

# Sky's 'lab leak' propaganda hits peak stupid

29 Sept.—The louder the Australian mainstream demonisation of China becomes, the dumber it gets. Sky News's 20 February "documentary" *What Really Happened in Wuhan*, the Murdoch media's latest go at whipping up hatred of China by blaming it for the COVID-19 pandemic, may (we hope) be the high-water mark of both. As with previous instalments, the "evidence" advanced to support that hypothesis is not coherent, but rather a classic propagandist's brew of lies, halftruths, and deliberately misconstrued facts that when viewed in their proper context tend to refute the assertions they are held to support. But if it ever was, presenting a sound argument is no longer the point. The only real purpose is to reinforce among an already heavily propagandised target audience the false presumption that "Communist China" is a hostile, alien force, possessed of an implacable hatred of so-called Western liberal democracy and bent upon world domination, which Australia must join our so-called ally the United States in countering by any and all means necessary.



Top: In the most farcical part of the documentary, Sharri Markson interviewed Donald Trump, and took seriously his spur-of-the-moment conjecture, as if it was evidence. Below: Chinese dissident Wei Jingsheng, who hasn't been in China for 24 years, claimed to know in November 2019 that there was an outbreak, specifically of a coronavirus. Photos: Screenshots

Sky's *What Really Happened in Wuhan* was presented by reporter Sharri Markson, based upon interviews she conducted for her forthcoming book of the same title. Since May 2020<sup>1</sup> Markson has produced an intermittent drip-feed of articles, in her capacity as Sydney *Telegraph* political editor and then "investigations writer" at the *Australian* (both owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, as is Sky News), promoting the so-called "lab leak hypothesis". This holds that Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2), the virus that causes COVID-19, was engineered in and escaped from China's premier infectious diseases laboratory at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV). As the *Australian Alert Service* has reported, from the outset Markson's evidence has consisted entirely of material attributed to unnamed "Western" intelligence sources, which in every case has turned out to have been misleadingly re-packaged information already in the public domain. In May of this year Markson was widely ridiculed after her purportedly exclusive report that Chinese military and public health officials had been working on weaponising coronaviruses since 2015 was quickly debunked, including by some of the very "experts" she had cited therein,

as being based on a book that had been freely available on the internet for years, which speculated that the 2002 SARS coronavirus might have originated as a US bioweapon *against China*.<sup>2</sup> The AAS questioned at the time whether it were more likely that everything about her article was deliberately misleading, or just that Ms Markson couldn't "investigate" her way out of a telephone booth. The even lower intellectual standard of her documentary suggests the latter.

## Papering over the cracks

In essence Markson's documentary is a one-hour summary of her series of articles on the same subject; but it includes several departures from its source material which, like many long-running serial works of fiction, has in the meantime developed several plot holes that want papering over. In literature and television this is known as "retroactive continuity". In journalism, it is usually called lying to cover one's posterior, though perhaps Markson has simply forgotten; it's been a while, after all.



For example, Markson's earlier articles claimed, on the sayso of unnamed US intelligence sources and "leaked" documents, that the virus had escaped the WIV in November 2019 by infecting several employees who were subsequently hospitalised, having presumably passed it on to persons unknown in the meantime, thus sparking the first recorded outbreak the following month. In the meantime, however, the US government has apparently stopped denying—though nor has it officially admitted—that multiple people including several of its own personnel became ill with what is retrospectively thought to be COVID-19 after attending the 2019 World Military Games, a quadrennial event akin to the Olympics, held at Wuhan that October. So on 15 September Markson published yet another

exclusive in the *Australian* in which she told how Wei Jingsheng, whom she described as “China’s most famous defector” and “the father of [its] democracy movement”, had claimed in an interview for her book that he had “warned US intelligence agencies a coronavirus was spreading in Wuhan in November 2019—six weeks before China admitted there was an outbreak”, which he had “first heard of ... at the time of the World Military Games”. According to the article, Wei told Markson that the Chinese government had “released” the virus, and was upset that US intelligence did not act on his warnings.

It is however never properly explained how Wei, a former US-backed *agent provocateur* who spent 18 years in jail for sedition before being deported (not “defecting”) to the USA in 1997 and has not set foot in China since, knew or could have known not only that a novel virus, but specifically a coronavirus, was “released” in Wuhan the Military Games. The article does not say, while the documentary gives two conflicting explanations: US-based exiled Chinese “human rights activist” Dimon Liu says Wei told her he had heard it from members of the Chinese-American diaspora community, while Wei himself tells Markson (via a translator) that he was informed by his “contacts high in the Communist Party”. Then in a 29 September *Australian* article, having presumably been made aware of the discrepancy in her timeline, Markson simply acknowledges that contrary to her previous assertion that the WIV employees had been hospitalised in November 2019, “Former [US] director of national intelligence John Ratcliffe said they actually fell sick a month before”—with no attempt to explain the error, despite her earlier report having supposedly been based on exactly the same intelligence.

The abysmal level of intellectual rigour Markson brings to her journalism is exemplified by her response to a throwaway remark by former US President Donald Trump, whom she also interviewed. Asked by Markson whether he “[thought] this was an accidental, or deliberate, release of COVID-19 from China”, Trump replied that it was “probably” an accident. “I think it was incompetence: A scientist walked out and had lunch outside in a park or something, with a girlfriend; and he had it, then she had it.” Even in writing, let alone given the manner in which Trump said it, it is entirely obvious that this was a hypothetical scenario invented on the spur of the moment. Obvious, that is, to everyone but Markson, who asked excitedly: “Was that ‘patient zero’? That scientist from the lab?”

“I don’t know if that’s ‘patient zero’ or patient something else”, Trump replied. “That’s one theory.” Markson, however, determinedly missed the point, demanding: “Do you know how he was infected?” as though she had achieved a scoop. That this painful exchange should have made it into the finished product boggles the mind.

## Meanwhile in the real world



Former MI6 chief Sir Richard Dearlove (left) and former CIA director and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (right), were Markson’s main sources. Both represent the agencies that invented the lie of weapons of mass destruction, in Dearlove’s case when he was in charge. Photos: Screenshots

To any moderately open-minded person in possession of a few facts, meanwhile, the lab leak hypothesis should have bit the dust long since. Contrary to Trump and others’ assertions of hospitalised WIV employees, Australian virologist Dr Danielle Anderson, who was working at the WIV’s new biosecurity level 4 lab (BSL-4, the highest internationally standardised safety level) during the entire period in which Markson’s sources allege the virus escaped, told the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 28 June that none of her colleagues had had so much as a cold. “Daily visits for a period in late 2019 put her in close proximity to many others working at the [WIV]”, *SMH* reported. “She was part of a group that gathered each morning at the Chinese Academy of Sciences to catch a bus that shuttled them to the institute about 30 kilometres away. ... ‘We went to dinners together, lunches, we saw each other outside of the lab’, she says. ... Anderson says no one she knew at the Wuhan institute was ill towards the end of 2019. Moreover, there is a procedure for reporting symptoms that correspond with the pathogens handled in high-risk containment labs. ‘If people were sick, I assume that I would have been sick—and I wasn’t’, she says.” Dr Anderson left Wuhan for Singapore in late November 2019, to take up a job at a local University. “I was tested for coronavirus in Singapore before I was vaccinated”, she told *SMH*, “and had never had it.”

Moreover, antibodies to SARS-CoV-2 discovered in stored blood samples by the Milan Institute for

Tumour Diseases and the university of Siena show that the virus was *already present in Italy in September of 2019*, long before either time given for the alleged leak (or “release”) from the WIV, while viral fragments found in wastewater samples suggest it had reached Spain a full six months earlier. And on 24 September *Nature* magazine [reported](#) that “Scientists have found three viruses in bats in Laos that are more similar to SARS-CoV-2 than any known viruses ... [and which] contain receptor binding domains that are almost identical to that of SARS-CoV-2, and can therefore infect human cells.” The article continues: “‘When SARS-CoV-2 was first sequenced, the receptor binding domain didn’t really look like anything we’d seen before’, says Edward Holmes, a virologist at the University of Sydney in Australia. This caused some people to speculate that the virus had been created in a laboratory. But the Laos coronaviruses confirm these parts of SARS-CoV-2 exist in nature, he says.”

Small wonder, then, that even Trump administration Secretary of State and former Director of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Michael Pompeo, who has led the international accusations of a lab leak and subsequent cover-up since the pandemic began, would only go so far on camera as to tell a credulous Markson that “There is enormous albeit indirect evidence that the Wuhan Institute of Virology was the centre-point for this.” In other words: We’ve got nothing.

It is Pompeo’s (and the program’s) last word, though, that should ring Australians’ mental alarm bells. Having completely failed yet again even to make a convincing case for, let alone prove, that a lab leak and subsequent Chinese government cover-up caused the COVID-19 pandemic, Pompeo intoned: “The other thing that the cover-up tells you is the *absolute absence of humanity* of these leaders. They are willing to allow people to die. They don’t care about human life; they don’t value that, the way that people in the West, in the United States, in Australia do.”

The West’s concern for human life would no doubt come as news to the innocent Afghan farmers murdered by Australian special forces soldiers, during a 20-year US-led invasion and occupation that killed an estimated 200,000 civilians and displaced millions; or the half-million Iraqi children former US Secretary of State Madeline Albright admitted to killing with trade sanctions even before the illegal 2003 invasion, justified by faked “intelligence” concerning weapons of mass destruction that turned out to be as non-existent as Pompeo et al.’s evidence of a lab leak, in which Australia was also a proud participant. (That one of the inventors of the lie of WMDs, former MI6 chief Sir Richard Dearlove, was one of Sharri Markson’s few sources for her documentary, speaks volumes.) China, meanwhile, has lifted over 800 million of its own people out of poverty, and is now helping Africa, South America and southwest and central Asia do the same. Nor has it fought a war since 1979 (and that was only month-long border skirmish with Vietnam), since which time the United States has made war almost continuously with Australia’s support. The record as to who really values human life speaks for itself.

## Footnotes

[1.](#) “Aus media’s anti-China spin turns reality upside down”, AAS, 6 May 2020.

[2.](#) “China-haters run for cover as Newscorp ‘virus warfare’ propaganda implodes”, AAS, 19 May 2021.

By Richard Bardon, Australian Alert Service, 29 September 2021