

# **Chinese Crisis Decision Making: Managing the COVID-19 Pandemic**

## **Part Two: The International Dimension**

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**Fall 2020 Issue 65**

**Tuesday September 1, 2020**

The international aspects of the Chinese leadership's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic cover a broad spectrum of activities, both positive and negative. On the positive side, Beijing has provided valuable assistance to nations and international organizations struggling with the virus and engaged in an intensive diplomatic effort to present itself as a strong supporter of the global response. On the negative side, the Chinese leadership has resorted to ham-handed efforts to compel other countries to praise China's role and at times acted irresponsibly in responding to foreign criticism of its own behavior. In the process, it has argued that its system of rule is extremely adept at handling major crises and by implication superior to the American system. The Chinese leadership has also engaged with Washington in a petty "blame game" over the pandemic that has damaged the reputation of both nations. Beijing's mixed record suggests that it must do more to show that it is genuinely committed to overcoming the pandemic through greater transparency, cooperation, and consultation.

This is the second half of a two-part examination of China's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first part (appearing on June 1, 2020) focuses on the domestic components of the crisis. This part takes a look at the international dimensions.

The COVID-19 pandemic first publicly broke out as a serious disease in Wuhan, China. It spread rapidly across China and then abroad. As of the present, it has infected over 21.6 million people, killing some 774,000 (with nearly one-quarter of the fatalities in the United States). As a result, it is no surprise that in combating the pandemic China is confronting a range of international issues.

From the overall perspective of global health and stability, the most significant international dimension of Beijing's stance regarding COVID-19 involves its relations with the U.S. Unfortunately, rather than providing a clear opportunity for China to work with the U.S., the pandemic has caused both countries to engage in petty, acrimonious attacks on one another for a.) causing the outbreak, b.) covering up the truth, and c.) attempting to manipulate or undermine the activities of the World Health Organization (WHO) and other international health agencies. This blame game has accelerated the deterioration of U.S.-China relations, tarnished each of their reputations, alarmed much of the rest of the world, and in the process further weakened global cooperation and confidence in an eventual recovery, both health-wise and economically.

In partial contrast, the COVID-19 pandemic produced more beneficial outcomes for China within the larger international arena, albeit with some notable exceptions. On the positive side, Beijing is working with other countries to defeat the virus by facilitating sustained cooperation with foreign doctors and scientists, providing and receiving needed medical supplies and assistance to and from other countries, supporting the actions of international public health organizations, meeting with and offering encouraging statements to other world leaders, and generally presenting China as strongly committed to cooperation, transparency, and good relations.

Yet China's efforts in these areas have by no means always gone smoothly. Some governments have criticized Beijing on various fronts, from pressuring other capitals to praise China for its assistance, avoiding international calls for an investigation into the origins of the virus and its handling by the Chinese leadership, engaging in heavy-handed criticism (and punishment) of other countries, and in some instances offering their own ridiculous charges of a coverup by the U.S.

These criticisms, together with the Chinese desire to push back against U.S. attacks regarding COVID-19 and other issues, have produced an array of Chinese actions. Some of these reactions are associated with the so-called "Wolf Warrior" (战狼) phenomenon, marked by aggressive propaganda and other rhetorical swipes directed at foreign governments and individuals. Other reactions are more benign, including attempts to clarify China's record regarding its handling of the pandemic and to present (either explicitly or implicitly) the Chinese government as responsive and its behavior as superior to that of the U.S. and the other democracies.

As shown below, the efforts by the Chinese leadership to address these issues and to advance its own interests have met with limited success. On the positive side, Beijing has generated some goodwill among various nations for its assistance, scientific collaboration and provision of information, and general efforts to work with and support the WHO and other agencies. On the negative side, accusations of a coverup as well as supposed efforts to intimidate, pressure, and castigate other nations or foreign leaders—either in response to perceived attacks or as part of an attempt to advance China's image or to increase its overall leverage—continue to plague China's leaders, undermining their gains. And yet, the Chinese leadership seems to believe that its COVID stance has been beneficial to its international position.

This essay takes a look at China's statements and behavior in the above overlapping issues. It is divided into three parts. The first part examines China's overall international strategy toward COVID-19, including its actions in relation to individual nations and multilateral organizations and its response to foreign criticism. This includes a look at the so-called "Wolf Warrior" phenomenon and Chinese efforts to pressure other nations to support Chinese behavior, to deter certain countries from taking actions unacceptable to Beijing, and to attempt to use China's handling of COVID-19 to show the strength and superiority of the Chinese system. The second part looks at the negative impact of COVID-19 on China's relations with the U.S. and the mutually destructive blame game that continues between Beijing and Washington. The conclusion offers an overall assessment of China's international handling of COVID-19 and it draws some implications for global order and U.S.-China relations going forward.

## **China's External Strategy, Securitization of Public Health Issues, and Disruptive Wolf Warrior Responses**

Chinese external diplomatic strategy regarding COVID-19 has combined many diplomatically polite and positive actions, along with some missteps and crude propaganda and pressure tactics. This overall behavior resembles Chinese actions taken with regard to many other foreign-policy issues.

Beijing's international strategy toward the COVID-19 pandemic consists of three major elements. The first element is concerted efforts by Beijing to use diplomacy, propaganda, and both bilateral and multilateral actions to show that China is dedicated to working with the international community to combat the pandemic. These actions include providing equipment, supplies, and information on the virus as well as making statements in support of international efforts. The second element is to rebut or to undermine, through various means, foreign charges that China had not responded effectively to the outbreak and thus had contributed to its severity overseas. Third, in the process of rebutting foreign and domestic criticisms, Beijing has attempted to show other countries and the Chinese public that Beijing's political system is effective in handling major crises and in this respect is in some ways superior to the large and complex democracies such as the U.S.

On the diplomatic front, shortly after the COVID-19 epidemic appeared in China, Beijing launched a concerted campaign, under the direct leadership of Xi Jinping, to establish positive contacts with outside countries, international organizations, and scientists and doctors. By June 8, Xi Jinping had "explained China's tactics and achievements in fighting the virus and emphasized China's open, transparent and responsible approach ..." in phone calls or meetings with nearly 50 foreign leaders and heads of international organizations.<sup>1</sup> According to a State Council white paper issued later in June by Beijing, as of May 31 China had sent 29 medical expert teams to 27 countries and had offered assistance to 150 countries and 4 international organizations. It had instructed its medical teams stationed in 56 countries to support the local fight and to provide counseling and health information to local people and overseas Chinese.<sup>2</sup> In addition to its more general foreign-aid programs, China had also established a mechanism for Chinese hospitals to pair up with 30 African hospitals and, together with other G20 members, it had implemented the Debt Service Suspension Initiative for 77 developing countries.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond these individual initiatives, the Chinese government has also attempted to link its international anti-COVID efforts to broader efforts to improve global health governance and to support the development of a so-called global community. For example, on March 16, in a phone conversation with Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, Xi Jinping raised the notion of working with Italy to build a "Health Silk Road" (健康丝绸之路), a concept first brought up by Xi during a visit to Geneva in 2017.<sup>4</sup> In the following days, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson called "on the international community ... to build a Health Silk Road" to "strengthen global public health governance."<sup>5</sup>

In addition, the Chinese government and companies engaged in Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects abroad were actively providing medical aid and consultation to foreign countries on a bilateral basis. In many of his interactions with foreign leaders, Xi Jinping has stressed the

theme that international cooperation against the COVID-19 pandemic serves to enhance his “vision of a global community with a shared future for mankind,” and he has offered to share with the international community treatments that China had developed.<sup>6</sup>

On the propaganda /commentary front, both authoritative and non-authoritative Chinese sources have stressed the positive actions taken by China. They have cited: a.) the sympathy and support for China expressed by many countries; b.) China’s extensive assistance to countries and organizations in the form of the construction of health-related facilities, material supplies, scientists and doctors, and financial contributions; c.) Beijing’s support for multilateralism in coping with the pandemic; and d.) the general view that China’s actions had “...won time and hope for the world.”<sup>7</sup>

All these positive actions are undoubtedly intended to deflect blame for its own missteps by raising China’s international stature as a responsible, cooperative, and transparent nation supporting efforts to combat the global spread of COVID-19. They are also intended to boost Beijing’s standing in the eyes of the Chinese public, given the criticisms China has received at home for its handling of the epidemic.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond such overt propaganda efforts by state media, Beijing has also reportedly engaged in covert efforts to manipulate information and even to sow chaos. In April, according to *The New York Times*, the European Union was drafting a report (discussed below) documenting how governments (mainly China and Russia) were promoting disinformation about the pandemic.<sup>9</sup> Another study by ProPublica uncovered a disinformation network on Twitter that was “involved in a coordinated influence campaign with ties to the Chinese government.”<sup>10</sup> Some U.S. officials also suggested that Chinese operatives were helping amplify false text messages, warning that President Trump was about to order a two-week national quarantine and was causing massive panic.<sup>11</sup>

Taken as a whole, many of the above efforts have certainly produced positive responses from countries such as Italy, Iran, and Serbia.<sup>12</sup> However, China’s positive messaging and assistance have not prevented the emergence of international criticism.<sup>13</sup> This includes charges of an initial coverup and a failure to provide timely information, the notion that China’s draconian measures to quell the virus reflected a disdain for human rights, criticism of faulty PPE and COVID-19 test kits provided to other countries, attacks on the WHO for being too pro-China, and complaints about Beijing’s heavy-handed efforts to elicit expressions of appreciation for China’s assistance (apparently supplemented by China-based Internet bots praising China’s assistance).<sup>14</sup>

Such criticism apparently led some countries, such as Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, to demand an international inquiry into the origins of COVID-19. It probably also contributed to a widespread call from over 100 countries for an “impartial, independent, and comprehensive evaluation” of the overall international health response to the virus.<sup>15</sup> Criticism emanated from the developing countries as well, including those African countries with which Beijing has been building a “South-South partnership.”<sup>16</sup>

At the authoritative level, Beijing's response to such international criticism has been a mixture of diplomatically worded explanations and rebuttals alongside far less diplomatic pressure tactics. In the former category, Xi Jinping has made sweeping calls for all countries:

...to push forward cooperation within the frameworks of the UN and G20, enhance the exchange and sharing of information and experience, boost collaboration in scientific research, support the WHO in playing its due role, improve global health governance, increase macro-economic policy coordination so as to stabilize the market, maintain economic growth, safeguard people's well-being, and keep the global supply chains open, stable and safe.<sup>17</sup>

Chinese officials have also tried to rebut criticisms by stressing the volume of health supplies supplied to foreign countries, China's sincerity in providing assistance, and its efforts to correct or replace defective items.<sup>18</sup> In addition, Xi Jinping has stated that China would support a "comprehensive review" of the global response to COVID-19 after the pandemic has ended.<sup>19</sup> He has also asserted:

In view of the weaknesses and deficiencies exposed by COVID-19, we need to improve the governance system for public health security. We need to respond more quickly to public health emergencies.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, Chinese officials have stated that any investigations into the origins of the virus should be undertaken only by scientists and hence (by implication) not by government-organized panels.<sup>21</sup> This undoubtedly reflects a fear that any international investigation would serve the political purpose of criticizing China.<sup>22</sup>

As for diplomatic pressure, as noted above Chinese officials reportedly made threats to get the EU to soften its criticism of China's "disinformation" that appeared in the above-mentioned EU report published on April 24.<sup>23</sup> Although spokespersons for the European Commission subsequently denied they had watered down the report, indications appeared thereafter that Beijing had also pressured European ambassadors in China to censor "...parts of an op-ed commemorating forty-five years of China-EU diplomatic relations that labeled China as the source of the coronavirus."<sup>24</sup> Also notable was Beijing's crude efforts to deter or punish Australia for pushing for an international inquiry into the origins of the pandemic.<sup>25</sup>

Other Chinese sources have largely echoed the responses by Chinese officials and spokespersons to international criticism, including such statements as the following:

During the battle against the epidemic, heads of state from over 170 countries and leaders of more than 40 international and regional organizations expressed sympathy and support for China.<sup>26</sup>

In response to criticism of China's draconian lockdown, a *People's Daily* article states:

Chinese President Xi Jinping has directed governmental agencies at all levels to put the health and security of people first. The "tough measures" that some foreign media outlets

have decried as inhumane, such as locking down the city of Wuhan, are the result of difficult decisions and great sacrifice for the Chinese people and are for the sake of protecting public health both domestically and abroad. ...

The definition of inhumane is without compassion for misery or suffering. There is nothing to suggest that the measures China has taken to contain the coronavirus are for the sake of cruelty, and to argue otherwise is just ridiculous and shows ignorance and insensitivity.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, unsurprisingly, such sources have also included somewhat harder-edged rebuttals, particularly regarding the actions by some (usually unnamed) Western countries. They have used words such as “despise” and “showing a lack of conscience.”<sup>28</sup> Some Chinese commentators have also attributed both international and U.S. criticisms of China’s COVID-19 assistance due to a fear that China will use such actions to achieve excessive influence in key regions of the world.<sup>29</sup>

Although China’s external behavior during this pandemic resemble to a certain extent its past actions, one notable difference is evident. In the past, any truly hard-edged, confrontational Chinese statements or actions were almost exclusively found in non-authoritative sources. However, in recent months Chinese diplomats and other officials have become far more sharply critical of foreign countries, especially the U.S. This phenomenon, called “Wolf Warrior diplomacy” (战狼外交) by Chinese observers, is clearly evident in Beijing’s international stance regarding COVID-19.

For example, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian has repeated unfounded accusations that the U.S. military might have brought COVID-19 to China,<sup>30</sup> a charge then repeated by some PRC ambassadors.<sup>31</sup> The Chinese-run (highly nationalistic) *Global Times* echoed Zhao’s sentiment, adding that this view reflected the opinion of many among the Chinese public.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, in response to a question about one of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s inflammatory statements on the Wuhan lab theory (discussed below), Zhao Lijian stated, in a decidedly undiplomatic manner, that “this US politician has been spreading all kinds of lies for some time. Responding to his lies is a waste of everyone’s time.”<sup>33</sup> As another example, apparently in response to a French article strongly criticizing China’s COVID-19 actions, the PRC embassy in Paris reportedly suggested on its website that France had left its citizens to die of the virus in old-aged-care homes.<sup>34</sup>

Despite Zhao’s unprofessional behavior, he was not removed or even censured by the Foreign Ministry. The continuation of Zhao’s position can likely be attributed to: a.) Zhao’s overall popularity in China; b.) the indignation that many Chinese undoubtedly feel in response to the U.S. attempt to stigmatize China through its use of terms like the “China virus”; and c.) the impression that Zhao was responding to Xi Jinping’s earlier call for PRC diplomats to display a more “fighting spirit.”<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, Chinese authorities within foreign-policy circles seem to be conveying mixed messages. Younger officials within the Foreign Ministry, such as Zhao Lijian and Hua Chunying, have occasionally adopted harsh, blunt, and diplomatically unsophisticated rhetoric in response to U.S. actions. In contrast, senior Chinese officials, including Chinese Ambassador to the U.S. Cui Tiankai and former Deputy Foreign Minister Fu Ying, have

implicitly criticized Zhao Lijian's views as well as those by other such "Wolf-Warriors," attaching more importance to engagement and communications.<sup>36</sup> Other senior officials, such as Foreign Minister Wang Yi, have also seemed pragmatic in discussing China's relations with other countries.<sup>37</sup>

In a similar manner, non-authoritative Chinese sources have expressed different opinions on the aggressive diplomatic stances taken by some officials. While some sources have urged diplomats to tone down their rhetoric, others have sought to excuse it as a justifiable response to the sharpening attacks on China from the U.S. and other (primarily Western) countries.<sup>38</sup>

As some observers have stated, the "Wolf Warrior" phenomenon no doubt reflects the influence of a variety of factors, including Xi Jinping's above-mentioned encouragement of officials to express a greater "fighting spirit"; the growing overall influence of China in the international arena; resentment toward what many Chinese regard as arrogant, bullying attacks on China; and the emergence of a younger generation of Chinese officials who are less sympathetic to the "...quiet, measured diplomacy" of the past.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, there is probably a gap between the elder generation of senior Foreign Ministry officials (e.g., Cui Tiankai, Wang Yi, and Fu Ying) and the younger generation of mid-level Foreign Ministry officials (e.g., Zhao Lijian, Hua Chunying, and Lu Shaye) in responding to foreign criticism of China. The former usually stress cooperation and communications, and they use more diplomatic, reserved language when criticizing the U.S. In contrast, the two younger spokespersons both have Twitter accounts in which they sometimes use informal and even insulting words to rebut criticism, apparently playing to a large domestic audience that employs similar language online.<sup>40</sup> Regardless, while the "Wolf Warrior diplomacy" might satisfy many among the Chinese public and is tolerated or encouraged by the Chinese political leadership, it simply reinforces the view among many outsiders that a more powerful China will act in a more belligerent and aggressive manner.

Another aspect of Beijing's international COVID-19 behavior that raises concern is its attempt to tout its use of highly intrusive surveillance technologies and rigid lock-down policies as superior methods to address security-related problems. As two scholars recently remarked:

If Chinese firms, bolstered by aid and propaganda from Beijing, can convince enough people that their approach to health surveillance is best-in-class for coping with infectious disease, then COVID-19 is likely to accelerate global reliance on Chinese technology, as well as acceptance of its associated model of "prevention and control"—with little protection built in for data security, privacy, or the protection of civil liberties.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, the attractiveness of China's approach in this regard is increased by the utter failure of many democracies, especially the U.S., to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. More broadly, America's abject failure to contain the virus reinforces the Chinese argument that the PRC system is better able than the leading democratic nations to deal with major national emergencies

Indeed, a range of Chinese sources have attempted to portray Beijing's supposedly successful handling of COVID-19 as proof of the overall superiority of the Chinese Communist Party

(CCP) leadership and the PRC system. For example, in a June 2 speech, Xi Jinping asserted that China's prevention and control measures "...have demonstrated the remarkable political advantages of the leadership of the Communist Party and the socialist system of our country. ..."<sup>42</sup> An article appearing in May on Xinhuanet.com states:

The epidemic prevention and control have once again proved that the leadership of the Communist Party of China, our socialist system, and our national governance system have strong vitality and remarkable superiority.<sup>43</sup>

A more recent *Guangming Daily* article explicitly suggests that this superiority is in relation to the Western political systems.<sup>44</sup>

### **Relations with the U.S.: The COVID-19 Blame Game**

The COVID-19 pandemic did not immediately become a major source of Sino-U.S. contention or a subject associated with sometimes vicious Chinese attacks on U.S. leaders for their vicious attacks on China. Instead, the overall tenor and tone of the bilateral spat have gone up and down, but the direction has clearly been downward.

During the initial period of public awareness of the outbreak in Wuhan, from early January through most of February, Sino-U.S. interactions remained largely free of animosity and recrimination. Trump repeatedly and effusively praised China and Xi Jinping for the handling of the epidemic and greatly downplayed the possibility that the virus would cause a problem in the U.S.<sup>45</sup> This occurred despite the fact that during this early period subordinates in the White House and members of the public health and intelligence communities repeatedly told Trump that the outbreak could become a pandemic. They suggested that Chinese reporting on the virus was likely low-balling the number of cases.<sup>46</sup>

Some observers have speculated that Trump praised China and downplayed the danger the virus posed in order not to jeopardize the delicate Sino-U.S. negotiations for the Phase One trade deal that were reportedly reaching a conclusion during this period.<sup>47</sup> However, his frequent past praise for Xi, in addition to the relative absence during this time of many COVID-19 cases in the U.S., might also explain his positive tone.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, some early signs of friction between Washington and Beijing did occur during this initial period. For example, in January U.S. officials began to complain that China was showing reluctance to cooperate with the U.S. in combating the virus.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, there was criticism in China of the U.S. decision to implement severe travel restrictions on flights to and from China, despite the absence at the time of any such calls by the WHO.<sup>50</sup> In addition, Secretary of State Pompeo and other U.S. officials continued their by then usual attacks on the CCP.<sup>51</sup> Regardless, overall relations remained reasonable and positive.

This absence of acrimony changed in early March as a result of U.S. actions. On March 6, Secretary of State Pompeo used the term "Wuhan coronavirus," despite the fact that the WHO and other members of the public health community strongly urged against referring such location-based labels.<sup>52</sup> At about this time, Washington also began to repeatedly accuse Beijing



of deliberately covering up the severity of the virus during its early stages and allowing it to spread beyond China, while Washington suggested that the virus might have been a bioweapon leaked from a virology lab in Wuhan.<sup>53</sup> Secretary of State Pompeo was particularly vociferous in his escalating criticism of China.<sup>54</sup>

As Part One of this study on China's domestic handling of COVID-19 indicates, there is no public evidence that the central authorities in Beijing (as opposed to the local authorities in Wuhan and Hubei) deliberately downplayed the severity of the virus or allowed it to spread during the initial period. Moreover, thus far there is no clear evidence to indicate what motivated the behavior by local officials, although several possibilities seem likely.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the U.S. accusation that the virus escaped from a lab in Wuhan and might have been a bioweapon thus far lacks any evidence.<sup>56</sup>

Beyond these notable U.S. criticisms, Washington also accused Beijing of a range of other missteps, including: a.) a refusal to allow U.S. scientists to travel to China to access the area of the outbreak and a failure to provide live samples and other data related to the virus; b.) excessive influence over the activities of the WHO, which Washington accused of toying Beijing's line and concealing information; and c.) criticism of the "spiteful" Chinese rejection of allowing Taiwan to attend the WHO's annual meeting as an observer.<sup>57</sup> Some U.S. politicians and others have also demanded that China pay reparations for "unleashing" the virus on the world.<sup>58</sup>

The particularly serious charge against the WHO of deliberately concealing information and not being responsive to the virus outbreak directly contradicts the official record, although there are indications that WHO officials were frustrated by China's failure to provide information in early January.<sup>59</sup> More generally, the increasingly vociferous U.S. attacks were at least in part motivated by a deliberate Republican presidential election campaign strategy to use the virus to criticize China and to demand punishment for causing the pandemic.<sup>60</sup> Yet, interestingly, even during this increase in attacks on China, Trump at times would nonetheless still say positive things about Beijing and the Chinese leadership, thus reinforcing the general impression of a chaotic China policy.<sup>61</sup>

The Chinese response to these U.S. attacks were somewhat mixed if not chaotic. At the highest, most authoritative levels, Chinese officials generally used diplomatic language to counter the U.S. criticism. For example,

The US should react in an objective, fair, calm and evidence-based manner rather than excessively. It should respect and coordinate with China's prevention and control measures and join us and the international community to beat this epidemic. The US has said many times that it wants to help China. We would like to see the early arrival of such help.<sup>62</sup>

Alongside such apparent diplomatic efforts, however, several Chinese officials responded to some of the groundless U.S. charges with their own unfounded charges, often fueled by highly nationalistic Chinese netizens. These Chinese statements undoubtedly constitute one major reason why Trump's stance toward China became more negative by mid-March. At that time,

only days after Zhao Lijian's irresponsible statement, Trump started to echo other U.S. leaders in using the term "Wuhan" or "China" virus.<sup>63</sup>

Foreign Ministry officials have long been subject to attacks by the People's Liberation Army (PLA), other parts of the PRC government, and the public for being too accommodating toward the U.S. and other countries. Some younger Foreign Ministry officials such as Zhao Lijian were undoubtedly responding to these attacks.<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless, Cui Tiankai is a very seasoned Chinese official with the confidence of the leadership and he would not have suggested (albeit without naming him) that Zhao's comment was "crazy" without being sure that such a pushback was acceptable.<sup>65</sup>

Yet such apparent attempts at moderation had little effect on Washington. By April, despite some occasional restrained rhetoric, both Trump and especially Secretary of State Pompeo seemed fully committed to using the virus to bludgeon China and attack the PRC regime and the CCP, at times employing insulting or inflammatory language.<sup>66</sup>

Authoritative Chinese sources generally did not respond in kind or directly to these attacks. Perhaps the closest harsh response from an authoritative Chinese source came from Hua Chunying, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson, who stated on April 2:

...the comments by these few US politicians are just shameless and morally repulsive. As we've repeatedly said, slanders, smears and blame games cannot make up for lost time. More lies will only waste more time and lead to more lives lost. ... It is immoral and inhumane to politicize public health. ...<sup>67</sup>

On May 24, Foreign Minister Wang Yi indirectly criticized Pompeo's suggestion that China should "pay" for inflicting COVID on the world by referring to lawsuits filed in the U.S. to compel Beijing to pay restitution for damages resulting from the virus as "ludicrous."<sup>68</sup> Other Chinese media, commentators, and analysts, however, were less reserved.<sup>69</sup>

Two final, especially notable (and related) Chinese reactions to U.S. criticisms concern the WHO and Taiwan. In the former case, Beijing was given considerable room to push back against Washington because of Trump's and Pompeo's attacks on the WHO and Trump's subsequent, truly ridiculous, decision to withdraw U.S. funding and support for the WHO for allegedly being too "China-centric."<sup>70</sup>

Several countries have indeed upheld the idea of looking into the WHO's early handling of COVID-19 and its relationship with Beijing, and the WHO has agreed to submit to an independent probe into its actions.<sup>71</sup> Yet Trump's reckless response has been rightly condemned by many nations, including U.S. allies, as excessive and destructive of attempts to combat the pandemic.<sup>72</sup> Even analysts in the State Department reportedly counseled against such action.<sup>73</sup>

As early as January 31, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson stated, in response to such "unfriendly US comments":

... China has been in close communication and cooperation with WHO. WHO experts recently conducted a field trip to Wuhan. Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus also visited China and discussed containment and mitigation of the 2019-nCoV with the Chinese side. He commends China's efforts and speaks highly of China's great contribution to the world by fighting against the novel coronavirus. China will continue working with WHO and other countries to safeguard regional and global public health security.<sup>74</sup>

Then, on May 18, in an apparent response to Trump's initial decision to suspend WHO funding, Xi Jinping stated the following in an address to the World Health Assembly (WHA):

All along, we have acted with openness, transparency and responsibility. We have provided information to the WHO and the relevant countries in the most timely fashion. ... We released the genome sequence at the earliest possible time. We have shared control and treatment experience with the world without reservation.<sup>75</sup>

Xi also praised the WHO and called for other countries to support it, stating:

Under the leadership of Dr Tedros, the WHO has made a major contribution in leading and advancing a global response to Covid-19. Its good work is applauded by the international community.<sup>76</sup>

However, on May 24, Foreign Minister Wang Yi took a more direct swipe at the U.S. (without naming it), stating:

Since the start of the outbreak, the WHO, under the leadership of Dr. Tedros, has followed science and given timely and professional advice at every turn. The WHO is an international body made up of 194 sovereign states. It does not serve any particular country, and it should not defer to any country that provides more funding than others.<sup>77</sup>

In contrast to authoritative Chinese sources, other observers have been less diplomatic in their condemnation of Trump's attacks on the WHO.<sup>78</sup>

Beijing's response to U.S criticisms of China for excluding Taiwan from even an observer status in the WHA has been both defensive and narrowly political. At the rhetorical level, Beijing has argued that Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen's refusal to uphold her predecessor's support for the so-called '92 Consensus (a concept that acknowledges some version of the one-China principle) served to invalidate the island's previous observer status in the WHA, thus justifying China's opposition to its participation.<sup>79</sup>

Foreign Minister Wang Yi has asserted that "...it's the Taiwan authorities who have turned a blind eye to their people's well-being, and it's them who have shut the door to cross-Strait consultation on Taiwan's external activities." Wang also criticized Washington, advising the United States to "...ditch its illusions and political calculations."<sup>80</sup>

In May, a Xinhua commentary was more pointed, asserting:

A handful of countries have claimed that Taiwan should be invited as an observer in the upcoming session of the World Health Assembly (WHA). Such a show of political maneuvering is nothing but a futile attempt. The insistence by these countries on discussing the Taiwan-related proposal is not about protecting the health and welfare of the people in Taiwan, but only aimed at pursuing selfish political interests by politicizing the health issue, hijacking the WHA and undermining the joint international response to COVID-19.<sup>81</sup>

Beyond this, Beijing has also successfully opposed U.S.-led efforts to push for Taiwan's participation in the WHA.<sup>82</sup> This apparently caused Pompeo to further his attacks on the WHO, accusing it of playing politics "while lives are at stake" and succumbing to Chinese pressure.<sup>83</sup>

Despite its victory, Beijing has appeared to many observers to place what it regards as a justified and legal effort to limit Taiwan's interactions with the international community over attempts to strengthen the fight against COVID-19 by learning from Taiwan's widely regarded successful anti-virus policies.<sup>84</sup> This has arguably weakened China's overall image not only in the U.S. but also around the world. Yet Washington's own reckless and irresponsible attacks on the WHO, along with some of its COVID-19-related attacks on China, have also certainly damaged America's image in the international community.<sup>85</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The international dimensions of China's COVID-19 policies and actions cover a wide spectrum, including various types of contributions as well as some significant missteps and errors. The former have, in many instances, benefited international efforts to combat the pandemic by providing valuable assistance and information. Yet, the latter have at times served not only to undermine such efforts but also to pose broader, negative consequences for China's image, its relations with many nations (in particular the U.S.), and the overall global order.

Perhaps the most negative international consequences of China's COVID-19 actions have been played out in its relations with the U.S. Washington bears the brunt of the blame for using the virus as a political weapon in support of its overall demonization of China. However, Beijing has also contributed to the negative impact of COVID-19 by lending credence to U.S. criticisms—for instance, by failing to be entirely transparent in its handling of the outbreak within China, by at times restricting access of U.S. and international scientists, and by engaging in strong-arm tactics toward other countries. These and other actions have not only undermined global efforts to combat the pandemic but have also added to the current free-fall in Sino-U.S. relations.

Of nearly equal concern are the apparent implications of China's propaganda and pressure campaign involving COVID-19 for its general image. During the past several decades, China has become a major international player with growing influence on a range of transnational security-related issues, from climate change and global financial stability to terrorism and pandemics. This places a major responsibility on China to show that its endless propaganda on

“win-win” outcomes and the building of a “global community” are credibly reflected in its actual foreign-policy behavior.

Since the coronavirus outbreak, China has been engaging in ham-handed efforts (often by younger, less-experienced officials and diplomats) to push back against perceived COVID-19–related slights by the U.S. and other countries, to arm-twist nations and organizations to stop criticizing Beijing or to shower praise on China, to use Beijing’s response to COVID-19 to show the superiority of China’s political system, and to export China’s social-control mechanisms. However, these are not reassuring in terms of producing “win-win” outcomes. Such actions simply play into a growing narrative in the U.S. and other countries that a stronger China will inevitably resort to coercive, authoritarian, and zero-sum measures to achieve its goals.

Whether or not Beijing recognizes this fact is unclear. Despite at least one internal study arguing that COVID-19 has prompted a major negative international backlash against China,<sup>86</sup> the Chinese leadership seems to believe that, on balance, its stance on COVID has advanced its stature at least in the developing world, while also showing that its system has certain major advantages over many democratic nations, including the U.S. This latter view has arguably served to reinforce Beijing’s overall foreign-policy argument that China is acting more responsibly on the world stage than is the United States under Trump.

The ongoing spread of COVID-19 around the world offers the Chinese leadership additional opportunities to build on the positive aspects of its work in combating the pandemic while reducing the negative aspects. In some ways, the policies of the current U.S. administration undoubtedly serve to obstruct such beneficial efforts. However, if Beijing truly hopes to advance its own interests as well as those of other nations, it needs to ignore Washington’s politically motivated attacks, discard the counter-productive “Wolf-Warrior” features of its own approach, and focus on convincingly showing other nations that its commitment to overcoming the pandemic through greater transparency, cooperation, and consultation is genuine.

### **About the Contributor**

Michael Swaine is a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and one of the most prominent American analysts in Chinese security studies. Formerly a senior policy analyst at the RAND Corporation, Swaine is a specialist in Chinese defense and foreign policy, U.S.-China relations, and East Asian international relations. He has authored and edited more than a dozen books and monographs and many journal articles and book chapters in these areas, directs several security-related projects with Chinese partners, and advises the U.S. government on Asian security issues. He received his doctorate in government from Harvard University.

(The author is deeply indebted to Sylvie Zhong for her essential assistance in the preparation of this essay.)

Photo Credit: VOA - <https://www.voachinese.com/a/news-japan-china-detention-20170712/3940888.html>, Public Domain,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=78311684>

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> “Full Text: Fighting COVID-19: China in Action,” Xinhua, June 7, 2020, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-06/07/c\\_139120424.htm?bsh\\_bid=5517099546](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-06/07/c_139120424.htm?bsh_bid=5517099546); Joshua Kurlantzick, “China Thinks the Pandemic Will Make it the World’s New Leader. It Won’t,” *The Washington Post*, May 22, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/china-uses-the-pandemic-to-claim-global-leadership/2020/05/21/9b045692-9ab4-11ea-ac72-3841fcc9b35f\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/china-uses-the-pandemic-to-claim-global-leadership/2020/05/21/9b045692-9ab4-11ea-ac72-3841fcc9b35f_story.html)

One remarkable *China Daily* article from February 20 boasts, “were it not for the unique institutional advantages of the Chinese system, the world might be battling a devastating pandemic.” See Renée DiResta, “For China, the ‘USA Virus’ is a Geopolitical Ploy,” *The Atlantic*, April 11, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/04/chinas-covid-19-conspiracy-theories/609772>

<sup>2</sup> See “Full Text: Fighting COVID-19: China in Action,” Xinhua, June 7, 2020, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-06/07/c\\_139120424.htm?bsh\\_bid=5517099546](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-06/07/c_139120424.htm?bsh_bid=5517099546)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Kirk Lancaster, Michael Rubin, and Mira Rapp-Hooper, “Mapping China’s Health Silk Road,” Council on Foreign Relations, April 10, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/mapping-chinas-health-silk-road>

<sup>5</sup> “Like the BRI itself, the Health Silk Road is not a well-defined term, and it is not clear what Chinese activities fall under its banner. According to state media, the Health Silk Road includes mutual medical aid between China and Italy to “battle the COVID-19 pneumonia together,” as well as any activity that might support China’s vision of “a new approach for perfecting global public health governance.” This can certainly be expanded to include China’s activities with other countries.” Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Stuart Lau, “Xi Jinping Defends China, WHO Coronavirus Response for First Time on World Stage,” *South China Morning Post*, May 18, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3084916/coronavirus-xi-jinping-defends-china-and-who-response-world>; “China Publishes Timeline on COVID-19 Information Sharing, Int’l Cooperation,” Xinhua, April 6, 2020, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/06/c\\_138951662.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/06/c_138951662.htm)

<sup>7</sup> He Yin, “China Wins Trust From World For Its Value Placed on People’s Lives,” *People’s Daily*, March 18, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0318/c90000-9669346.html>; He Yin, “China Injects Confidence Into Global Efforts to Fight Novel Coronavirus,” *People’s Daily*, March 16, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0316/c90000-9668423.html>; Ren Ping, “Join Hands to Safeguard Global Public Health Security,” *People’s Daily*, March 16, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0316/c90000-9668441.html>; He Yin, “Commentary: Epidemic Cannot Stop China’s Contribution to Global Economy,” *People’s Daily*, February 11, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0211/c90000-9656486.html>; Steven Lee Myers and Chris Buckley, “In China’s Crisis, Xi Sees a Crucible to Strengthen His Rule,” *The New York Times*, May 20, 2020, [https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/20/world/asia/coronavirus-china-xi-jinping.html?action=click&module=Spotlight&pgtype=Homepage](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/20/world/asia/coronavirus-china-xi-jinping.html?action=click&module=Spotlight&pgtype=Homepage;);

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<https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/28/asia/china-coronavirus-model-democracy-intl-hnk/index.html>; James Griffiths, “China's Model of Control Has Been Blamed For the Coronavirus Crisis, But For Some It's Looking Increasingly Attractive,” *CNN*, April 29, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/28/asia/china-coronavirus-model-democracy-intl-hnk/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> Erik Brattberg and Philippe Le Corre, “No, COVID-19 Isn't Turning Europe Pro-China (Yet),” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 25, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/15/no-covid-19-isn-t-turning-europe-pro-china-yet-pub-81571> ; <https://www.dw.com/en/how-chinese-propaganda-is-reframing-the-coronavirus-narrative/a-52796337>

<sup>9</sup> According to *The New York Times*, EU officials faced heavy pressure from Beijing because of this draft. Worried about the repercussions, they first delayed and then rewrote the document in ways that diluted the focus on China. See Matt Apuzzo, “Pressured by China, E.U. Softens Report on Covid-19 Disinformation,” *The New York Times*, April 24, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/24/world/europe/disinformation-china-eu-coronavirus.html>; <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6877118-INTERNAL-Coronavirus-3rd-Information-Environment.html>

<sup>10</sup> Joshua Kurlantzick, “China Thinks the Pandemic Will Make it the World’s New Leader. It Won’t,” *The Washington Post*, May 22, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/china-uses-the-pandemic-to-claim-global-leadership/2020/05/21/9b045692-9ab4-11ea-ac72-3841fcc9b35f\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/china-uses-the-pandemic-to-claim-global-leadership/2020/05/21/9b045692-9ab4-11ea-ac72-3841fcc9b35f_story.html)

<sup>11</sup> Edward Wong, Matthew Rosenberg, and Julian E. Barnes, “Chinese Agents Helped Spread Messages That Sowed Virus Panic in U.S., Officials Say,” *The Washington Post*, April 22, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/22/us/politics/coronavirus-china-disinformation.html>

<sup>12</sup> James Griffiths, “China's Model of Control Has Been Blamed for the Coronavirus Crisis, But For Some It's Looking Increasingly Attractive,” *CNN*, April 29, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/28/asia/china-coronavirus-model-democracy-intl-hnk/index.html>

<sup>13</sup> According to a Reuters report, in April an internal report by an intelligence-related Chinese think-tank stating “global anti-China sentiment is at its highest since the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown,” concluded that China was facing a negative international backlash as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. See Paul Haenle and Lucas Tcheyan, “How the World Is Responding to a Changing China,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 10, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/06/10/how-world-is-responding-to-changing-china-pub-82039>

<sup>14</sup> See Joshua Kurlantzick, “China Thinks the Pandemic Will Make It the World’s New Leader. It Won’t,” *The Washington Post*, May 22, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/china-uses-the-pandemic-to-claim-global-leadership/2020/05/21/9b045692-9ab4-11ea-ac72-3841fcc9b35f\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/china-uses-the-pandemic-to-claim-global-leadership/2020/05/21/9b045692-9ab4-11ea-ac72-3841fcc9b35f_story.html); David Hutt, Covid-19 Trouble Brewing Behind EU-China Ties,” *Asia Times*, April 29, 2020, <https://asiatimes.com/2020/04/covid-19-trouble-brewing-behind-eu-china-ties/>; Erik Brattberg and Philippe Le Corre, “No, COVID-19 Isn't Turning Europe Pro-China (Yet),” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 15, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/15/no-covid-19-isn-t-turning-europe-pro-china-yet-pub-81571> ; Laura Rosenberger, “China’s Coronavirus Information Offensive, Beijing Is Using New

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Methods to Spin the Pandemic to Its Advantage,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 22, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-04-22/chinas-coronavirus-information-offensive> ; Paul Haenle and Lucas Tcheyan, “How the World Is Responding to a Changing China,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 10, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/06/10/how-world-is-responding-to-changing-china-pub-82039>

<sup>15</sup> Stuart Lau, “European Union Backs International Inquiry into Origins of Coronavirus Outbreak,” *South China Morning Post*, May 5, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3082989/european-union-backs-international-inquiry-origins-coronavirus>

<sup>16</sup> See Charles Dunst, “Beijing’s Propaganda is Finding Few Takers,” *Foreign Policy*, April 20, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/20/coronavirus-propaganda-china-developing-world/>

<sup>17</sup> Other Chinese officials have also made similar statements.” See “China Publishes Timeline on COVID-19 Information Sharing, Int’l Cooperation,” Xinhua, April 6, 2020, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/06/c\\_138951662.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/06/c_138951662.htm)

<sup>18</sup> See “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying’s Regular Press Conference on March 30, 2020,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, March 30, 2020, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/t1763695.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1763695.shtml)

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Guzman, “More Than 100 Countries Demand Probe into Origins of Coronavirus in China,” *The Hill*, <https://thehill.com/changing-america/resilience/natural-disasters/498299-more-than-120-countries-back-probe-into>

<sup>20</sup> Stuart Lau, “Xi Jinping Defends China, WHO Coronavirus Response for First Time on World Stage,” *South China Morning Post*, May 18, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3084916/coronavirus-xi-jinping-defends-china-and-who-response-world>

<sup>21</sup> “State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets the Press,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, May 25, 2020, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjbxw/t1782369.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1782369.shtml)

<sup>22</sup> “Coronavirus: China Rejects Call For Probe Into Origins of Disease,” *BBC News*, April 24, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-52420536>

<sup>23</sup> See Matt Apuzzo, “Pressured by China, E.U. Softens Report on Covid-19 Disinformation,” *The New York Times*, April 24, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/24/world/europe/disinformation-china-eu-coronavirus.html>

<sup>24</sup> Paul Haenle and Lucas Tcheyan, “How the World Is Responding to a Changing China,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 10, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/06/10/how-world-is-responding-to-changing-china-pub-82039>

<sup>25</sup> Paul Karp and Helen Davidson, “China Bristles at Australia’s Call For Investigation Into Coronavirus Origins,” *The Guardian*, April 29, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/29/australia-defends-plan-to-investigate-china-over-covid-19-outbreak-as-row-deepens>



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<sup>26</sup> Ren Ping, “Join Hands To Safeguard Global Public Health Security,” *People’s Daily*, March 16, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0316/c90000-9668441.html>

Also see, for example, “Politicizing China’s Foreign Assistance Does No Good For Global Efforts Against COVID-19,” *People’s Daily*, April 1, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0401/c90000-9675037.html> ; “Efforts Must be Ensured to Keep Wheels of Multilateral Cooperation Turning,” *People’s Daily*, April 28, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0428/c90000-9684965.html> ; “China Wins Trust From World For Its Value Placed On People’s Lives,” *People’s Daily*, March 18, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0318/c90000-9669346.html> ; He Yin, “China Injects Confidence Into Global Efforts To Fight Novel Coronavirus,” *People’s Daily*, March 16, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0316/c90000-9668423.html>

<sup>27</sup> Curtis Stone, “Why Are Some Framing China’s Heroic Efforts as Inhumane?” *People’s Daily*, February 22, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0222/c90000-9660676.html>

<sup>28</sup> “Efforts Must Be Ensured To Keep Wheels of Multilateral Cooperation Turning,” *People’s Daily*, April 28, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0428/c90000-9684965.html> ; “China Wins Trust From World For Its Value Placed On People’s Lives,” *People’s Daily*, March 18, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0318/c90000-9669346.html>

<sup>29</sup> “Coronavirus Diplomacy Versus Iron-Clad Friendship,” *People’s Daily*, June 17, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0617/c90000-9701461.html>

<sup>30</sup> On March 12, Zhao tweeted an article by the website Global Research headlined “Further Evidence that the Virus Originated in the US.” The article has since been deleted. See Zhao Lijian, Twitter Post, 9:02 AM, March 12, 2020, <https://twitter.com/zlj517/status/1238269193427906560?lang=en>

About an hour later, Zhao said on Twitter “CDC Director Robert Redfield admitted some Americans who seemingly died from influenza were tested positive for novel #coronavirus in the posthumous diagnosis. ... He then said, “CDC was caught on the spot. When did patient zero begin in US? How many people are infected? What are the names of the hospitals? It might be US army that brought the epidemic to Wuhan. Be transparent! Make public your data! US owe us an explanation!” See Zhao Lijian, Twitter Post, 10:30 AM, March 12, 2020,

<https://twitter.com/zlj517/status/1238110160884625409?lang=en>; Zhao Lijian, Twitter Post, 10:37 AM, March 12, 2020, [https://twitter.com/zlj517/status/1238111898828066823?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1238111898828066823%7Ctwgr%5E&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cnn.com%2F2020%2F03%2F13%2Fasia%2Fchina-coronavirus-us-lijian-zhao-intl-hnk%2Findex.html](https://twitter.com/zlj517/status/1238111898828066823?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1238111898828066823%7Ctwgr%5E&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cnn.com%2F2020%2F03%2F13%2Fasia%2Fchina-coronavirus-us-lijian-zhao-intl-hnk%2Findex.html). Zhao Lijian is extremely popular among many Chinese netizens. See Bill Bishop, “A Split Over Zhao Lijian and His Claims, or a Shift in Messaging? Xi Busy with Foreign Outreach; Asymptomatic Cases,” *Sinocism*, March 23, 2020, <https://sinocism.com/p/a-split-over-zhao-lijian-and-his>. Also see Renée DiResta, “For China, the ‘USA Virus’ Is a Geopolitical Ploy,” *The Atlantic*, April 11, 2020,

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/04/chinas-covid-19-conspiracy-theories/609772/>

<sup>31</sup> Laura Rosenberger, “China’s Coronavirus Information Offensive: Beijing Is Using New Methods to Spin the Pandemic to Its Advantage,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 22, 2020,

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<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-04-22/chinas-coronavirus-information-offensive>

<sup>32</sup> “US Sparks Word War Against China On COVID-19,” *Global Times*, March 14, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1182511.shtml>

<sup>33</sup> Steven Jiang, “China Rejects ‘Unilateral Interpretation’ of Proposed WHO Resolution,” *CNN*, May 18, 2020, [https://edition.cnn.com/world/live-news/coronavirus-pandemic-05-18-20-intl/h\\_1a073cf579cd5d1bae66e3718c3f98f6](https://edition.cnn.com/world/live-news/coronavirus-pandemic-05-18-20-intl/h_1a073cf579cd5d1bae66e3718c3f98f6)

<sup>34</sup> Catherine Wong, “Too Soon, Too Loud: Chinese Foreign-Policy Advisers Tell ‘Wolf Warrior’ Diplomats To Tone It Down,” *South China Morning Post*, May 14, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3084274/too-soon-too-loud-chinese-foreign-policy-advisers-tell-wolf>

<sup>35</sup> According to *China Daily*, “in September 2019, President Xi Jinping ... urged officials, especially young officials, to embrace a fighting spirit and enhance their abilities so that they can fight and win in the face of risks and challenges now and in the future.” He said, “Fighting is an art, and officials must assume their due responsibilities and stay ever ready to fight and to win.” See Xu Wei, “Xi Calls For Fighting Spirit In Face Of Risks,” *China Daily*, September 4, 2020, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201909/04/WS5d6ed007a310cf3e35569835.html>

Yun Sun, a senior fellow at the Stimson Center, said that the rise of fiery ambassadors and mid-level diplomats, like Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian, was evidence that China’s policy change was being driven by its most senior leaders, Xi included. “Under Xi, the top-down approach is absolute, meaning that the leader’s decision is the order that has to be implemented. The diplomats don’t get to make decisions, only implement them,” Sun said.

“For their careers, it makes perfect sense for the diplomats to echo and magnify what they see as the leader’s wishes,” she said. See Shi Jiangtao, “Coronavirus: They’re Only Answering Xi Jinping’s Call but Are China’s ‘Wolf Warrior’ Diplomats Doing More Harm Than Good?” *South China Morning Post*, April 27, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3081592/coronavirus-theyre-only-answering-xi-jinpings-call-are-chinas>

<sup>36</sup> Cui Tiankai stated in an interview on March 22 that the theory that the virus had originated with the U.S. military was “crazy.” See “Rare Spat Between Chinese Diplomats Signals Split Over Trump,” *Bloomberg*, March 22, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-23/china-s-top-envoy-to-u-s-breaks-with-foreign-ministry-on-virus>

<sup>37</sup> See 财新网《王毅:只要美方愿意,中美任何问题都可以拿到桌面上谈》, July 9, 2020, <http://international.caixin.com/2020-07-09/101577371.html>; and “Update: Chinese FM Makes Suggestions On Bringing China-U.S. Relations Back To Right Track,” *Xinhua*, July 9, 2020, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-07/09/c\\_139200513.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-07/09/c_139200513.htm). In the latter source, Wang is cited as remarking: “Only communication can dispel falsehoods, and only dialogue can prevent miscalculation. ...As long as the U.S. side is ready, China can restore and restart the dialogue mechanisms at all levels and in all areas. All issues can be put on the table. All differences can be addressed properly through dialogue.”

<sup>38</sup> For those who urge diplomats to tone down their rhetoric, see RFI《施展: 战狼思维误中国 勿让国际社会不信任扩大》, April 18, 2020,

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<https://www.rfi.fr/cn/%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD/20200418-%E6%96%BD%E5%B1%95-%E6%88%98%E7%8B%BC%E6%80%9D%E7%BB%B4%E8%AF%AF%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD-%E5%8B%BF%E8%AE%A9%E5%9B%BD%E9%99%85%E7%A4%BE%E4%BC%9A%E4%B8%8D%E4%BF%A1%E4%BB%BB%E6%89%A9%E5%A4%A7>; 于潇清、汪伦宇《王毅首谈“战狼外交”，当下中国外交背后有怎样的逻辑》澎湃, May 25, [https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail\\_forward\\_7550262](https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_7550262)

For those who argue that the “wolf warrior” diplomacy is justifiable, see 红歌会《胡懋仁：“战狼式外交”，明批谁，又暗批谁？》April 23, 2020, <http://www.szhgh.com/Article/opinion/xuezhe/2020-04-23/231697.html>

<sup>39</sup> Dylan M.H Loh, “Over Here, Overbearing: The Origins of China’s ‘Wolf Warrior’ Style,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, June 12, 2020, <https://hongkongfp.com/2020/06/12/over-here-overbearing-the-origins-of-chinas-wolf-warrior-style-diplomacy/>

<sup>40</sup> For instance, on Twitter Hua Chunying, director general of the Foreign Ministry's Department of Information who boasts almost 500,000 followers, has frequently attacked her critics with sometimes harsh and straightforward language. See Hua Chunying, Twitter Post, August 6, 2020, <https://twitter.com/SpokespersonCHN/status/1291336540459737089>

<sup>41</sup> Sheena Chestnut Greitens and Julian Gewirtz, “China’s Troubling Vision for the Future of Public Health,” *Foreign Affairs*, July 10, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-07-10/chinas-troubling-vision-future-public-health>.

<sup>42</sup> 新华网《习近平主持专家学者座谈会强调 构建起强大的公共卫生体系 为维护人民健康提供有力保障 李克强王沪宁出席》，June 2, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-06/02/c\\_1126065865.html](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-06/02/c_1126065865.html). Also see 中央纪委国家监委网站《抗疫斗争是制度优势最直接的证明》，May 21, 2020, [http://www.ccdi.gov.cn/lsw/h/lilun/202005/t20200521\\_217670.html](http://www.ccdi.gov.cn/lsw/h/lilun/202005/t20200521_217670.html).

<sup>43</sup> 新华网《新华网评：这份“来之不易”彰显中国制度优势》，May 11, 2020, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/xxjxs/2020-05/11/c\\_1125963165.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/xxjxs/2020-05/11/c_1125963165.htm).

<sup>44</sup> 光明日报《举国抗疫彰显中国政治制度优势》，July 10, 2020, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-07/10/c\\_1126219676.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-07/10/c_1126219676.htm)

<sup>45</sup> Trump publicly praised China’s handling of the coronavirus well over a dozen times between January 29 and February 29. See “Remarks by President Trump Before Marine One Departure,” The White House, February 7, 2020, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-marine-one-departure-82/>; “CNBC Transcript: President Donald Trump Sits Down With CNBC’s Joe Kernen at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland,” *CNBC News*, January 22, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/01/22/cnbc-transcript-president-donald-trump-sits-down-with-cnbc-joe-kernen-at-the-world-economic-forum-in-davos-switzerland.html>; Donald J. Trump, Twitter Post, January 24, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1220818115354923009?lang=en>

<sup>46</sup> Shane Harris et al., “U.S. Intelligence Reports From January and February Warned About a Likely Pandemic,” *The Washington Post*, March 20, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/us-intelligence-reports-from-january-and-february-warned-about-a-likely-pandemic/2020/03/20/299d8cda-6ad5-11ea-b5f1->

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[a5a804158597\\_story.html](#) ; Eric Lipton, “He Could Have Seen What Was Coming: Behind Trump’s Failure on the Virus,” *The New York Times*, April 11, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/11/us/politics/coronavirus-trump-response.html>

<sup>47</sup> Darlene Superville and Christopher Rugaber, “Trump Announces Signing Date for ‘Phase One’ China Trade Deal,” *The Diplomat*, January 1, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/trump-announces-signing-date-for-phase-one-china-trade-deal/>

<sup>48</sup> President Trump praised President Xi several times in the latter half of 2019, over issues including the protests in Hong Kong and the U.S.-China trade talks. See Chris Megerian, “Trump Praises Chinese Leader, Not Hong Kong Protesters Seeking Democratic Reforms,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2019-08-15/trump-praises-chinese-leader-not-hong-kong-protesters>.

<sup>49</sup> On January 28, Alex Azar, secretary of Health and Human Services, said that the Chinese had refused continued offers from the U.S. to send CDC officials to the country to help with the response to the outbreak. Lev Fatcher, “Federal Officials Tell China: Let U.S. Health Workers Enter to Help Respond to Coronavirus,” *STAT*, January 28, 2020, <https://www.statnews.com/2020/01/28/federal-officials-china-health-workers-enter-coronavirus/>

Also, U.S. officials had continued to urge more transparency from China as the disease spread.

<sup>50</sup> In response to this, China’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying commented, “... some countries, the US in particular, have inappropriately overreacted, which certainly runs counter to WHO advice.” See “Trump: US Has ‘Shut Down’ Coronavirus Coming in From China,” *VOA News*, February 2, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/science-health/coronavirus-outbreak/trump-us-has-shut-down-coronavirus-coming-china>; “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying’s Daily Briefing Online on February 3, 2020,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, February 3, 2020, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/t1739548.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1739548.shtml)

<sup>51</sup> For instance, on January 30, Pompeo declared the Chinese Communist Party was “the central threat of our times.” In a speech on February 8 to the National Governors Association, Pompeo said China was pursuing a policy of exploiting U.S. freedoms to “gain advantage over us at the federal level, the state level and the local level.” “When it comes to doing business, I’m asking you to adopt a cautious mindset. In the words of President Reagan, when you are approached for introduction or a connection to a deal, ‘trust but verify,’” he told the governors. David Brunnstrom, “Pompeo Urges U.S. State Governors To Be Cautious In Business With China,” *Reuters*, February 8, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-pompeo/pompeo-urges-u-s-state-governors-to-be-cautious-in-business-with-china-idUSKBN2020R8>; Marc Santora, “Pompeo Calls China’s Ruling Party ‘Central Threat of Our Times,’” *The New York Times*, January 30, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/30/world/europe/pompeo-uk-china-huawei.html>

<sup>52</sup> Katie Rogers, “Politicians’ Use of ‘Wuhan Virus’ Starts a Debate Health Experts Wanted to Avoid,” *The New York Times*, March 10, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/10/us/politics/wuhan-virus.html> Bhavan Jaipragas, “Coronavirus: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo Switches Disease Name to ‘Wuhan Virus’ as it Spreads in the US,” *South China Morning Post*, March 7, 2020,

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<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3074050/coronavirus-us-secretary-state-mike-pompeos-wuhan-virus>

<sup>53</sup> See Dan Mangan, “Trump Blames China For Coronavirus Pandemic: ‘The World Is Paying a Very Big Price for What They Did’,” *CNBC News*, March 19, 2020, <https://www.cbc.com/2020/03/19/coronavirus-outbreak-trump-blames-china-for-virus-again.html>; Franco Ordonez, “U.S., China Accuse Each Other of Mishandling COVID-19 Outbreak,” *NPR News*, March 23, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/23/820009370/u-s-china-accuse-each-other-of-mishandling-covid-19-outbreak>; Lily Kuo, “Coronavirus Outbreak: Senior US Official Accuses China of Lack of Transparency,” *The Guardian*, February 14, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/14/coronavirus-china-not-being-honest-says-us-as-wartime-measures-widened>; Dave Lawler, “Robert O'Brien: China's Coronavirus Cover-Up ‘Cost the World’ Two Months,” *AXIOS*, March 11, 2020, <https://www.axios.com/china-coronavirus-cover-up-wuhan-robert-obrien-7febd3fb-533c-4df6-bd39-ac5c0ae1c284.html>; Tim Pearce, “Mike Pompeo Accuses China and Iran of Coronavirus Cover-Up,” *Washington Examiner*, February 25, 2020, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/mike-pompeo-accuses-china-and-iran-of-coronavirus-cover-up>; Adam Taylor, “What Caused the Coronavirus? A Skeptical Take on the Theories About the Outbreak’s Chinese Origin,” *The Washington Post*, April 16, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/04/16/what-caused-coronavirus-skeptical-take-theories-about-outbreaks-chinese-origin/>

<sup>54</sup> “Pompeo Blasts China, Iran for Response to Virus Outbreak,” *VOA*, February 25, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/science-health/coronavirus-outbreak/pompeo-blasts-china-iran-response-virus-outbreak>; Olivia Beavers, “Pompeo Says China, Russia, Iran Are Spreading Disinformation About Coronavirus,” *The Hill*, March 20, 2020, <https://thehill.com/policy/national-security/488659-pompeo-says-china-russia-iran-are-spreading-disinformation-about>; Mikio Sugeno, “Pompeo Blasts China Over Coronavirus ‘Disinformation,’” *Nikkei Asian Review*, March 31, 2020, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Interview/Pompeo-blasts-China-over-coronavirus-disinformation>

<sup>55</sup> They certainly could have been responding to the desire under the CCP system for lower-level officials not to send bad news upward, lest they open themselves to criticism. But a host of other explanations might also have been at work as well.

<sup>56</sup> Scientists and U.S. intelligence agencies have strongly argued that it was naturally occurring and not an artificially constructed bioweapon. See “Intelligence Community Statement on Origins of COVID-19,” Office of the Director of National Intelligence, April 30, 2020, <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/press-releases/item/2112-intelligence-community-statement-on-origins-of-covid-19>; Adam Taylor, “What Caused the Coronavirus? A Skeptical Take on The Theories About The Outbreak’s Chinese Origin,” *The Washington Post*, April 16, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/04/16/what-caused-coronavirus-skeptical-take-theories-about-outbreaks-chinese-origin/>; Adam Taylor, “What Caused the Coronavirus? A Skeptical Take on the Theories About the Outbreak’s Chinese Origin,” *The Washington Post*, April 26, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/04/16/what-caused-coronavirus-skeptical-take-theories-about-outbreaks-chinese-origin/>;

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence, in a rare public statement, on April 30 concurred “with the wide scientific consensus that the COVID-19 virus was not man-made or genetically modified.” Jeff Selden, “Coronavirus: Not Man-Made, US Intelligence Concludes,”

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May 1, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/coronavirus-not-man-made-us-intelligence-concludes> Jeanna Bryner, “The Coronavirus Was Not Engineered in A Lab. Here's How We Know,” *LiveScience*, March 21, 2020, <https://www.livescience.com/coronavirus-not-human-made-in-lab.html>; Justin Ling, “Key U.S. Allies Skeptical of Trump’s Coronavirus Lab Leak Claims,” *Foreign Policy*, May 4, 2020, [https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/04/coronavirus-lab-leak-trump-five-eyes/?utm\\_source=PostUp&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=22047&utm\\_term=China%20Brief%20OC&?tpcc=22047](https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/04/coronavirus-lab-leak-trump-five-eyes/?utm_source=PostUp&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=22047&utm_term=China%20Brief%20OC&?tpcc=22047)

<sup>57</sup> See Donald G. McNeil Jr. and Zolan Kanno-Youngs, “C.D.C. and W.H.O. Offers to Help China Have Been Ignored for Weeks,” *The New York Times*, February 7, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/07/health/cdc-coronavirus-china.html>; Katrina Manson, “Pompeo Accuses China of Destroying Coronavirus Samples,” *Financial Times*, April 22, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/09eda3e4-3fe2-4099-9ff5-c1cf4b50bdf4>; Margaret Brennan, “State Department Says Coronavirus Samples From China ‘Critical’ For Developing Vaccine; Experts Say That's Not The Case,” *CBS News*, April 27, 2020, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/state-department-says-coronavirus-samples-from-china-critical-for-developing-vaccine-experts-say-thats-not-the-case/>; “Trump Says ‘China-Centric’ WHO ‘Really Blew It’ On Coronavirus,” Reuters, April 7, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-who/trump-says-who-is-china-centric-really-blew-it-on-coronavirus-idUSKBN21P2E1>; Francesca Regalado and Alex Fang, “US Slams WHO and China For Excluding Taiwan From Key Meeting,” *Nikkei Asian Review*, May 18, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Coronavirus/US-slams-WHO-and-China-for-excluding-Taiwan-from-key-meeting> Colum Lynch, “China Launches Counterattack Against U.S. Effort to Restore Taiwan’s Status at WHO,” *Foreign Policy*, May 18, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/15/china-taiwan-united-states-world-health-organization-observer/>

<sup>58</sup> Trump suggested this on April 19, remarking “if it was a mistake, a mistake is a mistake. But if they were knowingly responsible, yeah, I mean, then, sure, there should be consequences. . . .” See Jeff Mason and Matt Spetalnick, “Trump Warns China Could Face Consequences For Virus Outbreak,” Reuters, April 18, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-trump-china/trump-warns-china-could-face-consequences-for-virus-outbreak-idUSKBN2200XZ>

On April 27, Trump suggested at a White House news conference that the United States will seek hundreds of billions of dollars in damages from China. The President also said he was considering additional measures to punish China, but he did not specify what they were. William Goldschlag and Dan Janison, “Trump Seeks Way To Make China Pay For Pandemic, Somehow,” *News Day*, May 1, 2020, <https://www.newsday.com/long-island/politics/trump-coronavirus-china-pence-flynn-biden-vaccine-unemployment-1.44292846>

<sup>59</sup> “After the Beijing visit (by Director-General Tedros Adhanom at end January), WHO said in a statement that it appreciated ‘especially the commitment from the top leadership, and the transparency they have demonstrated.’

See Hinnerk Feldwisch-Drentrup, “How WHO Became China’s Coronavirus Accomplice,” *Foreign Policy*, April 2, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/02/china-coronavirus-who-health-soft-power/>

However, there were also reports that the WHO struggled to get needed information from China during the critical early days of the coronavirus pandemic.

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According to *The Diplomat*, "... as Trump declared, WHO was kept in the dark as China gave it the minimal information required by law. However, the agency did try to portray China in the best light, likely as a means to secure more information. And WHO experts genuinely thought Chinese scientists had done 'a very good job' in detecting and decoding the virus, despite the lack of transparency from Chinese officials." See Lily Kuo, "China Withheld Data on Coronavirus From WHO, Recordings Reveal," *The Guardian*, June 2, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/02/china-withheld-data-coronavirus-world-health-organization-recordings-reveal>; "China Delayed Releasing Coronavirus Info, Frustrating WHO," *The Diplomat*, June 2, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/china-delayed-releasing-coronavirus-info-frustrating-who/>

<sup>60</sup> It was reported that the Senate Republican candidates were given advice to attack China aggressively. Democrats too have not held back on issues related to China. The current administration's handling of the pandemic and the U.S.-China issue will become hot topics for debate and discussion during the elections. See Yilun Zhang, "COVID-19's Fallout—An Accelerator of Renewed U.S.-China Great Power Strategic Competition," Institute for China-America Studies, May 19, 2020, <https://chinaus-icas.org/primer/covid-19s-fallout/>

<sup>61</sup> President Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping discussed the global response to the novel coronavirus in a phone call in which the two reportedly discussed easing tensions and pledged cooperation in the fight against the pandemic. In a tweet, Trump concluded "We are working closely together. Much respect!" See "In Phone Call, Trump And China's President Discuss Coronavirus Pandemic," *NPR*, March 27, <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/03/27/822380853/in-phone-call-trump-xi-discuss-coronavirus-pandemic>

<sup>62</sup> "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Remarks on US Comments Regarding the Pneumonia Outbreak," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, February 4, 2020, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2535\\_665405/t1739985.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2535_665405/t1739985.shtml)

<sup>63</sup> Philip Bump, "The Three Phases of Trump's Insistence on Pointing Out That the Coronavirus Originated in China," *The Washington Post*, March 20, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/03/20/three-phases-trumps-insistence-pointing-out-that-coronavirus-originated-china/>

Moreover, Trump's action probably in turn gave Pompeo license to speak on March 30 about "striking back" against China for publicizing "false" information about the novel coronavirus. "Secretary Pompeo's Call with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg," U.S. Department of State, March 30, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-pompeos-call-with-nato-secretary-general-jens-stoltenberg-2/>

<sup>64</sup> See Huang Lanlan, "Young Chinese Idolize FM Spokespersons, Welcome 'Wolf Warrior' Diplomats," *Global Times*, May 21, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1189118.shtml>

<sup>65</sup> Cui showed his moderation in April by counseling both Washington and Beijing to think about "where our true common interests lie" and "how should we define a relationship," as COVID-19 disrupts global politics and relations between the world's two largest economies. See Wang Zili and Han Wei, "U.S. and China Should Reboot Relationship Amid Pandemic, Ambassador Says," *Caixin*, April 23, <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2020-04-23/us-and-china-should-reboot-relationship-amid-pandemic-ambassador-says-101545958.html>

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<sup>66</sup> On April 24, Pompeo said that China "had caused an enormous amount of pain, loss of life," and that the "Chinese Communist Party will pay a price," while also stating that there was "enormous evidence" that the virus escaped from a Wuhan lab. On May 3, Pompeo said that China "has a history of infecting the world."

See Dylan Wells and Kylie Atwood, "Pompeo Says China 'Caused An Enormous Amount Of Pain, Loss of Life,' and 'Chinese Communist Party Will Pay A Price,'" *CNN*, April 25, [https://edition.cnn.com/world/live-news/coronavirus-pandemic-04-24-20-intl/h\\_05246e4e5b879b16869e4a7c47702cfe](https://edition.cnn.com/world/live-news/coronavirus-pandemic-04-24-20-intl/h_05246e4e5b879b16869e4a7c47702cfe); Secretary Pompeo, Twitter Post, May 3, 2020, <https://twitter.com/secpompeo/status/1257022823882727425?lang=en>

Ironically, as Pompeo intensified his claim that COVID-19 had leaked from a lab, both U.S. intelligence agencies and U.S. allies were openly cautioning against or expressing deep skepticism about the charge. For example, see Justin Ling, "Key U.S. Allies Skeptical of Trump's Coronavirus Lab Leak Claims," *Foreign Policy*, May 4, 2020 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/04/coronavirus-lab-leak-trump-five-eyes/>; Paul Heer, "America's Coronavirus Blame Game Must End," *The National Interest*, May 13, 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/america%E2%80%99s-coronavirus-blame-game-must-end-153856>

<sup>67</sup> "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference on April 2, 2020," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, April 2, 2020, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/t1765251.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1765251.shtml)

<sup>68</sup> Wang added, "the attempts to file frivolous lawsuits is a shoddy one, as it has zero basis in fact, law or international precedence. Lu Zhenhua, "Foreign Minister Talks Tough on U.S., Defends WHO, Promotes EU Cooperation," *Caixin*, May 25, 2020, <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2020-05-25/foreign-minister-talks-tough-on-us-defends-who-promotes-eu-cooperation-101558733.html> Zhong Sheng (a pen name often used by *People's Daily* to express views on foreign policy) raged on April 27 that Pompeo not only spreads a "political virus" everywhere but also "cannot shirk responsibilities for his crime (罪责难逃)."

<sup>69</sup> For other examples, see "Trump's Vicious Intentions of Demonizing China Must Be Condemned," *People's Daily*, June 3, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0603/c90000-9697088.html> ; "U.S. Politicians' Absurd Act of Scapegoating China Won't Change Facts," *People's Daily*, June 6, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0606/c90000-9698077.html> ; "Pompeo's Despicable Buck-Passing Trick, Lies Bound to Come to Light," *People's Daily*, June 12; Zhong Sheng, "Pompeo's Despicable Buck-Passing Trick, Lies Bound To Come To Light," *People's Daily*, June 12, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0612/c90000-9699939.html> ; Huang Jin, "Lawsuits Filed In U.S. Courts Against China Over COVID-19 Violate International Law," *People's Daily*, May 29, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0529/c90000-9695720.html> ; Zhong Sheng, "How Much Longer Will Pompeo's Awkward Show Last?" *People's Daily*, April 30, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0430/c90000-9685960.html> ; "Is Pompeo Planning to 'Make America Great Again' By Bullying?" *People's Daily*, April 28, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0428/c90000-9685144.html>

<sup>70</sup> "Coronavirus: Trump Attacks 'China-Centric' WHO Over Global Pandemic," *BBC News*, April 8, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52213439>



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<sup>71</sup> “The ‘comprehensive evaluation,’ sought by a coalition of African, European and other countries, is intended to review ‘lessons learned’ from WHO’s coordination of the global response to COVID-19, but it will stop short of looking into contentious issues such as the origins of the new coronavirus.” See “WHO Agrees to Independent Investigation into Its Coronavirus Response,” *MarketWatch*, May 18, 2020, <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/who-agrees-to-independent-investigation-into-its-coronavirus-response-2020-05-18>

<sup>72</sup> “Many of Washington’s allies have said that a cut in U.S. funding for WHO would be reckless, weakening the world’s leading health agency in the middle of a pandemic and jeopardizing a whole set of programs that fight polio, HIV/AIDS, and other infectious diseases. See Colum Lynch, “WHO Becomes Battleground as Trump Chooses Pandemic Confrontation Over Cooperation,” *Foreign Policy*, April 29, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/29/world-health-organization-who-battleground-trump-taiwan-china/>

<sup>73</sup> An internal State Department memo, leaked to ProPublica, urged the President “not to halt funding the WHO because doing so undermines the U.S. ability to address global urgent needs and the U.S. role as a global health leader.” See Yeganeh Torbati, “Trump Administration Officials Warned Against Halting Funding to WHO, Leaked Memo Shows,” *ProPublica*, April 15, 2020, <https://www.propublica.org/article/trump-administration-officials-warned-against-halting-funding-to-who-leaked-memo-shows>

Moreover, in a detailed examination of WHO’s behavior, *The New York Times* concluded that “...the W.H.O. acted with greater foresight and speed than many national governments, and more than it had shown in previous epidemics.” See Richard Pérez-Peña and Donald G. McNeil Jr., “W.H.O., Now Trump’s Scapegoat, Warned About Coronavirus Early and Often,” *The New York Times*, May 7, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/16/health/WHO-Trump-coronavirus.html?referringSource=articleShare>

<sup>74</sup> “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying’s Remarks on WHO Declaring Pneumonia Outbreak Caused by Novel Coronavirus Public Health Emergency of International Concern,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, January 31, 2020, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2535\\_665405/t1737676.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2535_665405/t1737676.shtml)

<sup>75</sup> Stuart Lau, “Xi Jinping Defends China, WHO Coronavirus Response For First Time On World Stage,” *South China Morning Post*, May 18, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3084916/coronavirus-xi-jinping-defends-china-and-who-response-world>

According to the Chinese state media Xinhuanet, Michael Ryan, executive director of the WHO health emergencies program, stated that the Chinese government actively cooperated with the WHO and showed a high level of transparency. See “China Publishes Timeline on COVID-19 Information Sharing, Int’l Cooperation,” Xinhua, April 6, 2020, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/06/c\\_138951662.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/06/c_138951662.htm)

<sup>76</sup> Xi Jinping, “Fighting COVID-19 Through Solidarity and Cooperation Building a Global Community of Health for All,” May 18, 2020, website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1780221.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1780221.shtml)

<sup>77</sup> Wang also asserted that the WHO needs to: “...improve mechanisms and rules so as to remove the interference of political factors, value science and professional views, and preclude politicization and stigmatization.” “State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets the

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Press,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, May 25, 2020, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjbxw/t1782369.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1782369.shtml)

<sup>78</sup> “WHO Will Remain Unaffected Whether U.S. in or Out,” *People’s Daily*, May 21, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0521/c90000-9692536.html> “U.S. Threats to Withdraw from WHO Are Unrealistic,” *People’s Daily*, May 21, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0521/c90000-9692710.html>; Yu Yicong, “U.S. Shirks Responsibilities By Scapegoating WHO,” *People’s Daily*, April 14, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0414/c90000-9679320.html>

<sup>79</sup> “On the premise of the one-China principle, China's central government has made proper arrangements for Taiwan's participation in the global health affairs, to ensure its prompt and effective responses to local and global public health incidents,” *China Daily*, May 14, 2020, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202005/14/WS5ebd2775a310a8b241155c26.html> ; Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on May 24 reiterated China’s stance on the reunification of the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, noting that it is the trend of history which no individual or force can stop. “We have closely followed the COVID-19 developments in Taiwan, and we send our best wishes for the health of our Taiwan compatriots,” said Wang. Wang also criticized the United States for meddling with Taiwan question, advising the United States to ditch its illusions and political calculations. “China Reiterates Firm Stance on Taiwan-Related Issues,” May 24, 2020 <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0524/c90000-9693874.html>

<sup>80</sup> “State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets the Press,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, May 24, 2020, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1782262.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1782262.shtml)

<sup>81</sup> In late April, Beijing pressured governments to co-sign a letter urging WHO Director-general Tedros to not raise the issue of Taiwan’s admission to a major May WHA virtual meeting. As a result, Taipei was not issued an invitation to the meeting. “Commentary: Taiwan-Related Proposal to WHA a Futile Political Show,” May 18, 2020, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/18/c\\_139066718.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/18/c_139066718.htm)

<sup>82</sup> Colum Lynch, “China Launches Counterattack Against U.S. Effort to Restore Taiwan’s Status at WHO,” *Foreign Policy*, May 15, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/15/china-taiwan- united-states-world-health-organization-observer/>

<sup>83</sup> “Taiwan to Postpone WHO Membership Bid Due to Pandemic,” *Taiwan News*, May 19, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/taiwan-to-postpone-who-membership-bid-due-to-pandemic/a-53480455>

<sup>84</sup> For example, a report published by the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission suggests that Beijing’s influence within the WHO and its pressure on the UN agency to exclude Taiwan undermine global health. Anastasya Lloyd-Damnjanovic, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, May 12, 2020, [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-05/Beijings\\_Deadly\\_Game\\_Excluding\\_Taiwan\\_from\\_WHO\\_during\\_COVID-19\\_Pandemic.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-05/Beijings_Deadly_Game_Excluding_Taiwan_from_WHO_during_COVID-19_Pandemic.pdf)

<sup>85</sup> Ilona Kickbusch, a German political scientist who previously worked for the WHO, said the U.S. attack on the health agency had put off its negotiating partners, who feel Washington is not acting in good faith. “It’s over, the U.S. has given up its leadership position, and people don’t trust them anymore,” she said. See Colum Lynch, “WHO Becomes Battleground as Trump Chooses Pandemic Confrontation Over Cooperation,” *Foreign Policy*, April 29, 2020,

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<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/29/world-health-organization-who-battleground-trump-taiwan-china/>

<sup>86</sup> According to a Reuters report, in April an internal report by an intelligence-related Chinese think-tank concluded that China was facing a negative international backlash as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, stating “global anti-China sentiment is at its highest since the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown.” See Paul Haenle and Lucas Tcheyan, “How the World Is Responding to a Changing China,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 10, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/06/10/how-world-is-responding-to-changing-china-pub-82039>