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By Charles McKelvey

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Donald Trump has criticized the World Health Organization for not seeing the Covid-19 pandemic. "They called it wrong," he said. He implied that the W.H.O. mistake was in accepting the Chinese perspective on the issue. "They seem to be very China-centric," the president said. "They seem to err always on the side of China." Trump further stated that his administration is going to reevaluate U.S. funding of the organization. W.H.O. Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, responded to the accusation, saying that the coronavirus pandemic ought not be politicized.

According to an April 7 article in The New York Times by Michael D. Shear, Trump's accusations of the W.H.O. are false. "In fact," he writes, "the W.H.O. sounded the alarm in the earliest days of the crisis, . . . [and] W.H.O. repeatedly issued warnings about the emergence of the virus in China and its spread across the world."

Shear notes that Republican lawmakers also have criticized W.H.O. for taking the Chinese line and for “failing to question China’s reports on the spread of the coronavirus.” He writes that several senators have appeared on Fox News “to charge that the organization should bear the blame for not curtailing the virus.” He also quoted Senator Ted Cruz, Republican of Texas, who said that “the W.H.O. has been far too willing to parrot Chinese propaganda.” The Republican strategy appears to be to divert blame for the tragedy toward China and W.H.O., deflecting away from Trump.

Although not mentioned by Shear, many articles in The New York Times also tend toward China bashing. It is taken as given that China is an authoritarian society, and when it is acknowledged that China was able to get the pandemic under control, it is declared that China was successful because, with an authoritarian state, it is able to coerce the people to adopt good hygiene. These articles reflect a common tendency with respect to socialist projects in China, Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, in which academics and journalists from the United States join with English-speaking natives of said countries to portray these projects as authoritarian, skirting important aspects of their political processes and thereby preying upon the ignorance of the U.S. public. In this vein, a February 7 article, which lists The New York Times as the author, states that China tried to silence the doctor who first warned of the coronavirus outbreak.

A view of China different from FOX and The New York Times generally emerges from the media of Cuba, Venezuela, and Russia, and this is true with respect to the coronavirus pandemic. An article by Du Xiaojun, Vijay Prashad, and Weiyan Zhu, published in ALAI on June 4 and distributed by Radio Habana Cuba, observed that the Trump administration initially blamed the Chinese government for the pandemic, which it referred to as the “Chinese virus.” Du, Prashad, and Weiyan consider that the U.S. discourse was racist, and that it was designed to marshal hostility toward China, in accordance with U.S. geopolitical interests.

In the context of this emerging global political conflict, the W.H.O. Director-General requested on February 14 that the virus not be used as a pretext to attack China. He issued a call to solidarity, setting aside the temptation to stigmatize. He declared that the threat of the virus should not be exaggerated in order to bash China for political purposes. Interpretations should be based on scientific evidence, he stated, and as of that moment, the new coronavirus was generating an endemic in China, but it had not yet become a pandemic that would warrant extreme measures worldwide, although it was necessary to continue to observe.

In addition to clarifying the W.H.O. perspective, Du, Prashad, and Weiyan write of the origin of the virus in China. They report that the date of the identification of the first patient with symptoms of the new coronavirus was December 1, 2019. Initially, there was much confusion concerning the nature of the virus and whether or not it was transmitted among humans. It was assumed that the virus was previously known and that it was transmitted from animals to humans. On December 26, Doctor Shang Jixian, Director of the Department of Respiratory Medicine and Critical Care of the Chinese and Western Hospital of Integral Medicine of the province of Hubei, attended to four patients (an elderly couple and their son, and a fish market vendor) that had identical symptoms of fever and cough, and tests for the typical infirmities proved negative. She immediately reported the four cases to the Center for the Prevention and Control of Diseases of China of Wuhan. In the following two days, she and her teams attend to another three patients that had visited the fish market and had the same symptoms.

On December 29, the Provincial Center of Prevention and Control of Diseases of Hubei sent experts to investigate the seven hospital patients. On February 6, the Province of Hubei recognized the valuable labor of Zhang and her team in the struggle to identify and reveal the virus. There was no attempt to hide their work.

In the first days following the discovery of December 29, another two medics, Dr. Li Wenliang and Dr. Ai Fen, were working to attain clarity over the new coronavirus. They were sanctioned by the authorities, who considered that they were disseminating fake news. Li died of the coronavirus on February 7, and on

March 19, the Office of Public Security of Wuhan admitted that he had been sanctioned in an inappropriate form, and it castigated the functionaries responsible. The same occurred with Ai Fen, who received an apology in February and later was congratulated by the Radio and Television Station of Wuhan. This incident was the basis for The New York Times February 7 article.

The New York Times February 7 article, however, leaves aside the fact that, independent of the incident involving suspicions of Li and Ai Fen of disseminating fake news, the affair proceeded as it should have in a timely fashion, as Du, Prashad, and Weiyan describe. The Provincial Authorities had been informed on December 29. The following day, they informed the Center for Control of Diseases of China, and on December 31, China informed the World Health Organization. On January 1, the Center for the Control of Diseases of China called Robert Redfield, Director of the Center for the Prevention and Control of Diseases of the United States. The virus was identified on January 3. The National Health Commission of China created a group of experts of various institutions that carried out a series of experiments with samples of the virus. On January 8, they confirmed that the new coronavirus was really the source of the outbreak. On January 10, the Chinese government shared the genetic sequence of the new coronavirus with the World Health Organization, in order that research seeking a vaccine could begin all over the world. On January 11, the first death by the coronavirus was reported. On January 14, the Municipal Health Commission of Wuhan said that it still did not have evidence of person-to-person transmission, but they could not say with certainty that it was not possible. On January 20, Dr. Zhong Nanshan, an expert in respiratory infirmities and leader in the struggle against Covid-19, stated that, indeed, the new coronavirus could be transmitted from person to person. That day, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Li Kegang gave instructions to the National Commission of Health and other official organisms to begin with emergency measures. Wuhan was placed in total confinement on January 23, no more than three days after the person-to-person transmission of the virus was established. The following day, the province of Hubei activated a level one alert, and thousands of doctors and medical personnel arrived to Wuhan. Two new hospitals were constructed, and the infected persons were placed in quarantine in the hospitals, in an attempt to break the increase of the infections.

A W.H.O. team visited China from February 16 to February 24, and in its report, praised the Chinese people and government for having done all that was possible to stop the propagation of the virus. The W.H.O. Director-General stated that "China's containment measures may have saved hundreds of thousands of people from infection," and they demonstrate that the virus can be contained through "a collective, coordinated, and comprehensive approach."

China has been successful in containing the virus through organization and discipline, that is, through organizing the identification, testing, isolation, and treatment of infected persons; and through the disciplined compliance of the people with the recommendation of measures of isolation and physical distancing. The success of this strategy influenced the formulation of the recommendations of the World Health Organization, and it has been the approach of Cuba. China and Cuba, acting in a manner consistent concert with W.H.O. suggestions, have relatively low numbers of confirmed cases per capita; six per 100,000 people in the case of China, and five per 100,000 people in the case of Cuba. In contrast, the United States has not responded with a unifying and scientifically informed comprehensive plan, and it has had 142 confirmed cases per 100,000 people. That Trump would criticize the World Health Organization speaks for itself.

<https://www.radiohc.cu/en/especiales/comentarios/219435-covid-19-who-china-and-trump>



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