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China calls on WHO to inspect US Army biological facility

In response to relentless and totally unfounded US accusations, first under Trump and now Biden, that China's Wuhan Institute of Virology was responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic, Beijing has hit back with its own baseless conspiracy theory.

Over the past month, the Chinese regime has given legitimacy to the claim that COVID-19 originated in the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases at Fort Detrick in Maryland and was brought to China when American military personnel took part in the Military World Games in the Wuhan region in October 2019.



Chinese President Xi Jinping, rear, gestures as he delivers a speech at a ceremony to mark the 100th anniversary of the founding of the ruling Chinese Communist Party at Tiananmen Gate in Beijing Thursday, July 1, 2021. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

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Last week, Chen Xu, China's permanent representative to the UN Office at Geneva formally wrote to Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organisation (WHO), reasserting that it was "extremely unlikely" that COVID-19 originated from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, as was also concluded by the WHO investigative team that went to Wuhan.

If "some parties" still viewed the "lab leak" hypothesis as open, the letter continued, then in the interests of "fairness and justice," WHO should also investigate the US Army's biological laboratory at Fort Detrick and the virology team led by Dr Ralph Baric at the University of North Carolina.

In a manner similar to the Wuhan lab lie, which has been taken up by the Biden administration and the entire political and media establishment in Washington, Beijing has provided no evidence that COVID-19 originated in a US laboratory. Its conspiracy theory relies on referring to the lab's involvement in bio-military research, including into SARS-related coronaviruses, its history of biological safety breaches and the outbreak of respiratory diseases in nearby communities.

The letter also noted that Baric's team is a world leader in gain-of-function research that can potentially be used to develop biological weapons. It pointed out that the US has conducted the most bio-military activities of any country in the world and withdrew from the Biological Weapons Convention after international agreement was reached on verification protocols to ensure no weapons were being developed, manufactured or stockpiled.

Even if everything claimed about Fort Detrick and the University of North Carolina were true, and much of it could be, that amounts to nothing more than circumstantial innuendo. To answer one conspiracy theory with another, one lie with another, only undermines China's own claim to be basing itself on science, not politics.

Indeed, implying that COVID-19 was developed in the US gives credence to the Washington's own conspiracy theories that the virus was manufactured in a Chinese lab. Eminent virologists around the world have concluded from a detailed examination of COVID-19's DNA that there is no evidence of human manipulation to create the virus and that it originated in animals, most likely bats, in the wild and jumped to humans.

Moreover, the WHO investigative team found no evidence that it had escaped from the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

The Biden administration, however, has continued to push its conspiracy theory to deflect attention from the criminal pandemic policies that have led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people in the US. It has pressured the WHO for further investigations in China, resulting in the WHO's call in late July for investigations into all Chinese biological facilities in and around Wuhan. Beijing bluntly refused, prompting unsubstantiated allegations in Washington that China had something to hide.

In fact, US intelligence agencies were tasked by Biden on May 25 with digging up "evidence" supporting the Wuhan lab lie. Nevertheless, their report released last week, after three months of investigation, including reportedly by hacking Chinese medical and scientific institutions, failed to produce a shred of evidence.

In a remarkable about-face, prominent US media outlets that have been promoting the Wuhan lab lie for months, turned on a dime and denounced China's Fort Detrick conspiracy theory.

The Fort Detrick allegation was first publicly voiced in March last year as Trump was ramping up his attacks on China and the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Zhao Lijian, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, tweeted that "it might be US army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan." He included an article referring to the history of Fort Detrick and demanded that the US "be transparent."

While the claim continued to be circulated on the internet in China, it was only taken up officially after the WHO called for new investigations into Chinese laboratories in July. *China Daily Global* ran a lengthy article entitled, "Behind the deadly secrets at Fort Detrick," citing everything from the US Army laboratory's history of accidents to its purported connection to the notorious Unit 731 of the Imperial Japanese Army, which conducted human experiments on prisoners of war and civilians in China during World War II.

Also in July, the hawkish state-owned *Global Times* circulated an online petition demanding an investigation of US laboratories, reportedly gaining 25 million signatures.

Chen Xu's letter to the WHO appended the petition, thereby giving it an official status. This campaign has encouraged divisive anti-Americanism and Chinese patriotism on the internet, where backward users do not hesitate to openly accuse the US of originating COVID-19—without any evidence.

Beijing's resort to its own conspiracy theory to counter Washington's Wuhan Lab Lie only undercuts its own record in combatting the virus. In contrast to the policy of the Trump and Biden administrations of letting COVID-19 rip through the American population, resulting in nearly 40 million cases and over 600,000 deaths, the Chinese government adopted a health strategy aimed at eliminating the virus. Not only was the outbreak that started in Wuhan rapidly brought under control through mass testing, contact tracing and isolation, but subsequent outbreaks to date also have been contained.

The fact that these later outbreaks resulted from visitors and returning citizens to China, despite the country's rigorous quarantine system, demonstrates that the only means of halting the pandemic is through international collaboration to forge a scientifically-based plan to eliminate the virus throughout the world. From that standpoint, the Fort Detrick conspiracy theory is reactionary. It fosters divisions between the Chinese workers and American workers and cuts across the international working-class unity needed to combat the pandemic.

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