



Who Loses When The China-Bat-Cave Narrative Implodes?

Description

CHINA/USA: The story about Wuhan's "wet market" is taking on water.

We've moved well past the "trust but verify" stage. We're now in the "don't trust a damn thing they say" stage.

In this case, "they" refers mostly to the Chinese Communist Party.

But the public's mistrust has spread to our own government's public health experts, and to much of the Western media, as well.

We still don't know where the COVID-19 pandemic originated, but the more we learn, the less China's official story sounds right. The World Health Organization's year-long endorsement of Beijing means nothing. At this point, even the WHO is starting to say we need a more thorough investigation. Good luck with that. China has prevented independent scientists from conducting any serious, open inquiry of the pandemic's origins. That won't change.

China's secrecy tells us sometimes, but we can't be sure what. Remember, U.S. intelligence agencies and the George W. Bush administration made the wrong inference from Saddam Hussein's secrecy about weapons of mass destruction. Saddam impeded international inspectors to search freely for WMDs, which he possessed previously. There was no proof he had destroyed them. Yet he blocked unannounced international inspections of Iraqi sites that might contain WMDs. The natural inference was that he still had those weapons and was hiding them. American and British intelligence researched that conclusion. The CIA director famously told President Bush it was a "slam dunk."

It wasn't. What Saddam was actually hiding was that he *didn't* have WMDs. He was hiding that less from his Western enemies and more from his dangerous neighbor, Iran, and possibly from internal enemies in Iraq itself. That mistaken inference is worth remembering as we ponder the still-murky origins of the Wuhan virus. **We know China is hiding something. What we don't know is what it is hiding and why.**

- Beijing could be hiding that a natural virus escaped from the lab.

- Beijing could be hiding that the escaped virus was artificially enhanced, made more contagious and lethal (called “gain of function”).
- Beijing could be hiding the fact that China’s military was involved in this gain-of-function project, or at least in some aspects of the lab’s research.
- Beijing could be hiding that Chinese political leaders knew, early on, that the virus spread from human to human and that it kept this crucial finding secret for months. During that period, Beijing and the WHO were falsely telling the world that the virus could *not* spread from human to human.
- Beijing could be hiding that Chinese leaders not only knew the virus was contagious, but that they acted on that knowledge by allowing Chinese nationals to travel freely around the world, spreading the disease, while sharply restricting travel within China from Wuhan. And, finally,
- Beijing could be hiding anything and everything simply because that’s how totalitarian regimes operate. They *a/ways* hide information, control the flow, and prevent outside inspections.

Whatever they’re hiding, they have powerful reasons. The Chinese Communist Party knows how high the stakes are if it is found responsible for a deadly lab leak and for keeping that information secret when others could have acted promptly and saved countless lives. Americans will be outraged, as they should be, and Washington will be forced to take serious action.

That action will begin with a reconsideration of bilateral trade relations, Chinese investments in the U.S., and Chinese students at U.S. universities. Our Asian allies, Japan, Australia, and India are likely to follow suit. Britain may well do the same; South Korea is more uncertain. Europeans will be reluctant since they have strong trade ties and few security interests in the Pacific. If the U.S. relationship with China deteriorates like this, Biden may be forced to bolster the military budget, something he has avoided so far.

Who loses in this shifting environment?

Here’s a preliminary assessment of the biggest losers.

1) U.S. firms with large economic stakes in China, everything from factories to consumer sales. Beijing will threaten to retaliate against them if Washington applies sanctions. The same will apply to international companies from any other countries that apply sanctions.

2) The feckless news media — including the social media giants — that considered the mere suggestion that the pandemic *might* have begun with a lab leak an outrageous conspiracy theory. They damned Sen. Tom Cotton and then President Trump for even suggesting it.

3) U.S. public health experts, particularly Dr. Anthony Fauci. He’s spinning as fast as he can, but he’s facing big trouble on multiple fronts. He was already hurt by his fibs about masks. Initially, he told the public they weren’t helpful, even though he privately believed they were, because he didn’t want public demand to crowd out health-care workers who needed the masks. His priorities were right, but he was wrong to mislead the public.

Lying about masks is not Fauci’s biggest problem, however. His biggest problems are his possible connections to the Wuhan Institute of Virology and his unwillingness to entertain the lab leak conjecture a year ago, when the investigation should have been ramped up. He helped quash that conjecture and now admits he didn’t really have strong evidence to do so. His recently released emails also show he had a close working relationship with scientists at the Wuhan lab and that he trusted

their reassuring statements. By then, however, the virus was spreading outside China and everybody at the lab was under close control of Chinese political authorities. Those authorities had one overriding goal: avoid any responsibility for this global health catastrophe.

4) Democrats lose because they are both the party of government and the party of science. If Donald Trump was the bullhorn for federalism and deregulation, Biden and his party are Mr. Microphone of centralized government and Washington experts. Their reliance on Washington is baked into Democrats' DNA and has been since Franklin Delano Roosevelt. So it's not a good look when experts are wrong, as they have been so often during the pandemic.

The key point is that the experts have been confused about technical questions of public health, not general political issues. Nothing could be more technical than questions about what's safe to do during a pandemic and what's unsafe. Which precautions really work? Which ones don't? Do we really need to sit six feet from each other? Did we really need to cancel all those outdoor sporting events? We still don't know the answers to even the most basic questions like "Do face masks help?" and "Why have blue states with stringent lockdowns fared no better than red states with much looser restrictions?" We still don't know when it was safe for kids to return to school — private schools have been operating all year with few problems — but we do know now that the Centers for Disease Control was collaborating with the teacher unions on that question.

The less confidence we have in public health bureaucrats and the federal government on the pandemic issue, the worse it is for the party of Washington experts. And that party is the Democrats.

5) Joe Biden is at least slightly damaged because he's made partisan statements about local decisions on reopening the economy. He has defended restrictions by Democratic governors and called some Republican state elected officials "Neanderthals" because they reopened their economies before he wanted them to do so. Turns out the Neanderthals were right: There don't appear to have been net negative health effects from doing so — and there were very positive economic ones. It also turns out that Biden's aides were smart to advise him never to say anything that they haven't written down for him. Republicans may use "Neanderthals" like they did "Deplorables," as a way to rally their voters against condescending elites.

And, most of all,

6) China. The only question is "How big will their loss be and what global repercussions will it have?"

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