



**United States Department of State**

***Washington, D.C. 20520***

May 30, 2023

Case No. FL-2022-00076

Mr. Sainath Suryanarayanan, PhD  
U.S. Right to Know  
4096 Piedmont Ave. #963  
Oakland, CA 94611

Dear Mr. Suryanarayanan:

As noted in our letter dated April 28, 2023, we are processing your request under the Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”), 5 U.S.C. § 552. Thus far, the Department of State (“Department”) has located 19 responsive records subject to the FOIA. Upon review, we have determined that all 19 records may be released in part.

An enclosure explains the FOIA exemptions and other grounds for withholding material. Where we have made redactions, the applicable FOIA exemptions are marked on each record. Where applicable, the Department has considered the foreseeable harm standard when reviewing these records and applying FOIA exemptions. All non-exempt material that is reasonably segregable from the exempt material has been released and is enclosed.

We will keep you informed as your case progresses. If you have any questions, your attorney may contact Savith Iyengar, Assistant U.S. Attorney, at [savith.iyengar@usdoj.gov](mailto:savith.iyengar@usdoj.gov). Please refer to the case number, FL-2022-00076, and the civil action number, 22-cv-04359, in all correspondence about this case.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diamonece Hickson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "H".

Diamonece Hickson  
Chief, Litigation and Appeals Branch  
Office of Information Programs and Services

Enclosures: As stated.

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

### FOIA Exemptions

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

### Other Grounds for Withholding

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

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(1); (b)(5)

B-00002428055

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(1); (b)(5)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(1); (b)(5)



Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved: EAP – Sung Kim, Acting []

Drafted: EAP/CM – Steve Sanders, ext. 7-6782 and cell 202-374-5907

Cleared:

EAP/FO: JFritz ()  
 EAP/FO: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/FO: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/CM: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/CM: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/CM: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/CM: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/CM: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/CM: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/TC: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/MLA: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/MLS: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/PD: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/EP: (b)(6) ()  
 IO: (b)(6) ()  
 IO/EDA: (b)(6) ()  
 USUN/W: (b)(6) ()  
 D: (b)(6) ()  
 P: (b)(6) ()  
 C: TNiblock ()  
 S/P: (b)(6) ()  
 GPA: (b)(6) ()  
 R: (b)(6) ()  
 E: (b)(6) ()  
 T: (b)(6) ()  
 J/IRF: (b)(6) ()  
 J/GCJ: (b)(6) ()  
 GEC: (b)(6) ()  
 ECA/P: (b)(6) ()  
 ECA/PE/C/SU: (b)(6) ()  
 EB/TRA: (b)(6) ()  
 EB/CIP/BA: (b)(6) ()  
 EB/CIP/TS: (b)(6) ()  
 EB/TPN/IBE: (b)(6) ()  
 OES/IHB: (b)(6) ()  
 STAS: (b)(6) ()  
 DRL/EAP: (b)(6) ()  
 ISN/PC: (b)(6) ()  
 ISN/CATR: (b)(6) ()  
 ISN/BPS: (b)(6) ()  
 AVC/SSD: (b)(6) ()  
 AVC/ESC: (b)(6) (ok)

AVC/BCW:	( )
PM/SA:	( )
PM/RSAT:	( )
PM: (b)(6)	( )
SPEHA:	( )
S/CCI:	( )
CA/OCS/ACS	( )
INL:	( )
INR/EAP:	( )
L/EAP:	( )
L/UNA:	( )
L/NPA:	( )
EUR/RPM:	( )
EUR/PGI:	( )
WHA/BSC: (b)(6)	( )
SCA/INSB:	( )

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(1); (b)(5)

B-00002428053

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(1); (b)(5)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved: EAP – Sung Kim, Acting []

Drafted: EAP/CM – Steve Sanders, ext. 7-6782 and cell 202-374-5907

Cleared:

EAP/FO: JFritz ()  
 EAP/FO: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/FO: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/CM: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/CM: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/CM: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/CM: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/CM: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/CM: (b)(6) ()  
 EAP/TC: ()  
 EAP/MLA: ()  
 EAP/MLS: ()  
 EAP/PL: (b)(6) (oh)  
 EAP/PL: (b)(6) (oh)  
 EAP/EP: ()  
 IO: ()  
 IO/EDA: ()  
 USUN/W: (b)(6) ()  
 D: (b)(6) ()  
 P: (b)(6) ()  
 C: (b)(6) ()  
 S/P: ()  
 GPA: ()  
 R: ()  
 E: ()  
 T: ()  
 J/IRF: ()  
 J/GCJ: ()  
 GEC: ()  
 ECA/P: ()  
 ECA/PE/C/SU: ()  
 EB/TRA: ()  
 EB/CIP/BA: ()  
 EB/CIP/TS: ()  
 EB/TPN/IBE: (b)(6) ()  
 OES/IHB: ()  
 STAS: ()  
 DRL/EAP: ()  
 ISN/PC: ()  
 ISN/CATR: ()  
 ISN/BPS: ()  
 AVC/SSD: ()



AVC/ESC:	(b)(6)	(ok)
AVC/BCW:		()
PM/SA:		()
PM/RSAT:		()
PM:	(b)(6)	()
SPEHA:		()
S/CCI:		()
CA/OCS/ACS		()
INL:		()
INR/EAP:		()
L/EAP:		()
L/UNA:		()
L/NPA:		()
EUR/RPM:		()
EUR/PGI:	(b)(6)	()
WHA/BSC:		()
SCA/INSB:		()

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(1)

B-00002428053

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(1); (b)(5)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(1); (b)(5)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved: EAP - (b)(6) Acting []

Drafted: EAP/CM - (b)(6)

Cleared:

- EAP/FO: Eritz ()
- EAP/FO: (b)(6) ()
- EAP/FO: ()
- EAP/CM: ()
- EAP/CM: ()
- EAP/CM: ()
- EAP/CM: ()
- EAP/CM: ()
- EAP/CM: ()
- EAP/TC: ()
- EAP/MLA: ()
- EAP/MLS: ()
- EAP/PD: ()
- EAP/EP: ()
- IO: ()
- IO/EDA: ()
- USUN/W: (b)(6) ()
- D: (b)(6) ()
- P: ()
- C: ()
- S/P: ()
- GPA: ()
- R: ()
- E: ()
- T: ()
- J/IRF: ()
- J/GCJ: ()
- GEC: ()
- ECA/P: ()
- ECA/PE/C/SU: ()
- EB/TRA: ()
- EB/CIP/BA: ()
- EB/CIP/TS: ()
- EB/TPN/IBE (b)(6) ()
- OES/IHB: ()
- STAS: ()
- DRL/EAP: ()
- ISN/PC: ()
- ISN/CATR: ()
- ISN/BPS: ()
- AVC/SSD: ()
- AVC/ESC: ()



AVC/BCW:	( )
PM/SA:	( )
PM/PSAT:	( )
PM: (b)(6)	( )
SPE/PA:	( )
S/CCI:	( )
CA/OCS/ACS	( )
INL:	( )
INR/EAP:	( )
L/EAP:	( )
L/UNA:	( )
L/NPA:	( )
EUR/RPM:	( )
EUR/PGI: (b)(6)	( )
WHA/BSC	( )
SCA/INSB	( )

**From:** "Park, Christopher J (T)" <(b)(6)@state.sgov.gov>  
**To:** T\_SpecAssts <TSpecAssts@state.sgov.gov>  
**Subject:** S SFRC China Briefing Material (LEAP)  
**Date:** Thu, 4 Mar 2021 11:48:56 -0500

I only had a couple of minor edits, (b)(5)

(b)(5)

**Official**

This message is **UNCLASSIFIED** when separated from **SECRET** attachment(s)  
Classified By: Christopher J. Park - Senior Advisor, Office:T, Agency:U.S. Department of State  
Declassify On: 3/4/2046  
Reasons: Derived Per DSCG.

**Sender:** "Park, Christopher J (T)" <(b)(6)@state.sgov.gov>  
**Recipient:** T\_SpecAssts <TSpecAssts@state.sgov.gov>

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(1); (b)(5)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(1); (b)(5)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved: EAP – Sung Kim, Acting []

Drafted: EAP/CM (b)(6)

Cleared:

- EAP/FO: JFritz ()
- EAP/FO: (b)(6) ()
- EAP/FO: (b)(6) ()
- EAP/CM (b)(6) ()
- EAP/CM (b)(6) ()
- EAP/CM (b)(6) ()
- EAP/CM (b)(6) ()
- EAP/CM (b)(6) ()
- EAP/CM (b)(6) ()
- EAP/TC: ()
- EAP/MLA: ()
- EAP/MLS: ()
- EAP/PD: ()
- EAP/EP: ()
- IO: ()
- IO/EDA: ()
- USUN/ (b)(6) ()
- D: (b)(6) ()
- P: (b)(6) ()
- C: (b)(6) ()
- S/P: ()
- GPA: ()
- R: ()
- E: ()
- T: ()
- J/IRF: ()
- J/GCJ: ()
- GEC ()
- ECA/P ()
- ECA/PE/C/SU ()
- EB/TRA ()
- EB/CIP/BA ()
- EB/CIP/TS ()
- EB/TPN/IBE: (b)(6) ()
- OES/IHB ()
- STAS ()
- DRL/EAP: ()
- ISN/PC: ()
- ISN/CATR: ()
- ISN/BPS: ()
- AVC/SSD: ()
- AVC/ESC: ()

AVC/BCW:	()
PM/SA:	()
PM/RSAT:	()
PM: (b)(6)	()
SPEHA:	()
S/CCI:	()
CA/OCS/ACS	()
INL:	()
INR/EAP:	()
L/EAP:	()
L/UNA:	()
L/NPA:	()
EUR/RPM:	()
EUR/PGI: (b)(6)	()
WHA/BSC:	()
SCA/INSB:	()



Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(1); (b)(5)

B-00002428050

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(1); (b)(5)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(1); (b)(5)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved: EAP (b)(6) Acting []

Drafted: EAP/CM - (b)(6)

Cleared:

- EAP/FO: JFritz ()
- EAP/FO: (b)(6) ()
- EAP/FO: (b)(6) ()
- EAP/CM: ()
- EAP/CM: ()
- EAP/CM: ()
- EAP/CM: ()
- EAP/CM: ()
- EAP/CM: ()
- EAP/TC: ()
- EAP/MLA: ()
- EAP/MLS: ()
- EAP/PD: ()
- EAP/EP: ()
- IO: ()
- IO/EDA: ()
- USUN/W: (b)(6) ()
- D: (b)(6) ()
- P: (b)(6) ()
- C: (b)(6) ()
- S/P: ()
- GPA: ()
- R: ()
- E: ()
- T: ()
- J/IRF: ()
- J/GCJ: ()
- GEC: ()
- ECA/P: ()
- ECA/PE/C/SU: ()
- EB/TRA: ()
- EB/CIP/BA: ()
- EB/CIP/TS: ()
- EB/TPN/IBE: (b)(6) ()
- OES/IHB: ()
- STAS: ()
- DRL/EAP: ()
- ISN/PC: ()
- ISN/CATR: ()
- ISN/BPS: ()
- AVC/SSD: ()
- AVC/ESC: ()

AVC/BCW:	()
PM/SA:	()
PM/RSAT:	()
PM(b)(6)	()
SPEHA:	()
S/CCI:	()
CA/OCS/ACS	()
INL:	()
INR/EAP:	()
L/EAP:	()
L/UNA:	()
L/NPA:	()
EUR/RPM:	()
EUR/PGI: (b)(6)	()
WHA/BSC	()
SCA/INSE	()



Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(1); (b)(5)

B-00002428049

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(1); (b)(5)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved: EAP – Sung Kim, Acting []

Drafted: EAP/CM: (b)(6)

Cleared:

- EAP/FO: JFritz ()
- EAP/FO: (b)(6) ()
- EAP/FO: () ()
- EAP/CM: () ()
- EAP/CM: () ()
- EAP/CM: () ()
- EAP/CM: () ()
- EAP/CM: () ()
- EAP/CM: () ()
- EAP/TC: () ()
- EAP/MLA: () ()
- EAP/MLS: () ()
- EAP/PD: () ()
- EAP/EP: () ()
- IO: () ()
- IO/EDA: () ()
- USUN/W: (b)(6) ()
- D: (b)(6) ()
- P: (b)(6) ()
- C: (b)(6) ()
- S/P: () ()
- GPA: () ()
- R: () ()
- E: () ()
- T: () ()
- J/IRF: () ()
- J/GCJ: () ()
- GEC: () ()
- ECA/P: () ()
- ECA/PE/C/SU: () ()
- EB/TRA: () ()
- EB/CIP/BA: () ()
- EB/CIP/TS: () ()
- EB/TPN/IBE: (b)(6) ()
- OES/IHB: () ()
- STAS: () ()
- DRL/EAP: () ()
- ISN/PC: () ()
- ISN/CATR: () ()
- ISN/BPS: () ()
- AVC/SSD: () ()
- AVC/ESC: () ()

AVC/BCW:		()
PM/SA:		()
PM/RSAT:		()
PM:	(b)(6)	()
SPE/HA:		()
S/CCI:		()
CA/OCS/ACS		()
INL:		()
INR/EAP:		()
L/EAP:		()
L/UNA:		()
L/NPA:		()
EUR/RPM:		()
EUR/PGI:	(b)(6)	()
WHA/BSC		()
SCA/INSB		()

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov>

**To:** Park, Christopher J (T) (b)(6)@state.gov>

**CC:** (b)(6)@state.gov>;  
ISN-BPS-DL <ISN-BPS-DL@STATE.GOV>

**Subject:** Revision of latest AVC draft - (b)(5)

**Date:** Tue, 5 Jan 2021 13:33:32 +0000

(b)(5);  
(h)(6)

(b)(5)

(b)(5);  
(h)(6)

Chris -

(b)(5)

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Please advise.

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

**Sender:** (b)(6)@state.gov>

Park, Christopher J (T) (b)(6)@state.gov>;

**Recipient:** (b)(6)@state.gov>;  
ISN-BPS-DL <ISN-BPS-DL@STATE.GOV>

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**To:** Park, Christopher J (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** RE: Suggestion for U.S. Panelist for IAEA Scientific Forum?  
**Date:** Fri, 23 Jul 2021 13:49:28 +0000

No worries.

**From:** Park, Christopher J (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Friday, July 23, 2021 9:48 AM  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** RE: Suggestion for U.S. Panelist for IAEA Scientific Forum?

I did not, because I'm in simultaneous COVID-origins and NSC-derived tasking hells and absolutely not getting through my inbox right now – but I will take a look at it right after backstopping, now that you've flagged it for me. Sorry.

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Friday, July 23, 2021 9:46 AM  
**To:** Park, Christopher J (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** RE: Suggestion for U.S. Panelist for IAEA Scientific Forum?

(b)(6)

Many thanks.

Did you see my message on BPS manpower, and was it of any use? (b)(6) is very resourceful and willing to help.

**From:** Park, Christopher J (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Friday, July 23, 2021 9:23 AM  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Cc:** (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** RE: Suggestion for U.S. Panelist for IAEA Scientific Forum?

(b)(6)

Let us bounce this around and get back to you shortly – including with respect to Mara Burr if you want feedback on that nomination and are still open to alternatives.

(b)(6) aside from PCR, can you remind me what relevant techniques the IAEA captures under “nuclear and nuclear-derived techniques”? I ask because that framing doesn't usually make much sense to the life science and public health types, aside from certain imaging and laboratory decontamination techniques so (in my experience, anyway) they tend to react with confusion rather than interest.

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Friday, July 23, 2021 9:09 AM



**To:** Park, Christopher J (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov;  
 (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Cc:** (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov;  
 (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Subject:** Suggestion for U.S. Panelist for IAEA Scientific Forum?

Hi Chris, (b)(6)

Attached is a briefing on this year's IAEA General Conference Scientific Forum, the subject of which is the role of nuclear science in dealing with zoonotic outbreaks. The Agency has invited both Anthony Fauci and Tracey Goldstein (USAID) to appear on a high-level panel on "Enhancing global preparedness to control zoonotic diseases: ZODIAC," but both have declined. They plan to reach out to William Karesh (Ecohealth Alliance), but we expect him to decline as well. Mara Burr from HHS/OGA has nominated herself to participate in a separate panel to speak about U.S. efforts to combat zoonotic diseases.

Recognizing (and having been party to) BPS misgivings about Zodiac, which (b)(6) tells me have receded somewhat, I'm writing to see whether you have any suggestions for a reasonably high-level (b)(5) (USG (or other U.S.) representative who might be willing to participate. We would want that person to

(b)(5)

(b)(5)

(b)(5)

(b)(6) can correct me if I'm wrong, but I expect this panel will take place virtually, so that the panelist would not have to travel to Vienna.

(b)(6)

**Sender:** (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Recipient:** Park, Christopher J (b)(6)@state.gov

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov>  
 (b)(6)@state.gov>;  
 (b)(6)@state.gov>;  
 (b)(6)@state.gov>;  
 Park, Christopher J (T) (h)(6)@state.gov>;  
**To:** (h)(6)@state.gov>;  
 ISN-PC-DL <ISN-PC-DL@state.gov>;  
 ISN-BPS-DL <ISN-BPS-DL@STATE.GOV>;  
 ISN-CTR-MGR-DL <ISN-CTR-MGR-DL@state.gov>;  
 ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL <ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL@state.gov>  
**CC:** T\_SpecAssts <T\_SpecAssts@state.gov>;  
 (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** RE: Reported PRC-Pak cooperation on bioweapons  
**Date:** Tue, 29 Sep 2020 17:30:19 +0000

JWICS e-mail sent to those who have accounts (although I only included East and South Asia colleagues from ISN/PC).

Thanks,

(b)(6)

(b)(6)

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 29, 2020 1:04 PM  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov>; (h)(6)@state.gov>; Park, Christopher J (T) (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov> (b)(6)@state.gov>; ISN-PC-DL <ISN-PC-DL@state.gov>; ISN-BPS-DL <ISN-BPS-DL@STATE.GOV>; ISN-CTR-MGR-DL <ISN-CTR-MGR-DL@state.gov>; ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL <ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL@state.gov>  
**Cc:** T\_SpecAssts <T\_SpecAssts@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** RE: Reported PRC-Pak cooperation on bioweapons

Wouldn't that imply that there is more to say on the relationship when there is none?

(b)(6)  
 U.S. Department of State, ISN/MBC  
 TEL: (b)(6)  
 FAX: (b)(6)  
 Unclass e-mail: (b)(6)@state.gov

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

---

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 29, 2020 12:57 PM  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov; Park, Christopher J (T) (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov; ISN-PC-DL <ISN-PC-DL@state.gov>; ISN-BPS-DL <ISN-BPS-DL@STATE.GOV>; ISN-CTR-MGR-DL <ISN-CTR-MGR-DL@state.gov>; ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL <ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL@state.gov>  
**Cc:** T\_SpecAssts <T\_SpecAssts@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Subject:** Re: Reported PRC-Pak cooperation on bioweapons

—BPS please work CTR in draft a Q&A on this issue that says we are aware of the report but that this issue would be best discussed in a classified meeting with the intelligence community.

CTR please also make DoD aware of this issue and our planned response

---

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 29, 2020 12:54 PM  
**To:** Park, Christopher J (T) (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov; ISN-PC-DL <ISN-PC-DL@state.gov>; ISN-BPS-DL <ISN-BPS-DL@STATE.GOV>; ISN-CTR-MGR-DL <ISN-CTR-MGR-DL@state.gov>; ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL <ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL@state.gov>  
**Cc:** T\_SpecAssts <T\_SpecAssts@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Subject:** RE: Reported PRC-Pak cooperation on bioweapons

Thanks to all. BPS will draft a Q/A for the HFAC hearing.

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

---

**From:** Park, Christopher J (T) (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 29, 2020 12:54 PM  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov; ISN-PC-DL <ISN-PC-DL@state.gov>; ISN-BPS-DL <ISN-BPS-DL@STATE.GOV>; ISN-CTR-MGR-DL <ISN-CTR-MGR-DL@state.gov>; ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL <ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL@state.gov>  
**Cc:** T\_SpecAssts <T\_SpecAssts@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Subject:** RE: Reported PRC-Pak cooperation on bioweapons

It's useful for context, at least.

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

---

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 29, 2020 12:50 PM

**To:** Park, Christopher J (T) (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; ISN-PC-DL <ISN-PC-DL@state.gov>; ISN-BPS-DL <ISN-BPS-DL@STATE.GOV>; ISN-CTR-MGR-DL <ISN-CTR-MGR-DL@state.gov>; ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL <ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL@state.gov>

**Cc:** T\_SpecAssts <T\_SpecAssts@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov><SouzaAM@state.gov>

**Subject:** RE: Reported PRC-Pak cooperation on bioweapons

Aside from the official Pakistani and Chinese rebuttals and Chris' astute observations on the press outlet and its potentially biased sources, the Compliance Reports are the only thing that I could readily think of to send to HFAC or cite at the hearing. The 2015 report's Pakistan-BWC finding is "Available information during the reporting period did not indicate that Pakistan is engaged in activities prohibited by the BWC." And I don't believe Pakistan has been mentioned under the BWC section since then.

I can provide additional information on JWICS, but I don't know if that helps you all vis-à-vis the hearing.

(b)(6)

Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR/SPM)

U.S. Department of State

(b)(6)

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

**From:** Park, Christopher J (T) (b)(6)@state.gov>

**Sent:** Tuesday, September 29, 2020 12:32 PM

**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; ISN-PC-DL <ISN-PC-DL@state.gov>; ISN-BPS-DL <ISN-BPS-DL@STATE.GOV>; ISN-CTR-MGR-DL <ISN-CTR-MGR-DL@state.gov>; ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL <ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL@state.gov>

**Cc:** T\_SpecAssts <T\_SpecAssts@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>

**Subject:** RE: Reported PRC-Pak cooperation on bioweapons

We'll need to check with (b)(6) about what, if anything, we can say re purported collaboration between DESTO and WIV, but we're certainly aware of the DESTO lab and the fact that they've been working to develop their disease surveillance and pathogen sampling capabilities. We can point to the assessment in the Compliance Report – that Pakistan does NOT have a covert offensive program – and we should probably point out that it's important to look carefully and critically at such allegations, since politically motivated allegations about BW programs and use significantly outnumber actual programs and use. The disinformation campaign concerning U.S. support for laboratories in the FSU, and particularly the Lugar Center, is a vivid case in point.

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov>

**Sent:** Tuesday, September 29, 2020 12:23 PM

**To:** Park, Christopher J (T) (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; ISN-PC-DL <ISN-PC-DL@state.gov>; ISN-BPS-DL <ISN-BPS-DL@STATE.GOV>; ISN-CTR-MGR-DL <ISN-CTR-MGR-DL@state.gov>; ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL <ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL@state.gov>

**Cc:** T\_SpecAssts <T\_SpecAssts@state.gov> (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)  
(b)(6)@nrc.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Subject:** RE: Reported PRC-Pak cooperation on bioweapons

Thanks, Chris. Is there anything we should say back to HFAC before Friday's hearing?

v/r,

(b)(6)

---

**From:** Park, Christopher J (T) (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 29, 2020 12:12 PM  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov; ISN-PC-DL <ISN-PC-DL@state.gov>; ISN-BPS-DL <ISN-BPS-DL@STATE.GOV>; ISN-CTR-MGR-DL <ISN-CTR-MGR-DL@state.gov>; ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL <ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL@state.gov>  
**Cc:** T\_SpecAssts <T\_SpecAssts@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)  
(b)(6)@nrc.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Subject:** RE: Reported PRC-Pak cooperation on bioweapons

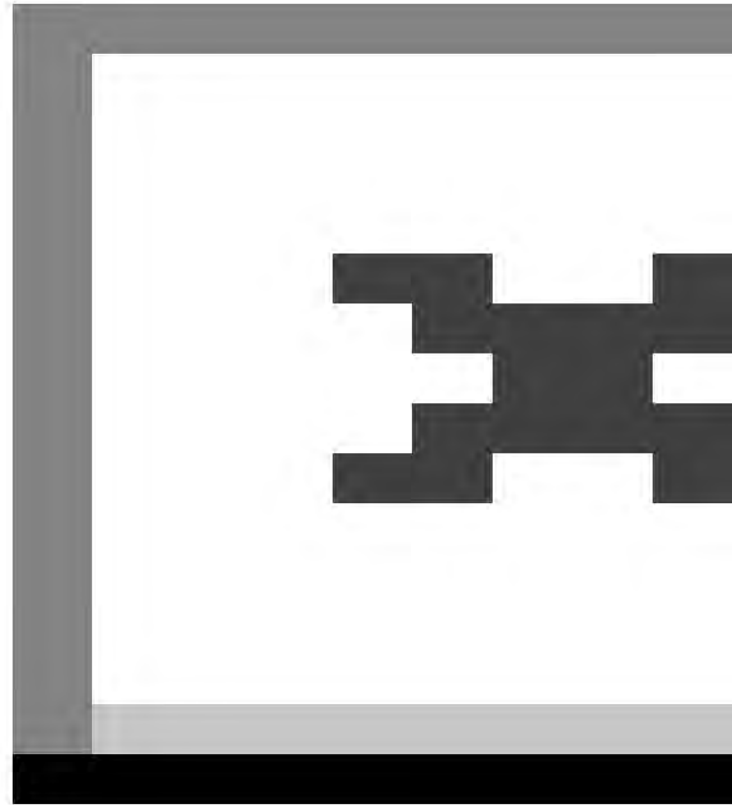
Pakistani response reported by DevDiscourse.com – funny they should mention their CBMS . . . :

## News of Chinese lab creating 'anthrax-like pathogens' in Pakistan 'fake': FO

Pakistan and China have concluded a secret deal to expand potential bio-warfare capabilities, including running research projects related to the deadly anthrax, an Australian media report has alleged, prompting Pakistan to dismiss it as a "politically motivated and fake story." In an article published on July 23, Australia's investigative newspaper The Klaxon said China's Wuhan Institute of Virology has signed a covert three-year deal with Pakistan military's Defense Science and Technology Organization (DESTO) to collaborate research in "emerging infectious diseases".

PTI | Islamabad | Updated: 26-07-2020 18:00 IST | Created: 26-07-2020 18:00 IST

---



Pakistan and China have concluded a secret deal to expand potential bio-warfare capabilities, including running research projects related to the deadly anthrax, an Australian media report has alleged, prompting Pakistan to dismiss it as a “politically motivated and fake story.” In an article published on

July 23, Australia's investigative newspaper The Klaxon said China's Wuhan Institute of Virology has signed a covert three-year deal with Pakistan military's Defense Science and Technology Organization (DESTO) to collaborate research in "emerging infectious diseases". The Wuhan Institute of Virology has drawn the international spotlight in recent months because the novel coronavirus is thought to have originated in Wuhan. There had been speculation the disease may have emerged from that laboratory, however most experts have since discounted the theory.

In a statement on Sunday, the Pakistan Foreign Office (FO) described the article as a "politically motivated and fake story" and said it was composed of "distortion of facts and fabrications that quote anonymous sources". "There is nothing secret about the Bio-Safety Level-3 (BSL-3) Laboratory of Pakistan referred to in the report. Pakistan has been sharing information about the facility with the States Parties to the Biological and Toxins Weapons Convention (BTWC) in its submission of Confidence Building Measures," the FO said.

It said the facility is meant for diagnostic and protective system improvement by Research and Development on emerging health threats, surveillance and disease outbreak investigation. Pakistan strictly abides by its BTWC obligations and has been one of the most vocal supporters for a strong verification mechanism to ensure full compliance by the states and parties to the convention, the FO said.

The BTWC is a 1975 multilateral disarmament treaty banning the production of chemical and biological weapons. Quoting anonymous intelligence sources, The Klaxon said the China-funded project has conducted "successful soil sampling tests" to isolate *Bacillus Thuringiensis* (BT), which has a "striking similarity" to *Bacillus Anthracis* - or anthrax, a classified bio-warfare agent. "Considering the striking similarity between BT and *Bacillus Anthracis*, a classified bio-warfare agent, (Pakistan's) improved know-how in handling the bacteria could enrich a potential offensive biological program," one source said. The Wuhan lab was providing "extensive training on manipulation of pathogens and bio-informatics" to Pakistani scientists "to help Pakistan develop its own virus collection database", the report said. "This could help Pakistan enhance its capability of genetic identification of viruses, access to dangerous microorganisms, and use of genomic tools for research and infectious diseases," an intelligence source said. The article quoted an anonymous defence source as saying that China wants Pakistan to engage India and it wants to conduct potentially dangerous experiments on foreign soil, without subjecting its own people to risk.

---

**From:** Park, Christopher J (T)

**Sent:** Tuesday, September 29, 2020 11:47 AM

**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov; ISN-PC-DL <ISN-PC-DL@state.gov>; ISN-BPS-DL <ISN-BPS-DL@STATE.GOV>; ISN-CTR-MGR-DL <ISN-CTR-MGR-DL@state.gov>; ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL <ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL@state.gov>

**Cc:** T\_SpecAssts <T\_SpecAssts@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@nrc.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov

**Subject:** RE: Reported PRC-Pak cooperation on bioweapons

Interesting. The Klaxon launched in July of this year, so it has no real track record. Appears to be a one-person show run and written by an Aussie journalist named Anthony Klan, largely reporting on other journalists' reports. He worked for *the Australian* until mid-2019 and seems to have racked up a number of awards for financial reporting, but his new venture is more ecumenical, though with a bent towards reporting on cover-ups, secret networks, and the ways in which government and corporations are selling out Australia's national interests. He reportedly left *the Australian* because "I had, and have, serious

misgivings about the direction that is now being taken. Australia faces unprecedented external threats. To do otherwise, I felt, would be treasonous."

The collaboration probably does exist. The spin being put on it by unnamed Indian officials reminds me of Russian characterizations of the Lugar Center and suggests an opportunistic disinformation campaign.

How can anybody think this is a credible source for a story like this? I feel embarrassed second hand.

CJP

---

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 29, 2020 11:20 AM  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov>; ISN-PC-DL <ISN-PC-DL@state.gov>; ISN-BPS-DL <ISN-BPS-DL@STATE.GOV>; ISN-CTR-MGR-DL <ISN-CTR-MGR-DL@state.gov>; ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL <ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL@state.gov>; Park, Christopher J (T) (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** RE: Reported PRC-Pak cooperation on bioweapons

In case the article wont open.

## EXCLUSIVE: China's Wuhan lab operating "covert operations" in Pakistan, handling "anthrax-like" pathogens

[China, Politics, National Security](#)

*Under the spotlight after Coronavirus savaged the globe, China's Wuhan lab has now set up operations in Pakistan as part of a broader offensive against India and Western rivals, according to intelligence experts. The secret facility is allegedly handling anthrax-like pathogens which could assist in biological warfare.*

**Anthony Klan reports.**

**ANTHONY KLAN**

**EXCLUSIVE**

Pakistan and China have entered a secret three-year deal to expand potential bio-warfare capabilities, including running several research projects related to the deadly agent anthrax, according to multiple intelligence sources.



In the wake of the Coronavirus outbreak on Chinese soil, China's now infamous Wuhan Institute of Virology has signed the covert deal with Pakistan military's Defense Science and Technology Organization (DESTO), to collaborate research in "emerging infectious diseases" and advance studies on the biological control of transmitted diseases.

According to highly credible intelligence sources, the program is being entirely funded by China and is formally titled the "Collaboration for Emerging Infectious Diseases and Studies on Biological Control of Vector Transmitting Diseases".

Intelligence sources, including from the Indian subcontinent, have told *The Klaxon* they have serious concerns about the secret project, which involves China testing biological agents outside its borders in an apparent bid to minimize the "risk of drawing condemnation from the international community".

"DESTO has been engaged in various dual-use research projects related to anthrax under a covert biological weapons program," one senior intelligence source said.

The source said China's Wuhan Institute of Virology had "lent all financial, material and scientific support for the project".

The Wuhan Institute of Virology has drawn the international spotlight in recent months because the Coronavirus is thought to have originated in Wuhan.

There had been speculation the disease may have emerged from that laboratory, however most experts have since discounted the theory.

The covert China-Pakistan project has conducted "successful soil sampling tests" to isolate *Bacillus Thuringiensis* (BT), which has a "striking similarity" to *Bacillus Anthracis* – or anthrax – *The Klaxon* is told.

“Considering the striking similarity between BT and Bacillus Anthracis, a classified bio-warfare agent, (Pakistan’s) improved know-how in handling the bacteria could enrich a potential offensive biological program,” one source said.

Pakistan had been provided with the reagents for Bacillus Thuringiensis by the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

The Wuhan lab was providing “extensive training on manipulation of pathogens and bio-informatics” to Pakistani scientists “to help Pakistan develop its own virus collection database”.

“This could help Pakistan enhance its capability of genetic identification of viruses, access to dangerous microorganisms, and use of genomic tools for research and infectious diseases,” an intelligence source told *The Klaxon*.

The secret project was “detached from supervision of civilian universities or government health departments in Pakistan” and was structured so as to allow “unspecified” future operations.

The agreement “clearly outlines that the cooperation is not necessarily limited to stated objectives” and “new thematic research to monitor potential new diseases can be added by either party”, a source said.

“DESTO has been engaged in various dual-use research projects related to anthrax under a covert biological weapons program”  
— Intelligence sources

One security expert, speaking on the condition of anonymity, told *The Klaxon* that India and key western intelligence agencies viewed China’s involvement in the project as being “driven chiefly by its agenda to engage Pakistan against India”.

“China’s keen interest in the project is driven chiefly by its agenda to engage Pakistan against India and to conduct potentially dangerous experiments on foreign soil, without subjecting its own land and people to risk,” the expert said.

The plan was part of a move by Beijing to “designate Pakistan a destination for hazardous bio chemical research” while “evading use of its own territory for such activities”, which “stand the risk of drawing criticism and condemnation from the international community”.

One example was a proposal to test a Coronavirus vaccine, made by Chinese state-owned company Sinopharm, on Pakistani citizens.

The China-Pakistan biological project had already undertaken experiments on the Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever Virus (CCHFV), sources said.

CCHFV is a rapid-onset fever virus that causes death in about 25% of cases and is similar to the Ebola virus.

CCHFV is categorised as a “class-4” microorganism – the highest possible risk category.

Class-4 microorganisms, which also include the Ebola, Marburg and Lassa viruses, are those which can kill humans, can easily travel from one person to another and for which there are no known treatments or vaccines.

Pakistan is allegedly carrying out tests on CCHFV in laboratories which are not equipped to handle Bio-Safety Level-4 diseases.

“Under these circumstances, concerns over manipulation of class 4 pathogens (and the associated) bio-safety issues cannot be overlooked,” an intelligence expert told *The Klaxon*.

Biological weapons have traditionally been unwieldy as they spread easily and are difficult to target at specific populations.

However the threat of biological warfare has grown considerably in recent years, and experts have warned China is heavily involved in DNA research that could potentially enable a biological weapon to specifically target - or conversely to be ineffective against - people of specific races.

While theories of Coronavirus emerging from the Wuhan Institute of Virology have been largely dismissed by experts, serious concerns have been raised about the safety standards at the Wuhan lab more generally.

In particular, there are concerns the lab is not equipped to handle class-4 diseases, despite claiming to be class-4 compliant.

Intelligence sources told *The Klaxon* there were concerns the Wuhan Institute of Virology had also established the Institute of Medical Biology in Kunming, in China's southern Yunnan province.

There were concerns the Kunming facility, which is controlled by the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, was also handling class-4 diseases without proper protections, sources said.

Do you know more?

[anthonyklan@protonmail.com](mailto:anthonyklan@protonmail.com)

v/r,

(b)(6)

----

(b)(6)

*Congressional Affairs Officer*

Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation

U.S. Department of State

*B3 Solutions, LLC*

M,W,F- Telework Phone: (b)(6)

T,Th- Office Phone: (b)(6)

Email: (b)(6)@state.gov

---

**From:** (b)(6)  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 29, 2020 11:18 AM  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov; ISN-PC-DL <ISN-PC-DL@state.gov>; ISN-BPS-DL <ISN-BPS-DL@STATE.GOV>; ISN-CTR-MGR-DL <ISN-CTR-MGR-DL@state.gov>; ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL <ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL@state.gov>; Park, Christopher J (T) (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Subject:** FW: Reported PRC-Pak cooperation on bioweapons

All-

HFAC shared this article with State this morning. Is there anything we can send back before Friday's hearing? They will want to discuss it during the hearing as well.

<https://www.theklaxon.com.au/home/xdx17f6auh0tew0g57ubqzrkdeux9>.

v/r,

(b)(6)

----

(b)(6)  
*Congressional Affairs Officer*  
Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation  
U.S. Department of State  
*B3 Solutions, LLC*  
M,W,F- Telework Phone: (b)(6)  
T,Th- Office Phone: (b)(6)  
Email: (b)(6)@state.gov

---

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 29, 2020 9:44 AM  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Subject:** Fwd: Reported PRC-Pak cooperation on bioweapons

FYI - Is there any info we can share before Friday's hearing? Thanks!

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** (b)(6) (b)(6)  
**Date:** September 29, 2020 at 9:41:50 AM EDT  
**Subject:** Reported PRC-Pak cooperation on bioweapons  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Cc:** (b)(6)@mail.house.gov

Hey (b)(6)

Getting questions from my Members about this article (<https://www.theklaxon.com.au/home/xdx17f6auh0tew0g57ubqrxkdeux9>). Sources reporting it seem to be limited to the Indian sub-continent, so trying to get any info I can from State as to validity/awareness. For context, I expect it to come up at the hearing Friday, so wanted to provide a heads up to y'all and make sure I can get my Members accurate information prior.

Thanks,

(b)(6)



(b)(6)

Professional Staff Member, Foreign Affairs Committee Republicans

(b)(6) [republicans-foreignaffairs.house.gov](mailto:republicans-foreignaffairs.house.gov)

(b)(6) (b)(6) t: @HouseForeignGOP

**Sender:** (b)(6)@state.gov>  
 (b)(6)@state.gov>;  
 (b)(6)@state.gov>;  
 (b)(6)@state.gov>;  
 Park, Christopher J (T) (b)(6)@state.gov>;  
 (b)(6)@state.gov>;

**Recipient:** ISN-PC-DL <ISN-PC-DL@state.gov>;  
 ISN-BPS-DL <ISN-BPS-DL@STATE.GOV>;  
 ISN-CTR-MGR-DL <ISN-CTR-MGR-DL@state.gov>;  
 ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL <ISN-CTR-BioSecurity-DL@state.gov>;  
 T\_SpecAssts <T\_SpecAssts@state.gov>;  
 (b)(6)@state.gov>

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**To:** Park, Christopher J (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** Newer version Q&A  
**Date:** Wed, 28 Jul 2021 15:53:08 +0000

In purple you'll see how I'm thinking about responding to questions. No need to review before we chat, just sharing while I give myself a break to work on other stuff.

(b)(6)

Foreign Affairs / Science Officer  
Biological Policy Staff | Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation  
U.S. Department of State

(b)(6)

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

**Sender:** (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Recipient:** Park, Christopher J (b)(6)@state.gov>

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)



**From:** "Stilwell, David R"  
**To:** (b)(6)  
(b)(6)  
**Subject:** New York Mag: The Lab Leak Hypothesis  
**Date:** Mon, 4 Jan 2021 20:27:S2 +0000

Last one I'll send. This guy does a beautiful job of summarizing what we've learned over the last 12 months.

**From:** Feith, David (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Monday, January 4, 2021 2:20 PM  
**Subject:** New York Mag: The Lab Leak Hypothesis

This looks awfully interesting. The story the New Yorker wouldn't tell...

<https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/coronavirus-lab-escape-theory.html>

Jan 4, 2021, 6:00 A.M.

# The Lab-Leak Hypothesis

## The Lab Leak Hypothesis

For decades, scientists have been hot-wiring viruses in hopes of preventing a pandemic, not causing one. But what if ...?

By *Nicholson Baker*

I.

## Flask Monsters

**What happened was** fairly simple, I've come to believe. It was an accident. A virus spent some time in a laboratory, and eventually it got out. SARS-CoV-

2, the virus that causes COVID-19, began its existence inside a bat, then it learned how to infect people in a claustrophobic mine shaft, and then it was made more infectious in one or more laboratories, perhaps as part of a scientist's well-intentioned but risky effort to create a broad-spectrum vaccine. SARS-2 was not designed as a biological weapon. But it was, I think, designed. Many thoughtful people dismiss this notion, and they may be right. They sincerely believe that the coronavirus arose naturally, "zoonotically," from animals, without having been previously studied, or hybridized, or sluiced through cell cultures, or otherwise worked on by trained professionals. They hold that a bat, carrying a coronavirus, infected some other creature, perhaps a pangolin, and that the pangolin may have already been sick with a different coronavirus disease, and out of the conjunction and commingling of those two diseases within the pangolin, a new disease, highly infectious to humans, evolved. Or they hypothesize that two coronaviruses recombined in a bat, and this new virus spread to other bats, and then the bats infected a person directly — in a rural setting, perhaps — and that this person caused a simmering undetected outbreak of respiratory disease, which over a period of months or years evolved to become virulent and highly transmissible but was not noticed until it appeared in Wuhan.

There is no direct evidence for these zoonotic possibilities, just as there is no direct evidence for an experimental mishap — no written confession, no incriminating notebook, no official accident report. Certainty craves detail, and detail requires an investigation. It has been a full year, 80 million people have been infected, and, surprisingly, no public investigation has taken place. We still know very little about the origins of this disease.

Nevertheless, I think it's worth offering some historical context for our yearlong medical nightmare. We need to hear from the people who for years have contended that certain types of virus experimentation might lead to a disastrous pandemic like this one. And we need to stop hunting for new exotic diseases in the wild, shipping them back to laboratories, and hot-wiring their genomes to prove how dangerous to human life they might become.

Over the past few decades, scientists have developed ingenious methods of evolutionary acceleration and recombination, and they've learned how to trick viruses, coronaviruses in particular, those spiky hairballs of protein we now know so well, into moving quickly from one species of animal to another or from one type of cell culture to another. They've made machines that mix and mingle the viral code for bat diseases with the code for human diseases — diseases like SARS, severe acute respiratory syndrome, for example, which arose in China in 2003, and MERS, Middle East respiratory syndrome, which

broke out a decade later and has to do with bats and camels. Some of the experiments — “gain of function” experiments — aimed to create new, more virulent, or more infectious strains of diseases in an effort to predict and therefore defend against threats that might conceivably arise in nature. The term *gain of function* is itself a euphemism; the Obama White House more accurately described this work as “experiments that may be reasonably anticipated to confer attributes to influenza, MERS, or SARS viruses such that the virus would have enhanced pathogenicity and/or transmissibility in mammals via the respiratory route.” The virologists who carried out these experiments have accomplished amazing feats of genetic transmutation, no question, and there have been very few publicized accidents over the years. But there have been some.

And we were warned, repeatedly. The intentional creation of new microbes that combine virulence with heightened transmissibility “poses extraordinary risks to the public,” wrote infectious-disease experts Marc Lipsitch and Thomas Inglesby in 2014. “A rigorous and transparent risk-assessment process for this work has not yet been established.” That’s still true today. In 2012, in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Lynn Klotz warned that there was an 80 percent chance, given how many laboratories were then handling virulent viro-varietals, that a leak of a potential pandemic pathogen would occur sometime in the next 12 years.

A lab accident — a dropped flask, a needle prick, a mouse bite, an illegibly labeled bottle — is apolitical. Proposing that something unfortunate happened during a scientific experiment in Wuhan — where COVID-19 was first diagnosed and where there are three high-security virology labs, one of which held in its freezers the most comprehensive inventory of sampled bat viruses in the world — isn’t a conspiracy theory. It’s just a theory. It merits attention, I believe, alongside other reasoned attempts to explain the source of our current catastrophe.

## II.

# “A Reasonable Chance”

From early 2020, the world was brooding over the origins of COVID-19. People were reading research papers, talking about what kinds of live animals were or were not sold at the Wuhan seafood market — wondering where the new virus had come from.

Meanwhile, things got strange all over the world. The Chinese government shut down transportation and built hospitals at high speed. There were video clips of people who'd suddenly dropped unconscious in the street. A doctor on YouTube told us how we were supposed to scrub down our produce when we got back from the supermarket. A scientist named Shi Zhengli of the Wuhan Institute of Virology published a paper saying that the novel coronavirus was 96 percent identical to a bat virus, RaTG13, found in Yunnan province in southern China. On March 13, I wrote in my journal that there seemed to be something oddly artificial about the disease: "It's too airborne — too catching — it's something that has been selected for infectivity. That's what I suspect. No way to know so no reason to waste time thinking about it."

This was just a note to self — at the time, I hadn't interviewed scientists about SARS-2 or read their research papers. But I did know something about pathogens and laboratory accidents; I published a book last year, *Baseless*, that talks about some of them. The book is named after a Pentagon program, Project Baseless, whose goal, as of 1951, was to achieve "an Air Force-wide combat capability in biological and chemical warfare at the earliest possible date."

A vast treasure was spent by the U.S. on the amplification and aerial delivery of diseases — some well known, others obscure and stealthy. America's biological-weapons program in the '50s had A1-priority status, as high as nuclear weapons. In preparation for a total war with a numerically superior communist foe, scientists bred germs to be resistant to antibiotics and other drug therapies, and they infected lab animals with them, using a technique called "serial passaging," in order to make the germs more virulent and more catching.

And along the way, there were laboratory accidents. By 1960, hundreds of American scientists and technicians had been hospitalized, victims of the diseases they were trying to weaponize. Charles Armstrong, of the National Institutes of Health, one of the consulting founders of the American germ-warfare program, investigated Q fever three times, and all three times, scientists and staffers got sick. In the anthrax pilot plant at Camp Detrick, Maryland, in 1951, a microbiologist, attempting to perfect the "foaming process" of high-volume production, developed a fever and died. In 1964, veterinary worker Albert Nickel fell ill after being bitten by a lab animal. His wife wasn't told that he had Machupo virus, or Bolivian hemorrhagic fever. "I watched him die through a little window to his quarantine room at the Detrick infirmary," she said.

In 1977, a worldwide epidemic of influenza A began in Russia and China; it was eventually traced to a sample of an American strain of flu preserved in a laboratory freezer since 1950. In 1978, a hybrid strain of smallpox killed a medical photographer at a lab in Birmingham, England; in 2007, live foot-and-mouth disease leaked from a faulty drainpipe at the Institute for Animal Health in Surrey. In the U.S., “more than 1,100 laboratory incidents involving bacteria, viruses and toxins that pose significant or bioterror risks to people and agriculture were reported to federal regulators during 2008 through 2012,” reported *USA Today* in an exposé published in 2014.

In 2015, the Department of Defense discovered that workers at a germ-warfare testing center in Utah had mistakenly sent close to 200 shipments of live anthrax to laboratories throughout the United States and also to Australia, Germany, Japan, South Korea, and several other countries over the past 12 years. In 2019, laboratories at Fort Detrick — where “defensive” research involves the creation of potential pathogens to defend against — were shut down for several months by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for “breaches of containment.” They reopened in December 2019.

High-containment laboratories have a whispered history of near misses. Scientists are people, and people have clumsy moments and poke themselves and get bitten by the enraged animals they are trying to nasally inoculate. Machines can create invisible aerosols, and cell solutions can become contaminated. Waste systems don’t always work properly. Things can go wrong in a hundred different ways.

Hold that human fallibility in your mind. And then consider the cautious words of Alina Chan, a scientist who works at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard. “There is a reasonable chance that what we are dealing with is the result of a lab accident,” Chan told me in July of last year. There was also, she added, a reasonable chance that the disease had evolved naturally — both were scientific possibilities. “I don’t know if we will ever find a smoking gun, especially if it was a lab accident. The stakes are so high now. It would be terrifying to be blamed for millions of cases of COVID-19 and possibly up to a million deaths by year end, if the pandemic continues to grow out of control. The Chinese government has also restricted their own scholars and scientists from looking into the origins of SARS-CoV-2. At this rate, the origin of SARS-CoV-2 may just be buried by the passage of time.”

I asked Jonathan A. King, a molecular biologist and biosafety advocate from MIT, whether he’d thought *lab accident* when he first heard about the epidemic. “Absolutely, absolutely,” King answered. Other scientists he knew were concerned as well. But scientists, he said, in general were cautious about

speaking out. There were “very intense, very subtle pressures” on them not to push on issues of laboratory biohazards. Collecting lots of bat viruses, and passaging those viruses repeatedly through cell cultures, and making bat-human viral hybrids, King believes, “generates new threats and desperately needs to be reined in.”

“All possibilities should be on the table, including a lab leak,” a scientist from the NIH, Philip Murphy — chief of the Laboratory of Molecular Immunology — wrote me recently. Nikolai Petrovsky, a professor of endocrinology at Flinders University College of Medicine in Adelaide, Australia, said in an email, “There are indeed many unexplained features of this virus that are hard if not impossible to explain based on a completely natural origin.” Richard Ebright, a molecular biologist at Rutgers University, wrote that he’d been concerned for some years about the Wuhan laboratory and about the work being done there to create “chimeric” (i.e., hybrid) SARS-related bat coronaviruses “with enhanced human infectivity.” Ebright said, “In this context, the news of a novel coronavirus in Wuhan \*\*\*screamed\*\*\* lab release.”

### III.

## “No Credible Evidence”

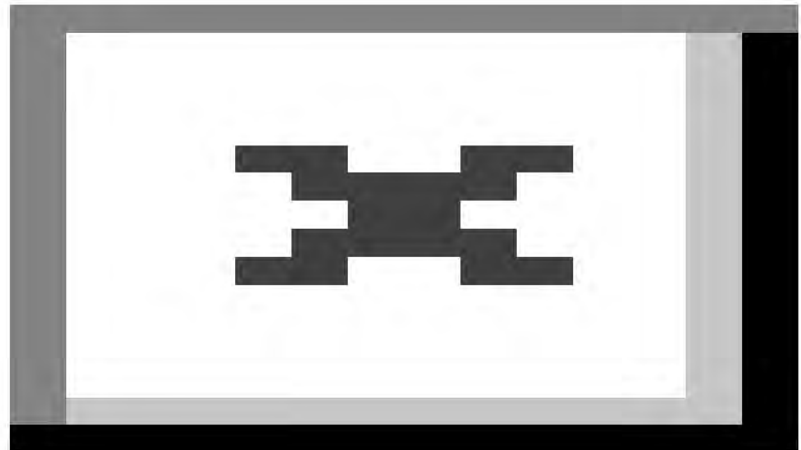
**The new disease**, as soon as it appeared, was intercepted — stolen and politicized by people with ulterior motives. The basic and extremely interesting scientific question of what happened was sucked up into an ideological sharknado.

Some Americans boycotted Chinese restaurants; others bullied and harassed Asian Americans. Steve Bannon, broadcasting from his living room, in a YouTube series called *War Room*, said that the Chinese Communist Party had made a biological weapon and intentionally released it. He called it the “CCP virus.” And his billionaire friend and backer, Miles Guo, a devoted Trump supporter, told a right-wing website that the communists’ goal was to “use the virus to infect selective people in Hong Kong, so that the Chinese Communist Party could use it as an excuse to impose martial law there and ultimately crush the Hong Kong pro-democracy movement. But it backfired terribly.”

In *The Lancet*, in February, a powerful counterstatement appeared, signed by 27 scientists. “We stand together to strongly condemn conspiracy theories suggesting that COVID-19 does not have a natural origin,” the statement said. “Scientists from multiple countries have published and analyzed genomes of

the causative agent, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), and they overwhelmingly conclude that this coronavirus originated in wildlife, as have so many other emerging pathogens.”

The behind-the-scenes organizer of this *Lancet* statement, Peter Daszak, is a zoologist and bat-virus sample collector and the head of a New York nonprofit called EcoHealth Alliance — a group that (as veteran science journalist Fred Guterl explained later in *Newsweek*) has channeled money from the National Institutes of Health to Shi Zhengli’s laboratory in Wuhan, allowing the lab to carry on recombinant research into diseases of bats and humans. “We have a choice whether to stand up and support colleagues who are being attacked and threatened daily by conspiracy theorists or to just turn a blind eye,” Daszak said in February in *Science* magazine.



**How Did It Get Out? 1. The Tongguan Mine Shaft** in Mojiang, Yunnan, where, in 2013, fragments of RaTG13, the closest known relative of SARSCoV-2, were recovered and transported to the Wuhan Institute of Virology; **2. The Wuhan Institute of Virology**, where Shi Zhengli’s team brought the RaTG13 sample, sequenced its genome, then took it out of the freezer several times in recent years; **3. The Wuhan Center for Disease Control and Prevention**, which first reported signs of the novel coronavirus in hospital patients; **4. The Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market**, an early suspected origin of the pandemic, where the first major outbreak occurred. Illustration: Map by Jason Lee



Vincent Racaniello, a professor at Columbia and a co-host of a podcast called *This Week in Virology*, said on February 9 that the idea of an accident in Wuhan was “complete bunk.” The coronavirus was 96 percent similar to a bat virus found in 2013, Racaniello said. “It’s not a man-made virus. It wasn’t released from a lab.”

Racaniello’s dismissal was seconded by a group of scientists from Ohio State, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of North Carolina, who put out a paper in *Emerging Microbes and Infections* to quiet the “speculations, rumors, and conspiracy theories that SARS-CoV-2 is of laboratory origin.” There was “currently no credible evidence” that SARS-2 leaked from a lab, these scientists said, using a somewhat different argument from Racaniello’s. “Some people have alleged that the human SARS-CoV-2 was leaked directly from a laboratory in Wuhan where a bat CoV (RaTG13) was recently reported,” they said. But RaTG13 could not be the source because it differed from the human SARS-2 virus by more than a thousand nucleotides. One of the paper’s authors, Susan Weiss, told the Raleigh *News & Observer*, “The conspiracy theory is ridiculous.”

The most influential natural-origin paper, “The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2,” by a group of biologists that included Kristian Andersen of Scripps Research, appeared online in a preliminary version in mid-February. “We do not believe any type of laboratory-based scenario is plausible,” the scientists said. Why? Because molecular-modeling software predicted that if you wanted to optimize an existing bat virus so that it would replicate well in human cells, you would arrange things a different way than how the SARS-2 virus actually does it — even though the SARS-2 virus does an extraordinarily good job of replicating in human cells. The laboratory-based scenario was implausible, the paper said, because, although it was true that the virus could conceivably have developed its unusual genetic features in a laboratory, a stronger and “more parsimonious” explanation was that the features came about through some kind of natural mutation or recombination. “What we think,” explained one of the authors, Robert F. Garry of Tulane University, on YouTube, “is that this virus is a recombinant. It probably came from a bat virus, plus perhaps one of these viruses from the pangolin.” Journalists, for the most part, echoed the authoritative pronouncements of Daszak, Racaniello, Weiss, Andersen, and other prominent natural-originists. “The balance of the scientific evidence strongly supports the conclusion that the new coronavirus emerged from nature — be it the Wuhan market or somewhere else,” said the Washington *Post*’s “Fact Checker” column. “Dr. Fauci Again Dismisses Wuhan Lab As Source of Coronavirus,” said CBS News, posting a video interview of Anthony Fauci by *National Geographic*. “If you



look at the evolution of the virus in bats, and what's out there now," Fauci said, "it's very, very strongly leaning toward 'This could not have been artificially or deliberately manipulated' — the way the mutations have naturally evolved."

Everyone took sides; everyone thought of the new disease as one more episode in an ongoing partisan struggle. Think of Mike Pompeo, that landmass of Cold War truculence; think of Donald Trump himself. They stood at their microphones saying, in a winking, I-know-something-you-don't-know sort of way, that this disease escaped from a Chinese laboratory. Whatever they were saying must be wrong. It became impermissible, almost taboo, to admit that, of course, SARS-2 could have come from a lab accident. "The administration's claim that the virus spread from a Wuhan lab has made the notion politically toxic, even among scientists who say it could have happened," wrote science journalist Mara Hvistendahl in the Intercept.

#### IV.

## “Is It a Complete Coincidence?”

**Even so, in** January and February of 2020, there were thoughtful people who were speaking up, formulating their perplexities.

One person was Sam Hussein, who works for Consortium News. He went to a CDC press conference at the National Press Club on February 11, 2020. By then, 42,000 people had gotten sick in China and more than a thousand had died. But there were only 13 confirmed cases in the U.S. Halfway through the Q&A period, Hussein went to the microphone and asked the CDC's representative, Anne Schuchat, where the virus had come from. His head was spinning, he told me later.

“Obviously the main concern is how to stop the virus,” Hussein said; nonetheless, he wanted to know more about its source. “Is it the CDC's contention,” he asked, “that there's absolutely no relation to the BSL-4 lab in Wuhan? It's my understanding that this is the only place in China with a BSL-4 lab. We in the United States have, I think, two dozen or so, and there have been problems and incidents.” (A BSL-4 laboratory is a maximum-security biosafety-level-four facility, used to house research on the most dangerous known pathogens. *New York* has confirmed there are at least 11 BSL-4 facilities currently operating in the U.S.) Hussein hastened to say that he wasn't implying that what happened in Wuhan was in any way intentional.

“I’m just asking, Is it a complete coincidence that this outbreak happened in the one city in China with a BSL-4 lab?”

Schuchat thanked Hussein for his questions and comments. Everything she’d seen was quite consistent with a natural, zoonotic origin for the disease, she said.

That same month, a group of French scientists from Aix-Marseille University posted a paper describing their investigation of a small insertion in the genome of the new SARS-2 virus. The virus’s spike protein contained a sequence of amino acids that formed what Etienne Decroly and colleagues called a “peculiar furin-like cleavage site” — a chemically sensitive region on the lobster claw of the spike protein that would react in the presence of an enzyme called furin, which is a type of protein found everywhere within the human body, but especially in the lungs. When the spike senses human furin, it shudders, chemically speaking, and the enzyme opens the protein, commencing the tiny morbid ballet whereby the virus burns a hole in a host cell’s outer membrane and finds its way inside.

The code for this particular molecular feature — not found in SARS or any SARS-like bat viruses, but present in a slightly different form in the more lethal MERS virus — is easy to remember because it’s a roar: “R-R-A-R.” The letter code stands for amino acids: arginine, arginine, alanine, and arginine. Its presence, so Decroly and his colleagues observed, may heighten the “pathogenicity” — that is, the god-awfulness — of a disease.

Botao Xiao, a professor at the South China University of Technology, posted a short paper on a preprint server titled “The Possible Origins of 2019-nCoV Coronavirus.” Two laboratories, the Wuhan Center for Disease Control and Prevention (WHCDC) and the Wuhan Institute of Virology, were not far from the seafood market, which was where the disease was said to have originated, Xiao wrote — in fact, the WHCDC was only a few hundred yards away from the market — whereas the horseshoe bats that hosted the disease were hundreds of miles to the south. (No bats were sold in the market, he pointed out.) It was unlikely, he wrote, that a bat would have flown to a densely populated metropolitan area of 15 million people. “The killer coronavirus probably originated from a laboratory in Wuhan,” Xiao believed. He urged the relocation of “biohazardous laboratories” away from densely populated places. His article disappeared from the server.

And late in the month, a professor at National Taiwan University, Fang Chitai, gave a lecture on the coronavirus in which he described the anomalous R-

R-A-R furin cleavage site. The virus was “unlikely to have four amino acids added all at once,” Fang said — natural mutations were smaller and more haphazard, he argued. “From an academic point of view, it is indeed possible that the amino acids were added to COVID-19 in the lab by humans.” When the Taiwan *News* published an article about Fang’s talk, Fang disavowed his own comments, and the video copy of the talk disappeared from the website of the Taiwan Public Health Association. “It has been taken down for a certain reason,” the association explained. “Thank you for your understanding.”

v.

## “A Serious Shortage of Appropriately Trained Technicians”

**In the spring**, I did some reading on coronavirus history. Beginning in the 1970s, dogs, cows, and pigs were diagnosed with coronavirus infections; dog shows were canceled in 1978 after 25 collies died in Louisville, Kentucky. New varieties of coronaviruses didn’t start killing humans, though, until 2003 — that’s when restaurant chefs, food handlers, and people who lived near a live-animal market got sick in Guangzhou, in southern China, where the shredded meat of a short-legged raccoonlike creature, the palm civet, was served in a regional dish called “dragon-tiger-phoenix soup.” The new disease, SARS, spread alarmingly in hospitals, and it reached 30 countries and territories. More than 800 people died; the civet-borne virus was eventually traced to horseshoe bats.

Later, smaller outbreaks of SARS in Taiwan, Singapore, and China’s National Institute of Virology in Beijing were all caused by laboratory accidents. Of the Beijing Virology Institute, the World Health Organization’s safety investigators wrote, in May 2004, that they had “serious concerns about biosafety procedures.” By one account, a SARS storage room in the Beijing lab was so crowded that the refrigerator holding live virus was moved out to the hallway. “Scientists still do not fully understand exactly where or how SARS emerged 18 months ago,” wrote *Washington Post* reporter David Brown in June 2004. “But it is clear now that the most threatening source of the deadly virus today may be places they know intimately — their own laboratories.”

## **I'm just asking, Is it a complete coincidence that this outbreak happened in the one city in China with a BSL-4 lab?**

MERS arose in 2012, possibly spread by camels that had contracted the disease from bats or bat guano, then passed it to human drinkers of raw camel milk and butchers of camel meat. It was an acute sickness, with a high fatality rate, mostly confined to Saudi Arabia. Like SARS, MERS ebbed quickly — it all but disappeared outside the Middle East, except for an outbreak in 2015 at the Samsung Medical Center in South Korea, where a single case of MERS led to more than 180 infections, many involving hospital workers.

In January 2015, the brand-new BSL-4 lab in Wuhan, built by a French contractor, celebrated its opening, but full safety certification came slowly. According to State Department cables from 2018 leaked to the *Washington Post*, the new BSL-4 lab had some start-up problems, including “a serious shortage of appropriately trained technicians and investigators needed to safely operate this high-containment laboratory.” The staff had gotten some training at a BSL-4 lab in Galveston, Texas, but they were doing potentially dangerous work with SARS-like viruses, the memo said, and they needed more help from the U.S.

In November or December of 2019, the novel coronavirus began to spread. Chinese scientists initially named it “Wuhan seafood market pneumonia virus,” but soon that idea went away. The market, closed and decontaminated by Chinese officials on January 1, 2020, was an amplifying hub, not the source of the outbreak, according to several studies by Chinese scientists. Forty-five percent of the earliest SARS-2 patients had no link with the market.

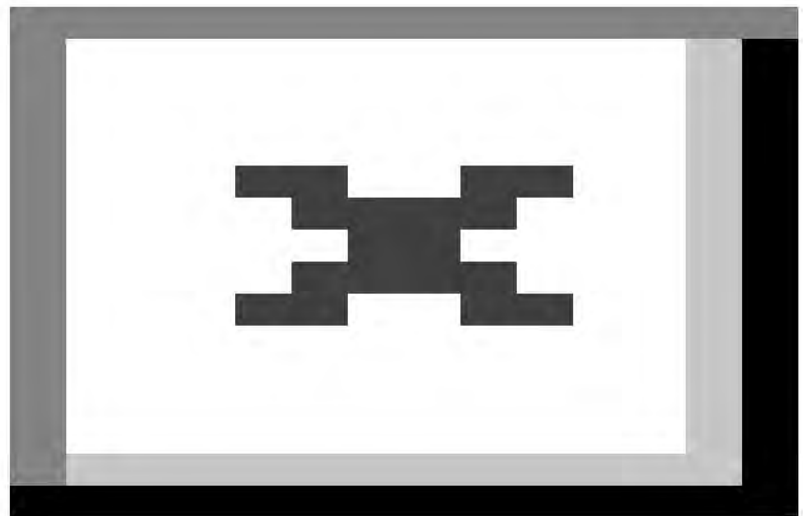
VI.

## **Emergence**

**Now let's take a step back.** AIDS, fatal and terrifying and politically charged, brought on a new era in government-guided vaccine research, under the guidance of Anthony Fauci. A virologist at Rockefeller University, Stephen S. Morse, began giving talks on “emerging viruses” — other plagues that might be in the process of coming out of nature's woodwork. In 1992, Richard Preston wrote a horrific account of one emergent virus, Ebola, in *The New Yorker*, which became a best-selling book in 1994; Laurie Garrett's *The*

*Coming Plague: Newly Emerging Diseases in a World Out of Balance* appeared that same year and was also a best seller. The idea seemed to be everywhere: We were on the verge of a wave of zoonotic, emergent plagues.

This new, useful term, *emerging*, began to glow in the research papers of some coronavirologists, who were out of the spotlight, working on common colds and livestock diseases. The term was useful because it was fluid. An emerging disease could be real and terrifying, as AIDS was — something that had just arrived on the medical scene and was confounding our efforts to combat it — or it could be a disease that hadn't arrived, and might never arrive, but could be shown in a laboratory to be waiting in the wings, just a few mutations away from a human epidemic. It was real and unreal at the same time — a quality that was helpful when applying for research grants.



**Where Did It Come From?** This chart measures the genetic similarity of known viruses to the novel coronavirus (which appears in yellow). By far the closest is the bat virus RaTG13, which appears in blue, and which was recovered in 2013 and brought to the Wuhan Institute of Virology. The first SARS, marked in red, is a

much more distant relative. Graphic: Zhou, P., Yang, XL., Wang, XG. et al. A pneumonia outbreak associated with a new coronavirus of probable bat origin. *Nature* 579, 270–273 (2020)

Take, for instance, [this paper](#) from 1995: “High Recombination and Mutation Rates in Mouse Hepatitis Viruses Suggest That Coronaviruses May Be Potentially Important Emerging Viruses.” It was written by Dr. Ralph Baric and his bench scientist, Boyd Yount, at the University of North Carolina. Baric, a gravelly voiced former swim champion, described in this early paper how his lab was able to train a coronavirus, MHV, which causes hepatitis in mice, to jump species, so that it could reliably infect BHK (baby-hamster kidney) cell cultures. They did it using serial passaging: repeatedly dosing a mixed solution of mouse cells and hamster cells with mouse-hepatitis virus, while each time decreasing the number of mouse cells and upping the concentration of hamster cells. At first, predictably, the mouse-hepatitis virus couldn’t do much with the hamster cells, which were left almost free of infection, floating in their world of fetal-calf serum. But by the end of the experiment, after dozens of passages through cell cultures, the virus had mutated: It had mastered the trick of parasitizing an unfamiliar rodent. A scourge of mice was transformed into a scourge of hamsters. And there was more: “It is clear that MHV can rapidly alter its species specificity and infect rats and primates,” Baric said. “The resulting virus variants are associated with demyelinating diseases in these alternative species.” (A demyelinating disease is a disease that damages nerve sheaths.) With steady prodding from laboratory science, along with some rhetorical exaggeration, a lowly mouse ailment was morphed into an emergent threat that might potentially cause nerve damage in primates. That is, nerve damage in us.

A few years later, in a further round of “interspecies transfer” experimentation, Baric’s scientists introduced their mouse coronavirus into flasks that held a suspension of African-green-monkey cells, human cells, and pig-testicle cells. Then, in 2002, they announced something even more impressive: They’d found a way to create a full-length infectious clone of the entire mouse-hepatitis genome. Their “infectious construct” replicated itself just like the real thing, [they wrote](#).

Not only that, but they’d figured out how to perform their assembly seamlessly, without any signs of human handiwork. Nobody would know if the virus had been fabricated in a laboratory or grown in nature. Baric called this the “no-see’em method,” and he asserted that it had “broad and largely unappreciated molecular biology applications.” The method was named, he wrote, after a “very small biting insect that is occasionally found on North Carolina beaches.”

In 2006, Baric, Yount, and two other scientists were granted a patent for their invisible method of fabricating a full-length infectious clone using the seamless, no-see'm method. But this time, it wasn't a clone of the mouse-hepatitis virus — it was a clone of the entire deadly human SARS virus, the one that had emerged from Chinese bats, via civets, in 2002. The Baric Lab came to be known by some scientists as “the Wild Wild West.” In 2007, Baric said that we had entered “the golden age of coronavirus genetics.”

“I would be afraid to look in their freezers,” one virologist told me.

Baric and Shi Zhengli of the Wuhan Institute of Virology, the two top experts on the genetic interplay between bat and human coronaviruses, began collaborating in 2015.

## VII.

# “I Had Not Slept a Wink”

**Early in the** pandemic, *Scientific American* profiled Shi Zhengli, known in China as the “bat woman.” Shi trapped hundreds of bats in nets at the mouths of caves in southern China, sampled their saliva and their blood, swabbed their anuses, and gathered up their fecal pellets. Several times, she visited and sampled bats in a mine in Mojiang, in southern China, where, in 2012, six men set to work shoveling bat guano were sickened by a severe lung disease, three of them fatally. Shi's team took the samples back to Wuhan and analyzed whatever fragments of bat virus she could find. In some cases, when she found a sequence that seemed particularly significant, she experimented with it in order to understand how it might potentially infect humans. Some of her work was funded by the National Institutes of Health and some of it by the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency of the Department of Defense via Peter Daszak's EcoHealth Alliance.

As Shi explained to *Scientific American*, late in December 2019, she heard from the director of the Wuhan Institute that there was an outbreak of a new disease in the city. Medical samples taken from hospital patients arrived at her lab for analysis. Shi determined that the new virus was related to SARS but even more closely related to a bat disease that her own team had found on a virus-hunting trip: the now-famous RaTG13. Shi was surprised that the outbreak was local, she said: “I had never expected this kind of thing to happen in Wuhan, in central China.” The bat hiding places that she'd been visiting were, after all, as far away as Orlando, Florida, is from New York City.

Could this new virus, she wondered, have come from her own laboratory? She checked her records and found no exact matches. “That really took a load off my mind,” she said. “I had not slept a wink for days.”

If one of the first thoughts that goes through the head of a lab director at the Wuhan Institute of Virology is that the new coronavirus could have come from her lab, then we are obliged to entertain the scientific possibility that it could indeed have come from her lab. Right then, there should have been a comprehensive, pockets-inside-out, fully public investigation of the Virology Institute, along with the other important virus labs in Wuhan, including the one close by the seafood market, headquarters of the Wuhan CDC. There should have been interviews with scientists, interviews with biosafety teams, close parsings of laboratory notebooks, freezer and plumbing and decontamination systems checks — everything. It didn’t happen. The Wuhan Institute of Virology closed down its databases of viral genomes, and the Chinese Ministry of Education sent out a directive: “Any paper that traces the origin of the virus must be strictly and tightly managed.”

Shi made some WeChat posts early in 2020. “The novel 2019 coronavirus is nature punishing the human race for keeping uncivilized living habits,” she wrote. “I, Shi Zhengli, swear on my life that it has nothing to do with our laboratory.” She advised those who believed rumors, and gave credence to unreliable scientific papers, to “shut their stinking mouths.”

#### VIII.

## “ ‘Bug to Drug’ in 24 Hours”

**It wasn’t only AIDS** that changed the way the NIH funded research. The War on Terror also influenced which diseases got the most attention. In the late ’90s, under Bill Clinton and then George W. Bush, biodefense specialists became interested — again — in anthrax. The Defense Threat Reduction Agency built a small anthrax factory in Nevada, using simulants, to demonstrate how easy it would be for a terrorist to build a small anthrax factory. And in the first year of the Bush presidency, the Defense Intelligence Agency wrote up plans to create a vaccine-resistant form of anthrax using state-of-the-art gene-splicery. A front-page article describing these initiatives, “U.S. Germ Warfare Research Pushes Treaty Limits,” appeared in the *New York Times* on September 4, 2001, one week before 9/11. “Pentagon Says Projects Are Defense, Is Pressing Ahead,” was the subtitle.



After the 9/11 attacks, and the mysterious anthrax mailings that began a week later (which said, "TAKE PENACILIN [sic] NOW / DEATH TO AMERICA / DEATH TO ISRAEL / ALLAH IS GREAT"), the desire for biopreparedness became all consuming. Now there were emerging biotreats from humans as well as from the evolving natural world. Fauci's anti-terror budget went from \$53 million in 2001 to \$1.7 billion in 2003. Setting aside his work toward an AIDS vaccine, which was taking longer than he'd foreseen, Fauci said he would be going all out to defend against a suite of known Cold War agents, all of which had been bred and perfected in American weapons programs many years before — brucellosis, anthrax, tularemia, and plague, for instance. "We are making this the highest priority," Fauci said. "We are really marshaling all available resources."

## **I would be afraid to look in their freezers.**

Vaccine development had to progress much faster, Fauci believed; he wanted to set up "vaccine systems" and "vaccine platforms," which could be quickly tailored to defend against a particular emergent strain some terrorist with an advanced biochemistry degree might have thrown together in a laboratory. "Our goal within the next 20 years is 'bug to drug' in 24 hours," Fauci said. "This would specifically meet the challenge of genetically engineered bioagents." The first Project BioShield contract Fauci awarded was to VaxGen, a California pharmaceutical company, for \$878 million worth of shots of anthrax vaccine.

By 2005, so much money was going toward biotreat reduction and preparedness that more than 750 scientists sent a protest letter to the NIH. Their claim was that grants to study canonical biowar diseases — anthrax, plague, brucellosis, and tularemia, all exceptionally rare in the U.S. — had increased by a factor of 15 since 2001, whereas funds for the study of widespread "normal" diseases, of high public-health importance, had decreased.

Fauci was firm in his reply: "The United States through its leaders made the decision that this money was going to be spent on biodefense," he said. "We disagree with the notion that biodefense concerns are of 'low public-health significance.'"

In 2010, by one count, there were 249 BSL-3 laboratories and seven BSL-4 laboratories in the U.S., and more than 11,000 scientists and staffers were authorized to handle the ultra-lethal germs on the government's select pathogen list. And yet the sole bioterrorist in living memory who actually

killed American citizens, according to the FBI — the man who sent the anthrax letters — turned out to be one of the government’s own researchers. Bruce Ivins, an eccentric, suicidal laboratory scientist from Ohio who worked in vaccine development at Fort Detrick, allegedly wanted to boost the fear level so as to persuade the government to buy more of the patented, genetically engineered anthrax VaxGen vaccine, of which he was a co-inventor. (See David Willman’s fascinating biography of Ivins, *Mirage Man*.) Fauci’s staff at NIH funded Ivins’s vaccine laboratory and gave \$100 million to VaxGen to accelerate vaccine production. (The NIH’s \$878 million contract with VaxGen, however, was quietly canceled in 2006; Ivins, who was never charged, killed himself in 2008.)

“The whole incident amounted to a snake eating its own tail,” wrote Wendy Orent in an August 2008 piece titled “Our Own Worst Bioenemy” in the Los Angeles *Times*. “No ingenious biowarrior from Al Qaeda sent the lethal envelopes through the U.S. postal system. An American scientist did.” What confirmed Ivins’s guilt, according to the FBI, was that there was a genetic match between the anthrax used in the killings and the strain held at Fort Detrick.

## IX.

# “Weapons of Mass Disruption”

**After SARS appeared** in 2003, Ralph Baric’s laboratory moved up the NIH funding ladder. SARS was a “dual use” organism — a security threat and a zoonotic threat at the same time. In 2006, Baric wrote a long, fairly creepy paper on the threat of “weaponizable” viruses. Synthetic biology had made possible new kinds of viral “weapons of mass disruption,” he wrote, involving, for example, “rapid production of numerous candidate bioweapons that can be simultaneously released,” a scattershot terror tactic Baric called the “‘survival of the fittest’ approach.”

Baric hoped to find a SARS vaccine, but he couldn’t; he kept looking for it, year after year, supported by the NIH, long after the disease itself had been contained. It wasn’t really gone, Baric believed. Like other epidemics that pop up and then disappear, as he told a university audience some years later, “they don’t go extinct. They are waiting to return.” What do you do if you run a well-funded laboratory, an NIH “center of excellence,” and your emergent virus is no longer actually making people sick? You start squeezing it and twisting it into different shapes. Making it stand on its hind legs and quack like a duck, or a bat. Or breathe like a person.

Baric's safety record is good — although there was a minor mouse-bite incident in 2016, uncovered by ProPublica — and his motives are beyond reproach: “Safe, universal, vaccine platforms are needed that can be tailored to new pathogens as they emerge, quickly tested for safety, and then strategically used to control new disease outbreaks in human populations,” he wrote in a paper on public health. But the pioneering work he did over the past 15 years — generating tiny eager single-stranded flask monsters and pitting them against human cells, or bat cells, or gene-spliced somewhat-human cells, or monkey cells, or humanized mice — was not without risk, and it may have led others astray.

In 2006, for instance, Baric and his colleagues, hoping to come up with a “vaccine strategy” for SARS, produced noninfectious virus replicon particles (or VRPs) using the Venezuelan-equine-encephalitis virus (another American germ-warfare agent), which they fitted with various SARS spike proteins. Then, wearing Tyvek suits and two pairs of gloves each, and working in a biological safety cabinet in a BSL-3-certified laboratory, they cloned and grew recombinant versions of the original SARS virus in an incubator in a medium that held African-green-monkey cells. When they had grown enough virus, the scientists swapped out one kind of spike protein for a carefully chosen mutant, and they challenged their prototype vaccine with it in mice.

The scientists also tried their infectious SARS clones in something called an air-liquid interface, using a relatively new type of cell culture developed by Raymond Pickles of the University of North Carolina's Cystic Fibrosis Center. Pickles had perfected a method of emulating the traits of human airway tissue by cultivating cells taken from lung-disease patients — nurturing the culture over four to six weeks in such a way that the cells differentiated and developed a crop of tiny moving hairs, or cilia, on top and goblet cells within that produced real human mucus. In fact, before infecting these HAE (human airway epithelial) cells with a virus, the lab worker must sometimes rinse off some of the accumulated mucus, as if helping the lab-grown tissue to clear its throat. So Baric was exposing and adapting his engineered viruses to an extraordinarily true-to-life environment — the juicy, sticky, hairy inner surface of our breathing apparatus.

SARS-2 seems almost perfectly calibrated to grab and ransack our breathing cells and choke the life out of them. “By the time SARS-CoV-2 was first detected in late 2019, it was already pre-adapted to human transmission,” Alina Chan and her co-authors have written, whereas SARS, when it first appeared in 2003, underwent “numerous adaptive mutations” before settling down. Perhaps viral nature hit a bull's-eye of airborne infectivity, with almost

no mutational drift, no period of accommodation and adjustment, or perhaps some lab worker somewhere, inspired by Baric's work with human airway tissue, took a spike protein that was specially groomed to colonize and thrive deep in the ciliated, mucosal tunnels of our inner core and cloned it onto some existing viral bat backbone. It could have happened in Wuhan, but — because anyone can now “print out” a fully infectious clone of any sequenced disease — it could also have happened at Fort Detrick, or in Texas, or in Italy, or in Rotterdam, or in Wisconsin, or in some other citadel of coronaviral inquiry. No conspiracy — just scientific ambition, and the urge to take exciting risks and make new things, and the fear of terrorism, and the fear of getting sick. Plus a whole lot of government money.

X.

## “Risky Areas for Spillover”

**Project Bioshield began** to fade by the end of the Bush administration, although the expensive high-containment laboratories, controversial preservers and incubators of past and future epidemics, remain. By 2010, some BioShield projects had dissolved into Obama's Predict program, which paid for laboratories and staff in 60 “risky areas for spillover” around the world. Jonna Mazet, a veterinary scientist from the University of California, Davis, was in charge of Predict, which was a component of USAID's “Emerging Pandemic Threats” program. Her far-flung teams collected samples from 164,000 animals and humans and claimed to have found “almost 1,200 potentially zoonotic viruses, among them 160 novel coronaviruses, including multiple SARS- and MERS-like coronaviruses.” The fruits of Predict's exotic harvest were studied and circulated in laboratories worldwide, and their genetic sequences became part of GenBank, the NIH's genome database, where any curious RNA wrangler anywhere could quickly synthesize snippets of code and test out a new disease on human cells.

Baric, Jonna Mazet, and Peter Daszak of EcoHealth worked together for years — and Daszak also routed Predict money to Shi Zhengli's bat-surveillance team in Wuhan through his nonprofit, mingling it with NIH money and money from the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency. In 2013, Mazet announced that Shi Zhengli's virus hunters, with Predict's support, had, for the first time, isolated and cultured a live SARS-like virus from bats and demonstrated that this virus could bind to the human ACE2, or “angiotensin-converting enzyme 2,” receptor, which Baric's laboratory had determined to be the sine qua non of human infectivity. “This work shows that these viruses can directly infect humans and validates our assumption that we should be

searching for viruses of pandemic potential before they spill over to people,” Mazet said.

Daszak, for his part, seems to have viewed his bat quests as part of an epic, quasi-religious death match. In a paper from 2008, Daszak and a co-author described Bruegel’s painting *The Fall of the Rebel Angels* and compared it to the contemporary human biological condition. The fallen angels could be seen as pathogenic organisms that had descended “through an evolutionary (not spiritual) pathway that takes them to a netherworld where they can feed only on our genes, our cells, our flesh,” Daszak wrote. “Will we succumb to the multitudinous horde? Are we to be cast downward into chthonic chaos represented here by the heaped up gibbering phantasmagory against which we rail and struggle?”

XI.

## “Lab-Made?”

**There are, in fact,** some helpful points of agreement between zoonoticists — those who believe in a natural origin of the SARS-2 virus — and those who believe that it probably came from a laboratory. Both sides agree, when pressed, that a lab origin can’t be conclusively ruled out and a natural origin can’t be ruled out either — because nature, after all, is capable of improbable, teleological-seeming achievements. Both sides also agree, for the most part, that the spillover event that began the human outbreak probably happened only once, or a few times, quite recently, and not many times over a longer period. They agree that bat virus RaTG13 (named for the *Rinolophus affinis* bat, from Tongguan, in 2013) is the closest match to the human virus that has yet been found, and that although the two viruses are very similar, the spike protein of the bat virus lacks the features the human spike protein possesses that enable it to work efficiently with human tissue.

Zoonoticists hold that SARS-2’s crucial features — the furin cleavage site and the ACE2 receptor — are the result of a recombinant event involving a bat coronavirus (perhaps RaTG13 or a virus closely related to it) and another, unknown virus. Early on, researchers proposed that it could be a snake sold at the seafood market — a Chinese cobra or a banded krait —but no: Snakes don’t typically carry coronaviruses. Then there was a thought that the disease came from sick smuggled pangolins, because there existed a certain pangolin coronavirus that was, inexplicably, almost identical in its spike protein to the human coronavirus — but then, no: There turned out to be questions about the reliability of the genetic information in that diseased-pangolin data set, on



top of which there were no pangolins for sale at the Wuhan market. Then a group from China's government veterinary laboratory at Harbin tried infecting beagles, pigs, chickens, ducks, ferrets, and cats with SARS-2 to see if they could be carriers. (Cats and ferrets got sick; pigs, ducks, and most dogs did not.)

In September, some scientists at the University of Michigan, led by Yang Zhang, reported that they had created a "computational pipeline" to screen nearly a hundred possible intermediate hosts, including the Sumatran orangutan, the Western gorilla, the Olive baboon, the crab-eating macaque, and the bonobo. All these primates were "permissive" to the SARS-2 coronavirus and should undergo "further experimental investigation," the scientists proposed.

Despite this wide-ranging effort, there is at the moment no animal host that zoonoticists can point to as the missing link. There's also no single, agreed-upon hypothesis to explain how the disease may have traveled from the bat reservoirs of Yunnan all the way to Wuhan, seven hours by train, without leaving any sick people behind and without infecting anyone along the way.

The zoonoticists say that we shouldn't find it troubling that virologists have been inserting and deleting furin cleavage sites and ACE2-receptor-binding domains in experimental viral spike proteins for years: The fact that virologists have been doing these things in laboratories, in advance of the pandemic, is to be taken as a sign of their prescience, not of their folly. But I keep returning to the basic, puzzling fact: This patchwork pathogen, which allegedly has evolved without human meddling, first came to notice in the only city in the world with a laboratory that was paid for years by the U.S. government to perform experiments on certain obscure and heretofore unpublicized strains of bat viruses — which bat viruses then turned out to be, out of all the organisms on the planet, the ones that are most closely related to the disease. What are the odds?

In July, I discovered a number of volunteer analysts who were doing a new kind of forensic, samizdat science, hunched over the letter code of the SARS-2 genome like scholars deciphering the cuneiform impressions in Linear B tablets. There were the anonymous authors of Project Evidence, on GitHub, who "disavow all racism and violent attacks, including those which are aimed at Asian or Chinese people," and there was Yuri Deigin, a biotech entrepreneur from Canada, who wrote a massive, lucid paper on Medium, "Lab-Made?," which illumined the mysteries of the spike protein. Jonathan Latham of the Bioscience Resource Project, with his co-author Allison Wilson, wrote two

important papers: one a calm, unsparing overview of laboratory accidents and rash research and the other a close look at the small outbreak of an unexplained viral pneumonia in a bat-infested copper mine in 2012. I corresponded with Alina Chan (now the subject of a nicely turned piece in *Boston* magazine by Rowan Jacobsen) and with the pseudonymous Billy Bostickson, a tireless researcher whose Twitter photo is a cartoon of an injured experimental monkey, and Monali Rahalkar, of the Agharkar Research Institute in Pune, India, who wrote a paper with her husband, Rahul Bahulikar, that also sheds light on the story of the bat-guano-shoveling men whose virus was remarkably like SARS-2, except that it was not nearly as catching. I talked to Rossana Segreto, a molecular biologist at the University of Innsbruck, whose paper, “Is Considering a Genetic-Manipulation Origin for SARS-CoV-2 a Conspiracy Theory That Must Be Censored?,” co-authored with Yuri Deigin, was finally published in November under a milder title; it argued that SARS-2’s most notable features, the furin site and the human ACE2-binding domain, were unlikely to have arisen simultaneously and “might be the result of lab manipulation techniques such as site directed mutagenesis.” Segreto is also the person who first established that a bat-virus fragment named BtCoV/4991, identified in 2013, was 100 percent identical to the closest known cousin to SARS-CoV-2, the bat virus RaTG13, thereby proving that the virus closest to the SARS-2-pandemic virus was linked back not to a bat cave but to a mine shaft, and that this same virus had been stored and worked on in the Wuhan Institute for years. This made possible the first big investigative piece on SARS-2’s origins, in the *Times* of London, in July: “Nobody can deny the bravery of scientists who risked their lives harvesting the highly infectious virus,” the *Times* authors write. “But did their courageous detective work lead inadvertently to a global disaster?”

## XII.

# “A New, Non-Natural Risk”

**In 2011, a tall**, confident Dutch scientist, Ron Fouchier, using grant money from Fauci’s group at NIH, created a mutant form of highly pathogenic avian influenza, H5N1, and passaged it ten times through ferrets in order to prove that he could “force” (his word) this potentially fatal disease to infect mammals, including humans, “via aerosols or respiratory droplets.” Fouchier said his findings indicated that these avian influenza viruses, thus forced, “pose a risk of becoming pandemic in humans.”

This experiment was too much for some scientists: Why, out of a desire to prove that something extremely infectious could happen, would you make it

happen? And why would the U.S. government feel compelled to pay for it to happen? Late in 2011, Marc Lipsitch of the Harvard School of Public Health got together with several other dismayed onlookers to ring the gong for caution. On January 8, 2012, the *New York Times* published a scorching editorial, "An Engineered Doomsday." "We cannot say there would be no benefits at all from studying the virus," the *Times* said. "But the consequences, should the virus escape, are too devastating to risk."

These gain-of-function experiments were an important part of the NIH's approach to vaccine development, and Anthony Fauci was reluctant to stop funding them. He and Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health, along with Gary Nabel, NIAID director of vaccine research, published an opinion piece in the *Washington Post* in which they contended that the ferret flu experiments, and others like them, were "a risk worth taking." "Important information and insights can come from generating a potentially dangerous virus in the laboratory," they wrote; the work can "help delineate the principles of virus transmission between species." The work was safe because the viruses were stored in a high-security lab, they believed, and the work was necessary because nature was always coming up with new threats. "Nature is the worst bioterrorist," Fauci told a reporter. "We know that through history."

Soon afterward, there followed some distressing screwups in secure federal laboratories involving live anthrax, live smallpox, and live avian influenza. These got attention in the science press. Then Lipsitch's activists (calling themselves the Cambridge Working Group) sent around a strong statement on the perils of research with "Potential Pandemic Pathogens," signed by more than a hundred scientists. The work might "trigger outbreaks that would be difficult or impossible to control," the signers said. Fauci reconsidered, and the White House in 2014 announced that there would be a "pause" in the funding of new influenza, SARS, and MERS gain-of-function research.

Baric, in North Carolina, was not happy. He had a number of gain-of-function experiments with pathogenic viruses in progress. "It took me ten seconds to realize that most of them were going to be affected," he told NPR. Baric and a former colleague from Vanderbilt University wrote a long letter to an NIH review board expressing their "profound concerns." "This decision will significantly inhibit our capacity to respond quickly and effectively to future outbreaks of SARS-like or MERS-like coronaviruses, which continue to circulate in bat populations and camels," they wrote. The funding ban was itself dangerous, they argued. "Emerging coronaviruses in nature do not observe a mandated pause."



Hoping to smooth over controversy by showing due diligence, the National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity, founded in the BioShield era under President Bush, paid a consulting firm, Gryphon Scientific, to write a report on gain-of-function research, which by now was simply referred to as GoF. In chapter six of this thousand-page dissertation, published in April 2016, the consultants take up the question of coronaviruses. “Increasing the transmissibility of the coronaviruses could significantly increase the chance of a global pandemic due to a laboratory accident,” they wrote.

The Cambridge Working Group continued to write letters of protest and plead for restraint and sanity. Steven Salzberg, a professor of biomedical engineering at Johns Hopkins, said, “We have enough problems simply keeping up with the current flu outbreaks — and now with Ebola — without scientists creating incredibly deadly new viruses that might accidentally escape their labs.” David Relman of Stanford Medical School said, “It is unethical to place so many members of the public at risk and then consult only scientists — or, even worse, just a small subset of scientists — and exclude others from the decision-making and oversight process.” Richard Ebright wrote that creating and evaluating new threats very seldom increases security: “Doing so in biology — where the number of potential threats is nearly infinite, and where the asymmetry between the ease of creating threats and the difficulty of addressing threats is nearly absolute — is especially counterproductive.” Lynn Klotz wrote, “Awful as a pandemic brought on by the escape of a variant H5N1 virus might be, it is SARS that now presents the greatest risk. The worry is less about recurrence of a natural SARS outbreak than of yet another escape from a laboratory researching it to help protect against a natural outbreak.” Marc Lipsitch argued that gain-of-function experiments can mislead, “resulting in worse not better decisions,” and that the entire gain-of-function debate as overseen by the NIH was heavily weighted in favor of scientific insiders and “distinctly unwelcoming of public participation.”

Nariyoshi Shinomiya, a professor of physiology and nano-medicine at the National Defense Medical College in Japan, offered this warning: “Similar to nuclear or chemical weapons there is no going back once we get a thing in our hands.”

But in the end, Baric was allowed to proceed with his experiments, and the research papers that resulted, showered with money, became a sort of *Anarchist’s Cookbook* for the rest of the scientific world. In November 2015, Baric and colleagues published [a collaboration paper](#) with Shi Zhengli titled “A SARS-like Cluster of Circulating Bat Coronaviruses Shows Potential for

Human Emergence.” Into a human SARS virus that they had adapted so that it would work in mice, Baric and Shi et al. inserted the spike protein of a bat virus, SHC014, discovered by Shi in southern China. They dabbed the mice nasally with virus and waited, looking for signs of sickness: “hunching, ruffled fur.” They also infected human airway cells with the mouse-adapted bat-spike-in-a-human-virus backbone. In both mice and human airway cells, the chimeric virus caused a “robust infection.”

This proved, Baric and Shi believed, that you did not need civets or other intermediate hosts in order for bats to cause an epidemic in humans and that therefore all the SARS-like viruses circulating in bat populations “may pose a future threat.” Peter Daszak, who had used Predict funds to pay Shi for her work on the paper, was impressed by this conclusion; the findings, he said, “move this virus from a candidate emerging pathogen to a clear and present danger.”

Richard Ebright was trenchantly unenthusiastic. “The only impact of this work,” he said, “is the creation, in a lab, of a new, non-natural risk.”

Early in 2016, Baric and Shi again collaborated. Shi sent Baric a fresh bat virus spike protein, and Baric inserted it into the backbone of a human SARS virus and then used that infectious clone to attack human airway cells. “The virus readily and efficiently replicated in cultured human airway tissues, suggesting an ability to potentially jump directly to humans,” reported the UNC’s website. This time, they also used the bat-human hybrid virus to infect transgenic humanized mice that grew human ACE2 protein. The mice, young and old, lost weight and died, proving, again, that this particular bat virus was potentially “poised to emerge in human populations.” It was “an ongoing threat,” Baric wrote. But was it? Civets and camels that are exposed to a lot of bat-guano dust may be an ongoing threat and a manageable one. But the bats themselves just want to hang in their caves and not be bothered by frowning sightseers in spacesuits who want to poke Q-tips in their bottoms. This 2016 “poised for human emergence” paper was supported by eight different NIH grants. In 2015, Baric’s lab received \$8.3 million from the NIH; in 2016, it received \$10.5 million.

Gain-of-function research came roaring back under Trump and Fauci. “The National Institutes of Health will again fund research that makes viruses more dangerous,” said an article in *Nature* in December 2017. Carrie Wolinetz of the NIH’s office of science policy defended the decision. “These experiments will help us get ahead of viruses that are already out there and pose a real and present danger to human health,” she told *The Lancet*. The NIH, Wolinetz

said, was committed to a leadership role with gain-of-function research internationally. “If we are pursuing this research in an active way, we will be much better positioned to develop protection and countermeasures should something bad happen in another country.”

A reporter asked Marc Lipsitch what he thought of the resumption of NIH funding. Gain-of-function experiments “have done almost nothing to improve our preparedness for pandemics,” he said, “yet they risked creating an accidental pandemic.”

### XIII.

## “Proximity Is a Problem”

**In April**, four months into the coronavirus emergency, a deputy director at the NIH wrote an email to EcoHealth Alliance. “You are instructed to cease providing any funds to Wuhan Institute of Virology,” it said. In response, Daszak and the chief scientific officer of New England Biolabs (a company that sells seamless gene-splicing products to laboratories, among other things) got 77 Nobel Prize winners to sign a statement saying that the cancellation deprived the “nation and the world of highly regarded science that could help control one of the greatest health crises in modern history and those that may arise in the future.” Later, as a condition of further funding, the NIH wrote to say it wanted Daszak to arrange an outside inspection of the Wuhan lab and to procure from Wuhan’s scientists a sample of whatever they’d used to sequence the SARS-2 virus. Daszak was outraged (“I am not trained as a private detective”), and again he fought back. He was reluctant to give up his own secrets, too. “Conspiracy-theory outlets and politically motivated organizations have made Freedom of Information Act requests on our grants and all of our letters and emails to the NIH,” he told *Nature*. “We don’t think it’s fair that we should have to reveal everything we do.”

But Daszak has survived — even prospered. Recently, *The Lancet* made him the lead investigator in its inquiry into the origins of the pandemic, and the World Health Organization named him to its ten-person origins investigation. (“We’re still close enough to the origin to really find out more details about where it has come from,” Daszak told *Nature*.)

The NIH has also set up an ambitious new international program, called CREID, which stands for Centers for Research in Emerging Infectious Diseases, and it has put Daszak’s EcoHealth in charge of trapping animals and looking for obscure bat viruses in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. Baric is

one of Daszak's partners in CREID. The virus hunting and collecting, which Richard Ebright likens to "looking for a gas leak with a lighted match," will continue and widen with U.S. funding. "We're going to work in remote parts of Malaysia and Thailand to get to the front line of where the next pandemic is going to start," Daszak told NPR.

In May, an interviewer from the People's Pharmacy website asked Baric if he had any thoughts on whether the coronavirus began with a natural bat-to-human transfer. "Or was there something a little bit more, perhaps, insidious involved?"

"Well, of course the answers to those questions are in China," Baric replied. "Exactly how they work in that facility is something that would be very difficult for a Westerner to know," he said. "The main problems that the Institute of Virology has is that the outbreak occurred in close proximity to that Institute. That Institute has in essence the best collection of virologists in the world that have gone out and sought out, and isolated, and sampled bat species throughout Southeast Asia. So they have a very large collection of viruses in their laboratory. And so it's — you know — proximity is a problem. It's a problem."

Over the course of the fall, and especially after the election muffled Donald Trump's influence over the country's public-health apparatus, that proximity problem — and the uncomfortable questions of origins it raised — began to grow somewhat more discussable. The BBC, *Le Monde*, and Italy's RAI have all recently taken seriously the scientific possibility of a lab leak. In late October, the World Health Organization convened the first meeting of its second inquiry into the origins of the disease. The WHO's effort is perhaps the world's best chance to satisfy its curiosity about goings-on at the Wuhan Institute of Virology and at the Wuhan CDC's virus lab near the Wuhan seafood market. But, as the *New York Times* has reported, the WHO's information gathering has been hindered by Chinese secretiveness since February, when an initial investigative team sent to Beijing was told its members' access to scientists would be restricted and that it couldn't visit the seafood market, then considered a hub of the pandemic.

When a BBC video team tried to inspect the Yunnan mine shaft, they found the road to the mine blocked by a strategically parked truck that had "broken down" shortly before they arrived. Reporter John Sudworth asked Daszak, one of the ten members of the second WHO investigative team, whether he would push for access to the Wuhan Institute of Virology. "That's not my job to do that," Daszak replied.

In November, David Relman, the Stanford microbiologist, one of the most thoughtful of the voices warning against gain-of-function research, published a paper in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* on the urgent need to unravel the origins of COVID-19. “If SARS-CoV-2 escaped from a lab to cause the pandemic,” he wrote, “it will become critical to understand the chain of events and prevent this from happening again.” Conflicts of interest by researchers and administrators will need to be addressed, Relman wrote; to reach the truth, the investigation must be transparent, international, and, as much as possible, unpolitical. “A more complete understanding of the origins of COVID-19 clearly serves the interests of every person in every country on this planet.”

“The world is sitting on a precedent-setting decision right now,” wrote Alina Chan on December 8. “It is unclear if SARS2 is 100 percent natural or emerged due to lab/research activities. If we walk away from this, demonstrating that we cannot effectively investigate its origins, it will pave the way for future COVIDS.”

Just before this issue of *New York* went to press, I reached Ralph Baric by phone and asked him where he now believed SARS-2 came from. (Anthony Fauci, Shi Zhengli, and Peter Daszak didn’t respond to emails, and Kristian Andersen said he was busy with other things.) Baric said he still thought the virus came from bats in southern China, perhaps directly, or possibly via an intermediate host, although the smuggled pangolins, in his view, were a red herring. The disease evolved in humans over time without being noticed, he suspected, becoming gradually more infectious, and eventually a person carried it to Wuhan “and the pandemic took off.” Then he said, “Can you rule out a laboratory escape? The answer in this case is probably not.”

#### XIV.

## Transmission

**So how did** we actually get this disease?

Here’s what I think happened. In April 2012, in a copper mine in Mojiang, China, three men were given an awful job — they were told to shovel bat guano out of a mine shaft. They went to work and shoveled guano for seven hours a day in the confined, insufficiently ventilated space of the mine shaft, and by the end of the week, they were sick with a viral pneumonia of unknown etiology. Three more, younger shovelers were hired to replace the ones who were out sick.

The viral load in their lungs was so huge, because of all the guano dust, that their lungs became a kind of accelerated laboratory passaging experiment, as Jonathan Latham and Allison Wilson have written, forcing the virus to switch its allegiance from bats to humans. SARS experts were consulted, and the disease was judged to be SARS-like but not SARS. It was something new. (Shi Zhengli told *Scientific American* that the guano shovelers had died of a fungal disease, but, as Monali Rahalkar pointed out, they were treated with antivirals, and their symptoms were consistent with viral pneumonia with attendant secondary fungal infections.)

Although it was a severe disease, and in the end three of the shovelers died, there was no resultant epidemic. It was actually a case of industrial overexposure to an infectious substance — what we might call a massive OSHA violation. The bat disease that the men encountered wasn't necessarily all that dangerous except in an environment of immunosuppressive overload.

Peter Daszak and Shi Zhengli were interested, of course, because this unidentified coronavirus disease involved bats and people. Of the fragmentary bits of virus Shi retrieved from the mine shaft, one was SARS-like, and Shi sequenced it and called it BtCoV/4991 and published a paper about it. Several times — in 2016 and 2018 and 2019 — this most interesting sample, a portion of what we now know as RaTG13, was taken out of the freezers in Shi's lab and worked on in undisclosed ways. (Peter Daszak claims that these samples have disintegrated and can't be validated or studied.) Samples of the nameless human disease also traveled back to the Wuhan Institute of Virology — few specifics about these valuable specimens have been released by Chinese sources, however.

This is the period in the story that demands a very close investigation, when chimeric assemblages may have been created and serially passaged, using BtCoV/4991, a.k.a. RaTG13, and other bat viruses, perhaps along with forms of the human virus. It's when Shi and Baric both published papers that were about what happened when you hot-swapped mutant spike proteins between bat viruses and human viruses.

The link, via the renamed sample BtCoV/4991, to the copper mine is of exceptional importance because of the one huge difference between the unnamed guano shovelers' virus and the SARS-2 virus that is now ravaging, for example, California: transmissibility. Airborne human-to-human transmissibility — the kind of thing that gain-of-functioneers like Ron Fouchier and Ralph Baric were aiming at, in order to demonstrate what Baric called "lurking threats" — is COVID-19's crucial distinguishing feature. If six

men had gotten extremely sick with COVID-19 back in 2012 in southern China, doctors and nurses in the hospital where they lay dying would likely have gotten sick as well. There might have been hundreds or thousands of cases. Instead, only the shovelers themselves, who had breathed a heavy concentration of guano dust for days, got it.

The existence of bat virus RaTG13 is therefore not necessarily evidence of a natural bat origin. In fact, it seems to me to imply the opposite: New functional components may have been overlaid onto or inserted into the RaTG13 genome, new Tinkertoy intermolecular manipulations, especially to its spike protein, which have the effect of making it unprecedentedly infectious in human airways.

This is where the uniquely peculiar furin insert and/or the human-tuned ACE2-receptor-binding domain may come in — although it's also possible that either of these elements could have evolved as part of some multistep zoonotic process. But in the climate of gonzo laboratory experimentation, at a time when all sorts of tweaked variants and amped-up substitutions were being tested on cell cultures and in the lungs of humanized mice and other experimental animals, isn't it possible that somebody in Wuhan took the virus that had been isolated from human samples, or the RaTG13 bat virus sequence, or both (or other viruses from that same mine shaft that Shi Zhengli has recently mentioned in passing), and used them to create a challenge disease for vaccine research — a chopped-and-channeled version of RaTG13 or the miners' virus that included elements that would make it thrive and even rampage in people? And then what if, during an experiment one afternoon, this new, virulent, human-infecting, furin-ready virus got out?

For more than 15 years, coronavirologists strove to prove that the threat of SARS was ever present and must be defended against, and they proved it by showing how they could doctor the viruses they stored in order to force them to jump species and go directly from bats to humans. More and more bat viruses came in from the field teams, and they were sequenced and synthesized and "rewired," to use a term that Baric likes. In this international potluck supper of genetic cookery, hundreds of new variant diseases were invented and stored. And then one day, perhaps, somebody messed up. It's at least a reasonable, "parsimonious" explanation of what might have happened.

This may be the great scientific meta-experiment of the 21st century. Could a world full of scientists do all kinds of reckless recombinant things with viral diseases for many years and successfully avoid a serious outbreak? The

hypothesis was that, yes, it was doable. The risk was worth taking. There would be no pandemic.

I hope the vaccine works.

*\*This article appears in the January 4, 2021, issue of New York Magazine*

--

David Feith  
Deputy Assistant Secretary  
Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP)  
U.S. Department of State

(b)(6)

(b)(6)@state.gov

**Sender:** "Stilwell, David R"

**Recipient:** (b)(6);  
(b)(6)



**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**To:** ISN-BPS-DL <ISN-BPS-DL@STATE.GOV>;  
Park, Christopher J (T) (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** FW: WSJ Op-Ed: China's Reckless Labs Put the World at Risk  
**Date:** Tue, 23 Feb 2021 21:33:53 +0000

**From:** PA Press Clips <PAPressMediaMonitors@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 23, 2021 4:26 PM  
**To:** PA Monitoring Group <PAMonitoringGroup@state.gov>  
**Subject:** WSJ Op-Ed: China's Reckless Labs Put the World at Risk

### China's Reckless Labs Put the World at Risk

Beijing is obsessed with viruses, but not biosafety. We are paying a high price for its lapses.

By Mike Pompeo and Miles Yu

Feb. 23, 2021 12:53 pm ET

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-reckless-labs-put-the-world-at-risk-11614102828?mod=opinion\\_lead\\_pos5](https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-reckless-labs-put-the-world-at-risk-11614102828?mod=opinion_lead_pos5)

The Chinese Communist Party is obsessed with viruses. Its army of scientists claim to have discovered almost 2,000 new viruses in a little over a decade. It took the past 200 years for the rest of the world to discover that many. More troubling is the party's negligence on biosafety. The costs and the risk to world health are enormous, as evidenced by a novel coronavirus that escaped Wuhan. This situation can't continue. The world must hold the Chinese Communist Party accountable and punish Beijing if it fails to uphold global biosafety standards, including basic transparency requirements.

The most recent example of this malfeasance is playing out around us. The evidence that the virus came from Wuhan is enormous, though largely circumstantial, and most signs point to the Wuhan Institute of Virology, or WIV, as the source of Covid-19. In America, concern about the site is now broad and bipartisan. The Biden administration stated that it has "deep concerns" about the World Health Organization's investigation into the early days of the pandemic, particularly Beijing's interference with the investigators' work.

The world has known for a long time that WIV poses a huge risk to global health. Two 2018 State Department cables warned of its biosafety problems. They even predicted that SARS-CoV-2's ACE2 receptor, identified by WIV scientists, would enable human-to-human transmission. Yuan Zhiming, then director of WIV's biosafety level 4 lab, warned, "The biosafety laboratory is a double-edge sword: It can be used for the benefit of humanity, but can also lead to a disaster." He listed the shortfalls prevalent among China's biology labs, including a lack of "operational technical support, professional instructions" and "feasible standards for the safety

requirements of different protection zones and for the inoculation of microbiological animals and equipment.”

The Chinese public took note, with several bloggers alleging that WIV’s virus-carrying animals are sold as pets. They may even show up at local wet markets. After the Wuhan outbreak, one since-disappeared blogger asked a WIV researcher to debate the lab’s biosafety practices in public. The offer was ignored.

Beijing has a moral and legal obligation to take biosafety seriously, especially given the kind of research going on at WIV. In 2015, WIV’s Dr. Shi Zhengli co-wrote an article titled “A SARS-like Cluster of Circulating Bat Coronaviruses Shows Potential for Human Emergence” in which she admitted that her team had engineered “chimeric” and “hybrid” viruses from horseshoe bats. In a 2019 article titled “Bat Coronavirus in China,” Ms. Shi and her co-authors warned, “It is highly likely that future SARS- or MERS-like coronavirus outbreaks will originate from bats, and there is an increased probability that this will occur in China.” At the time, WIV housed tens of thousands of bat virus samples and experiment animals.

China resisted international monitoring at WIV. The lab was built with French assistance, but China abrogated its promise to allow French scientists to participate in essential research there. China then accredited WIV through its own agency as its only level 4 facility, and the country’s National Health Commission quickly approved it to handle some of the world’s most dangerous viruses. The Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology completed a comprehensive safety and management survey of China’s 75 bioresearch labs in 2016, finding that WIV didn’t even make the top 20 in terms of quality.

The People’s Liberation Army, or PLA, has admitted to developing bioweapons. In 2011 China informed the International Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention Review Conference that its military experts were working on the “creation of man-made pathogens,” “genomics laying the foundation for pathogen transformation,” “population-specific genetic markers,” and “targeted drug-delivery technology making it easier to spread pathogens.” A 2015 PLA study treated the 2003 SARS coronavirus outbreak as a “contemporary genetic weapon” launched by foreign forces. And in January 2021, the State Department confirmed that people had fallen mysteriously ill at WIV in fall 2019, and that WIV conducts secret bioweapons research with the PLA.

The negligence at China’s biolabs, especially WIV, was so dangerous that the PLA dispatched a general to take over the facility soon after the outbreak in Wuhan. Xi Jinping’s first speech on the outbreak highlighted “lessons learned” about “shortcomings” and “leaking holes” in China’s management of biological material and biological-security system. He demanded that “a new biological-security law” be made part of the “national-security system.”

The Chinese Communist Party’s recklessness has already cost the world too much, and its obfuscation guarantees this won’t be the last such tragedy. It ordered the destruction of virus samples collected from the earliest patients. It banned the release of key data. It silenced

journalists, doctors and scientists. And it impeded the WHO's investigation. Beijing doesn't want the world to know the true origin of the coronavirus and its serious biosafety lapses.

The Chinese government must change course. It must be open about its biosafety systems, fix its errors and curtail its dangerous ambitions. Lives and livelihoods across the world are on the line. We all have a responsibility to make sure that the Chinese Communist Party isn't given a free pass.

Mr. Pompeo served as U.S. secretary of state (2018-21) and director of the Central Intelligence Agency (2017-18). Mr. Yu served as Secretary Pompeo's principal China policy and planning adviser. Both are fellows at the Hudson Institute.

**Sender:** (b)(6) @state.gov>

**Recipient:** ISN-BPS-DL <ISN-BPS-DL@STATE.GOV>;  
Park, Christopher J (T) (b)(6) @state.gov>

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**To:** Ford, Christopher A (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** FW: T nominee - ISN QA 5-11-2020 (Fong Isaac JY)  
**Date:** Thu, 14 May 2020 12:22:28 +0000

ISN Q&A attached.

**From:** Park, Christopher J (T) (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 12, 2020 6:27 PM  
**To:** Ford, Christopher A (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Cc:** T\_SpecAssts <T\_SpecAssts@state.gov>  
**Subject:** T nominee - ISN QA 5-11-2020 (Fong Isaac JY)

Dr. Ford – ISN Q&A for your review.

**Sender:** (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Recipient:** Ford, Christopher A (b)(6)@state.gov>

**Briefing Materials for Marshall Billingslea, Nominee to be Under Secretary  
for Arms Control and International Security**

**ISN Questions and Answers**

(b)(5)



Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved: ISN – DAS Phil Dolliff

Drafted: ISN/ECC – (b)(6)

Cleared: T: Chris Park (ok)  
D: (b)(6) (ok)  
P: (b)(6) (ok)  
S/P: (b)(6) (info)  
R: (b)(6) (ok)  
H: (b)(6) (ok)  
L/LFA: (b)(6) (ok)  
ISN/CPA: (b)(6) (ok)  
ISN/CTR: (b)(6) (ok)  
ISN/ECC: (b)(6) (ok)  
ISN/NDF: (b)(6) ()  
ISN/BPS: (b)(6) (ok)  
ISN/PC: (b)(6) (ok)  
ISN/MNSA: (b)(6) (ok)  
ISN/WMDT: (b)(6) (ok)  
ISN/MBC: (b)(6) (ok)  
F: (b)(6) (ok)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)



Approved: ISN – Eliot Kang

Drafted: ISN/MNSA (b)(6)

Cleared: ISN: (b)(6) OK  
ISN/MNSA (b)(6) OK  
D: (b)(6) OK  
P: (b)(6) OK  
T: CPark OK  
R: (b)(6) OK  
S/P: (b)(6) OK  
H: (b)(6) OK  
L/NPA: (b)(6) OK  
L/AN: (b)(6) OK  
L/EB: (b)(6) OK  
L/UNA: (b)(6) OK  
S/IAG: (b)(6) OK  
NEA-IR: (b)(6) OK  
ISN/CPI: (b)(6) OK  
ISN/CPI: (b)(6) OK  
ISN/RA: (b)(6) OK  
ISN/SCO: (b)(6) OK

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved: ISN/FO: Eliot Kang  
Drafted: ISN/MBC: (b)(6)

Cleared: D: (b)(6) OK  
P: (b)(6) OK  
T: (b)(6) OK  
R: (b)(6) OK  
S/P: (b)(6) OK  
S/IAG: (b)(6) OK  
H: (b)(6) OK  
L: (b)(6) OK  
NEA-IR: (b)(6) OK  
ISN/CPI: (b)(6) OK  
ISN/RA: (b)(6) OK

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved: ISN- Eliot Kang

Drafted: ISN/CPI (b)(6)

Cleared: ISN/FO: (b)(6) (ok)  
D: (b)(6) (ok)  
P: (b)(6) (ok)  
T: CPark (ok)  
R: (b)(6) (ok)  
S/IAG: (b)(6) (ok)  
H: (b)(6) (ok)  
L/NPA: (b)(6) (ok)  
L/EB: (b)(6) (ok)  
NEA/IR: (b)(6) (ok)  
ISN/CPI: (b)(6) (ok)  
ISN/SCO - (b)(6) (ok)  
ISN/MNSA (b)(6) (ok)  
ISN/RA (b)(6) (ok)  
ISN/NESS - (b)(6) (ok)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved: ISN – Eliot Kang

Drafted: ISN/NESS: (b)(6)

Cleared: ISN/FO: (b)(6) OK  
ISN/NESS: (b)(6) OK/OK  
ISN/RA: (b)(6) OK  
ISN/SCO: (b)(6) OK  
ISN/CTR: (b)(6) OK  
ISN/MNSA: (b)(6) OK  
L/NPA: (b)(6) OK  
NEA/EGY: (b)(6) OK  
NEA/ARP: (b)(6) OK  
NEA/LEV: (b)(6) OK  
T: (b)(6) OK  
D: (b)(6) OK  
P: (b)(6) OK  
S/P: (b)(6) OK  
H: (b)(6) OK  
R: (b)(6) OK

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)



Approved: ISN/FO: Eliot Kang

Drafted: ISN/TE - (b)(6)

Cleared:	ISN/FO:	(b)(6)	
	D:		OK
	P:		OK
	S/P:		OK
	L:		OK
	T:		
	R:		OK
	H:		OK
	ISN/CPI:		OK
	ISN/CTR:		info
	ISN/RA:		OK
	ISN/ECC:		OK
	ISN/MBC:		OK
	ISN/CPA:		OK
	ISN/MNSA:		OK
	EAP/K:		OK
	S/DPRK:		OK
	EB:		OK

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved by: ISN/FO: Eliot Kang

Drafted by: ISN/CATR (b)(6)

Cleared By: ISN/FO- (b)(6) (OK)  
ISN/CATR: (b)(6) (OK)  
EAP/CM (b)(6) (OK)  
EB - (b)(6) (OK)  
PM/RSAT - (b)(6) (OK)  
TSpec - CPark (OK)  
DSpec - (b)(6) (OK)  
ESpec - (b)(6) (OK)  
PSpec - (b)(6) (OK)  
PSpec - (b)(6) (OK)  
S/P - (b)(6) (OK)  
H - Info  
L - (b)(6) (OK)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved: ISN/FO: Eliot Kang

Drafted: ISN/RA: (b)(6)

Cleared: ISN: CSEKang (OK)  
ISN/RA: (b)(6) (OK)  
SCA/Pakistan Desk: (b)(6) (OK)  
ISN/CTR: (b)(6) (OK)  
ISN/NESS (b)(6) (OK)  
ISN/MBC (b)(6) (OK)  
ISN/SCO : (OK)  
ISN/CPI: (b)(6) (OK)  
D: (b)(6) (OK)  
P: (b)(6) (OK)  
S/P: (b)(6) (No Response)  
L/NPA: (b)(6) (OK)  
R: (b)(6) (OK)  
H/RGF: (b)(6) (OK)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved: ISN – Eliot Kang

Drafted: ISN/RA: (b)(6)  
May 08, 2020

Cleared: ISN/FO CSE.Kang ok  
ISN/RA (b)(6) ok  
ISN/ECC (b)(6) ok  
SCA/I (b)(6) ok  
SCA/STA (b)(6) ok  
H (b)(6) ok  
T (b)(6) ok  
ISN/CATR (b)(6) ok  
ISN/MBC (b)(6) ok  
ISS/NESS (b)(6) ok  
L/NPA (b)(6) ok

Info:

P (b)(6)  
D  
S/P  
R

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)



Approved: ISN – Eliot Kang (OK)

Drafted: (b)(6)

Cleared:

ISN/TF231	(b)(6)	OK
ISN/SCO	(b)(6)	OK
ISN/NESS	(b)(6)	OK
ISN/MBC	(b)(6)	OK
ISN/CTR	(b)(6)	OK
ISN/CATR	(b)(6)	OK
ISN/ECC	(b)(6)	OK
ISN/CPI	(b)(6)	OK
ISN/WMDT	(b)(6)	OK
ISN/BPS	(b)(6)	OK
ISN/RA	(b)(6)	OK
ISN/MNSA	(b)(6)	OK
PM	(b)(6)	INFO
AVC	(b)(6)	INFO
EUR/RUS	(b)(6)	OK
EUR/PRA	(b)(6)	OK
D	(b)(6)	OK
P	(b)(6)	OK
S/P	(b)(6)	INFO
H	(b)(6)	OK
L/NPV	(b)(6)	OK
R	(b)(6)	OK

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved by: ISN/FO, E Kang,

Drafted by: (b)(6)

Cleared:	ISN/MBC:	(b)(6)	ok
	ISN/CPI:		ok
	ISN/CATR:		ok
	ISN/RA:		ok
	ISN/SCO:		ok
	EUR/PRA:		ok
	NEA/LEV:		info
	S/IAG:		ok
	EAP/CM:		ok
	EAP/K:		ok
	S/DPRK:		ok
	L:		ok
	P:		ok
	D:		ok
	S/P:		ok
	T:		info
	R:		ok
	H:		ok

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved: ISN - (b)(6) OK

Drafted: (b)(6)

Cleared:	ISN/TF231	(b)(6)	OK
	ISN/TF231		OK
	ISN/SCO		OK
	ISN/RA		OK
	ISN/RA		OK
	ISN/CTR		OK
	PM		OK
	PM/RSAT		OK
	PM/RSAT		OK
	EUR/Turkey		OK
	EUR/Serbia		OK
	SCA/India		OK
	EAP/MTS		OK
	NEA/Egypt		OK
	NEA/Iraq		OK
	D		OK
	P		OK
	S/P		OK
	H		OK
	L/NPV		OK
	L/EB		OK
	R		OK

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved: ISN/FO: Eliot Kang

Drafted: ISN/MNSA - (b)(6)

Cleared:	ISN/FO:	Ann Ganzer	ok
	ISN/MNSA:	(b)(6)	ok
	ISN/NESS:		ok
	ISN/RA:		ok
	ISN/SRNN:		ok
	AVC/MNA:		ok
	L/NPA:		ok
	H:		ok
	D:		ok
	P:		ok
	S/P:		no response
	R:		ok

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)



Approved: ISN: EKang

Drafted: ISN/MNSA: (b)(6)

Cleared: ISN/FO: Ann Ganzer, Acting DAS (OK)  
ISN/MNSA: (b)(6) (OK)  
ISN/NESS: (b)(6) (OK)  
ISN/RA: (b)(6) (OK)  
ISN/SCO: (OK)  
IO/STA: (b)(6) (OK)  
IO/MPR: (OK)  
L/NPA: (b)(6) (OK)  
H: (b)(6) (OK)  
D: (OK)  
P: (OK)  
S/P: (b)(6) (OK)  
R: (b)(6) (OK)  
UNVIE: (b)(6) (OK)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved: ISN/FO: Eliot Kang

Drafted: ISN/MNSA - (b)(6)

Cleared:	ISN/FO:	Ann Ganzer	ok
	ISN/SRNN:	Amb. Eberhardt	ok
	ISN/MNSA:	(b)(6)	ok
	ISN/RA:		ok
	AVC/MNA:		ok
	L/NPA:		ok
	EUR/PRA:		ok
	EUR/RUS:		did not respond
	EAP/CM:		ok
	H:		ok
	D:		ok
	P:		ok
	S/P:		ok
	R:		ok

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved: ISN – C.S. Eliot Kang

Drafted: ISN/CTR – (b)(6)

Cleared: T: Chris Park ()  
D: (b)(6) (OK)  
P: (b)(6) (OK)  
S/P: (b)(6) (OK)  
R: (b)(6) (OK)  
H: (b)(6) (OK)  
L/NPA: (b)(6) (OK)  
ISN/FO: (b)(6) (OK)  
ISN/CTR: (b)(6) (OK)  
ISN/ECC: (b)(6) (OK)  
ISN/NDI: (b)(6) (OK)  
ISN/BPS: (b)(6) (OK)  
ISN/CPA: (b)(6) (OK)  
ISN/PC: (b)(6) (OK)  
ISN/MNSA: (b)(6) (OK)  
ISN/WMDT: (b)(6) (OK)  
ISN/MBC: (b)(6) (OK)  
OES/IHB: (b)(6) (OK)  
CGRCU: (b)(6) (OK)  
AVC/CBW: (b)(6) (OK)  
EAP/CM: (b)(6) (OK)  
INR/GGI: (b)(6) (OK)  
INR/SPM: (b)(6) (OK)  
S/GHD: (b)(6) (OK)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved: ISN – C.S. Eliot Kang, Acting

Drafted: ISN/MBC – (b)(6)

Cleared:

T:	(b)(6)	(OK)
D:		(OK)
P:	(b)(6)	(OK)
S/P:		(OK)
R:	(b)(6)	(OK)
H:		(OK)
ISN/FO:	(b)(6)	(OK)
L/NPA:		(OK)
ISN/CATR:	(b)(6)	(OK)
ISN/MBC:		(OK)
PM/RSAT:		(OK)
EUR/PRA:		(OK)

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)



Approved: ISN: (b)(6)

Drafted: ISN/CATR (b)(6)

Clearances: ISN/CATR (b)(6) - ok  
ISN/CPA (b)(6) - ok  
PM/WRA (b)(6) - ok  
T: (b)(6) - ok  
D: (b)(6) - ok  
P: (b)(6) - ok  
S/P (b)(6) - ok  
H: (b)(6) - ok  
L/NPA (b)(6) - ok  
NSC (b)(6) - ok

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Drafted by: ISN/WMDT: (b)(6)  
Approved by: ISN/FO: [ ] OK

Cleared by:	[ ]		
ISN/WMDT:		(b)(6)	OK
ISN/WMDT:			OK
ISN/WMDT:			OK
ISN/NESS:			OK
ISN/MNSA:			OK
ISN/CTR:			OK
ISN/CPI:			OK
ISN/ECC:			OK
ISN/CPA:			OK
CT:			OK
GEC:			OK
R:			OK
P:			OK
D:		OK	
S/P:		OK	
H:		OK	
L:		OK	

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

Approved: ISN/FO: Eliot Kang  
Drafter: ISN/CATR: (b)(6)

Cleared: ISN/FO: (b)(6) ok  
ISN/CATR: (b)(6) ok  
ISN/MBC: (b)(6) ok  
ISN/NESS: (b)(6) ok  
D: (b)(6) ok  
P: ok  
T: ok  
H: (b)(6) ok  
S/P: (b)(6) ok  
L/NP: (b)(6) ok  
R: (b)(6) ok

**From:** "Park, Christopher J" (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**To:** Park, Christopher J (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** FW: Prospects for cooperative investigations into the origin of COVID-19  
**Date:** Wed, 7 Jul 2021 18:35:52 +0000

**From:** (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Monday, August 17, 2020 5:17 PM  
**To:** ISN-BPS-DL <ISN-BPS-DL@STATE.GOV>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)  
(b)(6) CIV US NDU/CSWMD (b)(6)@ndu.edu>  
**Subject:** Prospects for cooperative investigations into the origin of COVID-19

Courtesy of Lourdes, attached is a Vertic paper on "Prospects for cooperative investigations into the origin of COVID-19."

**Sender:** "Park, Christopher J" (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Recipient:** Park, Christopher J (b)(6)@state.gov>

**From:** "Stilwell, David R" <(b)(6)@state.gov>  
**To:** (b)(6)  
Yu, Miles <(b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Subject:** FW: INTERVIEW: Secretary Michael R. Pompeo With Martha R addatz of ABC's This Week with George Stephanopoulos  
**Date:** Sun, 3 May 2020 16:46:22 +0000

Your fingerprints are all over this—he is armed with facts. Nicely done!

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Office of the Spokesperson

---

For Immediate Release

INTERVIEW

May 3, 2020

**Secretary Michael R. Pompeo**  
**With Martha Raddatz of ABC's This Week with George Stephanopoulos**

**May 3, 2020**  
**Washington, D.C.**

**QUESTION:** Good morning, Mr. Secretary. There are reports this morning – I want to talk about North Korea first, before we get to China – that shots were fired from North Korea into a South Korean guard tower on the DMZ and that the South fired back after a warning. What can you tell us about that?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Well, Martha, thanks for having me on this morning. I've seen that reporting, too. I've seen some of our internal information as well. We can confirm at least the initial reports are that you've described are just about right – a handful of shots that came across from the North. We think those were accidental. The South Koreans did return fire. So far as we can tell, there was no loss of life on either side.

**QUESTION:** And we saw images of Kim Jong-un for the first time in three weeks, the President tweeting he was glad to see him back and well. But before those images emerged, President Trump said that he had a very good idea about Kim's condition but could not talk about it at the time. What do you think Kim had

been doing during this period, even missing that major celebration for his late grandfather?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Martha, there's not much that I can share with you about what we knew about Chairman Kim's activities during that time. We don't know why he chose to miss that moment. We know there have been other extended periods of time where Chairman Kim has been out of public view as well, so it's not unprecedented. So there's not much I can share with you, other than we've seen the same images from yesterday that the world saw. It looks like Chairman Kim is alive and well.

Regardless of any of that, our mission is to remain the same: to convince the North Koreans to give up their nuclear weapons, to verify the same, and to then create a brighter future for the North Korean people. That's been something President Trump has been focused on since the beginning of his time in office and something we'll continue to work on.

**QUESTION:** And I know you can't share much information about Chairman Kim, but was he ever, in your opinion, gravely ill during this period?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Martha, I just can't say anything about that.

**QUESTION:** Can you rule out that it was COVID or that there was a cardiovascular problem?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Martha, I appreciate you continuing to try. I just can't offer you anything further here this morning.

**QUESTION:** Okay, thanks on that. I want to turn to China, with intelligence officials, as we mentioned, saying that the Chinese Government intentionally concealed the severity of COVID-19 from the international community in early January while it stockpiled medical supplies. In terms of international concealing, I assume you think they did that intentionally to keep as many masks for themselves as possible. Will there be some sort of retaliation?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** So, Martha, you've got the facts just about right. We can confirm that the Chinese Communist Party did all that it could to make sure that the world didn't learn in a timely fashion about what was taking place. There's lots of evidence of that. Some of it you can see in public, right? We've seen announcements. We've seen the fact that they kicked journalists out. We saw the fact that those who were trying to report on this – medical professionals inside of China – were silenced. They shut down reporting. All the kind of things that authoritarian regimes do. It's the way the Communist Party has operated. This is classic communist disinformation effort.

That created enormous risk, and now you can see hundreds of thousands of people around the world, tens of thousands in the United States, have been harmed. President Trump is very clear: We're going to hold those responsible accountable and we'll do so on a timeline that is our own.

**QUESTION:** And as for the origins of COVID-19, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence released a statement this week saying the virus did originate in China but concurs with the wide scientific consensus that the COVID-19 virus was not man-made or genetically modified, the statement going on to say that they will continue to examine whether the outbreak began through contact with infected animals or if it was the result of an accident in a laboratory in Wuhan.

Later, the President was asked if he had seen anything that gave him high confidence that the Wuhan lab was



the origin of the virus. Let's listen:

**QUESTION:** *"Have you seen anything at this point that gives you a high degree of confidence that the Wuhan Institute of Virology was the origin of this virus?"*

**PRESIDENT TRUMP:** *"Yes, I have. Yes, I have."*

**QUESTION:** *"What gives you a high degree of confidence that this originated from the Wuhan Institute of Virology?"*

**PRESIDENT TRUMP:** *"I can't tell you that. I'm not allowed to tell you that."*

And Mr. Secretary, have you seen anything that gives you high confidence that it originated in that Wuhan lab?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Martha, there is enormous evidence that that's where this began. We've said from the beginning that this was a virus that originated in Wuhan, China. We took a lot of grief for that from the outside, but I think the whole world can see now. Remember, China has a history of infecting the world and they have a history of running substandard laboratories. These are not the first times that we've had a world exposed to viruses as a result of failures in a Chinese lab. And so while the Intelligence Community continues to do its work, they should continue to do that and verify so that we are certain, I can tell you that there is a significant amount of evidence that this came from that laboratory in Wuhan.

**QUESTION:** Do you believe it was man-made or genetically modified?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Look, the best experts so far seem to think it was man-made. I have no reason to disbelieve that at this point.

**QUESTION:** Your Office of the DNI says the consensus, the scientific consensus, was not man-made or genetically modified.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** That's right. I agree with that. Yeah, I've seen their analysis. I've seen the summary that you saw that was released publicly. I have no reason to doubt that that is accurate at this point.

**QUESTION:** Okay. So just to be clear, you do not think it was man-made or genetically modified?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** I've seen what the Intelligence Community has said. I have no reason to believe that they've got it wrong. But you have to put this in context. Here's what's important, Martha. Here's what's important. The Chinese Communist Party had the opportunity to prevent all of the calamity that has befallen the world, and here we find ourselves today – you and I were talking about we haven't seen each other physically for a long time. That's true of people all across the world.

This is an enormous crisis created by the fact that the Chinese Communist Party reverted to form, reverted to the kinds of disinformation, the kinds of concealment, that authoritarian regimes do. Had those scientists been operating in America, they would have put this out, there would have been the exchange of ideas, and we would have quickly identified the kinds of things that needed to be done in response.

Instead, China behaved like authoritarian regimes do. It attempted to conceal and hide and confuse. It employed the World Health Organization as a tool to do the same. These are the kind of things that have

now presented this enormous crisis, an enormous loss of life, and tremendous economic cost all across the globe. The Australians agree with that. You hear the Europeans beginning to say the same thing. I think the whole world is united in understanding that China brought this virus to the world.

**QUESTION:** And just very quickly, if we can, Mr. Secretary – we’re running out of time – do you think they intentionally released that virus, or it was an accident in the lab?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** I don’t have anything to say about that. I think there’s a lot to know. But I can say this: We’ve done our best to try and answer all of those questions. We tried to get a team in there. The World Health Organization tried to get a team in there. And they have failed. No one has been allowed to go to this lab or any of the other laboratories. There are many labs inside of China, Martha.

This risk remains. This is an ongoing challenge. We still need to get in there. We still don’t have the virus samples we need. This is an ongoing threat, an ongoing pandemic, and the Chinese Communist Party continues to block access to the Western world, the world’s best scientists, to figure out exactly what happened. So I can’t answer your question about that because the Chinese Communist Party has refused to cooperate with world health experts.

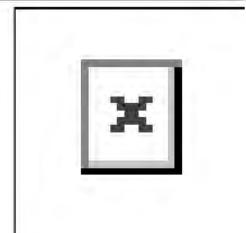
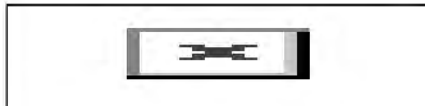
**QUESTION:** Thanks very much for joining us, Mr. Secretary. We appreciate your time.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Thank you, Martha. You have a great day. Thank you, ma’am.

###

---

Stay connected with the Office of Press Relations:



**Sender:** "Stilwell, David R" (b)(6)@state.gov>  
**Recipient:** (b)(6)@state.gov>;  
Yu, Miles (b)(6)@state.gov>

UNCLASSIFIED~~SBU~~


---

**MRN:** 20 BEIJING 272  
**Date/DTG:** Feb 12, 2020 / 120951Z FEB 20  
**From:** AMEMBASSY BEIJING  
**Action:** WASHDC, SECSTATE *ROUTINE*  
**E.O.:** 13526  
**TAGS:** ASEC, ECON, EINT, ETRD, AID, CDC, HHS, FDA, NIH, KPAO, KHIV, KFLU, KFPC, KGHI, KHLS, KSCA, PGOV, PREL, SENV, CN  
**Captions:** ~~SENSITIVE~~  
**Reference:** A) 20 BEIJING 250  
B) 20 BEIJING 254  
C) 20 BEIJING 260  
D) 20 BEIJING 264  
E) 20 BEIJING 252  
F) 20 ULAANBAATAR 68  
G) 20 TOKYO 188  
H) 20 Hong Kong 49  
**Subject:** (U) China: Coronavirus Blockades, Lockdowns Disrupt Supply Chains

1. ~~(SBU)~~ **Summary and Comment:** Uneven and restrictive COVID-19 outbreak policies – including the virtual lockdown of metropolitan areas, partial closures of regional borders, and shutdown of key transportation corridors – have created logistical gridlocks and disrupted global supply chains. Eight Chinese provinces and 94 cities had enacted “closed management” systems at last count. Although the severity of implementation varied by locale, measures have restricted movement of people and vehicles. Major ports continued to operate with extremely limited capacity and minimal staffing, and international airlines continued to reduce flights. Very few factories had re-started production by February 10, the extended date of the Chinese New Year holiday period; manufacturers that had continued operations or restarted plants relied on previously stockpiled inputs for production. Logistics and freight companies warned that disruptions could be overcome in the short term but worried about lasting effects. Beijing-based third country diplomats reported companies’ concern about the potential for disturbances to product and raw material distribution.

2. ~~(SBU)~~ As it attempted to manage the virus outbreak, the PRC government faced

two competing goals: 1) curtailing further spread of the virus through strict measures that disrupt the economy; and 2) maintaining basic services and allowing transportation corridors to return to business as usual while risking further virus spread. Balancing outbreak control and economic development forced hard choices that continued to disrupt supply chains. While the policy apparatus emphasis had been on the former, President Xi Jinping's public appearance on February 10 urged avoiding restrictive measures to focus on maintaining economic stability. **End Summary and Comment.**

### **Borders: Local, Regional, and International Border Closures on the Rise**

3. ~~(SBU)~~ As part of its "war" on the virus, the PRC local and provincial governments imposed "closed management," partial closures to regional borders, shutdowns of key transportation corridors, and issued strict requirements curtailing movement (Refs A-D). As an industrial heartland and nexus for rail and river shipments crisscrossing the country, Wuhan's continued closure limited shipping routes. Full or partial border closures from Central Asia, Russia, Mongolia, and Hong Kong to Vietnam, Southeast Asia, and even North Korea were reducing cross-border road and rail freight. Pilots, drivers, and staff of logistics companies allowed to enter China faced quarantine requirements upon return outside the country. Domestically, cargo truck drivers moving cargo within China faced onerous and often unclear restrictions. China's airports and high-speed rail service continued to operate, but with reduced or discontinued service.

4. ~~(SBU)~~ Ninety-four cities and eight provincial-level territories – including Wenzhou, Hangzhou, Suzhou, Fuzhou, Xuzhou, Shijiazhuang, Jiaxing, Chongqing, Nanjing, Ningbo, Harbin, and Liaoning, as well as Hainan, Guangxi, Fujian, Anhui, Jiangxi, Yunnan, Shandong, and Guangdong provinces – implemented "closed management" systems based on national guidelines. (Note: The implementation of "closed management" varied by locale, but generally referred to the restriction or control of movement of people and vehicles in and between communities. End note.) Transport authorities limited the number of passengers using public transport to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus. A Ministry of Transportation spokesman said at a February 6 news conference that vehicles, trains, and planes should set up isolation areas to quarantine suspected cases.

### **Air: Commercial Air Cancellations Obstruct Delivery Logistics**

5. ~~(SBU)~~ Airline cancellations hobbled the delivery of time-sensitive freight in

and out of China. (Note: By value, 28.9 percent of U.S. imports from China arrived via air and 63.6 percent via sea, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. End note.) As major international airlines reduced routes to China, shipping companies struggled to deliver cargo typically carried in the holds of commercial planes. United, American, Delta, Air Canada, British Airways, Kenya Airways, EgyptAir, and many other airlines had canceled or reduced service to China. The cancellation of more than 25,000 flights to and from China meant manufacturers that depended on commercial airliners were having difficulty getting products out. Airline industry sources said Chinese airlines have cut overall capacity by around 75 percent and planned on long-term storage of a large percentage of their wide-body aircraft for up to six months.

6. ~~(SBU)~~ The largest freight companies have struggled to maintain business as usual. (b)(4)

(b)(4)

7. ~~(SBU)~~ (b)(4)

(b)(4)

8. ~~(SBU)~~ (b)(4)

(b)(4)

(b)(4) A (b)(4) executive told Econoff that while logistics and transportation remained challenging for the company, the drop in Chinese consumer demand was even more worrisome. Even if domestic demand were closer to typical levels, the (b)(4) executive added, the Chinese express delivery services were not operating, so last-mile delivery would remain a problem.

9. (SBU) China's State Post Bureau declared express shipping a priority industry for returning to work on February 10, but local authorities in cities throughout the country refused express shippers' applications to restart operations. Some local authorities demanded shippers sign letters accepting full liability for COVID-19 cases. While domestic shippers often continued to operate in violation of such stipulations, U.S. companies were at a disadvantage by having to comply with all local laws and regulations. Local government officials had just approved the re-opening of (b)(4) has a logistics center in Suzhou, though with some additional requirements, according to the (b)(4) manager. The State Post Bureau estimated that express delivery services in China would recover to around 40 percent of normal capacity by mid-February.

#### **Ports: Restrictive Measures Hamstring Chinese Port Capacity**

10. (SBU) Slowdowns at China's ports rippled across maritime trade globally, causing shipping companies to reroute vessels and delay deliveries. China is home to seven of the world's 10 busiest ports, and China's mainland ports accounted for 28.5 percent of world container port traffic in 2018, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's 2019 review of maritime transport. Shipping consultancy Alphaliner estimated that the extended holiday and emergency measures had reduced cargo volumes at Chinese ports, including Hong Kong, by over 6 million TEUs (20-foot equivalent units) in the first quarter of 2020.

11. (SBU) The 18 major Chinese ports – including the Port of Wuhan – continued to operate but at greatly reduced capacity due to labor constraints. Agents and brokers reported slowing operations and decreased workers at Chinese ports and shipyards. Yards turned away vessels from scheduled dry docks, citing labor shortages. State-owned shipping giant COSCO reduced trans-Pacific service from ports in Shenzhen (Yantian and Shekou), Guangzhou (Nansha), Xiamen, and elsewhere – totaling 28 ship cancellations in February across south China.

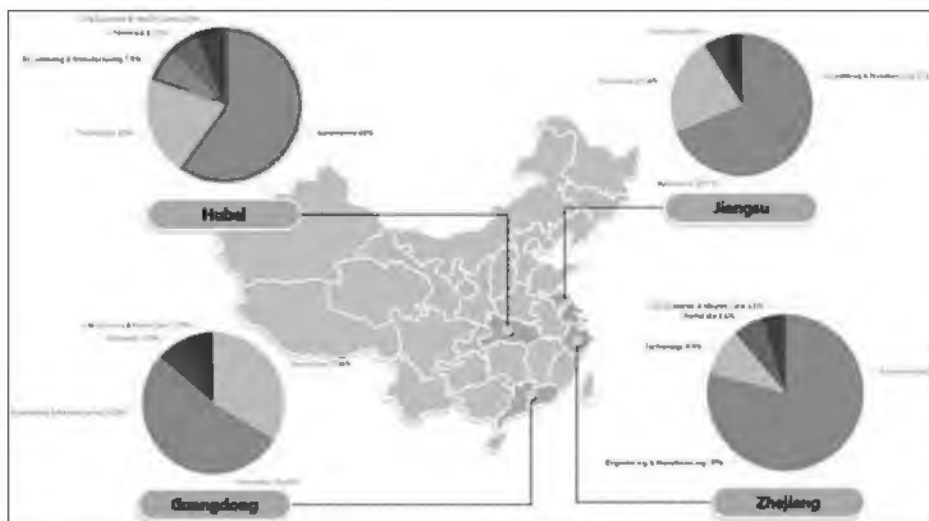
12. (SBU) Several ports, including Tianjin and Shanghai, reported container space

for refrigerated or frozen products was at full capacity, preventing the offloading of additional cargo. Due to capacity issues, some ships had been directed to ports in Korea and Malaysia. A Dalian port contact told ConGenOff February 6 that the port continued limited operation with minimal staffing. The Port of Ningbo-Zhoushan faced a similar staffing problem, but the impact on operations was minimal due to port automation, a port official told ConGenOff on February 11. A Hainan-based contact at international shipping company (b)(4) reported to Econoff a 12 percent drop year-to-date of its forecast exports out of China (to all destinations) and attributed the drop to the virus. (b)(4) had observed a drop in apparel inputs going out of China to nearby countries like Vietnam.

13. ~~(SBU)~~ International ports in many countries had already tightened the rules for Chinese ships to approach the port, creating delays for vessels waiting to discharge. The United States, Singapore, and Australia, for example, introduced quarantine and control measures to prevent ships that had docked in mainland China in the past 14 days. Australia and other countries required a quarantine period of 14 days before port entry.

14. ~~(SBU)~~ Shipping experts noted that freight forwarders (e.g. UPS, FedEx, DHL) had reduced capacity due to their reliance on increasingly limited commercial flights for shipping cargo. (b)(4) contacts emphasized that the February 8 Lantern Festival date represented a key turning point since the company was already expecting slowdowns due to Chinese New Year. The next two to three weeks would be important to assess the overall impact. The 2003 SARS outbreak was contained quickly enough to minimize its impact, but if the blockages continued for three weeks or more, the effects would become "substantial and permanent."





*Sector breakdown of locations in selected provinces impacted by government-mandated shutdowns. Source: Resilience360*

### **PRC Acts to Maintain Services Essential to Supply Chains**

15. ~~(SBU)~~ The PRC government announced a series of measures to ensure basic services and continued movement of cargo, particularly in the major epidemic-stricken areas of the country. The Chinese Ministry of Transportation urged port operators to keep ships moving and to ensure that roadways remained unblocked for the delivery of food and emergency medical supplies. The Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) directed the six chambers of commerce – for textiles; light industry; metals, minerals and chemicals; foodstuffs; machinery and electronics; and medicine and health products – to assist companies facing losses due to the epidemic. The Ministry of Finance (MOF) issued a notice to request local authorities support key enterprises manufacturing medical supplies. The National Energy Administration (NEA) required coal industry departments to guarantee stable supplies. Sectors related to healthcare, people’s livelihood, and transportation were priorities for resumed operation according to the National Development and Reform Commission.

16. ~~(SBU)~~ The State Council’s State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) requested that central state-owned enterprises fully support public services. Telecoms and state grid state-owned enterprises promised not to stop telecommunications, electricity, and gas for overdue users during the epidemic control period. China Telecom, China Unicom, and China Mobile announced they would provide non-stop service to ensure

communications to front-line personnel responding to the epidemic.

17. ~~(SBU)~~ The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA) issued a notice with measures to maintain normal production and sales of livestock and animal products. The notice prohibited blocking trucks transporting livestock, feed, or animal products. Provincial governments implemented policies to support normal transportation, including a "green track" traffic pass for livestock, feed, and related products. Companies reported mixed success with the green pass. In Shandong Province, companies could visit a website to print off the pass, while other provinces required much more complicated procedures with excessive limitations.

18. ~~(SBU)~~ On February 10, MOFCOM called on countries to refrain from restricting global trade due to the outbreak, as some countries moved to restrict vessels from China. Noting the side effects of outbreak measures, Chinese ports announced policies to help companies deal with the impact, including the free storage of goods stuck in transit. Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS) Department of International Cooperation DDG told  (b)(6) that Beijing policymakers were eager for accurate data and had asked the MOHRSS started making two nationwide surveys on staffing and labor.

19. ~~(SBU)~~ China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) declared force majeure, a legal justification for breaking commodity contracts on some LNG cargoes, because the virus is constraining the company's ability to import. The China Council for the Promotion of International Trade announced it would provide force majeure certificates to foreign trade companies affected by the epidemic to reduce losses to auto companies and spare parts suppliers. Separately, the China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Machinery and Electronic Products (CCCME) reached out to Beijing-based embassies on February 12 offering to provide force majeure certificates by use by foreign firms. Some western companies immediately rejected force majeure as a sufficient justification for breach of contract.

20. ~~(SBU)~~ The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) unveiled new measures, including financial support measures, to encourage small and medium-sized enterprises to resume production as soon as possible. Provincial and local governments throughout China also announced new economic stimulus measures to support businesses. These measures aimed to increase the operational effectiveness of firms engaged in epidemic control, reduce risks to migrant workers, and assist small and medium-size enterprises, including steps to alleviate

cash-flow crunches, increase credit availability, and ward off bankruptcies. Emergency capital investment to date focused on building health-sector capacity.

### **Some Companies Never Stopped Operations, Others Struggle to Restart**

21. ~~(SBU)~~ Some electronics, consumer products, chemicals, and equipment companies resumed production on February 10. Huawei resumed operations in Dongguan, Guangdong, according to a company spokesperson. Tesla's Shanghai factory officially restarted. Chang'an Ford in Chongqing resumed small-scale operations with approximately 600 of 14,000 total workers returning to work. Dow's chemical coatings plant in Shanghai also resumed operations February 10. However, Foxconn – producer of Apple iPhones – delayed its February 10 start date, as public health officials warned its Shenzhen plant faced a “high risk” of coronavirus infection. Additionally, Nike and Ford had not yet restarted production. Many companies reported challenges procuring protective gear and masks to meet requirements for worker protection. European manufacturers in Guangdong warned they lacked sufficient N95 masks for production-line workers.

22. ~~(SBU)~~ Firms in Chongqing had to meet exacting requirements covering personal protective equipment (PPE) for workers, symptom screening, and transportation arrangement for workers in order to resume operations. Chongqing authorities issued dozens of guidance documents, totaling hundreds of pages, one Consulate Chengdu contact reported. Local authorities followed up by actively checking whether firms met the new requirements.

23. ~~(SBU)~~ Other companies kept production running, even during the Chinese New Year and coronavirus outbreak. Semiconductor companies reported they had never stopped producing due to high levels of automation. Intel and Texas Instruments continued operations during the outbreak, according to industry contacts, who noted that their factories, in contrast to Foxconn's plant, were highly automated. Wuhan-based flash chip maker Yangtze Memory Technologies Co Ltd said production and operations were proceeding “normally.” Procter & Gamble's Guangzhou plant resumed production of daily-necessities prior to February 10. 3M's N95 respirator production in Shanghai has remained open through the crisis.

24. ~~(SBU)~~ Logistics challenges plagued many international companies. U.S. biotechnology company (b)(4) told Commerce officer February 7 that the company had difficulty accessing its warehouses, which meant the

company lacked raw materials for operations. U.S. multinational product company (b)(4) told Commerce officer it had to charter flights to bring in supplies, adding costs and delays. U.S. retailer (b)(4) faced delays supplying fresh foodstuffs as vendors were unable to resume production or delivery, reported (b)(4) contacts to Consulate General Shanghai February 11. According to U.S. supplement companies, panic buying had resulted in out-of-stock raw materials largely sourced from China. Contacts in the food processing industry reported challenges procuring raw material inputs.

25. (SBU) Heavy industry, including steel and auto sectors, experienced delays and production stoppage. Hubei province produced 2.24 million vehicles in 2019 – representing 8.8 percent of total automobiles produced in China. Analytics firm IHS Markit predicted at least 150,000 vehicles less of production in Guangdong, Shanghai, and Hubei due to epidemic outbreak. Shortage of logistic support and regional shutdown led to lack of supply in raw materials and auto parts.

Employers not only suffered from lost sales but also needed to pay salaries during the suspended days. BMW had not yet restarted production, while Volkswagen and Mercedes had restarted certain production lines, largely depending on the factory location, according to (b)(5) contacts. Chinese officials had asked (b)(5) companies to follow strict rules, such as ensuring employees self-quarantine for 14 days after return from Hubei.

26. (SBU) Even companies with significant stockpiles of raw inputs faced challenges due to logistics bottlenecks. In the short term, product delivery delays could cut down supplies of chips and displays for smartphone and computer makers. “The impact has been limited because we have stockpiles of chips to sustain shipments for another two months. We’re concerned about the restricted transportation network, which may pose hurdles,” a manager at Wuhan-based Mengxin Technology Co told the Global Times. A contact at a European logistics company said many south China firms were in “serious financial trouble,” with factories not running and supply chains under pressure.

**Third Country Diplomats Report Business Disruptions**

27. (SBU) International companies with China operations worried about sustained supply chain disruptions, Beijing-based third country diplomats told Econoffs. (b)(5) economic counselor reported reduced shipments resulting from falling consumer demand and air cargo delivery disruptions. (b)(5) companies had stopped nearly all production in China and were “very concerned” about supply chain disruptions. (b)(5) economic counselor told Econoff in a

(b)(4)

(b)(4)

February 11 phone call. Automaker [redacted] was particularly hard hit, with its factories in Yancheng, Jiansu and Qongqing closed, and component sourcing from other parts of China halted due to the blockades and extended Chinese New Year. [redacted] had even closed some factories in [redacted] due to challenges with the supply of Chinese-manufactured auto parts.

(b)(4)

(b)(5)

(b)(5)

(b)(5)

28. (SBU) Diplomats highlighted red tape for reopening, challenges procuring protective gear, and risks to the pharmaceutical industry. Onerous filing requirements to reopen businesses in Nanjing and East China cities would delay some [redacted] firms' openings, according to a [redacted] [redacted] companies reported difficulties procuring masks for employees' use, as importing the masks through customs had been "slow and undependable," [redacted] told Consulate Shanghai. (b)(5)

(b)(5)

(b)(5)

(b)(5)

[redacted] pharmaceutical companies were concerned about discontinued supply of "active pharmaceutical ingredients" (API) as the industry relies on Chinese inputs for nearly 80 percent of APIs, [redacted] told Econoff. Price advantages in China had shifted the majority of German API industry to China several years ago, with the largest percentage of Chinese API production for [redacted] pharmaceuticals coming from in Fujian province, an area hit by the virus and facing "closed management."

**Long-term Effects: Companies Reevaluating China Linkages**

(b)(5)

(b)(5)

(b)(5)

29. (SBU) Most private sector business contacts suggested that their businesses could weather supply chain cuts if the shutdowns only lasted a few weeks. The long-term effects would depend on the duration of the virus disruption. (b)(5) [redacted] representatives told Econoff the varying quarantine requirements and travel restrictions in China's provinces and cities represented the biggest challenge to supply chains. [redacted] conveyed to the Embassy that the current supply chain disruptions, while not enough to change models, would exacerbate already-existing trend of diversifying production lines out of China (Ref E). [redacted] reported in its February 7 member survey that some companies were reevaluating their China strategy as a result of the health crisis, with some already shifting production to India and ramping up production in Taiwan. While manufacturing could recover if the PRC lifted movement restrictions and supply chains normalized, noted one contact, any losses to service industries would be difficult to recoup.

(b)(5)

(b)(5)

30. (SBU) Manufacturing companies with the option to produce in other parts of



(b)(4) Southeast Asia had already started increasing output in other factories. However, shifting manufacturing supply chains takes years, and China's worldwide manufacturing export share had grown to 19 percent in 2018 from 8 percent in 2003 during the SARS outbreak, according to the Hong Kong-based research arm of investment bank Natixis. The [redacted] manager worried that the disruptions would not only affect global supply chains, but also sales in China, as domestic consumption, even on e-commerce platforms, had "dropped off a cliff." The Shanghai-based asset management company Zhuque/Rosefinch Fund also concluded that the epidemic would reinforce multinational companies' determination to shift supply chains out of China. Hardware technology companies at the core of the industrial chain, including 5G networking, 5G terminals, and terminal supply chains were at risk. [redacted] companies operating in China concluded it was "too early" to calculate the full negative impact, the [redacted] in Beijing shared.

(b)(5)

(b)(5)

### Empty Cities Indicate Nothing is Business as Usual

31. (SBU) Traffic, both passenger and freight, in major Chinese cities remained down significantly, indicating that employees had not fully returned to work on February 10. Before the epidemic, passengers on the Beijing metro averaged about 12 million per workday. That figure had fallen to 1.2 million, according to the Beijing Subway operations director. Shanghai Metro ridership was down 80 percent from a normal workday, according to Shanghai Metro officials.



Beijing subway line 7 during the outbreak. Source: Newsflare

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

**Signature:** Branstad

**Drafted By:** (b)(6)

**Cleared By:** ECON:(b)(6) (ECON)  
ECON:(b)(6) (ECON)  
ESTH:(b)(6) (ESTH)  
(b)(6) (FCS)  
USDA/FAS:(b)(6) (FAS)  
DOD/DAO:(b)(6) (DAO)  
DOD/DAO:(b)(6) (USCG)  
POL/PPS:(b)(6) (P&P)  
RSO:(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) RSO  
MGT:Munchmeyer, Katherine A (MGMT)  
DOT/FAA:(b)(6) (FAA)  
POL:(b)(6) (POL)  
PD:(b)(6) (PAS)  
HHS/OGA:(b)(6) (HHS)  
HHS/FDA:(b)(6) (FDA)  
POL-ECON:(b)(6) (Guangzhou)  
POL-ECON:(b)(6) (Chris) (Shanghai)  
EXEC/LEG:(b)(6) (Shenyang)  
POL-ECON:(b)(6) (Chengdu)  
HHS/CDC/CGH:(b)(6) (CDC) (INFO)  
POL-ECON:(b)(6) (Hong Kong) (INFO)  
POL:(b)(6) (A/DCM)

**Approved By:**  
**Released By:**  
**Info:**

BEIJING:(b)(6) (Adh) (Beijing)  
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE; DIA WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE; CIA WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE; PACOM IDHS HONOLULU HI ROUTINE; DEPT OF HHS WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE; ATLANTA GA, CDC ROUTINE; DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE; DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE; DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE; US TRADE REP WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE; DIRNSA FT GEORGE G MEADE MD ROUTINE; DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE; DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE; SEOUL, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE; HANOI, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE; TOKYO, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE; BERLIN, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE; ULAANBAATAR, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE; SINGAPORE, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE; BANGKOK, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE; HONG KONG, AMCONSUL ROUTINE; VLADIVOSTOK, AMCONSUL ROUTINE; MOSCOW, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE; PHNOM PENH, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE; MANILA, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE; CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE ROUTINE; ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND

**XMT:**

TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE *ROUTINE*  
CARACAS, AMEMBASSY; ST PETERSBURG, AMCONSUL

**Dissemination Rule:**

Archive Copy

**UNCLASSIFIED**  
**SBU**



**UNCLASSIFIED**

SBU



**MRN:** 20 BEIJING 218  
**Date/DTG:** Jan 29, 2020 / 290929Z JAN 20  
**From:** AMEMBASSY BEIJING  
**Action:** WASHDC, SECSTATE *ROUTINE*  
**E.O.:** 13526  
**TAGS:** SHLH, CDC, HHS, NIH, CN, PGOV, SENV, PREL, CASC, AMGT, AMED, KPAO, KMDR, ASEC  
**Captions:** ~~SENSITIVE~~  
**Reference:** A) 20 BEIJING 216  
 B) 20 BEIJING 214  
 C) 20 BEIJING 202  
 D) 20 BEIJING 200  
 E) 20 BEIJING 198  
 F) 20 BEIJING 188  
 G) 20 BEIJING 186  
 H) 20 BEIJING 174  
 I) 20 BEIJING 172  
 J) 20 BEIJING 166  
 K) 20 BEIJING 164  
 L) 20 BEIJING 142  
 M) 20 BEIJING 122  
 N) 20 BEIJING 108  
 O) 20 BEIJING 74  
 P) 19 WUHAN 112  
**Subject:** China Coronavirus: PRC Welcomes U.S. Expert Help After WHO Meeting

1. ~~(SBU)~~ **Summary:** Embassy Beijing convened an Emergency Action Committee (EAC) meeting January 29 with Mission China Consulates and chaired by Ambassador Branstad (septel). (b)(5)

(b)(5)

(b)(5) Airlines January 29 began suspending flights to mainland China. CG Wuhan personnel and private U.S. citizens departed Wuhan January 29. Embassy Beijing will hold a Town Hall January 30 led by the Ambassador. Mission China is closed until February 3. The Mission China Task Force will continue to meet daily and report on the 2019-nCoV outbreak.

**End Summary.**

**PRC Welcomes U.S. Expert Help Following WHO Meeting**

2. ~~(SBU)~~ (b)(5)

(b)(5)

**Mission China Convenes EAC**

3. (SBU) Embassy Beijing convened an EAC with all Mission China Consulates January 29 (septel). Embassy Beijing will hold a second Town Hall January 30 led by the Ambassador.

4. (SBU) The Wuhan evacuation flight departed Wuhan, China at 0438 Beijing Time. Embassy Beijing continues to coordinate with the Department on assistance to U.S. citizens who remain in Wuhan.

(b)(5)

5. (SBU) (b)(5)

(b)(5)

**Uptick in Flight Suspensions, Other Transit and Service Restrictions**

6. (SBU) CNN reported January 29 that British Air suspended all service to and from mainland China following the UK Foreign Office advisory to avoid nonessential travel. American, United, and other airlines announced January 28 they had temporarily reduced flights between Beijing and the United States, citing reduced demand in making their decisions.

7. (SBU) (b)(4)

(b)(4)

8. (SBU) Two CG Shanghai Officers reported their flight from Burma to Shanghai on the

Chinese carrier Spring Airlines had been cancelled due to public health reasons. (b)(6)

(b)( ) reported January 29 his Air Canada flight into China had been canceled. Passenger traffic at Baiyuan Guangzhou (CAN) International Airport was minimal January 28. An Embassy Beijing Officer reported January 29 there were no surprises at the PEK passenger departure screening. Only one simple form was required to be reviewed and signed by an official. Airport authorities were relying on the infrared temp monitors and were not doing any other checks.

9. (SBU) The DiDi ride-hailing app (similar to Uber) notified users on January 29 that it was suspending most services by private drivers in Beijing "in response to local authorities' requirement." Users will still be able to hail taxis via the app. Didi suspended inter-city service January 26. Didi also announced on its app that it has suspended service in Anhui and Suzhou. The announcement caused confusion as it also appeared for users outside of those areas, including for Shanghai users. The service is currently still functioning in Shanghai and Guangzhou. In Beijing, the popular English-language Sherpa food delivery app January 29 suspended all service indefinitely. In Guangzhou, the similar GZGrocery app was not operating.

**Hospitals**

10. (SBU) CG Chengdu reported contacts said January 28 Huaxi Hospital mandated its staff agree to not leave Chengdu. Chengdu MED believes the hospital is preparing, as medically appropriate, to have staff available to manage an influx of patients. On the morning of January 29, 2019-nCoV triage tents erected outside of Huaxi Hospital had been outfitted with electricity and water. Hospital staff were observed walking in and out of the tents in full personal protective equipment. The flaps, however, were closed, making it impossible to see if any patients were present. (b)(5)

(b)(5)

11. (SBU) CG Shanghai and Guangzhou have not observed signs of stress to the local healthcare systems. Private hospitals that serve international clients, including the official American community, appear to be operating as normal. Embassy Beijing health contacts also report no stress on the local healthcare system.

12. (SBU) CG Shenyang reported public hospitals in Shenyang are not understaffed and have not experienced overcrowding, based on a January 28 visit to three hospitals by MED unit staff and ESTOff. All three hospitals have instituted fever clinics that separate possible coronavirus patients from the regular appointment process. (b)(5)

(b)(5)

(b)(5) Four hospitals in Shenyang have announced they are seeking donations of masks and protective clothing: Shengjing Hospital, The First Affiliated

Hospital of China Medical University, Liaoning Provincial Hospital, Second Affiliated Hospital of Liaoning University. These include the hospitals where Consulate General Shenyang would ordinarily take mission members requiring medical treatment (Note: While some hospitals in China are soliciting donations for direct use of the requesting hospital, many donation requests are to provide support to hospitals in Wuhan. End note.).

13. (SBU) The fever clinic at Liaoning People's Hospital provides a case in point regarding the challenges of separating patients from the regular hospital population. From the window of the fever clinic ESTHoff could see doctors in full protective suits meeting patients one at a time. One parent, waiting at the door of the fever clinic with her daughter, was frustrated that the fever clinic was only processing 2-3 patients at a time. She did not believe her daughter had the coronavirus but told ESTHoff that the hospital required her daughter to first be cleared by the fever clinic before they would admit her to the regular hospital for treatment. At First Hospital of China Medical University, doctors were checking patients for possible coronavirus in the waiting room as they lined up to schedule a regular appointment. Any patients they suspected of coronavirus would then be sent to the fever clinic.

14. (SBU) CG (b)(6) reported at least one Guangzhou hospital had suspended general outpatient service until February 3.

#### **International School Closures for Holiday Extended; Re-Opening Plans Vary**

15. (SBU) Some international schools attended by Mission China children are pushing back their expected opening date, further to the notice issued by China's Ministry of Education on January 27 suspending all classes at schools until further instructions from local authorities ([link](#)). Western Academy of Beijing (WAB) informed parents that it had received a new notice from the Beijing Municipal Education Commission (BMEC) announcing that the reopening of school campuses and start of regular school activities shall now be determined by BMEC. Online learning at WAB will continue beyond February 17. The International School of Beijing made a similar announcement.

16. (SBU) Shanghai American School, which a substantial number of CG Shanghai EFMs attend, provided parents a new [FAQ on its Coronavirus response](#) in which the school reiterated that it anticipates reopening on Monday, February 17. At present, all Shanghai international schools Consulate EFMs attend plan to reopen on Feb. 17. Schools serving the CG Chengdu consulate community are closed until February 17<sup>th</sup>, according to consulate contacts, and have not received guidance on whether they would remain closed after that date.

17. (SBU) The Canadian School in Shenyang has cancelled classes indefinitely for the rest of the semester with classes to be conducted online. Another international school, Shenyang Transformational International School plans to open on February 24<sup>th</sup>. CG Shenyang's QSI branch has not amended its plan to re-open on February 17<sup>th</sup>.

18. (SBU) American International School of Guangzhou (AISG), where all ConGen Guangzhou children study, is still planning to re-open February 17, in accordance with current Guangdong government policy. Their management team is meeting daily to assess.

### **Transmissibility of 2019-nCoV is Strengthening, Says Top NHC Official**

19. (SBU) China National Health Commissioner Ma Xiaowei said on January 28 that recent clinical evidence has shown that transmissibility of the 2019-nCoV virus “appears to be strengthening.” Ma said further clinical analysis is needed to evaluate the pathogenicity of the virus. Meanwhile, Dr. Zhong Nanshan told *People’s Daily* in an interview that he predicted the outbreak would reach its peak within one week to 10 days ([link](#)). [Note: Dr. Zhong is renowned among the Chinese public for his work during the 2003 SARS epidemic and was formerly president of the Chinese Medical Association (CMA). End note.] Hubei Province Vice-Secretary Ma Guoqiang said at a press conference on January 28 that the sudden increase in confirmed cases in Hubei since January 24 “does not mean the spread of the outbreak is accelerating,” but rather that the vigilance of inspections by public health authorities is increasing ([CCTV](#)).

### **Chinese Expert Identifies Bats as Likely Source of Virus**

20. (SBU) Dean of the Institute of Pathogenic Biology at the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, Jin Qi, said on January 28, “There is already substantial research showing that bats are the source of 2019-nCoV, but it is still unclear what the intermediate medium for transmitting the disease was” ([link](#)).

### **Mission China Assistance on Relief Efforts**

21. (SBU) The Wuhan Relief Working Group is tracking U.S. businesses who have expressed interest in selling or donating medical supplies to stem the outbreak, as well as the types and quantities of items available. (b)(6) that China does not have an established process in place for accepting international donations. The IFRC is working with the Chinese Red Cross to develop SOPs for accepting donations that would comply with international standards. Such standards should include things like expiration dates for medications, specifications, and quantity of items needed. So far, the lists of needed items the Chinese Red Cross has published have been totally inadequate (b)(6) Given the urgent need to respond to the outbreak, (b)(6) expected that the Chinese would work quickly to adopt internationally accepted standards for donations. Although a number of hospitals and relief organizations have put out calls for supplies, the PRC government has not issued any request for international support and has not said what types of supplies are needed. The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology said in a statement January 29 that the PRC would expand purchases from overseas sources to meet domestic demand for protective gear that meets international standards. FCS will reach out to the Ministry of Commerce in Beijing to request information on the types and specifications of items the PRC needs to combat the outbreak

### **Beijing Authorities Crack Down on Price Gouging for Masks**

22. (SBU) ESTHOFF observed long lines outside a local pharmacy the afternoon of January 28 of customers waiting to buy masks, medical gloves, and other supplies. The pharmacy had

locked the doors of its store to customers and opened a small service window. Other convenience stores in the area have posted notices in their windows that they are sold out of masks. Meanwhile, the city government said it had issued fines against 15 stores for inflating prices of masks.

23. (SBU) The State Council issued a notice on January 28 indefinitely suspending the 2020 civil service exams for central government agencies and entities (CCTV).

### Traffic Restrictions and Travel Disruptions in China Widen

24. (SBU) *People's Daily* and *Xinhua* reported an increased number of drivers camping out at highway rest stops as authorities in some cities have begun denying entrance to out-of-province vehicles (link) (see figure below). In Yunnan, for example, a *Xinhua* reporter observed stranded motorists congregating at a rest stop near Dali city on the G56 highway leading to Kunming.



**Stranded travelers at a highway rest area**

Source: *People's Daily*

25. (SBU) Beijing Railway Administration (BRA) has suspended 43 rail routes connecting to Beijing stations. Citing a 60 percent drop in passenger volume, BRA said service on the routes will remain suspended through the middle or end of February (*People's Daily* and *Beijing Daily News*). BRA also reduced high-speed rail service between Beijing and Tianjin. Only some suspended routes were to destinations in Hubei. Ticketed passengers could receive full refunds.

### Chengdu

26. (SBU) On January 27, local media reported that all public transit passengers must wear masks in Chengdu. Notices were posted on buses and in metro stations. According to the Chengdu Public Transportation Bureau, all passengers must wear masks; those not complying with the regulation will be refused service. Despite the restrictions, CG Chengdu Officers have observed limited yet ongoing public bus, rail, and metro services. Transportation authorities have indicated services will be provided based on public demand. Chengdu Rail Group indicated, on social media, its workers are routinely disinfecting toilets, handrails, gates, trash

cans and other key areas. Authorities have also posted pictures of workers spraying subway trains with disinfectant to reassure the public of the local government's efforts to maintain a clean public transportation system.



*(SBU) Chengdu Metro Worker Disinfecting Subway Car*

27. ~~(SBU)~~ Hotels—including one hotel, housing consulate families—implemented further restrictions on common areas and guest entry. On January 28, a hotel manager with one of the CG Chengdu's housing facilities told officers the hotel would refuse entry to non-residents, including household staff, fearing contamination from non-residents who may have traveled to Wuhan. Hotel management said they were willing to reconsider the policy later in the week. Bulletins released by the Sichuan Coronavirus Protection Department—a new administrative body dedicated to stopping 2019-nCoV infections—and the Sichuan Culture and Tourism Bureau told hotel managers guests could be compelled to submit to temperature checks and hotel managers should do their best to sanitize public spaces and reduce large assemblies of people. Markets were open and fresh fruits and vegetables were present. Prices did not appear to be out of line with normal New Year pricing.

28. ~~(SBU)~~ As of January 29, the Chongqing Health Commission reported 15 new cases of 2019-nCoV, for a total of 147 confirmed cases. Jiangnan Hospital and the Second Affiliated Hospital of Jiangxi (both in Chongqing) have been designated to take all confirmed 2019-nCoV patients that are foreigners. While not currently in use, Liangjiang Hospital and People's Hospital of Banan District were designated as the reserve hospitals for 2019-nCoV treatment, which have a total of 2,000 beds. The Children's Hospital of Chongqing has been designated to assume all confirmed 2019-nCoV cases among children. Contacts in Chongqing describe the local government's efforts to mitigate the spread of the virus as "very active."

29. ~~(SBU)~~ The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), as of January 29, reported one suspected case of 2019-nCoV. If confirmed, it would be the first 2019-nCoV case in the TAR.

### **Guangzhou**

30. ~~(SBU)~~ The Hong Kong government January 28 announced land and sea closures scheduled to take effect midnight January 29 (see figure below for affected routes). The route for pouch



delivery is currently slated to remain open.

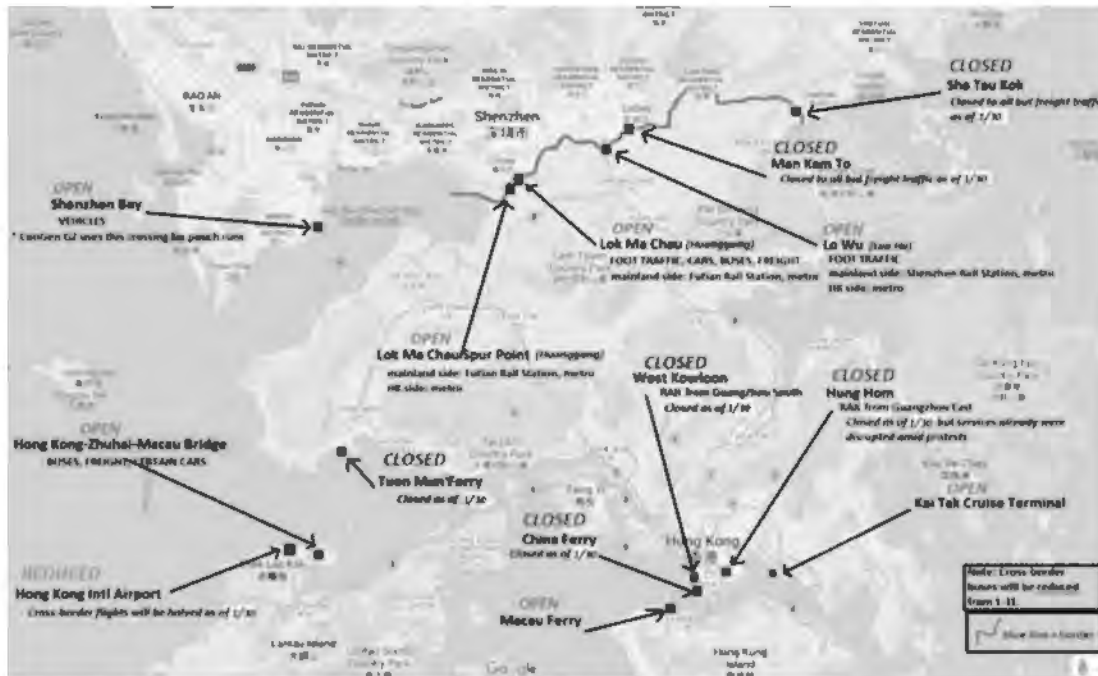


Figure: Shenzhen-Hong Kong crossing status effective January 30

31. (SBU) Guangdong's provincial government January 28 ordered companies to close until February 9, primary and secondary schools until February 17, and post-secondary until February 24. Business exceptions include those associated with basic utilities, food, water, public transportation, logistics, and communication. Provincial authorities are messaging that the virus has a maximum incubation period of 14-days and therefore by February 8 the effectiveness of current measures should be clear.

32. (SBU) CG Guangzhou USDH (b)(6) continue to report face masks and disinfectants are out of stock. Local provincial officials announced January 28 that 29 face mask manufacturers and protective clothing manufacturers were working to alleviate the shortage of essential supplies.

33. (SBU) CG Guangzhou ConGenOffs observed sporadic shortages of eggs, dairy, meat, fruits, and vegetables at grocery stores frequented by ConGen USDH. Stores are continuously restocking and there is no significant change from previous days. (b)(6)

(b)(6)

34. (SBU) Guangdong provincial authorities assured the population January 28 that food and water supplies were sufficient, including during expected heightened demand as people return from Spring Festival travel. ATO contacts have echoed this sentiment, telling ConGenOffs currently there are no supply chain disruptions in basic food supply.



35. (SBU) China Railway Groups Guangzhou announced approximately 60 suspended train routes effective January 28 to February 19. Most routes are to Hunan province, with some inter-city service suspended in Guangdong. [CG Guangzhou Comment: The emphasis on Hunan is likely because the company's territory includes Guangdong, Hunan, and Hainan. Cancellations involving Hubei and other provinces would be messaged separately. End Comment]

36. (SBU) Calls to CG Guangzhou ACS spiked January 29 with questions about rumors of flight bans from China. ACS has coordinated with Embassy Beijing to re-route calls to the Task Force.

37. (SBU) The Guangzhou municipal government sent an open letter to expats January 28 in English reiterating official measures in place and providing guidance for seeking medical or other assistance.

### Shanghai

38. (SBU) Consulate Shanghai CG Stein convened an information session for the Consulate community January 29 to share available information. Shanghai grocery stores remain reasonably well stocked with limited scarcity of certain items in some stores, likely due to higher than normal demand rather than insufficient supply. The Shanghai Commission of Commerce announced yesterday that it will take measures to ensure that food supplies are not disrupted, noting a recent spike in wholesale purchases of pork and fresh vegetables. It also cautioned residents to refrain from hoarding food.

39. (SBU) Private vehicle transportation within the city is normal. Fever checkpoints on major highways connecting to other cities are continuing. In general, vehicle traffic in Shanghai remains light. The Shanghai subway network is functioning as normal. Passenger volume is very low.

40. (SBU) CG Shanghai ACS reports an uptick in calls to the duty phone. One major focus was United Airlines' decision to cancel a substantial number of flights into and out of Shanghai next week.

### Shenyang

41. (SBU) Consulate Shenyang January 28 held an EAC meeting and a separate town hall meeting for AMCIT employees and family members. Shenyang will also hold an LE staff town hall meeting February 3, the first workday after the extended holiday. Shenyang's next EAC meeting is January 30.

42. (SBU) Shenyang announced traffic restrictions entering and leaving the city starting January 28 in order to consolidate all entry and exit points into the city. Health inspections will be done at thirty designated points. All vehicles entering and leaving the city must pass through these entry/exit points. Shenyang City is now requiring all passengers on public transportation to wear masks. On January 29, Shenyang railway announced temporary suspension of approximately 150 additional regional train routes.

43. ~~(SBU)~~ Stores in Shenyang are stocked and vegetable and fruits are available. However, Consulate staff report that some bakeries and restaurants lack fresh options.

#### **Media/Social Media**

44. (U) Chinese media continued to publish factual reports including on [Global Times](#) and [Xinhua](#) on cases and political support to battle the novel coronavirus. China reports 5,974 confirmed cases of new coronavirus pneumonia, 132 deaths said the news reports. The Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee issued a circular on strengthening Party leadership and providing strong political support for battling the novel coronavirus epidemic. Xinhua reports the circular says in coordination with health authorities and institutions, all Party committees and leading Party members groups should mobilize and select Party members and officials among medical experts and workers to play a leading role in patient treatment, scientific research and primary-level disease prevention. [Xinhua](#) also reported on Xi's meeting with WHO Director General quoting Xi saying, "China has full confidence and capability to win the battle against the outbreak of pneumonia caused by the novel coronavirus. And, "the Chinese people are now fighting a very serious battle against the epidemic." Xi welcomed the WHO to participate in the epidemic containment, reported Xinhua, adding that WHO experts have visited Wuhan in central China where the virus first broke out. Xinhua and [China Daily](#) also cited the WHO Director General "praising China's response" to the outbreak. [Xinhua](#) interviewed a Chinese respiratory expert, Zhong Nanshan saying, "It is very difficult to definitely estimate when the outbreak reaches its peak. But I think in one week or about 10 days, it will reach the climax and then there will be no large-scale increases." New that the White House was considering suspending China flights and the news that United airlines to suspend flights between China and U.S. in the first week of February was also reported by [Global Times](#) and [People's Daily](#). [People's Daily](#) said, "the U.S. has decided against suspending all flights from China amid the ongoing outbreak. [CGTN](#) and others covered the suspension of travel to Hong Kong and Macao. Other news [reports](#) focused on additional security at medial institutions and "crowded places."

45. (U) In commentary [Xinhua](#) continued the fighting rhetoric and amplifying Xi's instructions to party organizations at all levels and party officials to "resolutely implement the decisions and plans of the CPC central committee and firmly rely on the people to win the fight against the epidemic." It is a "major political task for the whole party to align its thinking and actions with the important instructions of General Secretary Xi Jinping and the decisions and plans of the CPC central committee, and to unite and lead the people in doing a solid job in epidemic prevention and control. At the critical moment, the key lies in the party. To prevent and control the epidemic, the leadership of the party must be strengthened." [Xinhua](#) amplified the nationwide response to prevent and control the novel coronavirus outbreak. Xinhua said measures are "rapid, strong and effective, all because they enjoy wide support from the people. China has taken many unprecedented moves, including extending the Spring Festival holiday, postponing the spring semesters of schools and universities, and adopting transport restrictions in various areas. Wuhan, a central Chinese city of 11 million people and the center of the outbreak, has even suspended all of its public transportation, including outbound channels at airports and railway stations. All these decisions were made quickly, some almost overnight, and were implemented immediately following their announcement. Some measures will inconvenience the

lives of the people, but authorities have every reason to be decisive, because a national consensus has been fortified: containing the epidemic is of paramount importance, and any difficulties must be overcome in the fight against the virus." CCTV added commentary that this epidemic prevention and control is "a mirror of human rights protection." Saying, "Chinese people are united in their efforts to combat the outbreak of pneumonia caused by the new coronavirus" and a small number of western media have attacked China for "overreacting" and even "violating human rights." CCTV says, "this is a typical case of taking advantage of people's danger and discrediting China in the name of human rights."

46. (U) On social media the most popular news regarding the U.S. and the coronavirus are stories from foreign media that the White House is considering suspending all U.S.-China flights. The CCTV news official Weibo account received over 1,531 reposts, 8,460 comments and 117,247 likes on this story. Comments are mixed. Some people said they can understand the U.S. decision, while others think the U.S. wants to create fear and panic. Later in the day on 1/29 official media posted more stories saying that the U.S. opted not to suspend flights from China. Most netizens comment that they feel confused about this news. A well-known aviation blogger posted to [Weibo](#) saying the U.S. evacuation is not as good as people's think because the U.S. used a 747 Freighter to evacuate American citizens from Wuhan. Another popular [post](#) about U.S. evacuation is a photo of medical staff swearing protective clothing in Ontario airport waiting American citizens from Wuhan. Netizens also watched a livestream of the hospital under construction in Wuhan, with Yicai reported more than 20 million netizens "cheered on the construction" watching the live stream and sending good wishes online.

#### All 31 Provincial Territories with Confirmed or Suspected Cases

47. (SBU) China's National Health Commission (NHC) reported 1,459 newly confirmed cases on January 28 as of 2400, bringing the total number of confirmed cases to 5,974 ([link](#)). Of the confirmed cases, 1,239 patients are currently in serious or critical condition. Total deaths rose to 132, with new deaths reported in Hubei (25) and Henan (1). The current number of suspected cases is up to 9,239, with 59,990 people in isolation under medical observation. All 31 of China's provincial territories now have confirmed or suspected cases.

**Table: Total Confirmed Cases in Mainland China as of end of January 28**

Province/City/Region	Total confirmed cases to date	New confirmed cases	Total deaths to date	New deaths reported
Anhui	152	46	--	--
Beijing	91	11	1	--
Chongqing	147	15	--	--
Fujian	82	16	--	--
Gansu	24	5	--	--
Guangdong	241	53	--	--
Guangxi	58	7	--	--

Guizhou	9	2	--	--
Hainan	43	5	1	--
Hebei	48	15	1	--
Heilongjiang	37	7	1	--
Henan	206	38	2	1
Hubei	3554	840	125	25
Hunan	221	78	--	--
Inner Mongolia	16	3	--	--
Jiangsu	99	29	--	--
Jiangxi	109	37	--	--
Jilin	9	1	--	--
Liaoning	36	5	--	--
Ningxia	12	1	--	--
Qinghai	6	0	--	--
Shaanxi	46	11	--	--
Shandong	121	34	--	--
Shanghai	80	14	1	--
Shanxi	27	7	--	--
Sichuan	108	18	--	--
Tianjin	24	1	--	--
Tibet	--	--	--	--
Xinjiang	13	3	--	--
Yunnan	44	12	--	--
Zhejiang	296	123	--	--
<b>TOTAL (NHS Reported)</b>	5974	1459	132	26
<b>TOTAL (From Provinces)</b>	5959	1437	132	26

night, hence the discrepancy. Sources: NHC, provincial health commissions, *People's Daily*, and China CCTV

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

Signature:

Branstad

**Drafted By:**

**Cleared By:**

**Approved By:**

**Released By:**

**Info:**

**XMT:**

BEIJING:(b)(6) (Beijing):(b)(6) (Beijing)

POL-ECON:(b)(6)

RSO:(b)(6) (Beijing)

CONS:(b)(6) (Beijing)

POL:(b)(6) (Seth) (Beijing)

MGT/MED:(b)(6) (Beijing)

MGT:Munchmeyer, Katherine A (Beijing)

POL-ECON:(b)(6) (Guangzhou)

HHS/CDC/CGH:(b)(6) (Beijing)

PD:(b)(6) (Beijing)

ECON:(b)(6) (Chengdu)

HHS/CDC/IRD:(b)(6) (Beijing)

INFO:(b)(6) (Shenyang)

INFO:(b)(6) (Beijing)

INFO: DHS/CBP:(b)(6) (Beijing)

INFO: HHS/OGA:(b)(6) (Beijing)

ESTH:(b)(6) (Beijing)

BEIJING:(b)(6) (Beijing)

SEOUL, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE; TAIPEI, AIT ROUTINE; HANOI, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE; SINGAPORE, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE; ULAANBAATAR, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE; PHNOM PENH, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE; BANGKOK, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE; HONG KONG, AMCONSUL ROUTINE; MANILA, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE; PARIS, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE; VLADIVOSTOK, AMCONSUL ROUTINE; NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE; ATLANTA GA, CDC ROUTINE; DIA WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE; CIA WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE; PACOM IDHS HONOLULU HI ROUTINE; CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE ROUTINE; ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE ROUTINE

CARACAS, AMEMBASSY; ST PETERSBURG, AMCONSUL

**Dissemination Rule:** Archive Copy

**UNCLASSIFIED**

SBU

**UNCLASSIFIED**

~~SBU~~



**MRN:** 20 BEIJING 188

**Date/DTG:** Jan 22, 2020 / 221235Z JAN 20

**From:** AMEMBASSY BEIJING

**Action:** WASHDC, SECSTATE *ROUTINE*

**E.O.:** 13526

**TAGS:** SHLH, CDC, HHS, NIH, CN, PGOV, SENV, PREL, CASC, AMGT, AMED, KPAO, KMDR

**Captions:** ~~SENSITIVE~~

**Reference:** A) 20 BEIJING 186  
 B) 20 BEIJING 174  
 C) 20 BEIJING 166  
 D) 20 BEIJING 172  
 E) 20 BEIJING 164  
 F) 20 BEIJING 142  
 G) 20 BEIJING 122  
 H) 20 BEIJING 108  
 I) 20 BEIJING 74  
 J) 20 BANGKOK 136  
 K) 20 BANGKOK 124  
 L) 20 BANGKOK 116  
 M) 20 BANGKOK 78  
 N) 19 WUHAN 112  
 O) 20 HONG KONG 50  
 P) 20 HONG KONG 28

**Subject:** China Novel Coronavirus: PRC Pledges Transparency; Health Screening and Exit Controls Continue

1. ~~(SBU)~~ **Summary and Comment:** PRC health authorities overseeing the country's response to the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) pledged to publish information on the epidemic in a timely, open, and transparent way during a nationally televised press conference January 22. Wuhan city continued enhanced health screening and exit controls, while health officials designated nine hospitals to treat confirmed and potential coronavirus patients in the city.

[Redacted]

[Redacted] Embassy Beijing and CG Wuhan

January 22 convened a second joint Emergency Action Committee (EAC) meeting (ref A). Consular issued an updated MASCOT message January 22 for U.S. citizens and Embassy Beijing Management issued a corresponding Notice to Mission China. Mission China will continue to report on the 2019-nCoV outbreak as it develops and additional information becomes available.

**End Summary and Comment.**

**PRC Pledges Transparency and to Step Up Efforts**

(b)(5)

(b)(5)

(b)(5)

2. (SBU) In a January 22 press conference organized by the PRC State Council and carried live on China CCTV and streamed online ([link](#)), PRC health officials leading the nation's response to the coronavirus outbreak pledged to provide information transparently and to step up prevention and control measures as the Lunar New Year migration begins. Participants included Li Bin, Vice Minister for the National Health Commission (NHC); Xu Shuqiang, Director General of the NHC's Emergency Response Office; Jiao Yahui, person in charge, NHC Department of Medical Administration; and Gao Fu, Director of China CDC.

3. (SBU) Vice Minister Li Bin said NHC's leadership team holds epidemic prevention and control meetings daily. He said NHC's Experts Committee attributed the recent large rise in confirmed cases to better understanding of the disease and improved diagnostic capabilities. He noted the NHC's Experts Committee judges that the cases are mainly limited to Wuhan; that human-to-human transmission and medical staff infections have occurred; and that community transmission has occurred. Li said the main transmission mode is respiratory transmission and that virus mutation is possible.

4. (SBU) Li also said that Wuhan has implemented severe prevention and control measures, including management of farmers' markets, prohibiting the sale of live poultry, and prohibiting the entry of wild animals and live poultry into Wuhan. Wuhan has also implemented temperature screening at airports, train stations, bus stations, and ferry stations, and has established isolation and observation measures for patients with fever and close contacts.

5. (SBU) Li said that while the novel coronavirus is classified as a class B infectious disease, the nationwide response is "A level." He said case diagnosis, and treatment, prevention and control plans have been issued nationwide and that daily reports, including a zero report system, are mandatory (Note: zero report system means officials are required to file a report even if the number of cases is zero. End note.).

6. (SBU) Li said efforts to find the source of transmission and transmission mode will be increased, along with targeted research and development of antiviral drugs. He said health officials will strengthen medical personnel in the health system during the Lunar New Year holiday and will ensure that there is sufficient staff at medical institutions and at CDCs nationwide.

(b)(5)

7. (SBU)(b)(5)

(b)(5)

#### **First WHO Sitrep As World Awaits Emergency Meeting**

8. (SBU) PRC health officials are expected to share more epidemiological information at the



January 22 WHO emergency committee of experts meeting convened to determine whether the 2019-nCoV outbreak constitutes a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). WHO January 21 issued its first Situation Report on the 2019-nCoV outbreak. The report included general surveillance data, details on WHO and China responses, as well as action in Thailand, Japan, and ROK.

9. (SBU) *China CDC Weekly* (launched in November 2019 and modeled after the U.S. CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report) published a "Notes from the Field" January 21 that focused on the virology of the pathogen ([link](#)). A second report was published on January 22 that included epidemiologic information ([link](#)).

(b)(5)

10. (SBU)(b)(5)

(b)(5)

**NHC Notified of Confirmed U.S. Case**

11. (SBU)(b)(5)

(b)(5)

**Beijing Diplomatic Community Meeting**

12. (SBU) Beijing Diplomatic Corps Health Attaches and Counselors will meet January 23 at the EU Delegation to exchange information on the 2019-nCoV outbreak. Australian Embassy contacts told Embassy Beijing officers that it had updated its travel advice January 22. Separately, New Zealand Embassy contacts told Embassy Beijing Officers that New Zealand had published a health alert but had yet to increase its travel advice. Post will report any substantive information from the Diplomatic Corps meeting.

**Renowned SARS Doctor Says PRC Has Been Transparent**

13. (SBU) Dr. Zhong Nanshan (ref B), famous among the Chinese public for his work during the 2003 SARS epidemic and for speaking out against the PRC response at the time, said at a January 21 press conference ([link](#)) that he did not believe the PRC had concealed information regarding the outbreak.

**New Cases Confirmed in Other Provinces**



14. ~~(SBU)~~ The Guangdong Health Commission reported that the total number of confirmed cases in the province had risen to 26 by the end of January 21, including 9 new cases. Of the newly confirmed cases, seven had been residing in Hubei or had traveled to Hubei, and two were in severe condition ([link](#), in Chinese).

#### Total new cases in China

15. ~~(SBU)~~ China's National Health Commission reported on January 22 that the total number of confirmed cases as of 24:00 on January 21 had reached 440, including 149 new cases—the largest daily increase yet ([link](#), in Chinese) (Note: this increase is expected as screening is more widespread and more testing kits have been made available. End note.). Confirmed cases had been documented in a total of 13 provincial-level territories, including nine that were reporting cases for the first time (see table below). The total number of deaths had increased to nine, with three new deaths, all in Hubei Province. Among the nine provinces/cities reporting cases for the first time on January 21, the health commissions in Chongqing, Henan, Hunan, Jiangxi, Shandong, Sichuan, Tianjin, Yunnan, and Zhejiang all reported that the newly diagnosed patients had recently traveled from Wuhan and been in close contact with people there. The 20 patients in these provinces were all reported in stable condition (except for one severely ill patient in Jiangxi) and were receiving treatment at locally designated hospitals.

#### Cases of 2019-nCoV Reported by China's National Health Commission as of January 21, 2020

Province/City/Region	Total confirmed cases to date	New confirmed cases	Total suspected cases to date	New suspected cases	Total deaths to date	New deaths reported
Anhui	--	--	3	2	--	--
Beijing	10	5	--	--	--	--
Chongqing	5	5	--	--	--	--
Fujian	--	--	--	--	--	--
Gansu	--	--	--	--	--	--
Guangdong	26	12	1	1	--	--
Guangxi	--	--	2	1	--	--
Guizhou	--	--	1	--	--	--
Hainan	--	--	1	--	--	--
Heilongjiang	--	--	1	--	--	--
Henan	1	1	--	--	--	--
Hubei	375	105	--	--	9	3
Hunan	1	1	--	--	--	--
Jiangxi	2	2	--	--	--	--
Jilin	--	--	1	--	--	--

<b>Ningxia</b>	--	--	1	--	--	--
<b>Shandong</b>	1	1	--	--	--	--
<b>Shanghai</b>	9	7	10	10	--	--
<b>Shanxi</b>	--	--	1	--	--	--
<b>Sichuan</b>	2	2	5	2	--	--
<b>Tianjin</b>	2	2	--	--	--	--
<b>Tibet</b>	--	--	--	--	--	--
<b>Xinjian</b>	--	--	--	--	--	--
<b>Yunnan</b>	1	1	--	--	--	--
<b>Zhejiang</b>	5	5	10	10	--	--
<b>TOTAL</b>	440	149	37	26	--	3

: “—” equals 0; NHC does not report cases for Hong Kong, Macau, or Taiwan

### Macau Announces First Case

16. (SBU) *Macau News* reported on January 22 that Macau’s first case of 2019-nCoV had been confirmed ([link](#)). The patient, a 52-year-old woman, had come from Hubei province and arrived in Macau on January 19. She was placed in quarantine at Conde S. Januário Hospital in Macau along with two other travel companions. She claimed to have had no known contact with any infected individuals.

### Prominent National Health Commission Expert Quarantined

17. (SBU) On January 21, China CCTV reported that Dr. Wang Guangfa, head of the respiratory unit at Peking University First Hospital, was suspected of contracting 2019-nCoV and had been placed under quarantine ([link](#), in Chinese). Dr. Wang had traveled to Wuhan as part of the National Health Commission’s team of experts. Dr. Wang is a leading specialist and was Peking University First Hospital’s chief physician in responding to the SARS outbreak in 2003.

### Wuhan Medical Response Evolves Rapidly

18. (SBU) CG Wuhan reported Wuhan now has nine designated hospitals for treating the coronavirus. The city previously had three designated hospitals. Media reports say that one hospital (#7 Hospital) will be completely closed to regular patients. CCTV reported that 800 beds had been specifically set up for coronavirus patients and that 1200 more beds are on the way. Treatment of the coronavirus will be centered on these hospitals and experts and specialized staff will be sent there. Besides the identified hospitals where specialized treatment will be carried out, other hospitals in Wuhan will play a supporting role. At a January 22 press conference, the Deputy Director of the National Health Commission said that experienced medical staff across China will be sent to Wuhan and that sanitation and increased ventilation will be put into place at transit hubs, including subway stations and bus stops.

19. (SBU) CG Wuhan reported fever clinics are routing people directly to Wuhan’s Tongji and Union hospitals (two of the largest hospitals in Wuhan). There were several online reports of

people with fever arriving at fever clinics – setup by the city for diagnosis – being told to go directly to Tongji or Union Hospital without seeing any clinic medical staff. CG Wuhan reported current average waiting times to see medical staff, based on local online reports, to be three to four hours at Tongji and Union hospitals.

### **Masks Everywhere...but Not Stores**

20. ~~(SBU)~~ Wuhan citizens are now almost universally wearing masks in public. In the McDonalds near the Wuhan Consulate, almost all customers were wearing masks and all restaurant staff were wearing masks (figures 1-2). However, several local citizens reported that it is now impossible to buy N95 masks in Wuhan and that people have resorted to wrapping cloth or bandannas around their mouths instead.



*Figure 1: Masked patrons at Wuhan McDonalds*



*Figure 2: Wuhan McDonalds Employees Wear Masks*

### Nearby City Appears Unconcerned

21. (SBU) A CG Wuhan officer transiting through Zhengzhou, Henan, did not observe any temperature screening on arrival or departure at Zhengzhou East train station. He noted that people were less concerned about the virus than citizens of Wuhan, with only about a third of people in the train station wearing masks.

### American Citizen Numbers in Wuhan

22. (SBU) There are approximately 1,000 American citizens in Wuhan and 7,050 in Wuhan's consular district. This number comes from the Wuhan City Foreign Affairs Office and is based on American citizens registered in the city as residents (students, work visas, long-term family visit visas). It does not necessarily include tourists or dual nationals who entered using Chinese passports. The estimated number of American citizens in CG Wuhan's consular district is 7,050.

### Media/Social Media Coverage

23. (SBU) Chinese media reported widely on the novel coronavirus, with a focus on the state council information office's [January 22 press conference](#). During the press conference, officials announced that there were a total of 9 deaths to date, but that the virus is less contagious than SARS. Media outlets reported on new cases in the United States and Taiwan, as well as five new cases in Beijing involving people recently returned from Wuhan. Media described several government policies to counteract the viruses spread, including new exit and entry restrictions in Wuhan and an agreement to refund tickets for Wuhan travelers. CCTV aired a full interview with the Mayor of Wuhan, who detailed the extent of the risk from the virus and the efforts made to address it. Xinhua published commentary describing China's dedicated efforts "at this critical stage" to control the coronavirus by sharing information and instituting effective quarantines. *The Global Times* and *Bull Piano* both gave the government's reaction mixed reviews, while also sharing advice on how to avoid further infections.

24. (SBU) The coronavirus dominated conversations on Chinese social media: four of the five "hot topics" on Weibo were about the coronavirus, garnering 186 million views and generating 330,000 online conversations. Eight of the ten most popular Weibo posts were about the coronavirus, including posts praising hazmat-clad medical staff for their bravery, and another post from People's Daily asking people not to eat wild animals. Netizens talked about ways to keep people informed, while many criticized the Wuhan authorities' information sharing practices, with an article titled "All major news was not first disclosed by Wuhan authority" widely circulated on WeChat and Weibo, noting that media and medical experts outside of Wuhan were the first to disclose major developments in the case, and also connecting the timing of announcing to the end of a big Wuhan political meeting on January 18. Other online rumors were more extreme, including that the coronavirus was created in a lab and planted by foreign actors participating in the Military World Games last summer, that relatives had died and been cremated quickly without testing for the virus. Concern about the availability of N95 masks continued to be a topic of conversation.

### Mission China Operating Procedures, Awareness Raising, and Preparedness

25. (SBU) Embassy Beijing and CG Wuhan convened a second joint EAC January 22 (ref A). EAC members concurred that the coronavirus situation is fluid and likely to keep changing. Beijing and Wuhan EACs agreed that at this time, no decision points have been crossed. The EACs agreed to meet daily for the near future.

26. (SBU) Consular sent an updated MASCOT message January 22 to reflect updated CDC health alert from Level 1 to Level 2. Embassy Beijing Management sent an updated Management Notice January 22 also mirroring the CDC guidance. Mission China will continue to coordinate with CDC to issue MASCOT messages to the general public as guidance is updated. The updated MASCOT message has also been posted on the Mission website. There have been no reports of affected U.S. citizens.

27. (SBU) CG Wuhan held a townhall meeting for Wuhan Eligible Family Members January 22. Beijing MGT, MED and CDC participated in the townhall. A direct-hire American nurse assigned to CG Guangzhou will be sent TDY to CG Wuhan.

28. (SBU) For additional actions taken by Mission China responding to the novel coronavirus outbreak, see Post's January 21 cable (ref B).

29. (SBU) Mission China will be officially closed January 24-29 for Lunar New Year. Embassy Beijing has established points of responsibility within the Mission to continue coordination of Mission China's response during the holiday.

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

Signature: BRANSTAD

Drafted By: BEIJING:(b)(6) (Beijing);(b)(6) (Wuhan); (h)(6) (Wuhan)

Cleared By: ESTH:(b)(6) (Beijing)  
EXEC/LEG:(h)(6) (Wuhan)  
HHS/OGA:(b)(6) (Beijing)  
HHS/CDC/CGH:(b)(6) (Beijing)  
MGT/MED:(h)(6) Beijing  
PD:(b)(6) Beijing  
POL:(h)(6) (Beijing)  
MGT:Munchmeyer, Katherine A (Beijing)  
CONS:(b)(6) (Beijing)  
RSO:(h)(6): (Beijing)  
INFO: USDA/APHIS (b)(6) (Beijing)  
INFO: DHS/CBP:(h)(6) (Beijing)

Approved By: POL:(b)(6) (Beijing)

Released By: BEIJING:(h)(6) Beijing

Info: NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE; CIA WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE; PACOM IDHS HONOLULU HI ROUTINE; ATLANTA GA, CDC ROUTINE; BANGKOK, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE;

SEOUL, AMEMBASSY *ROUTINE*; TAIPEI, AIT *ROUTINE*; HONG KONG,  
AMCONSUL *ROUTINE*; HANOI, AMEMBASSY *ROUTINE*; MANILA,  
AMEMBASSY *ROUTINE*; TOKYO, AMEMBASSY *ROUTINE*;  
VLADIVOSTOK, AMCONSUL *ROUTINE*; CHINA POSTS  
COLLECTIVE *ROUTINE*; ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND  
TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE *ROUTINE*

**XMT:**

CARACAS, AMEMBASSY; ST PETERSBURG, AMCONSUL

---

**Dissemination Rule:**

Archive Copy

**UNCLASSIFIED**

**SBU**

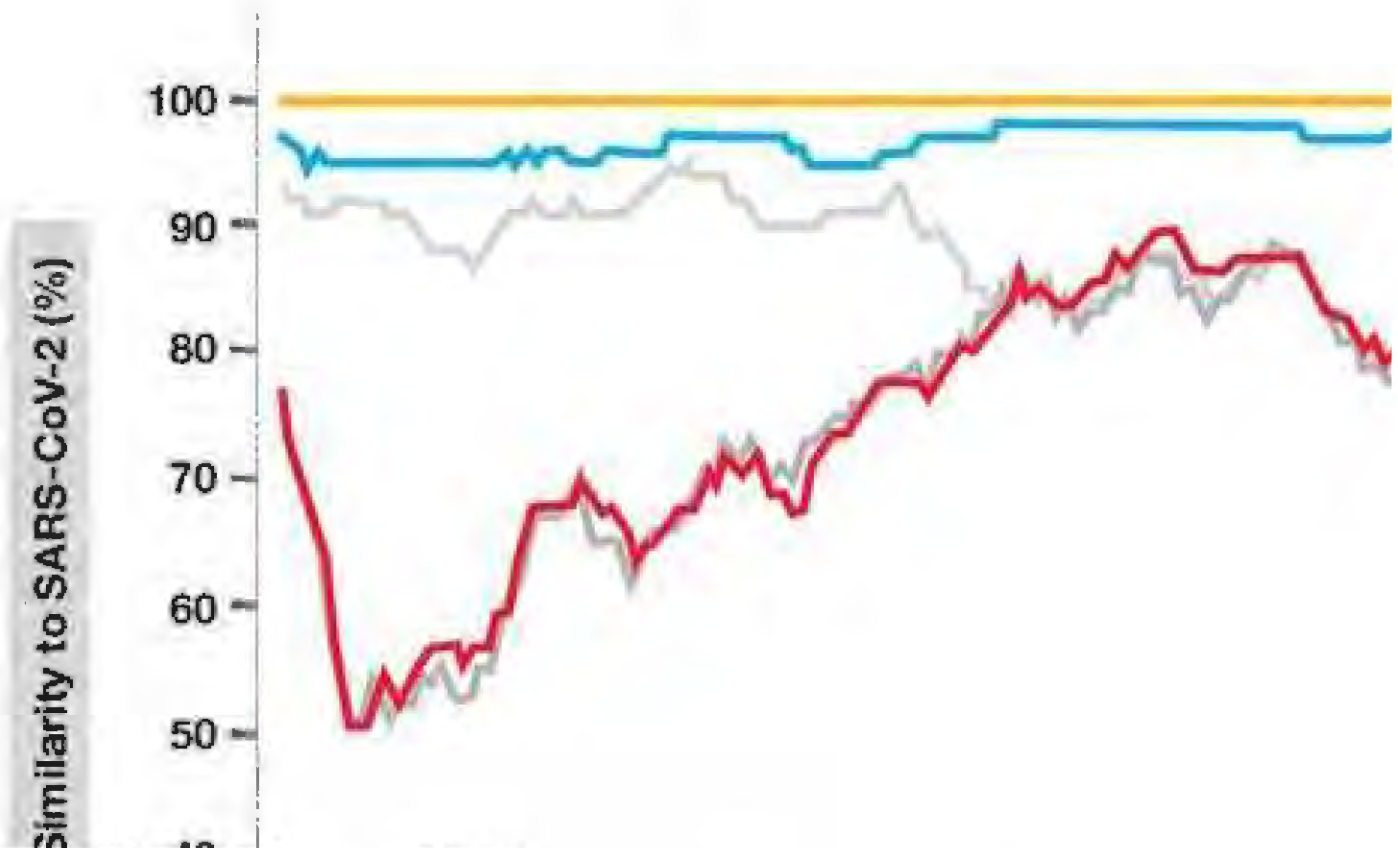


“politically motivated and fake story.” In an article published on July 23, Australia's investigative newspaper The Klaxon said China's Wuhan Institute of Virology has signed a covert three-year deal with Pakistan military's Defense Science and Technology Organization (DESTO) to collaborate research in "emerging infectious diseases".

[PTI](#) | Islamabad | Updated: 26-07-2020 18:00 IST | Created: 26-07-2020 18:00 IST



Pakistan and [China](#) have concluded a secret deal to expand potential bio-warfare capabilities, including running research projects related to the deadly anthrax, an [Australian](#) media report has alleged, prompting [Pakistan](#) to dismiss it as a “politically motivated and fake story.” In an article published on July 23, Australia's investigative newspaper The Klaxon



**Where Did It Come From?** This chart measures the genetic similarity of known viruses to the novel coronavirus (which appears in yellow). By far the closest is the bat virus RaTG13, which appears in blue, and which was recovered in 2013 and brought to the Wuhan Institute of Virology. The first SARS, marked in red, is a much more distant relative. Graphic: Zhou, P., Yang, XL., Wang, XG. et al. A pneumonia outbreak associated with a new coronavirus of probable bat origin. *Nature* 579, 270–273 (2020)

Take, for instance, [this paper](#) from 1995: “High Recombination and Mutation Rates in Mouse Hepatitis Viruses Suggest That Coronaviruses May Be Potentially Important Emerging Viruses.” It was written by Dr. Ralph Baric and his bench scientist, Boyd Yount, at the University of North Carolina. Baric, a gravelly voiced former swim champion, described in this early paper how his lab was able to train a coronavirus, MHV, which causes hepatitis in mice, to jump species, so that it could reliably infect BHK (baby-hamster kidney) cell cultures. They did it using serial passaging: repeatedly dosing a mixed solution of mouse cells and hamster cells with mouse-hepatitis virus, while each time decreasing the number of mouse cells and upping the concentration of hamster cells. At first, predictably, the mouse-hepatitis virus couldn’t do much with the hamster cells, which were left almost free of infection, floating in their world of fetal-calf serum. But by the end of the experiment, after dozens of passages through cell cultures, the virus had mutated: It had mastered the trick of parasitizing an unfamiliar rodent. A scourge of mice was transformed into a scourge of hamsters. And there was more: “It is clear that MHV can rapidly alter its species specificity and infect rats and primates,” Baric said. “The resulting virus variants are associated with demyelinating diseases in these alternative species.” (A demyelinating disease is a disease that damages nerve sheaths.) With steady



The behind-the-scenes organizer of this *Lancet* statement, Peter Daszak, is a zoologist and bat-virus sample collector and the head of a New York nonprofit called EcoHealth Alliance — a group that (as veteran science journalist Fred Guterl explained later in *Newsweek*) has channeled money from the National Institutes of Health to Shi Zhengli’s laboratory in Wuhan, allowing the lab to carry on recombinant research into diseases of bats and humans. “We have a choice whether to stand up and support colleagues who are being attacked and threatened daily by conspiracy theorists or to just turn a blind eye,” Daszak said in February in *Science* magazine.



**How Did It Get Out?** 1. **The Tongguan Mine Shaft** in Mojiang, Yunnan, where, in 2013, fragments of RaTG13, the closest known relative of SARS-CoV-2, were recovered and transported to the Wuhan Institute of Virology; 2. **The Wuhan Institute of Virology**, where Shi Zhengli’s team brought the RaTG13 sample, sequenced its genome, then took it out of the freezer several times in recent years; 3. **The Wuhan Center for Disease Control and Prevention**, which first reported signs of the novel coronavirus in hospital patients; 4. **The Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market**, an early suspected origin of the pandemic, where the first major outbreak occurred. Illustration: Map by Jason Lee

Vincent Racaniello, a professor at Columbia and a co-host of a podcast called *This Week in Virology*, said on February 9 that the idea of an accident in Wuhan was “complete bunk.” The coronavirus was 96 percent similar to a bat virus found in 2013, Racaniello said. “It’s not a man-made virus. It wasn’t released from a lab.”

Racaniello’s dismissal was seconded by a group of scientists from Ohio State, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of North Carolina, who put out a paper in *Emerging Microbes and Infections* to quiet the “speculations, rumors, and conspiracy theories that SARS-CoV-2 is of laboratory origin.” There was “currently no credible evidence” that SARS-2 leaked from a lab, these scientists said, using a somewhat different argument from Racaniello’s. “Some people have alleged that the human SARS-CoV-2 was