdown into the areas in which China employs its Three Warfares concept.

A. General Precepts of the Three Warfares concept²⁵

1. **Follow top-down guidance.** Mediawarfare must align with the larger national strategy.
2. **Pre-emption.** The first to broadcast gains an advantage in dominating airwaves, framing the debate, and defining the parameters of subsequent coverage. This is an offensive element to gain advantage.
3. **Be flexible and responsive to changing conditions.** Tailor operations to address specific audiences.
4. **Exploit all available resources.** Leverage news organizations, broadcast facilities, and internet users in a comprehensive media campaign. The goal is to ensure that (i) Chinese domestic audiences are not exposed to messages articulated by China's opponents and that, (ii) if exposed, such messages do not take root.

B. Tactical Operations for Three Warfares²⁶

Establish China's version of the incident. China's approach is to do that at the outset of the crisis. Beijing statements establish the Chinese position on what happened. Official statements in December and January downplayed the outbreak. China knew by December 10, when Wei Guixian, a seafood merchant in Wuhan's wet market, started feeling ill,²⁷ that a problem was brewing. By December 25, Chinese medical staff in two hospitals in Wuhan were suspected of contracting viral pneumonia and quarantined.²⁸ This was strong evidence of human-to human transmission.²⁹

²⁵ "China: The Three Warfares," Office Net Assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense, May 2013," p. 72-73.

²⁶ "China: The Three Warfares," Office Net Assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense, May 2013," p. 73-74.

²⁷ Bethany Allen-ebrahiman, "Timeline: The early days of China's coronavirus outbreak and cover-up," *Axios*, March 28, 2010: Timeline: The early days of China's coronavirus outbreak and; Jeremy Page, Wenxin Fan and Natasha Khan, "How It All Started: China's Early Coronavirus Missteps," *Wall Street Journal*, March 6, 2020: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-it-all-started-chinas-early-coronavirus-missteps-11583508932> and Gerry Shih, Emily Rauhala and Lena H. Sun, "Early missteps and state secrecy in China probably allowed the coronavirus to spread farther and faster," *Washington Post*, February 1, 2020: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/02/01/early-missteps-state-secrecy-china-likely-allowed-coronavirus-spread-farther-faster/>

²⁸ The Chinese Report, cited by *The National Review*: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/lzzCnz4Yr2jEiYZePiu_ow. TNR report: Jim Geraghty, "The Comprehensive Timeline of China's COVID-19 lies," *National Review*, March 23, 2020: <https://www.nationalreview.com/the-morning-jolt/chinas-devastating-lies/>

²⁹ Chinese statement from Wuhan Municipal Health Commission in Chinese: <http://wjw.wuhan.gov.cn/front/web/showDetail/2019123108989>; See also: Jim Geraghty, "The Comprehensive Timeline of China's COVID-19 lies," supra; and Niall Ferguson, "Let's Zoom Xi. He has questions to answer," *theglobeandmail*, April 6, 2020: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-lets-zoom-xi-he-has-questions-to-answer/>

By late December, Wuhan hospitals noticed “an exponential increase” in the number of cases that cannot be linked back to the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market.³⁰

China concealed the fact that the virus could be transmitted from human-to-human until January 20. It claimed the virus arose naturally from animals. Even then, its alibi is gruesome and gives China no claim to occupying moral high ground. The alibi rests on justifying the cruel slaughter of animals in a wildlife market they call a “seafood market.” The reality is far harsher and immoral. It is a cruel slaughterhouse for endangered species acquired illegally, as well as for other animals. China denies it arose from laboratory testing, to obscure the possibility that it was experimenting with bioweapons using bat viruses. But its alibi brands China as barbaric. It would pay that price to conceal the truth about its broader behavior.

The Wuhan Municipal Health Commission repeatedly maintained in public statements that the virus was not transmitted between humans.

State Principles to Resolve an incident. China broadcasts public statements to domestic and foreign audiences, to express commitment to certain principles. China expressed commitment to leading recovery efforts, providing medical assistance and expertise, medical supplies, applying its high-technology expertise and calling for global unity.

Shut down unofficial but normal information channels. China’s approach seeks to establish information control and dominance to frame and shape the debate. It has ruthlessly suppressed and oppressed medical opinion. China has expelled journalists from the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*. It refused to engage with international disease specialists who might suggest conclusions that contradicted China’s narrative that the virus was naturally occurring in animals, not a lab test accident. For over a month, Chinese officials refused to provide samples of its coronavirus to U.S. researchers such as the CDC and WHO investigators³¹ shortly after the outbreak became public. It refused to allow international disease specialists to visit Wuhan for weeks.³² That was despite the fact that on December 31, WHO reports Chinese health officials in Wuhan revealed a “cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause.”³³

By December 31: Chinese health officials were closely guarding information about the illness. By one account, between December 12 and December 31, China had 104 new cases of the virus including 15 deaths. Yet the official Chinese line on December 31 was there was “no clear evi-

³⁰ Qun Li, Xuhua Guan, Peng wu, Xiaoye Wang, Lee Shou, Yeqing Tong, Ruiqi Ren, Kathy S.M. Leung, Eric H.Y Lau, Jessica Y, Yong, Xuesen Xing, and Nijuan Xian, “Early Transmission Dynamics in Wuhan, China, of Novel Coronavirus-Infect Pneumonia,” *New England Journal of Medicine*, March 26, 2020: <https://www.nejm.org/doi/10.1056/NEJMoa2001316>

³¹ The WHO’s leadership is very political and pro-Chinese. Its scientists stand in different shoes and when finally allowed to see some facts, reported them.

³² Donald G. McNeil, Jr. and Zolan Kanno-Youngs, “C.D.C. and W.H.O. Offers to Help China have been ignored for weeks,” *New York Times*, February 7, 2020: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/07/health/cdc-coronavirus-china.html>

³³ Abbey Goodnough and Michael D. Shear, “The U.S.’s Slow Start to Coronavirus Testing: A Timeline,” *New York Times*, March 28, 2020: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/28/us/coronavirus-testing-timeline.html>

dence” of human-to-human transmission.³⁴ *New York Times* reported on January 6 that Wuhan government confirmed it was treating dozens of pneumonia cases of unknown origin “only after an emergency notice to city hospitals was shared on social media sites a day earlier, apparently triggering some public panic.”³⁵

Shut off information channels to make China’s official lines as much as possible the only ones available. Conceal facts unfavorable to China’s narrative.³⁶ On December 30, Dr. Li Wenliang was among the first to blow the whistle. He posted an online chat warning about a possible outbreak of an illness that resembled severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS).³⁷ He urged colleagues to take protective measures against infection.³⁸ Wuhan health officials sent an “urgent notice” to hospitals about the existence of “pneumonia of unclear cause.” Yet authorities omitted any mention of SARS or a coronavirus. They ordered all departments to compile information about known cases and report them up the chain of command. Tight control over damaging information was the order of the day.³⁹

The Chinese leadership wasted no time in moving to silence Dr. Li and other medical professionals. The Wuhan Public Security Bureau summoned him and accused him of “spreading rumors.” Two days later, at a police station, Dr. Li signed a statement acknowledging his “misdemeanor” and promising not to commit further “unlawful acts.” *Xinhua News Agency* warned: “The police call on all netizens not to fabricate rumors, not spread rumors, not believe rumors,” while encouraging Web users to “jointly build a harmonious, clear and bright cyberspace.”⁴⁰ Seven other doctors were arrested on similar charges. Their fate is unknown.⁴¹ Those

³⁴ Niall Ferguson, “Let’s Zoom Xi. He has questions to answer,” *theglobeandmail*, April 6, 2020: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-lets-zoom-xi-he-has-questions-to-answer/>

³⁵ Sui-Lee and Vivian Wang, “China Grapples With Mystery Pneumonia-like Illness,” *New York Times*, January 6, 2020: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/06/world/asia/china-SARS-pneumonialike.html>

³⁶ “China: The Three Warfares,” Office Net Assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense, May 2013,” p. 86.

³⁷ Gerry Shih, Emily Rauhala and Lena H. Sun, “Early missteps and state secrecy in China probably allowed the coronavirus to spread farther and faster,” *Washington Post*, February 1, 2020: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/02/01/early-missteps-state-secrecy-china-likely-allowed-coronavirus-spread-farther-faster/>

³⁸ Andrew Green, “Li Wenliang,” *The Lancet*, February 18, 2020: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30382-2/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30382-2/fulltext); and Gerry Shih, Emily Rauhala and Lena H. Sun, “Early missteps and state secrecy in China probably allowed the coronavirus to spread farther and faster,” *Washington Post*, February 1, 2020: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/02/01/early-missteps-state-secrecy-china-likely-allowed-coronavirus-spread-farther-faster/>. Dr. Li died from the virus on February 7: “Coronavirus: Chinese doctor who tried to warn of outbreak dies from virus,” *Straits Times*, February 7, 2020: <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/chinese-doctor-who-tried-to-warn-colleagues-in-wuhan-about-coronavirus-dies>

³⁹ Gerry Shih, Emily Rauhala and Lena H. Sun, “Early missteps and state secrecy in China probably allowed the coronavirus to spread farther and faster,” *Washington Post*, February 1, 2020: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/02/01/early-missteps-state-secrecy-china-likely-allowed-coronavirus-spread-farther-faster/>

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ Christina Tardaguila and Summer Chen, “China arrested 8 for spreading ‘hoaxes’ about what is now known as coronavirus. What happened to them?” *Poynter*, January 23, 2020: <https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2020/the-2019-coronavirus-virus-lands-in-the-u-s-after-killing-17-and-taking-eight-to-prison/>; Gerry Shih, Emily Rauhala and Lena H. Sun, “Early missteps and state secrecy in China probably allowed the coronavirus to spread farther and faster,” *Washington Post*, February 1, 2020:

arrested had posted on *Weibo* (a Facebook-like social media platform) and/or in other messaging apps that Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, or SARS, was back. The state's answer to repression was to step up the repression of the truth, at a time when the world deserved to know the truth, and there was time to act.

It was worse than just silencing voices. On or about January 1, an official at the Hubei Provincial Health Commission ordered a Guangzhou-based genomics company to stop testing samples from Wuhan related to the new disease and destroy all existing samples. Test results from multiple labs in December suggested there was an outbreak of a highly infectious virus. Yet these results failed to trigger a government response.⁴²

On or about January 2, the Wuhan Institute of Virology mapped the genome of the virus. But Chinese leaders delayed announcing that breakthrough for another week.⁴³ Why would they do that? A day later, China's National Health Commission ordered institutions not to publish information related to the unknown disease. It ordered labs to transfer any samples they had to designated testing institutions, or to destroy them.⁴⁴ There is a term for that action: cover-up. On January 7, Xi took responsibility for government action.⁴⁵ Is it not reasonable to presume he knew what was happening? Did he warn the world? Why not? What action did he take that even commands respect as a human being?

On January 11, Chinese officials reported the first death, of a 61-year-old-man.⁴⁶ Wuhan's health commission repeated claimed there was no evidence that the virus can be spread between humans.⁴⁷ Three days later, Wuhan city health authorities stated: "Among the close contacts, no related cases were found."⁴⁸ China knew that was false as from early December, they knew the

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/02/01/early-missteps-state-secrecy-china-likely-allowed-coronavirus-spread-farther-faster/> see also: "China pneumonia outbreak: Mystery virus probed in Wuhan," *Agence France Presse*, January 3, 2020: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-50984025>

⁴² Gao Yu, Peng Yanfeng, Yang Rui, Feng Yuding, Ma Danmeng, Flynn Murphy, Han Wei and Timmy Shen, "How early signs of the coronavirus were spotted, spread, and throttled in China," *Straits Times*, February 28, 2020:

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/how-early-signs-of-the-coronavirus-were-spotted-spread-and-throttled-in-china>

⁴³ Jeremy Page, Wenxin Fan and Natasha Khan, "How It All Started: China's Early Coronavirus Missteps," *Wall Street Journal*, March 6, 2020: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-it-all-started-chinas-early-coronavirus-missteps-11583508932>

⁴⁴ Gao Yu, Peng Yanfeng, Yang Rui, Feng Yuding, Ma Danmeng, Flynn Murphy, Han Wei and Timmy Shen, "How early signs of the coronavirus were spotted, spread, and throttled in China," *Straits Times*, February 28, 2020:

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/how-early-signs-of-the-coronavirus-were-spotted-spread-and-throttled-in-china>

⁴⁵ Jeremy Page, Wenxin Fan, and Natasha Khan, "How It All Started: China's Early Coronavirus Missteps," *Wall Street Journal*, March 6, 2020: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-it-all-started-chinas-early-coronavirus-missteps-11583508932>

⁴⁶ Amy Qin and Javier C. Hernandez, "China Reports First Death from New Virus," *New York Times*, January 10, 2020:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/10/world/asia/china-virus-wuhan-death.html>

⁴⁷ Wuhan Municipal Health Commission statement, January 11, in Chinese:

<http://wjw.wuhan.gov.cn/front/web/showDetail/2020011109036>, Jim Geraghty, "The Comprehensive Timeline of China's COVID-19 lies," supra.; and Sui-Lee and Donald G. McNeil, Jr., "China Identifies New Virus Causing Pneumonia-like Illness," *New York Times*, January 8, 2020: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/08/health/china-pneumonia-outbreak-virus.html>

⁴⁸ Wuhan Municipal Health Commission, January 14 statement, in Chinese:

<http://wjw.wuhan.gov.cn/front/web/showDetail/2020011409039>, cited by Jim Geraghty, "The Comprehensive Timeline of China's COVID-19 lies," supra.

first victim and his wife did not visit the market.⁴⁹ Not until January 15 do Wuhan health authorities change their statements, then declaring: “Existing survey results show the clear human-to-human evidence has not been found.”⁵⁰ It does not rule out the possibility. On January 20, the Wuhan Health commission declared in its daily bulletin: “no related cases were found among the close contacts.”⁵¹ Finally that day, the head of China’s national health commission admitted that two cases of infection in Guangdong province were caused by human-to-human transmission and medical staff infected. And the *Wuhan Evening News*, the city’s largest newspaper, mentions the first for the first time since January 5.⁵² Only on January 21 does the Communist Chinese Party (CCP) flagship newspaper, *People’s Daily*, mention the epidemic and President Xi Jinping’s efforts to fight it.⁵³

China has concealed the true virus infection and death toll at home. The CIA has warned since February that China has vastly understated its infections and deaths.⁵⁴

China’s secrecy as to virus outbreaks fits a historical pattern. During the 2003 SARS cases, that outbreak become internationally after Yanyong Jiang, a respected physician, broke the Chinese government’s silence in April 2003, putting it into action against the growing epidemic.⁵⁵ At the time, the WHO criticized China for under-reporting the number of cases of SARS in a southern province that affected over 8,000 people in 26 countries and killed 349 in mainland China and 299 in Hong Kong.⁵⁶

Emphasize Beijing’s Commitment to the US-China relationship. By firmly expressing its own commitment to bilateral actions, China implies that Washington does not take the relationship as seriously and is to blame for any potential relations. The crisis encompasses Beijing’s effort

⁴⁹ Jim Geraghty, “The Comprehensive Timeline of China’s COVID-19 lies,” supra.

⁵⁰ Wuhan Municipal Health Commission, Statement of January 15, in Chinese: <http://wjw.wuhan.gov.cn/front/web/showDetail/2020011509040>, cited by Jim Geraghty, “The Comprehensive Timeline of China’s COVID-19 lies,” supra.

⁵¹ Wuhan Municipal Health Commission statement, January 20, in Chinese: <http://wjw.wuhan.gov.cn/front/web/showDetail/2020012009077>, cited by Jim Geraghty, “The Comprehensive Timeline of China’s COVID-19 lies,” supra.

⁵² Ashley Collman, “China spent the crucial first days of the Wuhan coronavirus outbreak arresting people who posted about it online and threatening journalists,” *Business Insider*, January 24, 2020: <https://www.businessinsider.com/china-information-crackdown-on-wuhan-coronavirus-2020-1>

⁵³ Gerry Shih, Emily Rauhala and Lena H. Sun, “Early missteps and state secrecy in China probably allowed the coronavirus to spread farther and faster,” *Washington Post*, February 1, 2020: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/02/01/early-missteps-state-secrecy-china-likely-allowed-coronavirus-spread-farther-faster/>.

⁵⁴ Julian E. Barnes, “C.I.A. Hunts for Authentic Virus Totals in China, Dismissing Government Tallies,” *New York Times*, April 2, 2020: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/02/us/politics/cia-coronavirus-china.html>

⁵⁵ Christina Tardaguila and Summer Chen, “China arrested 8 for spreading ‘hoaxes’ about what is now known as coronavirus. What happened to them?” *Poynter*, January 23, 2020: <https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2020/the-2019-coronavirus-virus-lands-in-the-u-s-after-killing-17-and-taking-eight-to-prison/>; see also: “China pneumonia outbreak: Mystery virus probed in Wuhan,” *Agence France Presse*, January 3, 2020: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-50984025>

⁵⁶ “China pneumonia outbreak: Mystery virus probed in Wuhan,” *Agence France Presse*, January 3, 2020: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-50984025>

to make the crisis a testing point of US good will and intentions. This tactic is manifest in Chinese stories claiming that the US is at fault for tensions. *Xinhua* News Agency published a commentary by Shanghai professor Gao Wencheng denouncing “Washington’s poisonous coronavirus politics,” and warning that spreading rumors simply encouraged “fear, division, and hate.” Gao blasted the U.S. for “trying to shift blame and politicize humanity’s common challenge by stoking pernicious anti-Chinese sentiments.” He declared such action “could be much more menacing than the virus itself.” He refused to apologize for China’s conduct and blamed U.S. problems on “Washington’s chaotic and sloppy epidemic response.”⁵⁷

C. The Three Warfares’ Approach to Managing Perceptions of the Crisis and China

Manipulate pre-existing beliefs. The strategic goal is to frame the debate. China seeks to manipulate these beliefs towards their own interpretation of them.

China’s approach echoes the views of the renowned American political consultant Tony Schwartz. He created the 1964 “Daisy” advertisement. One showing destroyed Senator Barry Goldwater’s campaign against President Lyndon Johnson. Schwartz that it is hard to change fixed beliefs and the best communication rarely tries to do so. Effective media provides stimuli that evoke feelings an audience already has and provides a context for an audience to express those feelings. It takes what is in the unconscious mind, makes it conscious, and directs that individual to support a particular message and narrative that gives meaning to the message.⁵⁸

China sought to accomplish that by suppressing medical opinion and criticism, control over the domestic media, expulsion of foreign media, and an active propaganda campaign playing on nationalism at home, and for all audiences touting Chinese expertise, high-tech capability, and commitment to solving the problem.

Use as much accurate information as possible. China believes using factual information is more likely to influence an opponent. It uses them selectively. Finally forced to admit the outbreak, China has concealed the extent of it at home and suppressed information and opinions that contradict China’s narrative that presents it as leading the world in stamping out the pandemic that its fault caused. Almost certainly China has lied about the extent of the epidemic at home. At a minimum, it obfuscated about what it told to the world. Mostly it omitted to tell the truth, share scientific facts, cooperate with international health authorities on a timely basis—and then, as its propaganda machine swung into action, it spread deliberate lies about the facts.

Exploit U.S. media processes. China exploits the open, free press, while tightly controlling its own. As noted above, it makes the most of Western’s media’s willingness to adopt its terminology, accept single-source Chinese statements as equivalent to multi-source Western sources, and to exploit our freedom of expression to articulate criticism of the U.S. that China would at home prohibit. The U.S. media will treat a biased Chinese-state source with the same credibility as it accords a multi-sourced Western narrative. Our media is at fault for playing China’s, game, but the Chinese leadership—give them credit—do it splendidly. This commentary is not the place

⁵⁷ Gao Wencheng, “Opinion: Washington’s poisonous coronavirus politics must end,” *XinhuaNet*, March 9, 2020: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-03/09/c_138859548.htm

⁵⁸ Tony Schwartz, *The Responsive Chord* (New York: Anchor Press, 1973), p. 93

to itemize China's history of using this tactic. The report for the Office of Net Assessments of the U.S. Department of Defense, cited above, cites example after example of how China exploits our media. Naturally, while abusing our rights of free expression, at home, China has expelled foreign journalists hide truths.

Put the U.S. on the defensive. China's approach achieves this through anti-U.S. media propaganda, the purchase of social media advertising on Facebook and Twitter, and pro-Chinese propaganda.

Anti-U.S. media propaganda on the coronavirus. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian tweeted that the U.S. Army brought the epidemic to Wuhan during the Military World games held in Wuhan in October. In a tweet, he tweeted in English and Chinese: "When did patient zero begin in US? How many people are infected? What are the names of the hospitals? It might be US army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan. Be transparent! Make public your date! US owe us an explanation."⁵⁹ His tweet drew 160 million views. The story was baloney and Chinese leaders knew it.

A *Global Times* story urged the US "to release health info of military athletes who came to Wuhan in October 2019. The story alleges that George Webb, "an investigative journalist in Washington, DC, claimed in recent videos and tweets that he believes Maatje Benassi, an armed diplomatic driver and cyclist who was in Wuhan in October for the cycling in the Military World Games, could be patient zero of COVID-19 in Wuhan."⁶⁰ The story was baloney and Chinese leaders knew it.

On March 21, Zhao retweeted a message written by a Twitter user named The Lizard King, suggesting the coronavirus had been in the U.S. during the Christmas holidays. The tweet's author was Beatrice Ottomanelli, a 24-year-old grant writer living in Melbourne, Fla., who had about 500 followers before the message. The story was baloney and Chinese leaders knew it.

The somewhat random thought occurred to her when she was reflecting on advice doctors had given her to protect her infant son during last fall's flu season, she later said, adding that her tweet was retweeted about 10,000 times within a few hours after being posted on March 14. A week later, the response was amplified after it was retweeted by Mr. Zhao, someone she hadn't heard of before. "I gained a whole lot of Chinese followers," Ms. Ottomanelli said, helping quintuple her following. "They're all very nice, but that was not my target audience." Representatives of the Chinese government didn't respond to a request for comment about Mr. Zhao's tweets, and Mr. Zhao couldn't be reached for comment directly.⁶¹

⁵⁹ #ZhaoLijianPostedFiveTweetsinaRowQuestioningAmerica; quoted in Steven Lee Myers, "China Spins Tale That the U.S. Army Started the Coronavirus Epidemic," *New York Times*, March 17, 2020: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/13/world/asia/coronavirus-china-conspiracy-theory.html>

⁶⁰ Leng Shumei and Wan Lin, "US urged to release health info of military athletes who came to Wuhan in October 2019," *Global Times*: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1183658.shtml>.

⁶¹ Betsy Morris and Robert McMillan, "China Pushes Viral Messages to Shape Coronavirus Narrative," *Wall Street Journal*, April 10, 2020: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-pushes-viral-messages-to-shape-coronavirus-narrative-11586516402>

Xinhua News Agency published a commentary by Shanghai professor Gao Wencheng denouncing “Washington’s poisonous coronavirus politics,” and warning that spreading rumors simply encouraged “fear, division, and hate.” Gao blasted the U.S. for “trying to shift blame and politicize humanity’s common challenge by stoking pernicious anti-Chinese sentiments.” He declared such action “could be much more menacing than the virus itself.” He refused to apologize for China’s conduct and blamed U.S. problems on “Washington’s chaotic and sloppy epidemic response.”⁶² The story was baloney and Chinese leaders knew it.

Social Media—Facebook/Twitter Ads and Fake News. From mid-February until early March, social-media sites linked to Chinese state media posted more than 3,300 times a day, triple the normal rate, according to Recorded Future, a Somerville, Mass.-based cybersecurity consulting firm. Those outlets were principally active on Facebook and Twitter, research showed.⁶³ The tweets aim to cite doubt and stir anger about basic facts and promote fictitious claims.

China has bought more than 200 political ads on Facebook since the end of 2018, but more than a third have been purchased in the past two months, said Vanessa Molter, a researcher at the Stanford Internet Observatory, a cyber-policy institute. Most of the recent ads have focused on trying to shape global perceptions around China’s handling of the coronavirus outbreak.

Molter said China’s state-media political advertising on Facebook has drawn as many as 109 million views over the past 14 months, about 45 million of them since February 15. China’s reach is far larger than the estimated 40 million impressions that Stanford says Russia’s Internet Research Agency obtained in its operations around the 2016 U.S. presidential election, aimed at disrupting U.S. political processes, eroding confidence in social and political institutions, and discrediting Hillary Clinton, whom President Vladimir Putin bitterly disliked but expected to win that election.⁶⁴

Pro Publica has published an in-depth analysis showing China’s extensive, covert attempts to wield influence on Twitter.⁶⁵ China has persistently pushed fake narratives in the news. China circulated rumors that U.S. agents abroad were paying 3–4 times the price of medical gear meant for Italy, France, Germany, Canada and other nations.⁶⁶

⁶² Gao Wencheng, “Opinion: Washington’s poisonous coronavirus politics must end,” *XinhuaNet*, March 9, 2020: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-03/09/c_138859548.htm

⁶³ Betsy Morris and Robert McMillan, “China Pushes Viral Messages to Shape Coronavirus Narrative,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 10, 2020: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-pushes-viral-messages-to-shape-coronavirus-narrative-11586516402>

⁶⁴ Betsy Morris and Robert McMillan, “China Pushes Viral Messages to Shape Coronavirus Narrative,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 10, 2020: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-pushes-viral-messages-to-shape-coronavirus-narrative-11586516402>.

⁶⁵ Jeff Kao and Mia Shuang, “How China Built a Twitter Propaganda Machine Then Let It Loose on Coronavirus,” *ProPublica*, March 26, 2020: <https://www.propublica.org/article/how-china-built-a-twitter-propaganda-machine-then-let-it-loose-on-coronavirus>

⁶⁶ Michael Waller, “How the world is being manipulated by COVID-19 propaganda from china,” *theepochtimes*, April 11, 2020: https://www.theepochtimes.com/ccp-virus-how-the-world-is-being-manipulated-by-covid-19-propaganda-from-china-michael-waller_3308381.html. Waller may well be correct but note that *The Epoch Times* is a very conservative publication.

Pro-Chinese propaganda. Pro-China news stories flood the media. Representative newspaper stories promoting China as the global leader: “Xi plants trees in Beijing, urging respect for nature,”⁶⁷ “Chinese high-tech helps world combat pandemic;”⁶⁸ and “Nation Uses Tech Prowess to Help Fight World Virus.”⁶⁹

Pro-China/anti-US news stories. Representative newspaper stories include arguing that it is wrong to criticize China: “Stigmatizing Beijing will not help Washington;”⁷⁰ and “US shirks responsibility with wild finger-pointing.”⁷¹

Co-authoring articles with US scientists to support Chinese argument that the virus originated naturally. China uses scientific literature to its advantage. In just 2020, the Chinese have co-authored scientific articles in 2020 that could be construed to support China’s narrative on the natural animal origin of the coronavirus, and to suggest that it’s response to the panic is altruistic. The effort appears to include Chinese scientists working in the United States and Western scientists—some American—who have long-established U.S. government-funded collaborative research projects with Chinese laboratories. Some of the labs have been linked to China’s biological warfare program. These include the Wuhan Institute of Virology, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Hubei, and the Institute of Microbiology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing. These collaborative programs represent a small number of Chinese scientists working throughout U.S. medical research programs. Doubtless, China views these as soft intelligence targets.⁷² Attached as Appendix A is a list of such articles and commentary by Dr. Lawrence D. Sellin.⁷³

Suppressing articles that deviate from the official narrative. China is cracking down on the publication of academic research about the origins of the coronavirus. It appears likely to be part of a wider attempt to control the narrative surrounding the pandemic, reports *The Guardian*. Two websites for the prestigious Fudan University and the China University of Geosciences (Wuhan) appear to have recently published and removed pages that reference academic papers dealing with COVID-19.⁷⁴ Prof. Steve Tang, director of the SOAS China Institute in London, advises that:

⁶⁷ *China Daily*, April 3, 2020: https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202004/03/WS5e87099ea31012821728450b_9.html

⁶⁸ *China Daily*, April 2, 2020: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202004/02/WS5e854b60a310128217283dc3.html>

⁶⁹ Chen Na, “Nation Uses Tech Prowess to Help Fight World Virus,” *English.cas.cn*, April 1, 2020: http://english.cas.cn/newsroom/cas_media/202004/t20200403_232163.shtml

⁷⁰ Cai Meng, “Stigmatizing Beijing will not help Washington,” March 27, 2020: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202003/27/WS5e7d4640a3101282172825a1.html>

⁷¹ Ian Goodrum, “US shirks responsibility with wild-finger-pointing,” *China Daily*, April 3, 2020: <http://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202004/03/WS5e86c5c4a3101282172843bb.html>

⁷² Interview with Lawrence Sellin, Ph.D. is a retired U.S. Army Reserve colonel, who previously worked at the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases and conducted basic and clinical research in the pharmaceutical industry.

⁷³ Compiled by Dr. Sellin.

⁷⁴ Stephani Kirchgaessner, Emma Graham-Harrison and Lily Kuo, “China clamping down on coronavirus research, deleted pages suggest,” *Guardian*, April 11, 2020: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/11/china-clamping-down-on-coronavirus-research-deleted-pages-suggest>.

“In terms of priority, controlling the narrative is more important than the public health or the economic fallout.”⁷⁵ The tactic also seems aimed at managing research on the virus.⁷⁶

Using impaired readiness of the U.S. Department of Defense to diminish U.S. military image. China’s behavior has inflicted harm on our defense readiness. Four aircraft carriers report an outbreak of the virus. The USS Theodore Roosevelt has 600 positive cases of the virus, and 3,673 negative results at this writing.⁷⁷ Already one sailor has died.⁷⁸ The Roosevelt is one of three with crew members reported to have been infected with the coronavirus. The Pentagon has stopped identifying the locations of active duty service members infected, on grounds of operational security.⁷⁹ China is using this situation to promote its narrative that the U.S. capability and readiness is diminished.

The Pentagon has reported nearly 2,000 troops with coronavirus.⁸⁰ It has affected contractors and dependents.⁸¹ Chinese propaganda is propagating the narrative that the virus has undermined U.S. readiness, with the aim of undermining confidence in partner allies that the U.S. can carry out partnership commitments. One day after the first reports of Wuhan coronavirus outbreak on the Roosevelt, China’s *Global Times* (GT) falsely reported that rising infections have forced it into “maintenance condition,” and required that “scheduled military missions be cancelled.”⁸² The *Global Times* has misinformed, stating: “With the spread of the novel coronavirus accelerating on US aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt, the warship faces a fate much worse than the Diamond Princess cruise ship as most of the crew members remain in close quarters.”⁸³ Another story falsely asserted that U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper admitted that the U.S. military’s combat readiness could be affected. It stated that “Chinese military experts said on Tuesday that the US military could be dealt a huge blow and lose its influence over its allies.”⁸⁴ A

⁷⁵ Id.

⁷⁶ Id.

⁷⁷ Helene Cooper, Eric Schmitt and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, “Navy May Reinstate Fired Captain to Command of the Roosevelt,” *New York Times*, April 15, 2020: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/15/us/politics/coronavirus-navy-roosevelt-crozier.html?searchResultPosition=2>

⁷⁸ Id.

⁷⁹ David Welna, “With Warship Coronavirus Cases Rising, Concerns Over Military Readiness,” *NPR.org*, April 9, 2020: <https://www.npr.org/2020/04/09/831266852/with-warship-coronavirus-cases-rising-concerns-over-military-readiness>.

⁸⁰ Meghann Myers, “Pentagon reports nearly 1,000 new troops with coronavirus in last five days,” *Military Times*, April 8, 2020: <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2020/04/08/pentagon-reports-nearly-1000-new-troops-with-coronavirus-in-last-five-days/>.

⁸¹ Hope Hodge Seck, “The Military’s Coronavirus Cases: The Latest Rundown,” *Military.com*, March 16, 2020: <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/03/16/militarys-coronavirus-cases-latest-rundown.html>. One may presume that figure has jumped since March 16.

⁸² Guo Yuandan, “Rising infections force US warship into maintenance: analysts,” *Global Times*, March 27, 2020: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1183951.shtml>.

⁸³ Liu Xuanzun and Guo Yuandan, “Will US aircraft carrier become next Diamond Princess?,” *Global Times*, March 25, 2020: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1183758.shtml>.

⁸⁴ Guo Yuandan, “COVID-19 to have serious impact on US military’s global influence: Chinese experts,” *Global Times*, March 24, 2020: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1183644.shtml>.

PLA Daily claimed that “The outbreak of COVID-19 has significantly lowered the U.S. Navy’s warship deployment capability in the Asia-Pacific region.”⁸⁵ China contrasts the sad state of the US military with its own, asserting that “the outbreak did not cause cases of infection among the military medics and service members, but improved the combat readiness of the Chinese military instead.”⁸⁶

D. China is Waging Offensive Psychological Warfare as Tenet of The Three Warfares Concept

China is waging psychological warfare and inflicting disease, death, and a global economic collapse by hoarding medical supplies. China’s intention is to (i) create doubt in government institutions, by denying the U.S. and other nations the ability to protect their populations, (ii) divert focus from its fault, (iii) blame the U.S. for the virus, and (iv) inspire respect for China’s strength.

China has hoarded inventory of N95 masks, medical protective suits, googles, disinfectant, extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO), machines and medical ventilators. China has bought up billions of masks and hundreds of tons of other medical supplies. And though a major manufacturer of such supplies, with two exceptions we are aware of (Boston, for the Patriots owner; and Jack Ma for New York City), it has stopped exporting such supplies. Between January 24 and February 29, China imported 2.46 billion shipping cartons of supplies for epidemic prevention, including 2.02 billion facial masks and 25.38 million protective suits. China has bought up stock from the U.S., Europe, Australia, and other countries. Sometimes, Chinese companies negotiated with major international manufacturers and asked them to sell or donate their stocks to China.⁸⁷ Chinese export restrictions have left American companies’ U.S.-bound face masks, test kits, and other medical equipment urgently needed to fight the coronavirus stranded. *The Wall Street Journal* has reported that large quantities of critical protective gear and other medical goods are sitting in warehouses across China unable to receive necessary official clearances.⁸⁸

Blog sites with favorable stories boost the image of Chinese strength. Chinese leaders promote the narrative that China is guiding the world response to COVID-19.⁸⁹ Articles in *China Daily* include on its site: “Shanghai doctor talks about antiviral treatment, TCM;” “Wuhan and Shanghai

⁸⁵ See: Jamie Seidel, “China’s devious move under cover of virus,” *The Bulletin*, April 12, 2020: <https://www.themorningbulletin.com.au/news/chinas-devious-move-under-cover-of-virus/3993696/>. The story hyperlinks to the quote on the PLA website but does not take you directly there.

⁸⁶ Li Chun, “China confirms no cases of coronavirus infection in military,” *Chinamil.com*, March 3, 2020: http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2020-03/03/content_9758336.htm.

⁸⁷ Alan Boyd, “China’s wild and wooly medical equipment heist,” *Asian Times*, April 6, 2020: <https://asiatimes.com/2020/04/478656/>. Nicole Had, “Chinese Regime Hoards Global Inventory of Medical Supplies, Little for Virus-Hit Nations,” *Epoch Times*, April 6, 2020: https://www.theepochtimes.com/chinese-regime-hoards-global-inventory-of-medical-supplies-leading-to-growing-shortage-outside-china_3298893.html

⁸⁸ Kate O’Keffe, Liza Lin and Eva Xio, “China’s Export Restrictions Strand Medical Goods U.S. Needs to Fight Coronavirus, State Department says,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 16, 2020: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-export-restrictions-strand-medical-goods-u-s-needs-to-fight-coronavirus-state-department-says-11587031203>

⁸⁹ “China example guiding world response to COVID-19,” *China Daily*: <http://covid-19.chinadaily.com.cn/>

define frontline;” “Expert: Correct strategies key to control outbreak;” “China intensifies screening of asymptomatic infections;” “inflatable virus lab opens in Shenzhen.”

Influencing international organizations. China has managed to exercise undue influence over the World Health Organization to influence it to tout China’s narrative. Even as the Chinese mis-handled the virus and concealed the truth, WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has consistently praised China’s handling of the outbreak.⁹⁰ Beijing succeeded from the start in steering WHO—which both receives funding from China and is dependent on the regime of the Communist Party on many levels. Before Adhanom visited Xi at the end of January, WHO was uncritically repeating information from the Chinese authorities, ignoring warnings from Taiwanese doctors and reluctant to declare a “public health emergency of international concern,” denying after a January 22 meeting that there was any need to do so.⁹¹ White House skepticism about WHO is understandable, although it may wish to devote efforts to righting rather than sinking that ship by pushing it to install new leadership that is objective and calls the shots purely on a scientific basis, not politics.

Acting duplicitously towards other nations. Other nations are recognizing China’s duplicity. A dozen African nations have blasted China for racism after it expelled African nationals from their homes in Guangdong and banned them from restaurants. France criticized China for making false claims online that French nursing home workers were abandoning their charges. Much Chinese equipment delivered to Europe to fight the pandemic has proven defective or counterfeited. Kazakhstan has blasted China after the Chinese Sohu published a piece making revanchist claims to Kazakh territory.⁹²

⁹⁰ WHO Director-General’s statement on IHR Emergency Committee on Novel Coronavirus,” January 22, 2020: <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-statement-on-ih-er-emergency-committee-on-novel-coronavirus>

⁹¹ Hinnerk Feldwisch-Drentrup, “How WHO Became China’s Coronavirus Accomplice,” *Foreign Policy*, April 2, 2020: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/02/china-coronavirus-who-health-soft-power/>

⁹² James Palmer, “Why Chinese Embassies Have Embraced Aggressive Diplomacy,” *Foreign Policy*, April 15, 2020: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/15/chinese-embassies-embrace-aggressive-diplomacy-coronavirus-pandemic-misinformation/>

Options for U.S. Government Actions

If the U.S. government decides that China's actions constitute war, policy makers will confront complicated, nuanced, and difficult decisions. The same holds true for other countries that have suffered as a result of China's actions. This paper does not provide an exhaustive list of possible actions, but rather identifies key potential lines of effort. It will be difficult, perhaps impossible, to create domestic and international consensus behind the idea that China's actions constitute war under traditional definitions, or to achieve perfect transparency on Chinese government actions. But given the massive and global scale of economic and human damages, the U.S. should be able to forge an international coalition, rooted in our NATO partners and allies, to support strong action.

The primary goals of US policy should be to (1) punish China's government and leadership, not the Chinese people, and forcing them to accept moral and legal responsibility for their actions; (2) obtain compensation for economic and human damages, (3) work to minimize the threat of future epidemics from China, and (4) discredit, de-legitimize, and eviscerate China's strategic plan to establish global supremacy by 2049. There are four basic categories. Some options require difficult tradeoffs. Some are more actionable than others. But they are proportionate and worth pursuing, and virtually none is impossible.

1. Political and Diplomatic

- a. Develop a political and international legal case for damages.
- b. Demand that China demonstrate full transparency as to the virus and its scientific research on the fire. That includes international on-site inspections and providing full records that bear on the origins and spread of coronavirus, as well as Chinese government decision-making.
 - i. Use traditional and social media to "play" findings back into China for benefit of Chinese population.
- c. Take China's behavior to the UN Security Council (UNSC) for action, including international sanctions, emphasizing that it is the Beijing Government not the Chinese people deserving of censure.
 - i. China (or Russia) will veto strong action on the UNSC, but China will lose any (remaining) claim to moral high ground in the process.
 - ii. Going through motions to UN is critical to building broadest possible coalition.
- d. Exploit damage to China's standing to box in and isolate China on other troublesome aspects of China's behavior, for example in the South China Sea.
- e. Review and renegotiate relevant treaties and Taiwan Relations Act to reflect current realities and permit full substantive Taiwanese participation in international organizations.

- f. Use traditional and social media to convey accurate and timely information to inform and empower the Chinese people.
 - i. In particular, work to preempt, to extent possible, regime attempts to reinforce narrative of victimization (“century of humiliation” etc.)
- g. Secure a firm commitment from China to permanently close its wildlife markets, enforce the ban with criminal sanctions, and particularly provide special protections against wildlife trafficking in endangered species such as koalas and pangolins that have been sold in these markets. It’s a moral and a health problem. The animals are kept in unsanitary conditions. China claimed it was shutting down the markets.⁹³ That was a lie.⁹⁴
- h. Award Dr. Li Wenliang a posthumous Medal of Freedom for his heroism in alerting the world to the disease.
- i. Use social media to wage mediawarfare and psychological warfare among the Chinese people to de-legitimize the Chinese leadership, whose legitimacy at home many Chinese already question.
- j. Reform the World Health Organization to increase transparency, ensure accountable leadership, and minimize political influence.

2. U.S. Economic and Legal

- a. Use existing U.S. sanctions authorities and create new ones as required. Take China to the World Trade Organization under the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement and launch litigation against it for theft of intellectual property. If a panel rules in favor of the U.S., change U.S. Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act to enable a private plaintiff to file suit in a U.S. District Court to obtain an enforceable judgment against a Chinese defendant, with meaningful penalties.
- b. Require China to satisfy any outstanding Judgments rendered against it by a U.S. party in a court of competent jurisdiction. We must provide parties whom China injures, e.g. by looting intellectual property—with a **meaningful** remedy for damages. Amending the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act to allow that and to provide appropriate damages beyond compensatory, which may be difficult to quantify, is important. This must apply equally to all Judgments rendered by U.S. Courts against the Chinese state, including its State-Owned Enterprises, banks, and other entities through which it acts.

⁹³ See: David Cyranoski, “Mystery deepens over animal source of coronavirus,” *Nature*, February 26, 2020: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00548-w>; Ben Westcott and Serentie Wang, “China’s wet markets are not what some people think they are”: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/14/asia/china-wet-market-coronavirus-intl-hnk/index.html>, CNN, April 14, 2020.

⁹⁴ Mihai Andrei, “China is reopening West markets, as international pressure mounts against against them,” *zmescience.com*, April 7, 2020: <https://www.zmescience.com/science/wet-markets-coronavirus-06042020/>

- c. Seize U.S. Treasury notes held at the Federal Reserve in the Southern District of New York. Reportedly China has about \$1 trillion in these notes. We recognize this would be controversial and disruptive. China's disruption of our government's financial situation and our economy is far more serious.
- d. Threaten to destroy China's economy unless it pays fair compensation to the U.S. and its Western NATO partners for the damage that China has inflicted. This may seem like an extreme measure. What is China going to do—threaten to unravel our economy, throw millions out of work, potentially bankrupt governments? We suggest that threat may ring hollow.
- e. Investigate universities who receive U.S. Government funding to provide an accounting of whether any funding was used to support research that was shared with China or Chinese professors, and require them to refund such money
- f. Review and U.S. law and regulations governing educational and scientific exchanges with China (and other countries of concern) to ensure reciprocity and transparency on funding and recipients.

Conclusion

This white paper proposes a hypothesis and raises questions for policy makers. The key questions are whether, as defined by its own notions of warfare, China is conducting undeclared but real war against the United States, and if so, what should be the U.S. response. We have relied heavily upon authoritative media sources, using their language, in stating the facts and evidence as they appear in Open Source.

The evidence raises grave questions about Chinese behavior, from its secrecy and concealment of the virus in December, when the outbreak occurred. It raises questions about its motive for maintaining secrecy and engaging in broadscale deception. It raises questions about whether, recognizing that its mishandling of the virus at home rattled China's leadership, worrying it about whether it could maintain legitimacy at home. It raises questions about whether to deflect concerns by the Chinese population, and perceiving an opportunity to turn debacle into triumph, it pivoted from defense to offense.

It raises questions as to whether it exploited that opportunity to employ its notions of Three Warfares and unrestricted warfare to allow the virus to spread globally, concealing the truth, lying about what it knew, and hoarding medical supplies that the rest of the world required to protect itself against a pandemic that it knew would spread, and whose consequences it easily foresaw. It raises questions about what might be the prudent, actionable U.S. response to these events and to Chinese strategies, operations, and tactics.

Appendix I

By Lawrence C. Sellin, Ph.D.⁹⁵

The origin of COVID-19 is not clear, but there is no conclusive evidence that the virus jumped from animals to humans and contrary evidence it “leaked” from a laboratory in Wuhan, China.

China has sought to shape the debate about the virus through the scientific literature. The aim is to exculpate China from fault. China’s narrative is that the coronavirus is a naturally occurring virus that originates from animals. Since January 1, 2020, the Chinese have published scientific articles to support their hypothesis.

To strengthen their credibility, the Chinese have co-authored articles with Western scientists that support their argument that COVID-19 originated naturally.

A growing number of people believe that the current virus stemmed from a leak at a Wuhan laboratory, either as a yet unknown bat coronavirus laboratory isolate or a new genetically engineered virus. Techniques exist to manufacture COVID-19. See the following for details:

- Lawrence Sellin, “Yes, the COVID-19 Pandemic Could Have Originated in a Chinese Lab” April 6, 2020. https://www.zerohedge.com/geopolitical/us-army-colonel-ret-yes-covid-19-pandemic-could-have-originated-chinese-lab#comment_stream
- Lawrence Sellin, “China, coronavirus and the weaponisation of medical science” April 15, 2020. <https://www.wionews.com/opinions-blogs/china-coronavirus-and-the-weaponisation-of-medical-science-292585>
- Lawrence Sellin “Evidence Suggesting COVID-19 is Man-Made” April 16, 2020. <https://ccnationalecurity.org/evidence-suggesting-covid-19-is-man-made/>

The starting point is that no one yet knows the origin of COVID-19.

Below is an annotated bibliography, only a partial list of scientific articles, published in 2020 by Chinese scientists. China appears to have flooded the scientific literature with publications that could be construed as supporting the ongoing political narrative of the Chinese Communist Party government. It is occasionally obvious, but most often subtle, to demonstrate China’s “altruistic” response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also to leverage the accepted credibility of science within a propaganda framework.

The Chinese information effort seems to concentrate on the natural animal origin of COVID-19, particularly via the Wuhan Seafood Market, cross-species infections supporting the natural origin argument and discounting any hypothesis related to a laboratory leak or an engineered virus. Note that the Chinese have often used non-peer-reviewed publication.

That effort appears to include Chinese scientists working in the United States and Western scientists, some American, who have long-established U.S. government-funded collaborative research projects with Chinese laboratories, some of which have been linked to China’s bio-

⁹⁵ Lawrence Sellin, Ph.D. is a retired U.S. Army Reserve colonel, who previously worked at the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases and conducted basic and clinical research in the pharmaceutical industry.

logical warfare program such as the Wuhan Institute of Virology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Hubei and the Institute of Microbiology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing.

Those collaborative programs represent only a small portion of the large number of Chinese scientists, postdoctoral researchers and students now working throughout U.S. medical research programs, which are no doubt considered by China as soft intelligence targets.

One Western scientist, Edward C. Holmes, has been a co-author with Chinese scientists on at least nine scientific articles since January 1, 2020, all nine of which emphasize the Chinese government narrative that the COVID-19 pandemic originated from animals in the Wuhan Seafood Market.

Scientific Publications, Annotated

1. Jiang, S., Shi, Z. (2020) The First Disease X is Caused by a Highly Transmissible Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus. *Virology*. 1–3.

Although this article has an innocuous scientific title, it is packed with political nuance. It was part of a Chinese effort to rename the virus because “Most reporters and media are still calling it “Wuhan pneumonia,” but this terminology is detrimental to Wuhanese already facing lockdown and economic loss.” It also reinforces the Chinese narrative of a late onset and its origin in a food market “On 31 December 2019, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission reported that 27 cases of unexplained pneumonia linked to the wholesale Huanan Seafood Market in Wuhan.” The first author, Shibo Jiang, is associated with China’s Fudan University and the New York Blood Center, The Lindsley F. Kimball Research Institute. The second author is Zheng-Li Shi, a lead scientist at the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

2. Liu, S. L., Saif, L. J., Weiss, S. R., & Su, L. (2020). No credible evidence supporting claims of the laboratory engineering of SARS-CoV-2. *Emerging microbes & infections*, 9(1), 505–507.

This article is rather blatant and coming from an odd source. The first author, Shan-Lu Liu is a Chinese virologist working in the U.S. (Ohio State University) and the founding President of the Association of Chinese Virologists in America. Although having no background in coronaviruses, he is the senior author on two 2020 coronavirus-related articles. In this article, he strongly pushes the Chinese narrative that COVID-19 was a naturally occurring transmission from animals to humans making, in my opinion, misleading statements as scientific strawmen, which he then discounts.

3. Liu, S. L., & Saif, L. (2020). Emerging Viruses without Borders: The Wuhan Coronavirus. *Viruses*, 12(2).

This is the second 2020 article by Shan-Lu Liu, a Chinese virologist working in the U.S. (Ohio State University) and founding President of the Association of Chinese Virologists in America, who has no background in coronaviruses. He praises China “We applaud the rapid release to the public of the genome sequence of the new virus by Chinese virologists, as this represents an important first step in curbing the spread of the new virus to other parts of the world.” He also makes this rather remarkable politically-tainted statement “Viruses spread irrespective of borders—they jump from animals to humans, and they move from one country to another.

Controlling the spread of emerging and re-emerging viruses requires international efforts and collaboration. We anticipate that scientific data and reagents will be shared publicly and fairly, and most importantly, that the scientific collaborations between the US and China, including the study of emerging viruses and infectious diseases, will continue unabated despite some turmoil in other aspects of the US-China relationship.”

4. Hong Zhou, Xing Chen, Tao Hu, Juan Li, Hao Song, Yanran Liu, Peihan Wang, Di Liu, Jing Yang, Edward C. Holmes, Alice C. Hughes, Yuhai Bi, Weifeng Shi (2020) A novel bat coronavirus reveals natural insertions at the S1/S2 cleavage site of the Spike protein and a possible recombinant origin of HCoV-19, March 11, 2020, <https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.03.02.974139v3.article-info>.

This non-peer-reviewed preliminary report that supports the Chinese narrative of a natural origin of COVID-19 appears to be very misleading. It could also be an example of how scientific misinformation eventually makes its way into the public domain. In its attempt to prove the natural origin of COVID-19, the article states “The insertion of three residues, PAA, at the junction of S1 and S2 in RmYN02 is therefore of major importance.” It is not. There is indeed an insertion, but the amino acid sequence PAA is neutral and totally unlike COVID-19’s polybasic amino acid PRRAR sequence. Unfortunately, a more recent scientific article cited it as evidence of the natural origin of CoVid-19 (Boni et al. March 31, 2020), “Furthermore, the other key feature thought to be instrumental to SARS-CoV-2’s ability to infect humans—a polybasic cleavage site insertion in the Spike protein—has been seen in another close bat relative of the SARS-CoV-2 virus (Zhou et al., 2020a); however, the sequence is different and it is likely an independent event.” The Boni et al. article was the basis of articles in the Wall Street Journal and the National Review. It is important to note that a co-author on the original Zhou et al. article is Edward C. Holmes, a long-time research collaborator with the Chinese and also a co-author on a Nature Medicine article “The proximal origin of SARS-CoV-2” much-cited by the main stream media and parroted by people in the U.S. government, as conclusive proof that COVID-19 is of natural origin.

5. Botao Xiao and Lei Xiao (2020) The possible origins of 2019-nCoV coronavirus (https://web.archive.org/web/20200214144447/https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339070128_The_possible_origins_of_2019-nCoV_coronavirus)

This non-peer-reviewed preliminary report by Chinese researchers implicating a laboratory leak as the source of the COVID-19 pandemic was withdrawn, disappeared from the internet and is now only available on the internet archive WayBackMachine.

6. Hu, Z.; Yang, Z.; Li, Q.; Zhang, A.; Huang, Y. (2020) Infodemiological Study on COVID-19 Epidemic and COVID-19 Infodemic. Preprints 2020, 2020020380 (doi: 10.20944/preprints202002.0380.v3).

This non-peer-reviewed scientific article appears to play the race card, seeks to limit free speech and wishes to control the scientific nomenclature in regard to COVID-19, e.g. “On one hand, global profusion of running headlines often inscribe fear, prejudice, disgust and hostility into tangled hashtags and monikers, branding ethnic accusations intentionally misleading. Those monikers and morbid contents always team up with each other in the epicen-

ter of infodemic, wherein one sheds light on the social contagion of the other. The past few weeks has witnessed an explosive growth of stigmatized monikers, which have found their ways in daily communication and contributed to backlash against Chinese and diaspora.”

7. Liangsheng Zhang, Fu-ming Shen, Fei Chen, Zhenguo Lin (2020) Origin and Evolution of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus, *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, ciaa112, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cid/ciaa112>

The senior author of this article claiming the natural origin of COVID-19 is a plant biologist. None of the authors have appear to have any research experience in coronaviruses.

8. Wei Ji Wei Wang Xiaofang Zhao Junjie Zai Xingguang Li (2020) Cross-species transmission of the newly identified coronavirus 2019-nCoV, *Journal of Medical Biology*, April 2020, Pages 433-440.

This article focuses on the animal origin of COVID-19 in the Wuhan Seafood Market and the cross-species transmission and the “jump” from animals to humans, “Many initial patients were exposed to wildlife animals at the Huanan seafood wholesale market, where poultry, snake, bats, and other farm animals were also sold” and “It is critical to determine the animal reservoir of the 2019-nCoV to understand the molecular mechanism of its cross-species spread. Homologous recombination within viral structural proteins between coronaviruses from different hosts may be responsible for “cross-species” transmission.”

9. Jin-Yan Li, 1, Zhi You, 1, QiongWang, Zhi-Jian Zhou, Ye Qiu, Rui Luo, Xing-Yi Ge (2020) The epidemic of 2019-novel-coronavirus (2019-nCoV) pneumonia and insights for emerging infectious diseases in the future, *Microbes Infect.* 2020 Mar;22(2):80-85.

This article heavily emphasizes the Wuhan Seafood Market as the origin of COVID-19. Strangely, this publication states that bats were not present in the Wuhan Seafood Market and could not be the origin of COVID-19, “The epidemiological investigation of early cases of 2019-nCoV pneumonia showed that many cases had been exposed to the Huanan Seafood Market in Wuhan. In addition, 33 of the 585 environmental samples from Huanan Seafood Market were positive for 2019-nCoV; however, that market was trading a variety of live animals, such as hedgehog, badger, snake, and bird (turtledoves), probably pangolin, but not bats. Thus, bats are less likely to have direct contact with human, and direct transmission of the virus from bat to human is unlikely.”

10. Zhou, P., Yang, X., Wang, X. et al. A pneumonia outbreak associated with a new coronavirus of probable bat origin. *Nature* 579, 270–273.

This is the definitive article published by the Wuhan Institute of Virology in the prestigious journal *Nature* stating that the COVID-19 pandemic originated in the Wuhan Seafood Market, probably from bats, even though other Chinese sources claim there were no bats in the market. The authors repeat the claim throughout the article, “This disease outbreak—which started from a local seafood market” and “most of the early cases had contact history with the original seafood market” and “seven patients with severe pneumonia (six of whom are sellers or deliverymen from the seafood market), who were admitted to the intensive care unit of Wuhan Jin Yin-Tan Hospital at the beginning of the outbreak” and “given that the outbreak occurred

in winter and in a market” and “Most importantly, strict regulations against the domestication and consumption of wildlife should be implemented.”

11. Shibo Jiang, Lanying Du, Zhengli Shi (2020) An emerging coronavirus causing pneumonia outbreak in Wuhan, China: calling for developing therapeutic and prophylactic strategies *Emerging Microbes & Infections*, VOL. 9, 275-277.

This January 2020 article, published in the Chinese-controlled journal *Emerging Microbes & Infections* by a lead scientist from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, Zhengli Shi, and two Chinese scientists working at the Lindsley F. Kimball Research Institute, New York Blood Center, New York, NY and funded by the National Institutes of Health states the animal/market origin of COVID-19, “In December of 2019, an outbreak of pneumonia caused by an unknown etiology occurred in Wuhan, China and most patients were linked to a single seafood market, which reportedly sold seafood and some live animals, including poultry, bats, marmots and other wild animals, suggesting that the pathogen may be transmitted from an animal to human.”

12. Wu, F., Zhao, S., Yu, B. et al. (2020) A new coronavirus associated with human respiratory disease in China. *Nature* 579, 265–269

Strangely, this lengthy article published in the prestigious journal *Nature* is entirely based on only one COVID-19 patient. Also, strangely, a co-author is again Edward C. Holmes. How he can appear as an author of so many articles within such a short period of time is surprising. Not so surprising is the article endorsing the Wuhan Seafood Market as the origin of the outbreak, “Epidemiological investigations have suggested that the outbreak was associated with a seafood market in Wuhan. Here we study a single patient who was a worker at the market and who was admitted to the Central Hospital of Wuhan on 26 December 2019.”

13. Na Zhu, Ph.D., Dingyu Zhang, M.D., Wenling Wang, Ph.D., Xingwang Li, M.D., Bo Yang, M.S., Jingdong Song, Ph.D., Xiang Zhao, Ph.D., Baoying Huang, Ph.D., Weifeng Shi, Ph.D., Roujian Lu, M.D., Peihua Niu, Ph.D., Faxian Zhan, Ph.D., et al. (2020) A Novel Coronavirus from Patients with Pneumonia in China, 2019, *N Engl J Med* 2020; 382:727-733.

This article published by the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine* on January 24, 2020 and in print on February 20, 2020 repeats the Chinese government narrative multiple times, “In December 2019, a cluster of patients with pneumonia of unknown cause was linked to a seafood wholesale market in Wuhan, China” and “In late December 2019, several local health facilities reported clusters of patients with pneumonia of unknown cause that were epidemiologically linked to a seafood and wet animal wholesale market in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China” and “Four lower respiratory tract samples, including bronchoalveolar-lavage fluid, were collected from patients with pneumonia of unknown cause who were identified in Wuhan on December 21, 2019, or later and who had been present at the Huanan Seafood Market close to the time of their clinical presentation” and “Her occupation was retailer in the seafood wholesale market” and “He had been a frequent visitor to the seafood wholesale market.”

Additional Articles

The following is a partial list of additional articles published in 2020 by Chinese scientists supporting the Chinese government's narrative attributing the origin of COVID-19 to various animals with cross-species infection to humans (abbreviated citations).

Pangolins (scaly anteater)

- Identifying SARS-CoV-2 related coronaviruses in Malayan pangolins, TTY Lam, MHH Shum, HC Zhu, YG Tong, XB Ni... – Nature, 2020
- Are pangolins the intermediate host of the 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV)? P Liu, JZ Jiang, Y Hua, X Wang, F Hou, XF Wan... – Biorxiv, 2020
- Isolation and characterization of 2019-nCoV-like coronavirus from Malayan pangolins, K Xiao, J Zhai, Y Feng, N Zhou, X Zhang, JJ Zou, N Li... – BioRxiv, 2020
- Probable pangolin origin of SARS-CoV-2 associated with the COVID-19 outbreak, T Zhang, Q Wu, Z Zhang – Current Biology, 2020.
- Pangolin homology associated with 2019-nCoV, Z Zhang, Q Wu, T Zhang – bioRxiv, 2020

Snakes

- Cross-species transmission of the newly identified coronavirus 2019-nCoV, W Ji, W Wang, X Zhao, J Zai, X Li – Journal of Medical Virology, 2020.
- W. Ji, W. Wang, X. Zhao, J. Zai, X. Li, Homologous recombination within the spike glycoprotein of the newly identified coronavirus may boost cross-species transmission from snake to human – Journal of Medical Virology, 2020.

Turtles

- Composition and divergence of coronavirus spike proteins and host ACE2 receptors predict potential intermediate hosts of SARS-CoV-2, Z Liu, X Xiao, X Wei, J Li, J Yang, H Tan... – Journal of Medical Virology, 2020.

Bats

- A pneumonia outbreak associated with a new coronavirus of probable bat origin, P Zhou, XL Yang, XG Wang, B Hu, L Zhang, W Zhang... – Nature, 2020.
- A new coronavirus associated with human respiratory disease in China, F Wu, S Zhao, B Yu, YM Chen, W Wang, ZG Song... – Nature, 2020.
- Bat origin of a new human coronavirus: there and back again, X Li, Y Song, G Wong, J Cui – Science China Life Sciences, 2020.
- Emerging coronaviruses: genome structure, replication, and pathogenesis, Y Chen, Q Liu, D Guo – Journal of Medical Virology, 2020.
- A familial cluster of pneumonia associated with the 2019 novel coronavirus indicating person-to-person transmission: a study of a family cluster, JFW Chan, S Yuan, KH Kok, KKW To, H Chu, J Yang... – The Lancet, 2020.

- Genomic characterization of the 2019 novel human-pathogenic coronavirus isolated from a patient with atypical pneumonia after visiting Wuhan, JFW Chan, KH Kok, Z Zhu, H Chu, KKW To... – Emerging Microbes, 2020.
- Discovery of Bat Coronaviruses through Surveillance and Probe Capture-Based Next-Generation Sequencing, B Li, HR Si, Y Zhu, XL Yang, DE Anderson, ZL Shi... – MSphere, 2020 – Am Soc Microbiol
- Molecular diagnosis of a novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) causing an outbreak of pneumonia, DKW Chu, Y Pan, SMS Cheng, KPY Hui... – Clinical..., 2020
- RNA based mNGS approach identifies a novel human coronavirus from two individual pneumonia cases in 2019 Wuhan outbreak, L Chen, W Liu, Q Zhang, K Xu, G Ye, W Wu... – Emerging microbes &..., 2020.
- The deadly coronaviruses: The 2003 SARS pandemic and the 2020 novel coronavirus epidemic in China, Y Yang, F Peng, R Wang, K Guan, T Jiang, G Xu... – Journal of..., 2020.

Civets (intermediate host)

- Genomic characterization of the 2019 novel human-pathogenic coronavirus isolated from a patient with atypical pneumonia after visiting Wuhan, JFW Chan, KH Kok, Z Zhu, H Chu, KKW To... – Emerging Microbes &..., 2020.
- Zoonotic origins of human coronaviruses, ZW Ye, S Yuan, KS Yuen, SY Fung... – International Journal of..., 2020.
- SARS-CoV-2: an Emerging Coronavirus that Causes a Global Threat, J Zheng – International Journal of Biological Sciences, 2020.