



Virtual Event | Investigating COVID-19 and the China Coverup

TRANSCRIPT

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A video of the event is available: <https://www.hudson.org/events/2012-virtual-event-investigating-covid-19-and-the-china-coverup92021>

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John Walters:

Welcome. I'm John Walters, president of Hudson Institute. This discussion is going to focus on the investigation of the origins of COVID-19. Approximately two years ago, after the start of the worst pandemic in recent history, today there are still no scientific or investigative consensus about how the virus arose. After a devastating failure to stop and contain COVID-19, few measures have been put in place to prevent another catastrophe, partly because how COVID emerged remains unclear. We have seen keen institutions of global public health, science, intelligence, and free press lose public trust as they seem to have become politicized, confused, and even bullied by the Chinese Communist Party leadership in reporting on this issue. This event we'll discuss where we are and what would be necessary to proceed from here through a serious investigation of the origins of COVID-19 and the lessons that would teach about preventing further pandemics in the future.

We are pleased to be joined by a distinguished panel. I'd like to just briefly introduce them. I will not do justice to their long years of distinguished public service, but I want to let them tell us what they know on this important issue. Our first speaker will be Kevin Brock, senior fellow at the Center for Financial Stability. He's former assistant director of intelligence for the FBI was an FBI agent for 24 years and principal deputy director of the National Counter Terrorism Center.

Then Diane Cutler. She's a detailee now to the House Committee On Energy Commerce and is focused on investigations. She's detailed from the Department Of Health And Human Services, Office Of Inspector General, where she served as assistant special agent in charge for over 10 years. She's investigated criminal fraud, not only in the federal government, but outside in state government.

Tom DiNanno is an adjunct fellow at Hudson Institute. He served as assistant Secretary of State for arms control verification and compliance in that bureau from 2018 to 2021 and was active and a key player in investigating the origins of COVID-19 from the beginning in the Trump Administration.

Finally, David Asher is a senior fellow at Huntsman Institute. In 2020, he served in the State Department advising and supporting investigations into nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons proliferation. At state, he spearheaded a task force for the Office Of The Secretary, looking at the origins of COVID-19 and the role of the Chinese Communist government.

I'm going to ask each of the panelists begin by giving us three to five minute overview of where we are, where the investigation is based on their expertise, and then we'll have a discussion on some of the follow-up questions. So let me first ask Mr. Brock to start us off.

Kevin Brock:

And I'll unmute for everybody, as we were coached on. Thank you, John. Thanks for the invite. It's a pleasure to be with you this morning, and this is a vitally important topic. David, thank you for your invitation as well. I wrote on this few weeks ago. As a former head of intelligence for the FBI, I have a deep interest in issues that impact our nation's national security, how we gather intelligence and act on that intelligence. And in this instance where we have a pandemic of unknown origins, or at least that's the opinion right now, that has killed over 600,000 Americans, avoidable deaths over a year and a half period, we as Americans deserve answers to what happened, to how this started, and hopefully then

eliminate a path forward so that it doesn't happen again. My concern is that this is not being taken seriously enough.

I used an example in my article, if a terrorist organization had smuggled in an improvised nuclear device into New York city and detonated it and killed 600,000 people, we would not respond with a 90 day study by the intelligence community, but that's what we have. 90 days on the surfaces seems highly inadequate. It doesn't look like it is a question that was taken seriously. Then we have a report returned in 90 days that returns no conclusion. The community revealed itself to be basically divided on the question as to whether or not the virus was genetically engineered or created in a lab, or was naturally occurring, all of which they expressed with "low confidence," which is an intelligence community standard so that you get a sense of how firmly they believe or don't believe in something. This was startling to me for such an important question.

And then you'll notice since the report was issued, we haven't had much discussion about it at all. This has to change. This has to remain on the front burner. There are too many important national security issues in play that we have to consider and we have the souls of 600,000 people crying out for some type of answers, if not justice. And so that's why it remains important for us today to do that. I think in this discussion, it would merit an examination of how the intelligence community came to this conclusion, what our deficits are, why we couldn't get a better conclusion from this report, and maybe what needs to be done as far as next steps. So I'll stop there and then we can continue the conversation.

John Walters:

Thank you. Diane Cutler, may I ask for you to make some opening remarks, given your background, experience and your continuing work on the investigation?

Diane Cutler:

Thank you, John. It's good to see you again and thank you for this invitation to join this very important discussion, very timely. Yeah, we started investigating this case after the World Health Organization came back and had difficulties. They reported that they couldn't get information so we started looking into it. I'm right in the middle of the investigation. Some people are surprised that there's an investigation. In fact, there are a lot of investigations going on. There are several on The Hill that are unfortunately fragmented, which is not a criticism. It's just that we can move forward much better, much more efficiently and effectively if we combine forces and have more of a task force approach to this. It's just very important. And to Kevin's point of why we need to continue forward, yes, the lives lost, all their families need to understand why. We also need to inform policy makers about different mitigation strategies that we've already identified in our investigation to prevent this from happening again, which no one wants this to happen again of course.

One thing that we really need to do too, we have to do this investigation. We have to do it right, because we need to protect the scientists. We need to protect their safety. We need to protect the safety of the laboratories so that they can be empowered to continue their critical life-saving work. I mean, this case is the most important public health investigation of this century, and ground zero is Wuhan. People ask all the time, how can you investigate a case when the Chinese government isn't cooperating? Well, because with my investigative experience and my partner on the committee, we've

been able to identify US grants that have supported the risky research, the bat coronavirus research that was taking place in the Wuhan Institute of Virology and we have a lot of information already.

We have more questions than we do answers at this point, because we need to have a cohesive team, a task force environment where we are empowered to obtain documents, but we are making headway. We have identified several individuals and an organization that have been mostly involved with Wuhan's Institute of Virology and they have been uncooperative. So we need to have a cohesive investigation. We have to have a centralized strategy. In all of my years of investigating, I've coordinated national strike force efforts, national task force efforts, have investigated white collar crime and have been successful with it. We've disrupted organized criminal enterprises and have worked with the JTTF.

This is doable. It's doable. We can get answers. There is a lot of information that is available in the United States, but we haven't had the cooperation. I think some people may have seen the grant documents that were recently released last week that really shed a lot of light onto what is happening or what the research was that was being conducted at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Those are the kinds of records we need.

We followed the money. We've been following the money as best we can. It's been interesting to find out that a lot of the transparency that we should be having in the United States into where the grant money is spent and what it's going towards isn't as visible as intended. In fact, the grant that most people know about where EcoHealth Alliance is the nonprofit organization that's mostly worked at the Wuhan Institute of Virology over the years, 20 years, they hid their ties to China in the financial records. We've uncovered all of that. So we have a lot of information. Happy to answer our questions about specifics, but I'm just here to say that we can do this. We need a concerted effort. We need to be empowered and we can move forward and we can solve this.

John Walters:

Thank you, Diane. I'm going to now turn to Tom DiNanno to talk about his experience with looking at the discussion of lab origin or the non-lab origin of COVID-19. Tom?

Tom DiNanno:

Thank you, John. Good morning. Let me first start by saying what we did do at the state department in 2020 and early 2021 was in fact an investigation. We called it, in the Arms Control Verification Compliance Bureau, verification assessment to determine if this Chinese research program that we saw information regarding was in compliance with the biological weapons convention. And I know that's not the purpose of this discussion today, but we did engage in perusing both intelligence and open source information. In fact, a tremendous amount of open source information came into to our team to our analysts, including folks that have been involved in the arms control and verification business for decades, some of the most experienced federal employees that were advising myself and other department leadership on the Chinese program. We began to discover, in both the classified and open source, a disturbing pattern of events.

As I sit here today, I believe that investigation was inconclusive. It wasn't finished. I believe the current administration, I can't speak for them, I can only speak to what I did under the leadership in the Trump Administration, and that was to vigorously pursue whether or not China was violation of, again, my

specific piece of this was the biological weapons convention. I wrote a policy memo on this through the Hudson Institute recently and there's still a lot of questions that need to be answered.

As far as I'm concerned, it's inconclusive, but there's tremendous amount of troubling evidence, circumstantial evidence, and I'm glad that at least for today's call, we have two experienced criminal investigators that understand evidence and how important circumstantial evidence is and that there is a significant amount of strip substantial evidence. And that circumstantial evidence is in fact evidence, and to dismiss it as not being forensic evidence, therefore not credible, which seemed to be some of the mainstream thinking out there, doesn't add up to me. So I think having a discussion today of what experienced criminal investigators, how they develop evidence, how they present it to build a case, literally a criminal case, this was far different. The case that we were making is in the court of public diplomacy and international diplomacy.

And of course the origin issue is so critical because it would show one, potential Chinese malfeasance. We know they have a biological weapons program. The US government's on record, multiple administrations recognizing this. We know they have a advanced virus research program. To assume that these are decoupled or one is for peaceful purposes and one is for non-peaceful purposes, I've seen no evidence to indicate that. And not presenting or having forensic proof should not default to the status quo in a shrug of the shoulders. And I thought that Mr. Brock's recent article was really a breath of fresh air that we can't default to the status quo. It's too important. And also from the work that we do in Washington, in both the agencies and in Congress and think tanks and whatnot, there were two distinct public policy tracks that need to be pursued. One, through zoonotic or natural currency. Either through a lab, potential lab release. Those are two drastically different public policy outcomes and tracks that need to be pursued. That's why the origin is so critical. Lab safety, disclosures, international responsibilities under both the Biological Weapons Convention, which I was responsible for, and the international health regulations, which was not my direct area of responsibility, but there seems to be little debate that the Chinese were in gross violation of the international health regulations. If we're going to use and [inaudible 00:16:56] work. They need to be closely looked at in the age of the advanced biological technology. So with that, I'll stop my comments. And again, I look forward to hearing from the rest of the panelists sending questions. Thank you.

John Walters:

Thank you, Tom. We're now going to turn over to David Asher, who has both been a part of the investigation when he was in government and he's been undertaken in an effort both to talk about what we do know to help the public understand since he's joined Hudson, but also to talk about what we need to do to properly defend the United States from other pathogens in the future. David.

David Asher:

Thanks, John. Thanks everyone for joining us today. I'm glad people are still trying to pay attention to this issue in the media and in the public. I think no one who's read the DNI, the Director of National Intelligence, is somewhat pathetic to put it mildly, summary of their initial conclusions from their 90 day surge of activity can be pleased with what it says. In my mind, it's a bit of a disgrace to the nation's intelligence collectively that our intelligence community, whose job it is to penetrate hard targets, to tell us secrets that otherwise can't be obtained through normal types of research, didn't even make

probative conclusions that were factually based upon articles and manuscripts published by the Chinese regarding their own capabilities at the Wuhan Institute of Virology and other facilities that were related to it in Wuhan. And most importantly, they didn't pay attention to the cover.

The cover up in this situation is really worse than the crime. Whether this thing came out of a bat cave, arrived from the moon, was lab leak, is somewhat immaterial at this stage from the national security and health standpoint. In the long-term it matters, but right now we know the Chinese covered this up. And the idea that this is the Chinese character to cover up an international pandemic disaster is just not true. I was a senior official at the State Department in 2003, dealt with the Chinese during SARS. They didn't totally cover it up. They sort of covered part of it up, but they did tell us privately that they had a big problem. They needed help to try to identify what it was. And moreover, we had huge amounts of insight and information coming, not just from intelligence, but coming from the State Department's own reporting.

The Chinese were on a frantic search to try to figure out where this thing was spreading, where it actually had come from. I mean, they still don't know the exact origins. They've got a better idea, came out of a bat to I think a civet cat is I think the consensus, but this time they really weren't looking. That's the thing that bothered me the most at the State Department. We looked very hard at what the Chinese were doing, not just inside the Wuhan Institute of Virology, but where the Chinese Center for Disease Control was in terms of searching for this thing. And then up came someone, an organization that we'd never seen respond to a pandemic in China, which I'll end on, the People's Liberation Army. The same People's Liberation Army unit tied to their army military medical corps that was involved in their bio warfare program based on our State Department, the unclassified assessments over the years, was put in charge of cleaning this thing up.

So my concern is that they had some responsibility for this thing. The DNI, one of its conclusions, this wasn't a bio weapon. Well, maybe it wasn't in a canister and delivered off a back of a C-130 aircraft or something people think we'd see in a bio warfare situation, but there is such a thing as dual use research and concern and dual use weapons. [inaudible 00:21:16] dual use technologies that could be weaponized. The key thing with advanced biotechnology today as National Academy of Sciences pointed out is that it all comes down to intent. Almost any major lab in the world could create a bio weapon, unfortunately. It really comes down to if something was released in a form of a potential pandemic pathogen, whether it was covered up or not. They certainly in China weaponized this virus, however it arrived on the face of the earth by covering up, not just its origin, but the fact that it was spreading and could spread asymptotically human to human, and they did it for months. Thank you.

John Walters:

Thank you. Thank you, David. Thank you to the entire panel. I want to try to move forward on a couple of the issues that you've raised. I'd like to start though by first noting for the listeners, Hudson has prepared and has up for over a year now, a timeline of what's happened all from public reporting on the pandemic and listing what we've learned from the Chinese government, what the Chinese government has said, what the communist communication has been on this. It's long, but it shows you quite a striking record of evasion, misdirection, and it's quite troubling in terms of the cover up issue that David just raised. But I want to start first before we get to why we've had problems getting our institutions to do their jobs here about what do our investigators think we know now, however much it may be

disputed or there may be some who deny it? What do you think the preponderance of evidence is now about the origins of COVID-19, Mr. Brock?

Kevin Brock:

Great question and I think it's the burning question in front of us right now. So I can't think of another issue in a recent past that has generated so much misinformation and disinformation than this one. As Americans, we're wrestling with it. How should we treat ourselves? How should we protect ourselves? The government is giving mixed signals as to what the appropriate path is. It's become politicized so that people are now being left to their own way or feel of what the right response should be, because we just don't have a sense that we're getting the truth, that we have the information that we need. Now, to build on a point that Diane made, we have the investigators. We have the intelligence community that can get to the truth on this. The question is, do we have the will? Are there political, are there foreign international relation issues that come into play that obfuscate us finally getting to the truth? And I think we have to consider that.

The report that was issued at after 90 days, to me, indicates that there may have been more behind the scenes toward downplaying this question than it may seem. Our intelligence community is filled with people, analysts who can do analysis, specifically when there's as much open source material available. I'm not convinced that we are flying so blind in China right now from an intelligence collection standpoint that this report intimates. That's just not the truth. We have good sources, we have good methods, we have good tactics, and we should be able to aggregate the intelligence that we need as a government to formulate policy going forward. So the question becomes, then why did they issue a report like this?

I think there are competing interests regarding China that stem from a political atmosphere in this country that right now the power of structure may be more aligned towards the leftist, socialist, communist outlook of that government. You've got big technology that has existential markets in China right now that are, I used the word in my article, kowtowing to the Chinese communist party as far as their policies and practices. There are political influences exercised in this country by China in a very sophisticated way against our politicians that can sometimes compromise from a conflict of interest's standpoint. I think we have to be honest about that. So all of these factors come into play and ultimately result in a concern that perhaps our quest for truth is being downplayed or blocked in some way. So I think these are important questions. There's a lot of misinformation out there. And so, discussions like this are important.

John Walters:

Thank you, Mr. Brock. Ms. Cutler, Could you elaborate on what you think we know despite the efforts to prevent us from reaching certain conclusions? I think one of the things that we've already talked about here is the sustained effort by the Chinese communist government to be misleading, at least in some dimensions. They're not the only problem perhaps, but they certainly have made it more difficult and have not leaned in as a partner to get us to answers. Can you say what you think the investigators now

have reason to believe about the origins of COVID and what the obstacles are to getting to a full account?

Diane Cutler:

Sure. Thank you. Well, keep in mind I'm used to working towards a higher level with the burden of proof. And so I can say certainly that the information that we have now absolutely meets preponderance of the evidence that we have questions that need to be answered with documents from the executive branch and from grantees. I mean, we have information. So for instance, following the money, which is something we've been doing. Not only has NIH been funding this research, but USAID has been a huge player. The Department of Defense, the Department of Interior. I mean, there is a lot of information that these agencies have because of reports that had to go back to them. So we need that information. We can get it. We've identified what information we need. We just need help getting it.

And by that, I mean, subpoenas and we need to be empowered. What else are they sitting on? So we've seen that USAID funded a \$200 million project called PREDICT to capacity build at the WIV, at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Why is that happening? Why did we help them when we know that there's a military-civilian fusion mandate in China where research is going to... There's just no separation between the civilians and the PLA there, the military.

So we do have a lot of questions, but we have information about how much money. We've got that \$200 million program. We've got EcoHealth Alliance, which has been, like I said before, it's a nonprofit organization funded 98% by taxpayer money and they aren't cooperating. And they should have, by all accounts, by all of the reports that they have issued and that the federal agencies have issued, EcoHealth Alliance is going to have detailed information about the safety situations and the training at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. They're going to have detailed information about samples. Their business was to predict the next outbreak.

What kind of return on investment are we getting for that money? Because we haven't seen that. So we've also seen, we've gathered a lot of inconsistencies between what should have happened and the criteria for past outbreaks when they are of zoonotic origin. And then what has happened this time. Like I said, we have a lot of information, but we need the detailed documents behind it to do the thorough review. We've interviewed a lot of witnesses or people involved. We've reviewed documents, we have done what's normally done in an investigation, but it's been without the ability to get the actual evidence that we need to put into an evidence log.

We actually need to proceed with moving forward and getting the actual evidence that the taxpayers deserve to see. So we don't know what all the agencies are sitting on, but we have a really, really good idea. They're going to know about the conditions at the WIV, the safety concerns, the equipment, the research that was being done, who was involved, who we should talk to. We're ready to go. We've been going. We've been moving forward, but it has certainly been stymied by the obstruction from China and from a group of scientists that have... There was the Lancet article you've may have seen that was... It was part of the disinformation campaign, and that was proven when FOIA requests revealed some emails that showed that these scientists are coordinating public messages that go against what they are personally seeing and believing.

John Walters:

Thank you. I going to ask Tom DiNanno and David Asher. This discussion, I think, I would divide the confusion from a normal citizen like myself to two parts. One is I think a tendency for people with expertise that gave them authority to overstate from their point of view of expertise what we knew, I mean, government officials, health officials, science officials, where you've had a backtrack which has caused both confusion and, I think, a loss of confidence in some of these institutions of the World Health Organization, our own health institutions, on the what's happening with COVID, what can we do to control the damage that this pathogen is doing?

That's different from what you're also talking about now, where we're looking at origins, and it seems to me there's been consistent reporting that institutions of the United States government are not leaning forward to help find answers to the question, that they are, in fact, colluding in both public and private, maybe even with Chinese communist leadership interests, not directly as I'm not suggesting they're traitors, but what I'm saying is I think what has to be troubling to people is that our institutions that are supposed to protect us are now not protecting us, obstructing the way in which we can find the answer to this. It does, of course, suggest that they have something that there are themselves concerned about being criticized for. Tom and David, can you talk a little about this? Because you tried to put together an initial report, you've been talking about this subsequently, why are our institutions working against the American people, it seems, in some of these cases.

Thanks, John. Look, that's a great question. I guess my biggest surprise in all of this was the... I would expect the Chinese to obfuscate, cover up, and having spent the last four or five years, at least, understanding the threat from China, militarily, asymmetrically, having detailed access to their WMD programs, those programs that are designed to destroy the United States. There were some very strong assertions made by critical players in the government that, again, as I mentioned before, that this program, this Chinese research program was for public health purposes, exclusively for public health. I think my job in a position of public trust at the time was the old Reagan adage, trust but verify. That's great, thanks for sharing that, but how do you know that? How can you assume it's peaceful when we know everything they're doing...

Again, deluge of intelligence. I agree with Mr. Brock, the information we get is exquisite from our national intelligence agencies. Overwhelming information, advanced weapons program, asymmetric programs, WMD programs. Why would we assume this is a peaceful program? Seemed to be that should be our job in the government to say, "We need to cast a very wary eye. We should not trust the Chinese. If it is a peaceful program, that's fine. The burden of proof needs to be on proving it's peaceful because I'm going to assume, and again the position of public trust and national security agency, that it is not peaceful.

John Walters:

Thank you. David, you want to talk a little bit more about... I mean, you've been trying to make the argument that we ought to consider options initially, that the claim was made that there's no question this came from an animal source through nature, through the selling of animals in a market, through a variety of other things. And initially, some of your early discussion was, "Well, we have to consider the possibility that it came from a non-animal source or that it was modified or..." Not even asserting there was a conclusion, but that there was a need for a broader inquiry to gather facts and to consider possibility, not to shut down possibilities. Can you say a little bit about why are our institutions and

science which, in some ways, is always open-ended waiting from a hypothesis to see whether there's a better hypothesis, why did we turn toward this kind of obfuscation?

David Asher:

That's a very good question. I mean, I spent my career to break into hard targets. I helped penetrate the A.Q. Khan Network. I've gone after North Korea at the highest levels twice in my career. Helped hunt down Chapo Guzman by following the money, was involved a bit in the hunt for Osama bin Laden, work deciduously to penetrate the Iranian nuclear weapons program. And every time I worked with the US intelligence community, particularly supported by the Central Intelligence Agency, which is not the central incompetence agency... They've got great tech capabilities which have been consistently proven publicly with the exception of what happened in Iraq, which I want to reflect on in context, and the failure to predict 9/11 fully, which has some similarity to the failure to predict what happened in Wuhan fully for current intelligence reporting.

The IC, basically, has gotten scared of its own shadow over the years. It wants to rely on smoking guns. Even if the room's on fire, they don't want to believe there has to be some source to that fire. They failed to do deductive reasoning. But operationally, I have no doubt that we're capable of penetrating the Wuhan Institute of Virology. In fact, I would be interested in even speaking further about this if I didn't absolutely fundamentally believe we could do it and that, frankly, my own bureau, our own team at state was far down the road to working toward gaining access to valuable sources of evidence, not conjecture.

But let me say, the most powerful source of evidence remains, and it's not reflected at all by the DNI that wrecked national intelligence, is Wuhan whitewash report, I'll call it, is just the sequence itself. You've got a bat coronavirus backbone, not surprisingly. We all know these coronaviruses which cause the SARS outbreak could spread through intermediate hosts to humans. We have an intermediate host, which is clear in the sequence, which is that of a pangolin, very strange animal. You've got clear indications of a furin cleavage site from which has never been seen in this genus or clade, they call it, this type of coronaviruses in bats. There are some coronaviruses in bats that have this furin cleavage site. What does that do? It allows it to infect a human being and spread. And then we've got the fact that this thing spreads so asymptotically, which is totally atypical.

Okay. So, why does this matter? Well, because we put in our, I mean the State Department on January 15th of this year declassified or released a fact sheet on what happened in Wuhan, we made it clear that there were bats, there were pangolins, there were mice. We know they were humanized mice, which had human lungs. And there was work with furin cleavage sites all going on in the Wuhan Institute of Virology. So, four out of four of the preexisting conditions to explain, at least the most plausibly, the origins of this and it's likelihood to have involved that laboratory in Wuhan, are there. Why can't the intelligence community reflect on that? I have no idea. But they can't reflect on five other facts, which I'll just quickly summarize.

First, this thing wasn't smoldering the community prior to an outbreak, something which scientists had clearly assessed, including our national lab scientists. Despite an intensive search, I'm quoting from Dr. Steve Quay here, there hadn't been any close relative found in nature that can be identified before or

after. There's little genetic diversity in this thing. Okay? So, it was to optimize the spread, which is very strange. The fact that they were working on the furin cleavage site thing that allows it to go into humans at the Wuhan Institute and publish papers on how to do that, that seems like too much of a coincidence. And the virus is highly adapted. As I mentioned from the start, freshly emerging viruses are almost, I've never heard of from our scientists spread asymptomatic, which is very odd. But that was something that Dr. Xi, the bat lady, was working on, how to make it spread asymptotically. She did a paper on a coronavirus spoofing interferon response.

So, the clues, and these are clues, as Kevin has pointed out in his article. They're all there, but for the zoonotic side, there's basically no evidence. And if the intelligence community can't reflect on that as their starting point, then it becomes exasperating. And if they want to go to a higher standard, then they need to do their job, they need to break into this laboratory. They haven't done any of the typical things we saw like when we needed to penetrate other organizations, rewards for justice, tip lines, whistleblowers. We have so much information, just as Diane pointed, in our own government. We haven't looked at it. We haven't looked at with the EcoHealth Alliance knows.

So, I mean, the fact is this. We got to use the intelligence between our own two years to solve this problem and start putting criminal investigators in charge of this rather than intelligence investigators, because intelligence people don't typically investigate anything. Thank you.

John Walters:

Yeah. Thank you, David. I'd like to ask Mr. Brock and Ms. Cutler individually. Okay. So, from where we are now, and with the considerable disappointment in the ability to move forward with understanding and the lack of confidence, I think in a whole range of institutions, I want to ask them as investigators, as seasoned intelligence preparers, consumers, designers, what should we expect from an investigation? If we want to get this right, what do we have as the demands or the goals of such an investigation? And do you believe we will get the answers consistent with those goals going forward if we seek that from our own leaders? Mr. Brock?

Kevin Brock:

Yeah. Well, before I answer that specifically, let me address something that David just said, and this is, I think, vitally important. The American people have learned something new here. They've learned a new term, gain-of-function. How many of us knew what gain-of-function meant a year and a half ago? I think most Americans are aghast at the idea that in laboratories in China and in the United States, scientists are meddling with virus to change them, to alter them, and, in this case, to make them more powerful. Most people can't get their heads around this. Why would we do something like that? We don't get clear answers other than, "Well, it's important because we need to know this for future defense against such viruses." Well, if we're making them, then why do we need a defense?

So, there's a lot of confusion around this, a lot of upset. Part of the justice that we seek is getting answers to the original question, why was this undertaken in the first place? And now we're getting information that the United States government itself might have contributed to what was going on in the Wuhan lab, either through funding or scientific exchanges, whatever. We need to understand that.

So, as an investigator to get to your question, we're not going to get cooperation from the Chinese Communist Party. We know that. That's a given. So, we have to start in this country, and we have to start bringing people in to testify either before Congress or in some type of a criminal investigation if adequate predication can be established, where we lock people down under oath and get testimony as to what were all of the things that were set in motion prior to the release of this virus in this country? What cooperations existed with Wuhan? What exchanges? What funding? What information? What intelligence was shared? And we bring them before a grand jury and locked that information down to see whether there is actually a criminal nexus to this terrible tragedy. I think we owe it to ourselves to pursue that kind of investigation. We will see whether the political will exists to follow through on something like that to that degree. I pray that we do.

John Walters:

Thank you. Ms. Cutler, let me just add to the question. Even if you accept the principle of these dangerous pathogens, we want to study where they might come from, we want to study how to defend against them to understand them better, as Mr. Brock said, it's the question if we're having to make them, why do we have to defend against them? If you set that aside for a minute and say, "Well, [inaudible 00:47:29] people differed, they wanted to pursue this," from what you've seen so far, why did we choose to work with the largest, most powerful adversary in the world to the United States on these dangerous pathogens? I mean, there are many countries in the world that have sophisticated technological capacity. We have sophisticated technological... Okay, there's bats of a certain kind, I guess, in China, I'm not an expert, but the decision to work with the Chinese Communist government seems a little odd. Maybe it only seems odd in retrospect, but can you say anything about what you've seen so far in that regard?

Diane Cutler:

Sure, happy to. Thank you. So the scientific community is built on success through collaboration and information sharing. And I think we have a mix here of where the scientists were trusting the scientists and not paying attention to the national security efforts. And the risk assessment process that is currently in place has a lot to be desired. In fact, the person who runs that now just recently asked questions about or commented that it could be better.

And so I think you have the scientists trusting the scientists. You've got procedures and policies that need to be shored up. And the scientists, I think there's a lack of realization in this country for the pressures the Chinese scientists have to sustain over there. You know, they can't talk, they're not free to talk. And when I've seen people interviewed saying, "Oh, I, I believe so and so over Chinese scientists," they're putting their own filters on that situation.

The Chinese scientists do not have the free will. They are under a totalitarian regime. That can't be separated from this situation. And again, with the following the money, there is a very complex issue there that I won't get into here. But we have certainly uncovered a lot of questions that need to be followed to follow this money. There is an intricate global group that is working towards there's a bigger picture here. Okay? That I think may also play a part of it.

And then you have the fact that we have very strict controls here in this country in our laboratories. We know what we're doing. We know what our safety measures are. We don't know that in China. So your

question is valid. Why were we doing that? Why were we working with them? And now hopefully a lesson is learned now that they have closed their doors. The Chinese government has. They have not welcomed us. They have not encouraged or allowed a real investigation at all. They haven't even asked for our help, which is highly unusual.

So now that that has happened, I hope that we have learned a lesson and do not repeat the mistake of collaborating in this risky research in a place where we have no access. We have no control. It just doesn't even make sense. And I would like to say too, that one thing that can be done now is NIH and the other agencies can call on all of their grantees who have done work in China, any of this research, and ask for information. Say, "What do you know?" Do an all-call.

We need to take leadership in this country. We live in America. This is the greatest country on the earth. And we have a responsibility to lead this effort because the World Health Organization has not been able to do it. The intelligence community did their piece, their one piece, but it is time for a holistic investigation where it's an all- government approach, all hands on deck.

Thank you.

John Walters:

Yeah. I think one of the things that's striking when you think about it is the fact that that hasn't happened. And I was going to ask Tom and David as a kind of closing comment here. They actually began an internal inquiry. They tried to get cooperation inside the various bureaucracies of the United States government. And I guess I'd ask you, I mean, is this just when you ask a bureaucracy that may have been related to some of this, "Do you see anything wrong?" They might feel culpable. There might be the natural bureaucratic cover up to not embarrass myself or my institution. Is it more than that? I mean, I guess what's striking is it's one thing to have an embarrassing grant to somebody in the federal government. We've all seen that over the years we've been Washington.

It's another thing to have information about a global pandemic and not say, "Look, we may have made a mistake, but we're going to have to be transparent. We're going to have to go to our contacts and we're going to have to turn this information over to people who have to protect the American people and indeed people around the world." That has not happened. I mean, that's one fact that seems to me that you can say from this that is in some ways shocking. I mean, it's kind of the small cover up made into a monstrous cover up. Why is that? I mean, what can we do? What can we hope for now in terms of both breaking this open and learning what we need to learn to protect in the narrow term? But also what institutional restructuring might we do to better protect the interests of the American people when this kind of pervasive failure of leadership happens. Tom?

Tom DiNanno:

Yeah, John, this is the \$64,000 question. I do not understand the reluctance of the current administration or the leadership in the Congress. This should be a bipartisan issue. The offender here is the Communist Chinese Party. I completely agree with you. Mistakes were made. We need to learn from them and move on and correct the mistake. And obviously clearly mistakes were made. Institutional-wise, I think Diane points out some great points. There's a lot of money chasing a very opaque, unclear what the deliverables are. Unclear. I've been in the grant business, the grant oversight business. It's the

critical question of what are we getting for our dollars. That onus really lies with the Congress and the folks that write to checks, both in oversight and in appropriations. Oversight's important, perhaps inconvenient. But I think we've learned a very hard lesson here.

Other institutions, I agree with you. There may be some bureaucratic resistance. But again, I maybe defer to Mr. Brock on this, but the intelligence process seems cumbersome. They seem to seek the least common denominator, not perhaps the forward leaning, the best expert. Everyone has a view. Everyone has a vote in sort of this national consensus building.

I don't think we need consensus. We need to have a sharp and vigorous science-based debate and differences. And if mistakes were made, we need to own up to them and move on. But for God's sakes, let's stop doing business with China. I mean, what's wrong with the Pasteur Institute? And maybe think about a Five Eyes. There's a reason we have a television sharing network with our closest allies. Maybe we need the same with advanced WMD, dual use technology. So a lot of lessons to be made. But yeah, this should be a bipartisan issue. And I really wish it were. Thank you,

John Walters:

David, in answering that question, I want you to also touch on another point because I know you've been working a lot here at Hudson with members of the media to try to get some of this information out, to help them better understand and to push forward. But I don't think the media can avoid some culpability here, because they could have pressed some of these questions more pervasively. They could have not accepted what were, even for an average American, a kind of glib answer or an answer that wasn't consistent with the evidence in a non-expert way. What did you see in working with representatives of the media? What was the resistance for them to be more inquisitive and more insistent on better answers?

David Asher:

Good question. I mean, I've been supportive of media inquiry, but exasperated by the fact that they really haven't done a basic sort of investigation into the facts surrounding what was going on inside Wuhan with this dangerous research. You know, even if it didn't directly result in this, which I think it did, highly probably. But it certainly accounts for some of the behavior of the Chinese to cover up what was going on because all these facts just point that the Chinese government was engaged in a dual use research technology effort with their People's Liberation Army, developed essentially biowarfare capabilities, maybe not bioweapon. It's hard to say what a weapon is these days. That's why the intelligence committee is coming out and saying, "This wasn't a weapon." Well, how do we know what a weapon is? It all comes down to intent.

And we know this. The intent of the Chinese government, as any journalist can see, as any person can see, is to cover this thing up. I mean, why did they take down the data from their database on coronaviruses at the Wuhan Institute in September, mid-September? Did something happen? I mean, why does it take Jon Stewart to ask what are the odds of this pangolin mating with a bat? You know? I mean, the sequence has to be accounted for by some type of recombination event, or some sort of scientific convolutional event, not evolutionary event.

And it seems pretty obvious that they were working on this approach of creating a bridge between these different species and seeing the sequence. Anyone, any journalist, can see that. Why hasn't that gotten more coverage? I don't know. It's like a fingerprint. I mean, Kevin's done a lot of fingerprint investigations I'm sure when he was younger agent. I worked with the FBI in many of them.

I mean, frankly, if the FBI was back in charge of this in a bigger part, like they did after 9/11 with the 9/11 commission, and we had a 9/11 led commission, I'm pretty sure we could get to the bottom of this. I've certainly received information and have at Hudson from people who worked in the Wuhan Institute of Virology from our Australian partners. They trained Dr. Shi, the bat lady. The French actually trained her the most. The Taiwanese have great information. What about India? India's the one that's got the biggest threat from Chinese biowarfare. In public health they know more about China and its capabilities probably than anyone. They're sitting right on their doorstep and they're in a constant state of low intensity conflict.

I'm just telling you, we can get to the bottom of this. And what we seen is irresponsible lack of resolve. And frankly, I am absolutely confident in our intelligence community's ability to break into almost anything on the face of the earth. Certainly the Wuhan Institute of Virology. We just have to have clear orders to do so at basically whatever cost. And thank you for the chance to speak up.

John Walters:

Yeah. Well, thank you, David. Thank you, Tom. Thank you, Ms. Cutler. Thank you, Mr. Brock. I want to thank you people who've joined us as well. Look, my takeaway from this is there's a lot of work to do. We aren't there yet, but we have some reasonable expectation that can be done. This covers working with some of the investigators. Now, obviously there's more to be done, but there's more to be done even on the outside. As some of you have pointed out, there's the assembling of public information as well. And I think we're going to continue to do some of that in our own way at Hudson, but we're not the center of this. Many of our scientific institutions could do a better job, as well as I think some of those who defend the public trust in the media. More probative, more intensity on this issue will be good for not only the United States, but I think the whole world. So thank you all for joining us and thank you for helping us better understand some of the tasks ahead.