

US ramps up attacks on China over COVID-19

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US President Trump has followed his criminal decision to suspend funding to the World Health Organization (WHO) with a broadside against China, blaming it for the global COVID-19 pandemic that has claimed tens of thousands of lives.

Trump's remarks are a transparent attempt to deflect attention from his own administration's irresponsible actions in allowing the spread of the virus in the US which now has the highest number of cases and death toll in the world. More fundamentally, Trump is exploiting the COVID-19 pandemic to ramp up the underlying agenda of trade war and military confrontation with China.

In his press conference on Wednesday, Trump lashed out at China for its alleged lack of transparency. Asked why COVID-19 cases and deaths in the US were far higher than China, he declared: "Do you really believe those numbers in this vast country called China. ... Does anybody really believe that?"

He also gave credence to a far-right conspiracy theory that COVID-19 originated not in a so-called wet market in Wuhan, China but rather in a hi-tech virology laboratory in the same city. The claim has been flatly rejected by scientific experts, including the WHO which has declared there is no evidence that the virus was manufactured in a laboratory.

Asked about the theory, Trump did not dismiss it out of hand but declared that "more and more we're hearing the story... we'll see," and adding: "But we are doing a very thorough examination of this horrible situation that happened."

Speaking to Fox News after the press conference, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was even more explicit, declaring: "We know they have this lab. We know about the wet markets. We know that the virus itself did originate in Wuhan. So, all those things come

together."

Neither Pompeo nor Trump has provided a shred of evidence to back their allegations, in the face of overwhelming scientific opinion to the contrary.

Trump's attacks make clear that the chief target is China, not the WHO which he has accused of being a pawn of Beijing. Moreover, it is a signal for a far broader offensive to blacken China's name.

Two Republican Senators have sponsored legislation this week aimed at punishing China for its alleged mishandling of the pandemic. Senator Ted Cruz announced his intention to introduce the "Ending Chinese Medical Censorship and Cover Ups Act of 2020" to penalize Chinese officials who allegedly suppressed information about the virus.

At the same time, Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO) proposed a "Justice for Victims of COVID-19 Act," which would enable victims to sue the Chinese Communist Party for withholding information. "There is overwhelming evidence that the CCP's lies, deceit, and incompetence caused COVID-19 to transform from a local disease outbreak into a global pandemic," said Hawley.

What is involved in all these claims is a staggering level of lies, distortions and hypocrisy.

Whatever the Chinese regime might have done to keep a lid on what for it was an unknown disease whose characteristics were not immediately understood, it acted with speed to warn the public and the world once the dangers were recognised. The lack of action by governments internationally, particularly the Trump administration, to a known danger—a lethal, easily transmittable disease—is the real cause of the global death and suffering.

Significantly what has to date been largely confined to the anti-China far right has now been taken up and

amplified by the establishment media in the US.

The Associated Press published a lengthy report this week claiming that Chinese officials suppressed information about the virus for six days between January 14 and January 20 that led to an accelerated spread of infections. The report has been picked up and reproduced repeatedly as evidence of the Chinese regime's withholding of crucial data about the disease.

Yet, what emerges from the report is a government struggling to understand the nature of a disease that first emerged in December, that appeared to be spreading rapidly and led to the first death on January 9. The COVID-19 genome was posted on January 13 and the WHO kept apprised of developments.

As the AP report explained, on January 15, the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in Beijing initiated the highest-level emergency response setting up working groups to obtain funds, train health workers and carry out further investigations. The National Health Commission sent a set of instructions to provincial health officials to set up fever clinics, identify suspected cases and for protective gear for medical staff.

On January 20, President Xi Jinping announced that the outbreak must be taken seriously. As the AP report admitted, estimates as to what might have happened if emergency measures had been taken six days earlier are “retrospective”—that is, made with the benefit of hindsight.

Moreover, as the article also pointed out, in the two months he had to prepare the US, “Trump ignored the warnings of his own staff and dismissed the disease as nothing to worry about, while the government failed to bolster medical supplies and deployed flawed testing kits.”

Even more significantly, the *Washington Post* has published an opinion article giving credence to the conspiracy theory that COVID-19 originated in a Wuhan virology laboratory. Once again, the allegations are based on insinuations rather than evidence—visits by US officials to the laboratory in 2018 which found that safety could be improved and recommended additional US funding, which was not forthcoming.

Yet it cites uncritically a senior Trump administration official: “The idea that it [COVID-19] was just a totally natural occurrence is circumstantial. The evidence it leaked from the lab is circumstantial. Right now, the

ledger on the side of it leaking from the lab is packed with bullet points and there’s almost nothing on the other side,” the official said.

That is, except the opinion of scientific experts that an examination of the virus itself reveals that it was not produced in a lab. The article is forced to acknowledge “conclusive evidence is yet to emerge.” It is not just “conclusive evidence” that is lacking, but any evidence at all.

The fact that Trump’s crude attacks on China are now being given credence in the broader media is another sign of a broad agreement in Washington that Beijing cannot be allowed to take advantage of the decay of US capitalism that has been revealed by the COVID-19 crisis.

Far from the pandemic fostering international cooperation, the plunge of the global economy towards depression is accelerating the geo-political antagonisms that were developing apace before its outbreak. Mired in the worst crisis since the Great Depression, US imperialism is determined to use all available means to prevent any challenge to its global position by China. As in the 1930s, this is the road to trade war and war.



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