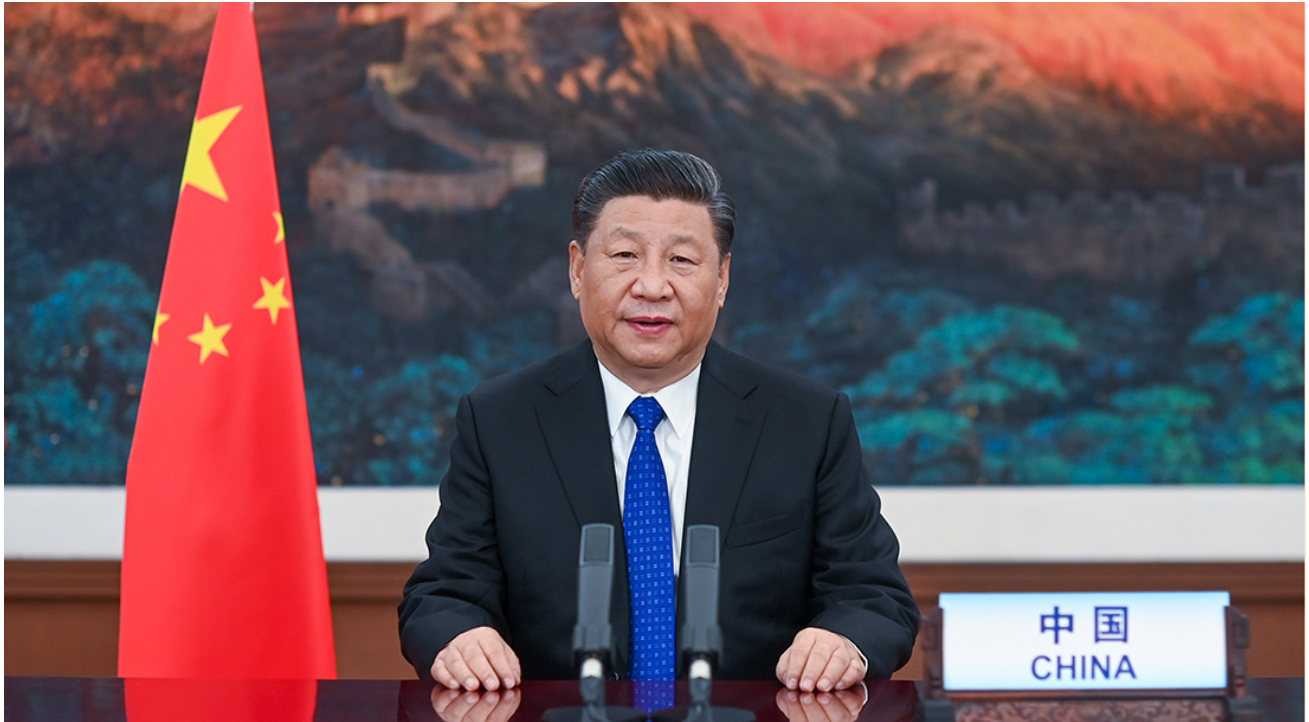


China's Horrific Triumph

It turned a domestic epidemic into a successful biological attack on the rest of the world.

by Conrad Black



As the end of the year approaches, we must reluctantly acknowledge that it has been a year of unimaginable triumph for America's only serious rival, the People's Republic of China. We will probably never know exactly how the coronavirus originated, and there appears to be a plausible scientific consensus that it was not deliberately and artificially created in the Wuhan viral laboratory, but it does seem likely that it originated there, rather than in the live-animal market of that city. In any case, there can be no possible doubt that once the Chinese government became aware of the virus, it took draconian measures, even by totalitarian standards, to contain and suppress it within China, and did absolutely nothing to prevent its spread out of China to the four corners of the world. The government of the People's Republic, as is its frequent habit, went to very great lengths

to disguise the extent of the virus in China, and the published official number of fatalities is a ludicrous underestimate. There is news film of special Chinese police riveting and welding shut the doors of homes and buildings to contain people at the height of the pandemic in that country, and there are many credible reports of special crematoria to dispose of the corpses of the very numerous victims.

In geostrategic terms, given the often-proclaimed Chinese intention of becoming the preeminent power in the world, it is objectively difficult not to respect the PRC's talents of improvisation in instantly transforming a domestic public-health crisis into what amounted to the stealthy unleashing of bacteriological warfare against the entire outside world, with particular emphasis on disturbing China's principal rivals, the large, economically advanced western countries. Japan, by some combination of good fortune and astuteness, moved at the outset to take drastic precautions and has not been overly disturbed by the coronavirus. But the world's other large, economically advanced countries – the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Canada, Spain, Brazil, and even India and Russia – have all been hard hit, and have mainly responded with more or less economically self-punitive lockdowns that have inflicted great hardship on their populations and severely strained their treasuries in caring for the suddenly and blamelessly COVID-related unemployed. If we concede, as seems reasonable, that the Chinese government did not deliberately create this virus and was taken by surprise when it arose, then we are also obliged to respect their ruthless ingenuity in leveraging upon the severity of their dictatorship and their official indifference to domestic humanitarian problems in inflicting the coronavirus on the world and thoroughly exploiting the humanitarian sensibility and vulnerability of the western countries.

Whether they foresaw it or not, leaders of the Chinese government must quickly have realized that the western

democracies had no ability to respond to the coronavirus in as authoritarian a manner as China and would be slow and reluctant to impute to China the deliberate propagation of such a virulent menace to the health of the whole world. While no economic statistics published by the People's Republic can ever be altogether believed, it is indisputable that by containing the coronavirus through recourse to extreme measures (by the standards of democratic countries), it confined economic damage in that country to a brief and sharp decline followed by a steep comeback. As the Chinese leadership must have hoped, the western states did not suspect for a long time that they were suffering from deliberate hostile Chinese actions in doing nothing to reduce or contain the spread of the coronavirus abroad, and were quickly panicked by their public-health experts into shutdowns that conferred immense competitive benefits on China and gravely weakened the economies and currencies of the major western powers.

As this year began, all talk of China's rapidly overtaking the United States economically, a truism for years, had stopped. China was seriously inconvenienced by American tariffs, and the United States had begun an effective and comprehensive response to China's challenge to the preeminence among nations that America has enjoyed for approximately 100 years. President Trump had effectively eliminated unemployment and almost stopped the arrival of illegal aliens, who provided cheap labor that undermined the prosperity of the American workforce. Despite the immense controversy surrounding his administration, Trump had considerable bipartisan support for a policy of constructive and non-polemical resistance to China's extraterritorial ambitions. With Japan, India, and Australia, the United States formed the Quad, a loose but flexible network of cooperation between countries that together had almost twice China's GDP and far superior combined military forces. An appropriate system of peaceful counterpressure to the steady expansion of Chinese influence

appeared to be in place and functioning well. It is still there, but the member countries have all been severely distracted by the social and economic implications of the coronavirus. As an astonishing bonus for China's unscrupulous opportunism, the coronavirus led to the defeat of China's greatest rival, who awakened the world to the Chinese challenge, President Donald Trump.

It is now clear that a broad range of Chinese policies have been astutely launched and discreetly conducted to raise China's strategic strength to a point that was not imaginable even ten years ago. Five million Chinese nationals are authorized to roam about the United States, a great many of them effectively conducting industrial, scientific, technological, and political espionage. There are Chinese intelligence units within many American corporations, stealing and remitting to the People's Republic details of American industrial innovation. Many Chinese institutions have made large donations to American universities that have not until very recently been revealed, and that are clearly devoted largely to ensuring that China benefits from the cutting edge of American academic science. The Chinese consulates in the United States are generally considered to be outright centers of espionage. And China, with a modest contribution compared with that of the United States and some other western powers, seems effectively to have taken over the World Health Organization and some other United Nations agencies and transformed them into useful tools of the People's Republic and its vast international ambitions.

The incoming Biden administration, including Mr. Biden himself and his nominee as secretary of state, Antony Blinken, have long Sinophilic records, and Biden even criticized Trump for shutting down direct flights from China on January 31, an act that undoubtedly spared many American lives. And the relationship of Hunter Biden with China and some other countries is now notorious. But there is no reason to question

the patriotism of a Biden administration. Even if they are very late in focusing on the Chinese rivalry, they will presumably patch together some sort of policy, taking advantage of the miraculous achievement of the Trump administration in developing so quickly a coronavirus vaccine. This should help reverse the terrible nosedive in American and Western fortunes implicit in the decisive defeat China has inflicted upon the West during this very sad and unsuccessful year. We have all in the West been thoroughly outsmarted and beaten; we must grow stronger and wiser from adversity, before the Chinese replicate the outrage they committed against us all this year.

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