

China-haters run for cover as Newscorp ‘virus warfare’ propaganda implodes

17 May—At no point since the Canberra intelligence establishment and its media puppets commenced their anti-China propaganda campaign in earnest some five years ago have they put forth any meaningful evidence to back up their accusations against Beijing. On the contrary, it would be fair to say that their proofs have grown ever flimsier in proportion to the scale of atrocity alleged. Newscorp’s attempt this month to revive the “Wuhan lab leak” theory on the origin of the COVID-19 coronavirus may (we hope) be the nadir of this trend, being so transparently stupid that it has been roundly rejected by other news agencies, and even disowned by some of the very “experts” it cites, whose own outlandish China scare-stories have already strained credulity to its limits, and who have gone strangely quiet since. It is early days yet, and this will likely be only a temporary lull; but in the event the dying Anglo-American empire to which Australia is annexed doesn’t take the world down with it in a thermonuclear holocaust, some future historian may pinpoint 8 May 2021 as the day our nation’s media-inflated bubble of anti-China hysteria burst, and the *Australian* newspaper’s front-page “exclusive” that day, headlined “‘Virus warfare’ in China files”, as the pin that pricked it.



The “secret” Chinese germ warfare document is available at Chinese online bookstore Dangdang and Amazon.com! Right: The front page of *The Australian*, 8 May 2021. Photos: Screenshots

Penned by the *Australian’s* “investigations writer” Sharri Markson, the article claims that “Chinese military scientists discussed the weaponisation of SARS [severe acute respiratory syndrome] coronaviruses five years before the COVID-19 pandemic, outlining their ideas in a document that predicted a third world war would be fought with biological weapons.” Written in 2015 by “People’s Liberation Army [PLA] scientists and senior Chinese public health officials”, and titled *The Unnatural Origin of SARS and New Species of Man-Made Viruses as Genetic Bioweapons*, this document “describes SARS coronaviruses as heralding a ‘new era of genetic weapons’ and says they can be ‘artificially manipulated into an emerging human disease virus, then weaponised and unleashed in a way never seen before’”, Markson reports. She adds that “The chairmen of the British and Australian foreign affairs and intelligence committees, Tom Tugendhat and James Paterson, say the document raises major concerns about China’s lack of transparency over the origins of COVID-19 ... [and] outlines China’s progress in the research field of biowarfare.” This revelation, she helpfully notes, “features in an upcoming investigative book on the origins of COVID-19, titled *What Really Happened In Wuhan*”, which is due to hit the shelves later this year.

Self-promotion, sans substance

We should first observe that the book is by Markson herself, and her article mostly an extended plug for it. (How nice it must be, to be able not only to promote one’s book free of charge on the front page of Australia’s most widely circulated newspaper, but to be paid for the privilege!) But that aside, presuming she is at all competent as a journalist, she has apparently put far more effort into spin than into “investigation”. Or to put it even more bluntly: either everything about the article is deliberately misleading, or Ms Markson couldn’t investigate her way out of a telephone booth. The two are, of course, not mutually exclusive.

To begin with, besides Markson’s book announcement there is nothing at all “exclusive” about her article. She insinuates in every way possible that the Chinese “document”, or “paper” as she also calls it, is the product of some sort of secret and perhaps illicit research project. It “was obtained by the US State Department as it conducted an investigation into the origins of COVID-19”, she reports, adding that “Intelligence agencies suspect COVID-19 may be the result of an inadvertent leak from a Wuhan laboratory, a line of inquiry under active investigation since early 2020.” She then cites former Australian Army intelligence officer Robert Potter, “a digital forensics specialist who has worked for the US, Australian and Canadian governments, and has previously analysed leaked Chinese government documents”. Now the coCEO of cybersecurity company Internet 2.0, Potter tells the *Australian*: “We were able to verify its authenticity as a document authored by the particular PLA researchers and scientists stated. We were able to locate its genesis on the Chinese internet.” Alongside is an image of the front cover of Markson’s book, whose tagline makes reference to “classified research”.

In the words of every Australian Rules footballer ever interviewed at the sideline: Yeah, nah. References to a “Chinese ‘paper’ or ‘document’ ... may lead the reader to think this is a leaked

document from Chinese military, but in fact it's a published book", Deakin University Associate Professor of International Relations Dr Chengxin Pan [wrote](#) on Twitter later that day—and provided a [link](#) to the full text, which turns out to have been freely available on the internet for years. “[You] don’t have to be someone from the US State Department to get hold of this prized ‘document’”, he wrote. “Nor do you have to be a cyber expert to verify ‘the authenticity of the paper’. Anyone can ‘locate its genesis on the Chinese internet’.”

Once Prof. Pan broke the dam, denunciations of Markson’s malarkey began to flow, including from unexpected quarters. Notable among the latter was former Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) researcher turned “independent journalist” Vicky Xu, lead author of the March 2020 ASPI report *Uyghurs for Sale*, which used fraudulent methods including mistranslation of official documents to portray work placement schemes in China’s Xinjiang province as an industrial-scale slave labour program.¹ On 9 May Xu took to Twitter to call Markson’s report “misleading”. She wrote: “the ‘leaked’ paper here is a five-year-old conspiracy theory book that is publicly available on Amazon. With almost no evidence, it argues SARS could have been a bioweapon of the West. There’s also no clear evidence that the book had any official backing in China.” It has received poor reviews, she added, “and its theories [have been] debunked by Chinese scientists. Pretty wild for such a shaky document to attract this much attention from certain outlets and officials.”

Amusingly, one of those “officials” is Xu’s old boss Peter Jennings, a former deputy defence secretary who has been Australia’s anti-China warmonger-in-chief since he took up his current sinecure as executive director of ASPI in May 2012. (ASPI is sponsored by various armament manufacturers and the US and allied governments, but most of its funding comes from the Australian taxpayer via an annual grant from the Defence Department, making Jennings a public official of sorts.) Markson’s article had quoted Jennings that the so-called paper indicated China was likely in a position to weaponise its coronavirus research because, as he put it, “There is no clear distinction for research capability because whether it’s used offensively or defensively is not a decision these scientists would take. If you are building skills ostensibly to protect your military from a biological attack, you’re at the same time giving your military a capacity to use these weapons offensively. You can’t separate the two.”

This statement is true, in and of itself—and much more telling than Jennings presumably intended. What Xu failed to mention when she derided *The Unnatural Origin of SARS* as a “conspiracy theory”, but which Markson’s article actually does note, albeit in passing, is that the book was written as a response to a paper by United States Air Force medical expert Colonel Michael J. Ainscough titled “Next Generation Bioweapons”, which predicted that “the Third World War ... will be biological”. Published by the USAF Air War College in April 2002, some seven months before SARS broke out in Guangdong, China, the paper is premised on the need to protect against “biowarfare and bioterrorism”, but includes a chapter that outlines “Six Paths to Enhance Biothreats”. Under the sub-heading “Host-swapping diseases”, Col. Ainscough explains that “When a virus has a primary reservoir in an animal species, but is transmissible to humans, it is called a zoonotic disease.” Noting that deadly diseases including the Ebola haemorrhagic fever and AIDS, among others, are presumed to have had zoonotic origins, he states: “These examples illustrate that manageable infectious agents can be transformed naturally into organisms with markedly increased virulence. ... In the laboratory of inspired, determined and well-funded bioterrorists, an animal virus may be genetically modified and developed specifically to infect human populations. Emerging diseases could have serious implications for biological warfare or terrorism applications.”

Given the US government’s well-known penchant for sponsoring various forms of terrorism against designated geopolitical adversaries, is it any wonder Chinese scientists thought it worth investigating the possibility that exactly such an apparently natural zoonotic disease had in fact been an engineered bioweapon released by terrorists, after they chanced upon Ainscough’s paper years later? Markson, apparently immune to irony, dismisses this theory as “bizarre” on the grounds that “Scientific consensus holds that SARS-CoV-1 was of natural origin, having crossed the xenographic barrier from Asian palm civets [a cat-like mammal] to humans”—yet she does so in an article insinuating COVID-19 is a Chinese bioweapon! Specifically, an article intended to cast SARS-CoV-2 as a bioweapon engineered to look like a naturally occurring zoonotic disease, which current scientific consensus holds probably crossed to humans (perhaps via an intermediary species) from bats.

Abandon ship!

ASPI’s Jennings is the only “expert” Markson cited who has not denounced her exclusive interpretation of the very unexclusive Chinese “document”. (This is perhaps unsurprising given his continued insistence in 2016 that “China” had “hacked” Australia’s national census, weeks after the Australian Bureau of Statistics had admitted that its online portal had in fact failed because of a hardware fault, which could have been resolved by turning a router off and on again.) In an article published 13 May the *Sydney Morning Herald*, itself no stranger to lurid conspiracy theories about China, reported that “Robert Potter, the Canberra internet security analyst who verified the authenticity of the document in Markson’s story, said he told *The Australian* that the book was available on Amazon, Twitter and WeChat. ‘It had been covered by some pretty right-wing people, [including] some of the Miles Guo crowd’, he said, referring to the exiled Chinese billionaire who has partnered with [former Trump Administration advisor] Steve Bannon in an attempt to overthrow the Chinese Communist Party. ‘And

that was all part of my findings', he said." Oh dear.

When the *SMH* approached Markson herself for comment, she referred them to British "human rights" and "anti-slavery" activist and researcher Luke de Pulford, founder (ostensibly) and co-ordinator of the meddlesome klatch of Anglo-American and affiliated politicians known as the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (of which the aforementioned Australian Senator James Paterson is a co-chairman). She had quoted de Pulford in her article saying that "while many Chinese papers came across his desk, this one 'stuck out'. 'If this piece of work is representative of the scientific thinking of those who have advised the top leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, then there are very serious questions which need urgent answers', he said." To the *SMH*, however, de Pulford "was equivocal. 'I make no claims about the significance of the paper—that's a question for the China analysts, and there are at least two schools of thought on it', he said." Oh dear again. Whilst there is doubtless an element of professional rivalry in the *SMH*'s debunking, allow us to suggest to Ms Markson that you know you have really messed up when your smears are too dumb for even *SMH*, the newspaper that once touted a private Chinese company's contract to build a cruise boat terminal and reception centre as proof positive that the PLA Navy had plans to take over Vanuatu.² Meanwhile, we await with interest the publication of her book, not least to see whether or not the book shops allot it space in their "non-fiction" aisles.

By Richard Bardon, Australian Alert Service, 19 May 2021

Footnotes

[1. "ASPI: forced labour hypocrites and academic fraudsters"](#), AAS, 14 Oct. 2020.

[2. "'White elephant' or 'Chinese naval base?'"](#), AAS, 18 Apr. 2018.