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THE EPOCH TIMES

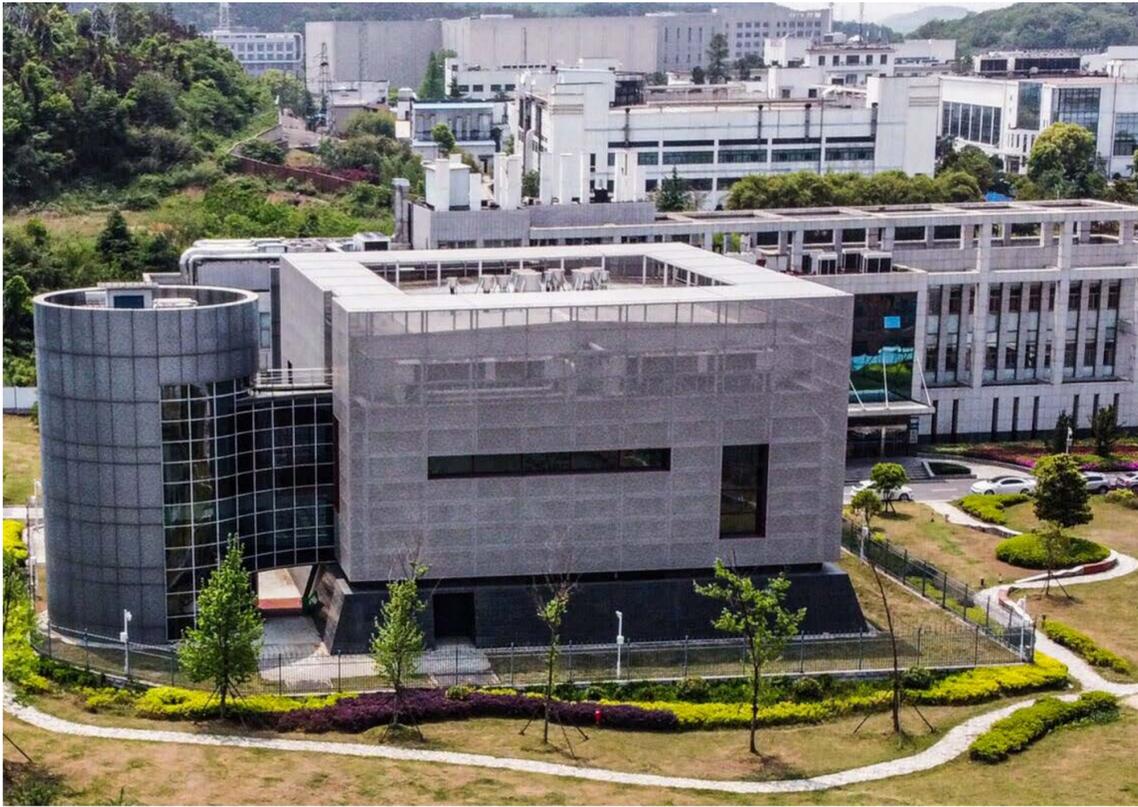
CHINA INSIDER

The CCTV
building in
Beijing on Aug.
28, 2018.

CHINESE STATE MEDIA EXPORTS DISCRIMINATION TO US

INTERNAL DOCUMENT SHOWS CGTN FORBIDS
WORKERS FROM PRACTICING PERSECUTED FAITH

See Page 4



The P4 laboratory at the Wuhan Institute of Virology in Wuhan, China, on April 17, 2020.

ANALYSIS

Head of NIAID-Funded Galveston Lab Relayed Lab Leak Concerns to Head of Wuhan Institute at Onset of Pandemic

‘If there are weaknesses in your program, now is the time to admit them and get them corrected’

JEFF CARLSON & HANS MAHNCKE

In early February 2020, as Dr. Anthony Fauci and a small circle of collaborating scientists were in the process of establishing the natural origin narrative about COVID-19 that would pervade the media, the man who had personally trained staff at China’s Wuhan Institute of Virology—and was the director of one of our nation’s most sophisticated biocontainment research facilities—was privately expressing concern that the pandemic might have originated from the Wuhan lab.

New emails, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) by the public interest group U.S. Right to Know, reveal that James Le Duc, director of the Galveston National Laboratory in Texas, had strong suspicions about the role of the Wuhan Institute in sparking the COVID-19 pandemic. The Galveston National Laboratory was conceived and funded in 2003 by Fauci’s National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) in response to biothreats that emerged in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.

Early in the COVID-19 outbreak, on Feb. 9, 2020, Le Duc sent an email to the vice director of the Wuhan Institute of Virology, Yuan Zhiming. The email contained a document titled “Investigation into the possibility that the nCoV was the result of a release from the Wuhan Institute of Virology (main campus or new BSL3/BSL4 facilities).”

Le Duc’s reference to the Wuhan Institute’s main campus also suggests that he may have



Peter Daszak (R) the president of the EcoHealth Alliance, is seen in Wuhan, China, on Feb. 3, 2021.

been aware that coronavirus experiments were being carried out in unsafe biosafety level (BSL) 2 facilities, a fact that was later admitted by the facility’s director, Shi Zhengli.

Le Duc urged Yuan to “conduct a thorough review of the laboratory activities associated with research on coronaviruses so that you are fully prepared to answer questions dealing with the origin of the virus.”

Le Duc suggested a number of areas Yuan should investigate and urged him to “consider preparing a manuscript that addresses these topics in an effort to be transparent and proactive,” adding that he would be “pleased to work with [Yuan] on such a paper.”

Le Duc told Yuan that the possibility of a lab leak was first

discussed on social media and he was now being approached by “senior officials and major reputable newspapers” about the role of the Wuhan Institute in the pandemic. He stated that while he had “the utmost respect and admiration for Dr. Shi,” the Wuhan facility needed to “aggressively address these rumors.”

Le Duc noted that these “presumably false accusations” needed to be addressed quickly with “definitive, honest information.”

He then told Yuan that “if there are weaknesses in your program, now is the time to admit them and get them corrected.” He closed his email by telling Yuan, “I trust that you will take my suggestions in the spirit of one friend trying to help

another during a very difficult time.”

Despite the detailed nature of Le Duc’s email proposal and his years-long affiliation with both Yuan and the Wuhan Institute, it appears that he never received a response from Yuan. Le Duc would later relay concerns regarding Yuan’s lack of a response in a message to EcoHealth adviser David Franz. EcoHealth is the organization headed by Peter Daszak, through which Fauci was funding gain-of-function experiments at the Wuhan Institute.

Despite the concerns that Le Duc conveyed to Yuan regarding the possibility of a lab leak in February 2020, just two months later, Le Duc struck a very different tone during an email conversation with retired and

now-deceased Maj. Gen. Philip Russell.

Russell, the former commander of the U.S. Army Medical Research and Development Command, reached out to Le Duc on April 9, 2020, in an email that contained a video, asking Le Duc: “This is gaining credibility. What do you think?” Although it isn’t known which video Russell shared, it appears to be a video that documents the Wuhan lab leak theory.

Russell was equally direct in his criticism of the natural origin narrative that was being pushed by Fauci’s group of scientists and promoted by the media at that time, telling Le Duc that the “flimsiness of the epidemiology pointing to the wet market, the absence of bats in the market, the failure to identify an intermediate animal host” all pointed to a lab leak as the likely explanation for the pandemic.

It’s particularly notable that Le Duc’s first reaction to the COVID outbreak was to contact his longtime friend and vice director of the Wuhan Institute of Virology with his private concerns that the pandemic had originated at the Wuhan Institute.

Although it hasn’t been confirmed, the video being discussed coincides with the release of the first full-length documentary on the virus’s origins, “Tracking Down the Origin of the Wuhan Coronavirus,” which was produced by The Epoch Times and premiered on April 7, 2020—two days before Le Duc’s conversation with Russell.

Le Duc responded to Russell saying that he had already received the unidentified video that morning and told Russell that he didn’t “believe that the virus originated from the lab in Wuhan.” Le Duc also sent Rus-

sell a paper, likely the proximal origin paper in which Fauci-funded scientists claimed that the virus had a natural origin. Notably, at the same time the article was being drafted, those same scientists were privately telling Fauci that the virus was likely engineered.

Le Duc told Russell that he thought “the attached paper makes a strong argument that [COVID] came from nature” and stated that he agreed with the paper’s conclusion. Later that same day, Le Duc expressed an entirely different belief regarding the virus’s origins when he told Franz that the lab leak issue was “not going away—and it probably shouldn’t.”

Notably, Le Duc didn’t share his lab leak concerns with Russell. Instead, he informed Russell that his group at the NIAID-affiliated Galveston National Laboratory had been working with Shi Zhengli, the director of the Wuhan Institute of Virology, and that Shi was also in agreement with the natural origin theory.

Le Duc told Russell that Shi had consistently maintained that “bat coronaviruses hold the ability to infect humans through the hACE2 receptor.”

Put another way, Le Duc was suggesting that the virus could have jumped directly from bat to human. But this theory conflicts with previous bat virus outbreaks—all of which required an intermediate host animal. Additionally, a recent study that conducted a thorough examination of more than 13,000 wild bats in China found that none of the bats carried COVID-19 nor any directly related virus. By contrast, that same study did find that many of the 13,000 bats carried the original SARS virus.

Le Duc also noted that the meetings with Shi had included U.S. virologists Ralph Baric and Linda Saif. Le Duc failed to inform Russell that Baric and Shi had co-authored an article in November 2015 that showcased Baric’s gain-of-function techniques—techniques that Shi later adopted.

Russell didn’t agree with Le Duc or with the paper that Le Duc shared, as he was frank in his response, telling Le Duc that this “does not rule out the possibility that one of the many bat coronaviruses isolated in the Wuhan lab infected a technician who walked out the door.” As Russell noted, there was no need “for engineering the virus” in order to precipitate the outbreak.

Russell was equally direct in his criticism of the natural origin narrative that was being pushed by Fauci’s group of scientists and promoted by the media at that time, telling Le Duc that the “flimsiness of the epidemiology pointing to the wet market, the absence of bats in the market, the failure to identify an intermediate animal host” all pointed to a lab leak as the likely explanation for the pandemic.

Russell highlighted actions taken by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), citing the “extraordinary measures” taken by Beijing during the advent of the outbreak, “including persecution and probable killing of two brave physicians to cover up the outbreak.” Russell also told Le Duc that the many “steps taken to silence the laboratory personnel,” along with changes in leadership of the lab, were indications that “all point to the lab as the source of the outbreak.”

Russell noted similarities between the COVID pandemic and the Soviet Anthrax outbreak in 1979, telling Le Duc: “This reminds me of the efforts by Matt Messelson and many colleagues to cover up the Sverdlosk anthrax outbreak. They succeeded for many years aided and [were] abetted by many in academia until Ken Alibek defected and the truth came out.”

Russell concluded by saying that he had “bought the wet market story for months,” but was now very skeptical of any information that was “coming from the Chinese government.”

In a subsequent email, Le Duc admitted to Russell that “it is certainly possible that a lab accident was the source of the epidemic” and agreed that “we can’t trust the Chinese government.” Le Duc also finally divulged to Russell that he had sent Yuan “a rather detailed plan to investigate the possibility that the lab might have been the source of the outbreak,” but acknowledged that he never heard back from Yuan.

Reciting a line often put forth by natural origin advocates, Le Duc told Russell that “we need to strike a balance such that we are not in an adversarial situation” with China. Russell’s reply was blunt and to the point.

“I admire your desire to avoid an adversarial situation but [that seems] to be impossible with the Chinese communists.”

Later that afternoon, Le Duc emailed the entirety of his Russell email conversation to Franz, who also is the former commander of the U.S. bioweapons lab USAMRIID at Fort Detrick in Maryland.

In addition to sending Franz his conversation with Russell, Le Duc raised some material concerns regarding the development of COVID vaccines. Le Duc’s concerns seem particularly relevant in light of ongoing questions that are currently being raised regarding vaccine effectiveness.

Le Duc told Franz that “there is a lot we do not know about immunity to this virus and we need to be very careful as we design and test vaccines.” Le Duc also noted that “we need to address the question of re-infection/re-occurrence of illness,” asking Franz if this is “an artifact of PCR testing or represent[s] a real issue.”

Finally, Le Duc told Franz, “There is also emerging information on genetic variability of the virus” and rhetorically

From: LeDuc, James W. [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=937DF8E29C439E8A048ABFFB162AD-JWLEUDC]
Sent: 4/13/2020 2:47:19 PM
To: Dave Franz [REDACTED]
Subject: FW: Suggestions
Attachments: Questions on nCoV in Wuhan lab.docx

Please do not forward—below and attached is the message I sent to Zhiming early in the outbreak as questions began to surface about the origin of the new virus. Unfortunately, I never received a response. As we explore trying to reengage our dialogue, some of these questions might be discussed.

Jim

From: LeDuc, James W.
Sent: Sunday, February 09, 2020 4:15 PM
To: Yuan Zhiming [REDACTED]
Cc: Shi, Pei yong [REDACTED]
Subject: Suggestions

Dear Zhiming,

I am devastated to see the evolving nCoV epidemic unfolding in Wuhan and I just hope that you, your family and the larger Institute colleagues are well and surviving this very difficult time.

I want to suggest that you conduct a thorough review of the laboratory activities associated with research on coronaviruses so that you are fully prepared to answer questions dealing with the origin of the virus. I’m sure that you have considered this already, but attached are some areas where you may wish to investigate and be prepared to address. You might even consider preparing a manuscript that addresses these topics in an effort to be transparent and proactive. I would be pleased to work with you on such a paper if you think that would be helpful.

I raise these issues since I am receiving questions along these lines more and more frequently. Initially they came from social media and other “alternate information sources” but in the last few days I have been approached by senior officials and major reputable newspapers. Most link the opening of the new BSL4 lab as a possible source of the virus. Clearly addressing this will be essential, with any kind of documentation you might have available used to back up your comments. (It’s not clear to me where the coronavirus work was/is actually being conducted.)

I have the utmost respect and admiration for Dr Shi and I am in no way casting doubt on her or her colleagues. I just think that we need to aggressively address these rumors and presumably false accusations quickly and provide definitive, honest information to counter misinformation. If there are weaknesses in your program, now is the time to admit them and get them corrected.

I trust that you will take my suggestions in the spirit of one friend trying to help another during a very difficult time.

Jim

James W. Le Duc, Ph.D.
Director
Galveston National Laboratory
University of Texas Medical Branch
Galveston, TX 77555-0610

Screenshot of an email obtained by U.S. Right to Know under the Freedom of Information Act. (Email address redaction by The Epoch Times)

This latest FOIA email release provides additional proof that yet another virologist closely affiliated with Fauci was publicly dismissing the lab leak theory, while privately expressing very real concerns that a lab leak might have occurred.

asked Franz “what the impact might be on transmission and disease.” Le Duc’s comments may have been in reference to the unique furin cleavage site in COVID-19, a feature that has never been observed in any natural SARS coronavirus.

As since discovered through a September whistleblower document release, Daszak had drafted a 2018 blueprint for inserting furin cleavage sites into bat coronaviruses.

It should be noted that Le Duc, a biodefense expert who previously worked at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, has a long history of cooperation with the Wuhan Institute, dating back to at least 1986 when LeDuc spent a year working on and off in Wuhan.

In 2014, LeDuc was instrumental in introducing NIAID’s China representative, Chen Ping, to the Wuhan Institute. Surprisingly, Chen, who looked after Fauci’s affairs in China, seemingly was unable to get an introduction through Fauci’s office. Eventually she reached out to LeDuc as she knew he had collaborated with the Institute. Le Duc immediately replied to Chen and introduced her to staff at the Wuhan lab. Le Duc also mentioned that he personally knew the director of the Institute, Yuan—the same person with whom he shared his concerns about a lab leak in February 2020.

Le Duc also told Chen that staff from the Wuhan lab were undergoing training at Le Duc’s lab in Galveston in 2014 and they had “invested considerably in our partnership with the CAS [Chinese Academy of Sciences, parent body of the Wuhan Institute of Virology] in Wuhan and we are anxious to ensure its long-term success.”

Le Duc’s work with the Wuhan lab was again confirmed in 2017, when NIAID’s director of global research, James Meegan, disclosed in an internal email that both he and Le Duc had trained Wuhan lab staff in China and that some staff members were later also trained in the United States. Meegan stated that he thought their training efforts “helped [the Wuhan lab] on its way to becoming a center for virology.”

Notably, Le Duc was training Wuhan lab staff on the maintenance and operations of a BSL-4 facility in advance of the opening of the Wuhan Institute of Virology’s new BSL-4 lab.

Originally that training was to have been provided by French scientists who helped construct the Wuhan Institute’s new BSL-4 lab, but after France expressed security concerns over the use of China’s new lab for noncivilian activities, that cooperation was ended and U.S. scientists took over certain aspects of staff training.

This latest FOIA email release provides additional proof that yet another virologist closely affiliated with Fauci was publicly dismissing the lab leak theory while privately expressing very real concerns that a lab leak might have occurred.

Previous FOIA releases revealed that Fauci-funded scientists Kristian Andersen and Daszak put out natural origin papers at the same time that there was a private consensus among Fauci’s group that the virus was likely engineered. We know through previous FOIA releases that the first draft of proximal origin was completed on the same day Fauci was informed by the paper’s drafting authors that a lab leak was 70 to 80 percent likely.

Le Duc and his Galveston National Laboratory are both directly funded by Fauci’s NIAID. Other than Daszak, through whom Fauci funded the Wuhan lab, Le Duc is perhaps the most knowledgeable person in the United States about the Wuhan Institute, its operations and staff, and its various labs.

It’s particularly notable that Le Duc’s first reaction to the COVID-19 outbreak was to contact his longtime friend and vice director of the Wuhan Institute of Virology with his private concerns that the pandemic had originated at the Wuhan Institute. Equally notable was the complete lack of response from his old friend.

Jeff Carlson co-hosts the show *Truth Over News* on Epoch TV. He is a CFA-registered Charterholder and worked for 20 years as an analyst and portfolio manager in the high-yield bond market. He also runs the website *TheMarketsWork.com*

Hans Mahncke co-hosts the show *Truth Over News* on Epoch TV. He holds LL.B., LL.M. and Ph.D. degrees in law. He is the author of numerous law books and his research has been published in a range of international journals.



Dr. Anthony Fauci in Washington on July 20, 2021.

Chinese State Media Orders US Workers to Maintain ‘Political Purity,’ Not Practice Falun Gong: Internal Document

EVA FU

The international arm of the Chinese regime's state broadcaster ordered some of its contracted workers in the United States to distance themselves from the persecuted faith group Falun Gong, an internal document supplied to The Epoch Times shows.

The Washington bureau of CGTN, a state-run English language television network, earlier this year instructed several contract workers to pledge to maintain their “political purity,” according to a worker conduct agreement. That includes being members of groups deemed unacceptable to the Chinese Communist Party, including Falun Gong, according to the document.

Under the regime's totalitarian rule, the Party maintains tight control over the civil society groups and religions that may operate in the country.

The spiritual practice Falun Gong features three core tenets—truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance—along with a set of meditative exercises. Its adherents have been the target of a brutal suppression campaign by the Chinese regime for more than two decades. It's estimated that millions of practitioners have been detained, tortured, and killed in the past 22 years, according to Falun Dafa Information Center.

CTGN is a registered foreign agent under U.S. law, and one of 15 Chinese outlets that the State Department last year designated as foreign missions, in recognition of their roles as overseas propaganda arms of the Chinese communist regime.

‘An Indenture’

The document, titled “promise statement” and written in Chinese, was provided by former U.S. contractors who left CGTN in late October upon finding the level of pressure and control at the company unbearable.

It appears to be a replica of a memo issued by the Beijing headquarters of CCTV,



Falun Gong practitioners take part in a parade in Flushing, New York, on April 18, 2021, to commemorate the 22nd anniversary of the April 25th peaceful appeal of 10,000 Falun Gong practitioners in Beijing.

CGTN's parent company, one worker said.

The Beijing-centric tone is unambiguous in certain parts of the document: One pandemic control requirement directs workers to adhere to COVID-19 rules from Beijing's city government and local districts.

Other provisions in the agreement include restrictions on gambling, social media use, bribery, “creating ‘rumors,’” drunk driving, running red lights, and the dislo-

sure of company business secrets.

“It feels like we have signed an indenture,” James (a pseudonym), an IT technician who signed the document, told The Epoch Times. James, like others current and former CGTN contract workers referenced in this piece, spoke to The Epoch Times on the condition of anonymity over fear of company reprisal.

These IT technicians were contracted to work at CGTN by Sobey Digital Technology Co., Ltd., an IT solutions provider for the media industry based in Chengdu city, China. Sobey declined to comment, and CGTN didn't respond to repeated emailed and phoned requests for comment from The Epoch Times.

The document also placed a special emphasis on Party ideology, telling workers to “unify their thinking” and “managers of all levels” to “diligently ensure the ideological education of personnel under their oversight.”

The aspect of ideological supervision should raise eyebrows, said Sarah Cook, senior China analyst at the Washington-based nonprofit Freedom House.

“To me, it seems along the lines of dynamics we see often in the CCP system, or

‘outsourcing’ ideological enforcement to ordinary citizens to have to report on each other and supervise each other,” she told The Epoch Times, referring to the Chinese Communist Party. “Managers aren't responsible only for policing their own thoughts but also those of their subordinates.”

It demonstrates how deeply ingrained in the CCP system ... these kinds of restrictions and violations of religious and political freedom are, and how it doesn't stop at China's borders.

Sarah Cook, senior China analyst, Freedom House

James and coworkers on his IT team signed the agreement in CGTN's Washington office in August—more than a year after he began working there, and about seven months after his teammate Alvin came onboard.

It's unclear whether the same document

was imposed on staff employees or other departments outside of IT. Nor was there any explanation from the company as to why the contractors were asked to sign the document at that particular time.

While none of the people interviewed by The Epoch Times practice Falun Gong, the very idea that the company should decide what employees do in their private capacity nonetheless felt repulsive, they said.

“No one wanted” to sign it, but they did so to keep their jobs, Alvin said.

“The team leader brought it over for us to sign and told us the station required it,” said Alvin. “We signed after a brief look.”

During a trip to Seoul, South Korea, over a decade ago, Michael, another former CGTN worker, passed a photo exhibition about Beijing's state-directed killing of imprisoned Falun Gong practitioners for their organs. He was dumbstruck by the sheer horror of the act, he said.

“That they are being persecuted is an undeniable fact,” Michael told The Epoch Times. “In a country with freedom of speech and freedom of religion, everyone should be free to believe.”

‘Explicitly Discriminatory’

For some China watchers, such requirements imposed by the state-run media outlet didn't come as a surprise.

Leaked internal documents previously obtained by The Epoch Times show that some local governments would train their personnel about Falun Gong before they traveled abroad to make sure they avoided Falun Gong-related events. Before a five-day work trip to Singapore in 2017, a city government department in south China's Haikou issued a confirmation to the city's foreign affairs office certifying that a staff member on the visit wasn't a Falun Gong adherent.

Confucius Institutes, a Beijing-funded language and culture program installed at universities across the world, sparked controversy more than a decade ago over similar hiring and employment practices focused on Falun Gong.

Sonia Zhao used to teach Chinese at the Confucius Institute at Canada's McMaster University. Prior to arriving in Canada in 2010, Zhao had to sign a contract issued by Hanban, the state agency overseeing the Institutes, pledging that she wouldn't practice Falun Gong.

Zhao was a Falun Gong practitioner, and her mother was imprisoned in China more than once for her faith. For one year while working at the institute, Zhao hid her belief, for fear that “if they found that out, something would happen to me,” she told The Epoch Times at the time.

In 2012, Zhao filed a human rights complaint against the university alleging discriminatory hiring practices. The Canadi-



The headquarters of China's state-run broadcaster, CCTV, in Beijing on Feb. 26, 2011.

an university closed its Confucius Institute a year later, saying they made the decision because “hiring decisions in China were not being done the way we would want to do the hiring.”

Recalling the Confucius Institute incident in Canada, Cook, the China analyst, said she was “not surprised that there is a provision along these lines.”

“But it's still striking in terms of how explicitly discriminatory” the CGTN agreement is—“not only regarding someone's practice of Falun Gong but their religious and political beliefs and activities more widely,” she said.

“It demonstrates how deeply ingrained in the CCP system ... these kinds of restrictions and violations of religious and political freedom are, and how it doesn't stop at China's borders,” she said.

Differential Treatment

At least eight IT contractors have resigned from CGTN's Washington office in recent months, saying they'd had enough of the alleged mistreatment and exploitative work environment.

James said that the company treated Chinese speakers deferentially. When “so-called superiors” appeared, they needed

to get up from their seats to show respect, even as employees who speak other languages were exempt from this rule, he said.

For James, who grew up in Malaysia, Mandarin isn't his mother tongue. His manager from mainland China had once mocked his Mandarin skills, he said.

“He said my Chinese wasn't good, that I was so stupid and didn't know so and so,” he told The Epoch Times. “He nipped over our work and threatened to withhold our pay.”

The mental stress was so great that Michael and some coworkers considered seeking psychological therapy.

Evan, another former IT worker for CGTN, believes that, for the company, it was all about control.

“Because we can speak Chinese ... they are constantly reminding us that they are the boss and they have the most say. They can dictate our every move,” he told The Epoch Times.

Li Xin'an contributed to this report.

Eva Fu is a New York-based writer for The Epoch Times focusing on U.S.-China relations, religious freedom, and human rights.



Falun Gong practitioners perform the exercises at an event celebrating World Falun Dafa Day in Taipei, Taiwan, on May 1, 2021.

AFGHANISTAN

US Abandonment of Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan Could Be Boon for China, Experts Say

J.M. PHELPS

Former President Donald Trump recently expressed concern that the Chinese regime could gain control of Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, adding that his administration would have maintained control of the airbase upon a U.S. withdrawal from the country.

Back in June, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley told Congress that Bagram was neither tactically nor operationally necessary for the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Biden administration pulled out all U.S. troops from Bagram in July, more than a month ahead of the widely-criticized chaotic pull-out from the country. The base, which was once the center of U.S. counterterrorism

operations in the country, is about an hour's drive from Kabul.

Trump on Nov. 7 Fox News interview, said his administration would have maintained control of Bagram Air Base because of its strategic location.

“We would have kept Bagram because it's next to China ... and now China's going to take over Bagram, in my opinion,” Trump told Fox News.

Geographic Advantage Lost

Dan Steiner, a retired U.S. Air Force colonel and global strategist, agreed with the former president, saying that its location close to China could have been valuable for the United States contending with the growing threat posed by the communist regime, including its expanding nuclear



Afghan National Army soldiers walk inside the Bagram US air base after all US and NATO troops left, some 43 miles north of Kabul on July 5, 2021.

capabilities.

Using satellite imagery, recent reports detail the construction of three missile silo fields near the cities of Hami, Ordos, and Yumen in western China. The total number of long-range missile silos in China could now exceed 250.

“An earshot away from western China, there was clearly a strategic advantage to keeping Bagram Air Base,” Steiner said.

Retired Brigadier General Don Bolduc

who served ten tours with the U.S. Army in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2013, similarly said that considering all threats from neighboring countries—China, Iran, and Pakistan—meant Bagram was strategically important.

With the United States out of the picture, the Chinese regime may want to keep it that way in Afghanistan.

“To prevent the United States from finding an excuse to return to Afghanistan to

reoccupy an air base that is so strategically close to the Chinese regime's nuclear weapons program,” Steiner said, “it's not out of the question for the Chinese communists to want a footprint at this location sooner than later.”

The development of “a transportation hub” could be a perfect “dual-use scenario” for the Chinese regime to occupy the air base, Steiner said. There is precedent for this arrangement in South Asia: Pakistan's Gwadar Port Authority is under the administrative control of the Maritime Secretary of Pakistan but operated by China Overseas Port Holding.

The idea of acquiring an air hub in a landlocked Afghanistan would be a “brilliant move on the part of Beijing,” according to Steiner. “It's a very logical way for the Chinese to play chess, moving their piece into a square on the board that blocks the U.S. from moving back to the geographical location.”

To further an alliance between the Communist Chinese Party (CCP) and Taliban, Beijing could also use the threat of terrorism as a factor, he added.

“They could propose coming alongside the Taliban to confront the terrorist threat to the air hub as well as to western China, but at the end of the day, it's just another means to get control of Bagram,” Steiner said.

While it may not be a Chinese military installation, per se, Steiner said it could easily be manned by members of the People's

Liberation Army (PLA). “And surely this fits into the [regime's] playbook of having control of Bagram.”

Big Business at Bagram

The Chinese regime recognizes the logistical and economic benefits to taking control of Bagram Air Field, according to Steiner.

“Should the Chinese gain an air hub in Afghanistan, it could be justified as a transportation point for airlift,” he said. Business contractors or even members of the PLA could be moved in or out of the country, or valuable minerals could be moved out, for example.

It's not out of the question for the Chinese communists to want a footprint at this location sooner than later.

Dan Steiner, a retired U.S. Air Force colonel and global strategist

estimated \$1 trillion in untapped mineral deposits, including industrial metals such as cobalt, copper, iron, and lithium.

In the case of lithium, the element is a key raw material for many batteries, including for electric cars. According to a report by the Institute for Energy Research, “China now dominates the world's production of new generation batteries that are used in electric vehicles and most portable consumer electronics such as cell phones and laptops.”

China's quest to continue to dominate lithium battery supply chains continues to move forward. For instance, China's Ganfeng Lithium Company, the world's top lithium company, recently signed a three-year contract to supply battery-grade lithium products to the leading manufacturer of electric vehicles Tesla Inc.

Because there is such “big business” associated with lithium and other mineral deposits, Bolduc said Beijing has been optimistic about contracting business in Afghanistan for quite a long time. He said the Chinese regime will likely be able to take advantage of the “less sophisticated, less bureaucratic government” of the Taliban to acquire all of what it desires.

“All China wants are the resources to maintain their global exploits—and as long as they're granted the opportunity to get those resources,” Bolduc said, “it's very likely they'll pay or say whatever is necessary to get them.”

Negotiations Neglected

Maintaining control of Bagram Air Field was equally important to Steiner and Bolduc, as it could be for the Chinese regime. Bolduc said that a minimal presence of the United States military could have continued to help bolster peace in Afghanistan and throughout the region, while also keeping the CCP at bay. “And why not use an area that's been used for 20 years as the base of operation for maintaining a regional footprint?” he said.

During U.S. negotiations with the Taliban, Steiner said the United States should have attempted to “maintain a location, like Bagram—much like has been done in northern Syria and Iraq.”

This is not unusual, as hundreds of U.S. troops remain deployed around the world in the fight against global terror. Bolduc said, “This should have been pressed for during the negotiation process, because it's really the only way the U.S. could have ensured that the Taliban doesn't go back to their own ways and allow Afghanistan to become the terrorist safe haven it will become.”

While the United States could have taken “a hard line” on the matter,” Steiner said, “the Taliban could have simply said no—and that's probably something we'll never know about the negotiation process.”

J.M. Phelps is a writer and researcher of both Islamist and Chinese threats.

OPINION

US Companies Are 'Hostages' to China

EMEL AKAN



Foreign firms doing business in China should be aware of the costs of transacting with a totalitarian regime that controls everything in society and can easily bend any company to its will.

Heads of U.S. corporations don't dare to criticize the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) even in private settings. They know Big Brother is always watching them.

JPMorgan boss Jamie Dimon's quick apology over a joke he made recently about the country's communist regime provides a good example of how business leaders fear retribution from Beijing.

Clyde Prestowitz, author and strategist on Asia and globalization, explains the true cost of doing business in China in his latest book "The World Turned Upside Down: America, China, and the Struggle for Global Leadership."

The U.S. companies that are highly coupled with China face all kinds of risks, from intellectual property theft to commercial cyber espionage. But the biggest, most fundamental risk is "the loss of free speech," Prestowitz says in his book.

Dimon is not alone as there are many examples of free-world CEOs and presidents making apologies or backtracking when they anger the Chinese regime.

During Hong Kong protests in 2019, for example, Apple pulled from its app store a map application widely used by pro-democracy protesters that showed the location of police patrols and tear gas deployments, citing security reasons. Google also sparked controversy when it removed a Hong Kong protest role-playing game from its app store.

These are by no means the only apparently self-censorship incidents by U.S. tech companies. Apple, for example, removed nearly 55,000 active apps from its app store in China since 2017, according to a New York Times report. They include apps made by minorities oppressed by the regime, including Uyghurs and Tibetans.

Such actions by U.S. firms, though, have drawn criticism from lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, who accuse companies of sacrificing American values for the allure of profits in the world's second-largest economy.

For the CEO of Apple Tim Cook and other U.S. corporate executives

They may be perceived as the heads of American companies, but they fear Beijing far more than they fear Washington.

Clyde Prestowitz writes in "The World Turned Upside Down: America, China, and the Struggle for Global Leadership."

navigating the Chinese market, they effectively become "hostages" to the whims of the Chinese regime.

"They may be perceived as the heads of American companies, but they fear Beijing far more than they fear Washington," Prestowitz writes in his book.

Since there's no rule of law in China, they become "captive," he adds. In Washington, they have lawyers and lobbyists that give them the power to influence or sue the U.S. government. In Beijing, however, they can't sue the Chinese regime because they know they would lose—the courts in China are controlled by the Communist Party—and would face retaliation from the regime for even trying.

Beijing is aware of this leverage and hence can freely use companies as a tool. As I wrote in a previous column, the Chinese Embassy in Washington is pressuring U.S. companies and trade groups that have business interests in China to lobby against a comprehensive China bill that aims to enhance U.S. competitiveness.

None of this should come as a surprise. As The Epoch Times readers will know, China exerts significant influence in the United States. It spent more than \$67 million on lobbyists last year, a sixfold increase since 2016, according to OpenSecrets.

And this is only the tip of the iceberg, as it only covers the overt influence operations that need to be disclosed under the Foreign

Agents Registration Act (FARA).

The FARA, passed in 1938, requires a person who represents a foreign interest to register as a foreign agent. The law, however, falls short in addressing less overt political influence operations conducted through proxies, including corporations, trade associations, and think tanks. Many China hawks in Washington are urging Congress to close this loophole in foreign influence.

"It's really something that must be addressed," Prestowitz tells me.

If heads of corporations have substantial business operations in China, "they should not be allowed to make political donations in the United States," he said.

"When they testify before Congress, they should be compelled to declare that they are testifying as the leaders of Chinese businesses. They should be made to tell the public and the Congress that they in fact, are subject to pressure and influence by the Chinese Communist Party."

Views expressed in this article are the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.

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Activists hold a rally in front of the Chinese Consulate to call for a boycott of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics due to concerns over China's human rights record, in Los Angeles on Nov. 3, 2021.

CLIVE BRUNSKILL/GETTY IMAGES

Peng Shuai (R) and Zhang Shuai of China during their Women's Doubles first round match against Veronika Kudermetova of Russia and Alison Riske of the United States on day four of the 2020 Australian Open at Melbourne Park in Melbourne, Australia, on Jan. 23, 2020.



HUMAN RIGHTS

Women's Tennis Association Sets Precedent in Pressuring China Over Rights Issues

MICHAEL WASHBURN

The Women's Tennis Association's (WTA) announcement last week of its decision not to hold tournaments in China next year in response to Beijing's silencing of tennis star Peng Shuai, who has made allegations of sexual assault against former vice premier Zhang Gaoli, is the latest sign of heightened awareness worldwide of the communist regime's abuses.

Grand Slam doubles and Olympic champion Peng has mostly been out of the public spotlight following her explosive charges against the former senior Chinese official, which are of a particularly sensitive nature in the age of #MeToo. A draft of governmental bodies worldwide has demanded proof of Peng's well-being, while the WTA in its announcement took strong exception to her disappearance from public life.

"I don't see how I can ask our athletes to compete there when Peng Shuai is not allowed to communicate freely and has seemingly been pressured to contradict her allegation of sexual assault," Steve Simon, the WTA's CEO, said in a Dec. 1 statement.

The organization stands to lose more than \$1 billion in revenues from tournaments in the vast Chinese market, and its decision is a strong statement that ethical principles must come before profits.

The WTA's decision may have a real impact on Beijing's conduct, observers said following the announcement. Moreover, it may point the way forward with regard to the complicated question of doing business in a country whose authoritarian regime chronically violates human rights, freedom of speech, and international treaty obligations.

The WTA has set an example of the type of ban that may actually work. It is not just another corporation in need of cheap labor. Tennis matches are not factories producing garments or shoes, and giving a livelihood to thousands of poor Chinese. A targeted ban of this nature, implemented by a high-profile organization, may prove both more politically effective and economically and socially feasible than a blanket withdrawal by corporations of every size and profile, experts said.

Growing Awareness

The WTA is the only major sports organization to implement such a ban in response to human rights concerns in China. Its move stands in stark contrast to many global corporations that have stayed silent on Beijing's abuses or bowed to the regime's expanding censorship demands.

Many multinationals appear intimidated by developments such as Beijing's retaliation earlier this year against clothing retailers such as Nike, H&M, and Adidas for having the temerity to raise concerns over

the forced labor of Uyghur workers in the cotton-growing regions of Xinjiang, not to mention the terrible penalties resulting in 2019 from a tweet sent out by then-Houston Rockets general manager Daryl Morey praising pro-democracy demonstrators in Hong Kong. The tweet cost the National Basketball Association partnerships in China's enormous sports market.

Yet the WTA's ban does come on the heels of other pointed public statements by high-profile players and organizations in the global sports industry, such as by Boston Celtics player Enes Kanter who in recent months has taken to Twitter to call out the communist regime on its rights violations, including its suppression in Hong Kong, Tibet, and its murder of prisoners of conscience for their organs.

Amid these developments, some may wonder whether other businesses and franchises should ramp up the pressure by emulating the WTA's move. Experts who have followed China and global corporations' engagement with the country say that the WTA's move may well have an impact on Beijing given the WTA's high profile and millions of fans, but the answer to the second question is not a simple yes or no.

Rather, corporations must make decisions on a case-by-case basis and determine what is the appropriate step given the nature of their relationship with the Chinese market and with labor in China, and the likely consequences at all levels—diplomatic, political, commercial, and social.

Feasibility

Global corporations that have plants in China and sell to the vast market there are not necessarily abetting human rights abuses and it is not self-evident that their withdrawal would help the struggling millions in China. There is a role for constructive engagement, some experts say.

"If foreign corporations were to stay out of all countries that disrespect human rights, including underpaying the ill-treating their workers, global trade would essentially grind to a halt," said Jane Golley, Director of the Australian Centre on China in the World at the Australian National University.

In the case of China, in particular, there would be costs for large numbers of poor laborers who are already suffering at the hands of the CCP.

"Refusing to engage with China at all would inflict large costs on the (unknown) portion of the Uyghur and other Chinese workers who have voluntarily chosen to work in factories that supply our goods, because that is the best option to provide for their families," Golley said.

"Certainly, every company—and all consumers, too—should be encouraged to have ethical decisions, and should also

be held to account when they do not. But this requires constructive engagement and truth-seeking, not walking away altogether," she continued.

Robert Atkinson, president of the Information Technology and Information Foundation, a Washington-based think tank, also said that walking away altogether would be a mistake. To the extent that U.S. businesses can sell to China, that is of benefit to the United States, he said.

"The idea that we should cut off sales to China because of human rights concerns is misguided," Atkinson said. "There is no reason to expect that action to have any effect on Chinese human rights practices, and, second, unless other nations also take actions, the result will simply be to shift sales from U.S. companies to other nations' companies."

U.S. government also needs to make it clear that it will also support organizations that don't kowtow to the Chinese government.

Robert Atkinson, president, Information Technology and Information Foundation

Leverage

Justine Nolan, a professor at the University of New South Wales in Sydney and director of the Australian Human Rights Institute, emphasized the need to proceed on a case-by-case basis.

In the case of the province of Xinjiang, the widespread use of forced labor to turn out products such as solar panels and cotton is of particular concern given the regime's lack of disclosure about labor practices there and outside observers' lack of access to the region.

In Xinjiang, Nolan said, constructive engagement may have a limited impact overall. Hence, in that particular case, there is an argument for a corporation to withdraw from the region and take its business elsewhere, she said. But that is not a universal solution.

"Generally, this should be a last resort because the aim is to change practices in a way that improves the lives of workers, and more commonly this can be done by supporting longer-term relationships with suppliers that are premised on and support workplace change," Nolan said.

It does not minimize the severity of the human rights situation in China to say that constructive engagement with Chinese entities has born fruit for some companies that have been smart about balancing the

profit imperative with concern for human rights and working conditions.

"Kathmandu has been trying to do this while also consolidating its supply chain. Outland Denim is a different model, where they are smaller but have pursued a factory ownership model to control production conditions but are also now looking more seriously at their supply chain back to the source," Nolan observed, referring to two Australian-based clothing companies.

The WTA Ban

The upshot of experts' analysis is that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to the question of doing business in China, but there is room for a bifurcated strategy depending on the nature and profile of a given business or franchise. For her part, Nolan sees potential for certain types of companies uniting with others on the issue and acting in concert.

"Where some companies are being singled out—like the Celtics, or, as has happened previously, some apparel companies operating in China—the ideal would be to find support by the industry/sector as a whole taking a clear stance that supports human rights, not as an optional extra, but as part of the business-as-usual approach. There is some safety in numbers," Nolan said.

But in the case of a franchise as prominent and respected as the WTA, implementing a ban on events in China, even if harmful to profits, might really prove effective as a means of letting Beijing know that its chronic abuses are not without consequences. It could help convince the CCP that the stakes are just too high to continue its more egregious behavior.

"Powerful, wealthy corporations may have more options than individuals. The recent decision by the WTA to ban China tournaments in the wake of Peng Shuai's allegation against Zhang Gaoli is a case in point," said Golley. "Surely this has got to hurt the Chinese government, as well as those Chinese fans of Peng and the game. And it's not obvious, to me, how they can retaliate."

Golley expressed hope that the WTA's action might result in an improvement in human rights in China in the long term, along with hope that it does not have the unfortunate side effect of exacerbating Peng's current predicament.

In the view of Atkinson of the ITIF, it is important for organizations like the NBA to show moral courage and make it clear that the NBA will not retaliate against NBA members, like Enes Kanter, who speak their minds on China. "At the same time, the U.S. government also needs to make it clear that it will also support organizations that don't kowtow to the Chinese government," he said.

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