

As death toll mounts, White House steps up efforts to scapegoat China for pandemic

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18 May 2020

In a round of interviews on US television talk shows, the top Trump trade adviser and anti-China hawk, Peter Navarro, stepped up the White House attack on Beijing, suggesting that it had purposely started the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Making China the scapegoat for the outbreak not only serves to deflect attention from the Trump administration's criminal responsibility for the horrific death toll in the United States, but feeds directly into the anti-China trade war measures for which Navarro has aggressively advocated.

Speaking on the "This Week" program on ABC News, Navarro repeatedly referred to COVID-19 in xenophobic terms as the "China virus"—a patently unscientific term intended to blame Beijing for the pandemic. While declaring he did not say that China deliberately unleashed the virus on the world, he immediately made clear that was exactly what he was implying.

Claiming to present "the facts," Navarro stated: "The virus was spawned in Wuhan province. Patient zero was in November. The Chinese, behind the shield of the World Health Organization, for two months hid the virus from the world, and then sent hundreds of thousands of Chinese on aircraft to Milan, New York, and around the world to seed that."

In another demonstration that the entire US media and political establishment is on board the anti-China campaign, ABC presenter George Stephanopoulos did not dispute any of these so-called "facts." In reality, China was wrestling with the sudden emergence of a previously unknown disease: its causes, let alone the means for testing and treating it, had to be identified and developed.

Any objective examination of the record shows that Chinese authorities provided information as it became

available to the World Health Organization (WHO) and other countries, including the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the United States.

* The first identified case was diagnosed in Wuhan on November 17, 2019 followed by a second on December 1, 2019.

* On December 21, 2019, the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention published a report on a cluster of patients with a "pneumonia of unknown cause."

* By January 3, Chinese scientists determined that the disease was caused by a novel coronavirus, which the WHO confirmed on January 9.

* Less than a week later, on January 13, Chinese virologists published the genome sequence for the virus.

* By January 21, a total of 291 cases were reported across major cities in China, the first deaths in China had occurred and cases were being reported outside China.

* On January 24, the Chinese leadership placed not only Wuhan but the entire Hubei province under lockdown.

To conclude on this basis that the Chinese regime "sent hundreds of thousands of Chinese on aircraft to Milan, New York, and around the world to seed that [virus]," is another of the big lies promoted by the Trump administration as part of its propaganda war against China. The very terms used are chosen to imply that Beijing deliberately "seeded" a catastrophic global pandemic.

Whatever the flaws in China's response, they pale into insignificance in comparison to the Trump administration's dismissal of the dangers, its lack of preparation, its failure to take action for weeks in the face of mounting scientific advice, and its promotion of

snake oil cures.

Navarro, however, simply ignored the facts, repeating Trump's line that "they could have kept it in Wuhan... So, that's why I say the Chinese did that to Americans and they are responsible." In reality, it is Trump, along with the protracted decay of the American health system, who is responsible for the horrendous US death toll that is now more than 90,000, even as the White House is pressing for a return to work in unsafe conditions.

Navarro made clear that China-bashing is going to be integral to Trump's bid for reelection, branding his leading Democrat candidate, Joe Biden, as a longstanding "friend of China" and referring to "the billion dollars that his son took from the Chinese"—a claim he was forced to withdraw. For his part, Biden and the Democrats are attacking Trump on an equally xenophobic basis as not being tough enough on China.

Navarro also lashed out at China for breaching its trade deal with the US signed on January 15 and for allegedly hacking vaccine research in the United States. The FBI and Department of Homeland Security, which made the claims, have provided no evidence of Chinese electronic espionage. That did not stop Navarro from declaring that China was "stealing" vaccine research "to profiteer and hold the world hostage."

Navarro directly linked his scapegoating of Beijing over the COVID-19 pandemic with trade war against China and his protectionist agenda. He absurdly declared: "I'm happy to report that this president, Donald J. Trump, in three-and-a-half years built the most beautiful economy in modern history. And the Chinese did take that down in about 30 days."

In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the inner rot and historic decline of American capitalism, which only accelerated under the Trump administration. Trump simply epitomises the rise of the parasitic financial oligarchy at the expense of the gutting of the real economy and, above all, the working class.

The trade war measures championed by Navarro are a desperate attempt to maintain the global hegemony of American imperialism by undermining its rivals, above all China, by every means necessary, including economic and military warfare. Last week, Trump even threatened to cut off all economic ties with China, claiming this would save the US \$500 billion in imports.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Trump administration is preparing punitive measures against China, some of which have already been enacted. These include the blocking of government pension funds in Chinese shares and tough new measures designed to prevent Chinese electronics giant Huawei accessing semi-conductors.

These measures are being accompanied by the continued US military buildup in the Indo-Pacific in preparation for conflict with China, as well as naval provocations in the South China Sea adjacent to the Chinese mainland. As in the 1930s, the current massive crisis of global capitalism is leading to trade war and war. Navarro, the author of the book *The Coming China Wars*, is well aware of the catastrophic potential consequences of his actions.



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