Virtual Event | Book Talk: What Really Happened in Wuhan

TRANSCRIPT

Discussion……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..2

• Sharri Markson, Investigations Editor at The Australian, host of “Sharri” on Sky News Australia
• David Asher, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute

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A video of the event is available: https://www.hudson.org/events/2034-virtual-event-book-talk-what-really-happened-in-wuhan112021

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David Asher:

Good day to you all. I'm David Asher, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute here in Washington, DC, where I've been working extensively to uncover the COVID coverup, as we see it from our vantage point at Hudson. And that's a coverup that extends all the way from China into our own governmental system at a level that's disarmingly uncomfortable and worrisome for the future. But today we're here to do an interview with a journalist who's written the most important book so far to emerge related to what happened in Wuhan. In fact, it's called What Happened in Wuhan. It's a tremendous book. It's written by Sharri Markson. Sharri is the investigation lead writer at the Australian Head of Investigations and host of Sharri on Sky News Australia, which is a very popular weekend news show.

She's also a very award-winning journalist. She's won two Walkley Awards in Australia and the Keith Murdoch Award for Journalism and the 2020 News Award for Investigative Journalism. She's got so many awards, in fact, if I read them all, we'll eat into time, but she certainly deserves an award for What Happened in Wuhan. I found this book spell binding myself, having lived through it. Learned a lot and recommend it to all. So today we're going to do an interview with Sharri, and ask her to start, what caused you to investigate what happened Wuhan before almost any other journalist in the world? How did this come to pass?

Sharri Markson:

David, it's great to be with you, and I'm so honored to be joining the Hudson Institute for this event. So thank you so much for having me. So it was about the 12th of March, 2020, and there were theories floating around that there was this laboratory in Wuhan. I texted one of my trusted contacts over an encrypted app. And this contact was tapped into Australia's foreign intelligence agency, ASIS. I said to him I wasn't even looking at writing a story. I mean at that point, the pandemic was really exploding, the virus was really exploding in Italy, but it wasn't a big issue globally yet. So I just texted him out of curiosity, more than anything else, saying, "Is this definitely a conspiracy theory, or could the virus have some connection to the laboratory?" And I was hugely surprised when he texted back an hour later saying that this was a possibility, that the intelligence agencies were exploring the connection to the lab. So over the course of the next six weeks, I pursued this. And eventually about six weeks later, I had enough confirmation from a lot of my contacts that, yes, the Five Eyes intelligence agencies, and that's the intelligence agencies of United States, UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, were looking at whether COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, had leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, and that in particular, they were looking at Shi Zhengli. Of course she's now a household name around the world, but also her number two, [unclear 00:03:52]. I reported this in a front page story at the time, just a factual story that the intelligence agencies were exploring the connection to the lab. And David, I thought that other media would follow-up on this, but instead I was ridiculed by everyone for pursuing a conspiracy theory. The attacks were really, really strong in Australia, even particularly from our public broadcaster, the ABC. It's the equivalent of the BBC in the UK.

So over the course of the next six weeks, I pursued this. And eventually about six weeks later, I had enough confirmation from a lot of my contacts that, yes, the Five Eyes intelligence agencies, and that's the intelligence agencies of United States, UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, were looking at whether COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, had leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, and that in particular, they were looking at Shi Zhengli. Of course she's now a household name around the world, but also her number two, [unclear 00:03:52]. I reported this in a front page story at the time, just a factual story that the intelligence agencies were investigating a lab leak. And David, I thought that other media would follow-up on this, but instead I was ridiculed by everyone for pursuing a conspiracy theory. The attacks were really, really strong in Australia, even particularly from our public broadcaster, the ABC. It's the equivalent of the BBC in the UK.

So, this was really not a fashionable topic to explore, particularly for a mainstream media outlet, but the more I looked into it, there were so many aspects to it. And as I said, the more I looked into it, the more people I interviewed from different walks of life. And over the course of my reporting on this since that time, I've interviewed intelligence officials, scientists, investigators like yourself in the State Department, politicians, whistleblowers in Wuhan, and Chinese dissidents now based in the West. So when you speak
to all of these different people and hear their stories and what information they'd uncovered, and then often that leads you on a path of your own to investigating certain areas and uncovering more information myself. This has been a huge investigation. There was so much to it, that I knew I had to write a book because you couldn't possibly get across the complexities of the cover up that had gone on here and of the research that was being undertaken in Wuhan in a few newspaper articles. It really needed a whole book, which is what's just come out.

David Asher:

Well, and we’re certainly grateful that you did do this because it provides not only a detailed chronology, it breaks it all down into very acutely footnoted and pinpoint conclusions. It's impossible to ask someone to describe the key conclusions of their book in a single question, but I would just wonder, what takeaways did you ... What do you think readers should get out of reading What Really Happened in Wuhan?

Sharri Markson:

Oh, I think that is an impossible question because it's about 400 pages and there's so much detail in there, but there was some huge revelations in there that I discovered as I was reporting this book. Firstly, the intelligence that Wuhan Institute of Virology scientists had been hospitalized with COVID-like symptoms back in November 2019. Although John Ratcliffe, the former head of the ODNI told me that was actually October 2019. You do know the answer to that, David, having discovered the intelligence yourself, but I won't ask you to speak about intelligence of course. But that was a story I first broke back in March this year, two months before The Wall Street Journal did, while reporting on this. That was a big revelation.

The fact that China had developed a vaccine for COVID-19 in February 2020, that was just so early. I got the documents for when they lodged that patent for the first COVID-19 vaccine. And then when I've interviewed scientists about it, like Nikolai Petrovsky and others, they say that not just to develop a vaccine, but also to compile all the paperwork required for a patent indicates ... They said it’s not impossible, but in all likelihood that meant the work on the vaccine for SARS-CoV-2 started in 2019. And as we know, that was well before China involuntarily admitted to the WHO that there was an outbreak. So, that's a big revelation as well.

Something that I got from a whistleblower in Wuhan, who provided a firsthand account of a community doctor, is that in November 2019, there were classes in schools that were shutting down because a student had become infected with COVID-19. Just that alone is so significant because it shows that there was ... And the other information that that community doctor in Wuhan had as well about he was seeing 23 patients a day with what he believes was COVID-19 in November, the same symptoms. There was widespread transmission through November, which puts the outbreak to October or potentially September 2019. So, I mean, those are some of them, but there's so much more.

The fact that scientist, this is the last one before I talk too much, David.

David Asher:

No, no, it's fantastic. Keep going.
Sharri Markson:

The military scientist who lodged the patent for the first COVID-19 vaccine, his name was Zhou Yusen. I found out and first reported that he died mysteriously a few months after lodging that patent and prior to the pandemic. So in late 2019, he was doing work with Shi Zhengli. So this is again, there's firm evidence of the Chinese military being involved in the coronavirus and MERS and other research that was happening at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. There's so much more, but I'll be here forever if I talk through all the big revelations.

David Asher:

One of the things that's in the news, at least on the back pages right now, is this Director of National Intelligence report that came out on Friday. It was about 18 pages long or 19 pages, where they elaborated on their conclusions, which they laid out in a short memo back in, I think it was late August, early September. Personally, I find it startling and almost a disgrace to the nation's intelligence or the international intelligence, because it's at odds with a lot of specific things that you point out in your book, which you provide reliable sourcing for, and it's also at odds with some things that have come out recently through some leaks and some Freedom of Information Act requests in the United States. I'm just wondering what your reaction from down under to the DNI report is, and how do you interpret it from your perspective as someone who's done research at a level that I would say is greater than the Director of National Intelligence office in my experience?

Sharri Markson:

Well, a few points. I think firstly, I was really surprised that in the body of this report, they were still addressing information that had come out early last year, like the Mace report, for example, and claims by, is it Li-Ming Yan, the virologists from Hong Kong. They were addressing or trying to debunk parts of their claims in that report, which is 18 months old now, rather than looking at, as you say, some of the more recent developments. The Wuhan Institute of Virology, in conjunction with the EcoHealth alliances' proposal to DAPA, the defense agency in the United States, that detailed, extremely risky concerning gain-of-function work, inserting fewer cleavage sites into bat coronaviruses, just this is what they should have been examining, but they were dealing with really old and outdated information. So that's problematic.

But also something that emerged in the course of interviewing a lot of people for my book, and including members of your team in the State Department, David, is that there was a lot of resistance in the intelligence community to even considering the possibility that this might have leaked from a Wuhan lab, firstly. But then secondly, that it could have been part of any offensive or defensive bio weapons program, as Tom DiNanno points out on the record in the book. This is literally the job of the Arms Verification and Control Bureau in the State Department to investigate whether there have been any breaches of the biological weapons convention, but there was resistance. There were people who didn't want to investigate, whether this coronavirus gain-of-function research was a breach of the biological weapons convention. So, that's partly because I think there's a resistance in some of the intelligence agencies, not all, not everyone, but the resistance in my opinion is partly because there was some politicization of the community, and you can't separate the fact that this pandemic broke out during a United States election year.
But the other side of it is partly because they were being advised by scientists who were conflicted. And one thing I report in the book is that there was this meeting on February 3rd, 2020, such an early meeting, where members of the ODNI and the FBI attended elements of the intelligence community, and they were being briefed by, literally invited to attend that briefing where Peter Daszak, who'd been working with and funding the lab for 15 years. I've got the full list of attendees in the book, but I think Ralph Barrack was one of them as well. He'd been doing gain-of-function research in conjunction with Shi Zhengli at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, and there were other scientists who were strong proponents of the natural origin theory and had signed that letter in the Lancet saying any other possibility, a lab leak, was a conspiracy theory. So I think there was a problem with the advice that agencies were getting. They could have been acting in very good faith, but they were being advised by conflicted scientists.

David Asher:

When you conclude with at least high confidence that there was a lab leak as the origination point of COVID-19, what are the key facts that you discovered in your research that convinced you of that?

Sharri Markson:

Well, in the conclusion without giving everything away, we can't rule it out. I think the proponents of the people who insist this virus was natural, they're very close-minded. And I think none of us can rule out the possibility that this virus arose naturally. Other pandemics in the past have started naturally, but what we have seen, and this is a different way of looking at it, is that we haven't seen any firm evidence that this virus had a natural origin, but then you're seeing overwhelming this preponderance of evidence that indicates there was an accidental leak from the Wuhan Institute of Virology specifically, and how I've viewed it and how I've approached this investigation is you look at the science, what the Wuhan Institute of Virology was doing, what scientific experiments with coronaviruses they were engaging in, and then many scientists say there are clues within the virus itself that could indicate it had been subject to laboratory research, although of course that's not definitive. So there's the science of it, and there's such strong indication there when you look at the risky experiments they were either conducting or had been planning to conduct, and they took their virus database offline so we don't know the full extent of what they were doing. And we know they have a history of not publicly disclosing viruses until years afterwards.

And then the other side of it is what was happening in Wuhan at that time and what was happening at the laboratory at that time? And again, there's a lot of evidence that indicates there was a leak. A lot of evidence in what I call the chapter, "The Window For an Outbreak," from September to November 2019. And there's really a lot of detail. So I think when you look at all of that, you'd have to say on the balance of probabilities, we're seeing a lot of evidence that this was a leak of either a natural or laboratory manipulated virus from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, rather than something that just naturally, innocently sprung from human contact with an infected animal.

David Asher:

You know, it's interesting to me that the first international leader that I can recall who called for an investigation is Prime Minister Scott Morrison, your PM. What's the status of Australia's investigation?
After all, Shi Zhengli had a close partnership with your... I'm trying to remember your laboratory that does all the work.

**Sharri Markson:**

The Australian Animal Health, yeah.

**David Asher:**

The Australian Animal Health [Laboratory’s Linfa Wang] who’s a key figure. If you could maybe explain who he is in the world of coronavirus research globally, and especially with Dr. Shi at the, at the Wuhan Institute and partnership with Dr. Barrack, who you mentioned from the University of North Carolina. Where’s the Australian investigation? You guys were the ones that demanded it, and what’s the status?

**Sharri Markson:**

Well actually the Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has just reiterated that call for an investigation to the origins just now at the G20 summit. So Australia has been very forward leaning on this. As as a result, we were hit with rolling tariffs and other retaliation. I mean, look, the Chinese ministers have been meeting with the Taliban, but they haven’t spoken to our ministers and government in probably close to a year and a half, coming on two years now. It’s extraordinary. Just because Australia stood up and called for an investigation into the origins of COVID-19.

The international community knew Australia was going to be doing that before we did, and what I found out and included in the book is that the U.S. or secretary of state at the time, Mike Pompeo, who’s of course at the Hudson Institute now, and I interviewed him both for my book and documentary, although not on this specific question, but my understanding is that the U.S. was happy for Australia to take the lead in calling for an inquiry into the origins, because it positioned the issue as a free world versus tyranny issue rather than a United States versus China issue, which of course this isn’t. This is much more important. What’s really important to note, and most people forget, is that when our foreign minister, Maurice Payne, first said there should be an inquiry, because she was the one who said it, she said in those same remarks that the inquiry should not be conducted by the World Health Organization.

And she actually used an example. She said it would be a bit like a poacher and gamekeeper scenario. She was suggesting that their response actually needed to be part of what is examined by this inquiry. And then Scott Morrison suggested it should be something with more teeth, like a weapons style investigator. But instead we saw the WHO probe take place with China’s terms of reference and China controlling it, and now, again, they’re starting a second probe that has many of the individuals who participated in the first one and other individuals who just have such a clear conflict of interest that should preclude them from being part of any investigation into how this virus started.

**David Asher:**

You know, whatever the origin is, we've discussed before, whether it came out of a bat cave or a lab, the thing that’s most disturbing, frankly, is the cover up for six to eight weeks minimum inside China as the existence of potential pandemic pathogen COVID-19, wherever it came from. When do you estimate
that the Chinese leadership in Beijing actually realized what it was going on, and what evidence did you uncover that they actually tried to search for the origin of COVID-19? Did you look into that issue?

Sharri Markson:

So this is an interesting thing about when Xi Jinping and other Beijing leadership knew about this. And one thing I explored in detail in the book is why former President Trump was... why he kept publicly praising China for its cooperation, why he kept publicly tweeting saying Xi Jinping was being transparent when the greatest coverup we’ve seen was actually taking place. And what I found out was that there was a school of thought that the Chinese president didn't know. So they were trying to encourage cooperation, and that by March, April, they realized, the Trump administration realized that no, this act was a coverup. Very early on Mike Pompeo, as early as January, he says, in an interview for the book that he realized the United States was getting shut out. So he knew that from a very early point. He compared it to the movie "The Sting."

But in terms of what I have uncovered, I think for school classes to be shutting down in November, where there were infected students, that's a very clear sign that authorities knew there was a problem. Schools just don't make the decision to shut down classes on their own. And look, there's so much other evidence for an early coverup. We've seen that the Chinese leadership made the decision to wipe any mention of coronavirus from social media, to destroy early samples of the virus, literally order the laboratory companies to destroy the earliest samples of the coronavirus. They never published the genetic sequence, the genetic code. That was done by Eddie Holmes here in Australia. And the code had been around for a while before he did that.

So there's no question this was a very strong coverup. And me personally, but more importantly, many of the people I've interviewed disagree with the intelligence communities' assessment that this is not diagnostic of anything. Many former heads of intelligence agencies, including Richard Dearlove, who was the head of Britain's MI6, many other people say that the cover up does indicate that China was hiding, was trying to hide the outbreak, trying to fix it, trying to stop anyone from finding out about it, but that the leadership were aware that there was an outbreak.

David Asher:

You've investigated and won numerous awards for uncovering complex conspiracies that are not theories, they're reality, and they led to people losing their jobs and certainly you managed to put some significant pressure on a number of individuals who had been engaged in coverups in Australia. I know you're not a China expert, but can you think of any good reason why the Chinese would cover up something that they had clear natural origins of? What would motivate even the paranoid regime in China? I mean, if they had it in a cave in Yunan, why wouldn't they just say that's where it came from. And if they had said it, would we ever really have looked into what really happened in Wuhan. I mean, they didn't even put out what I would call a cover story, other than the initial one, which was that it came out of a market. What's your view on this?

Sharri Markson:

Well, firstly you are a China expert, and we've done dozens of hours of interviews, possibly more over the past year or so. But I think of course coverups are a hallmark of authoritarian regimes. That's just
their nature. But in this instance, the coverup was so extensive and the aggression at any suggestion of an inquiry into how a pandemic started, something so standard and basic, yet has been met with such intense aggression from China. And what I think is fascinating is that while initially there was this story about the wet market that quickly fell away, and you you don't really see China's propaganda outlets insisting anymore that this is a natural virus. They're saying now that it's a laboratory leak from the United States. So I think the official line has shifted from China, from its propaganda outlets away from being a natural virus, saying it was a lab leak from Fort Dietrich or somewhere else in the United States.

And we haven't seen that same evidence that they are determined to find the natural source. People who were around in China, who I've interviewed around 2003, there was culling of civet cats. We're not seeing that search now. The WHO report said China tested 80,000 animals, and maybe this is what you want me to talk about, David. The WHO report says China tested 80,000 animals. But when you look at the timeframe, I think that was from 2018 to 2020. So they were looking at animals that had already been tested over the previous couple of years, rather than an intense search now. So yeah this, again, would all indicate that they are well aware of how and where the virus started, and they're not leading an aggressive search for an intermediary host, or original animal.

David Asher:

Do you have any trust at this stage in the WHO's competence, let alone its track record? I mean, if they indeed were aware that the information, the date of origin of the information on these animal tests occurred in years prior to the COVID-19... At least in some aspects, some of the tests occurred before it broke out, how can they even refer to that with any credibility from your perspective as a journalist?

Sharri Markson:

I mean in my view, the WHO bears as much culpability for the spread of this virus globally almost as the Chinese Communist Party does, because they spread misinformation at the start. The WHO, and people forget this, and often I pull out the original tweets that Tedros sent at the time or the WHO sent at the time, and I just retweet them so it's a reminder to people, why are we trusting this body again, to do another investigation? The WHO objected to travel bans that were introduced by the U.S., Australia, and New Zealand. They said there was no evidence that the virus was capable of human-to-human transmission. In fact, it is the most infectious virus we've seen in our lifetimes that spread around the world. There was so much misinformation.

And not only that, but the WHO whose very existence, its very reason for being is to try and prevent a pandemic, to prevent the spread of a virus when there is an outbreak, they categorically failed to do their job. They didn't get officials on the ground early enough. When they did get them on the ground in February 2020, only two of that team were allowed into Wuhan. And even then they were not allowed to visit the wet market or the laboratory. So the WHO has been beholden to China from the very start under Tedros's leadership. This wasn't the case under previous director generals.

So in my opinion it is utterly discredited and should not be charged, once again, with leading another inquiry, particularly when it has members like Marion Koopmans in it who already has a predetermined outcome, she's already said repeatedly that a lab leak is a conspiracy, or she doesn't think that's where the virus started. You need people to go in with open minds who are capable of investigating both
scenarios properly. And the intelligence community has even said that both scenarios are plausible explanations for how the virus started.

David Asher:

What's interesting is, it came out over the weekend in The New York Times, and it hasn't been refuted, that the one U.S. government agency that's part of the intelligence community that's actually specializes in national criminal investigation, concurrently the FBI is the agency that has moderate confidence that there was a lab origin of COVID-19. And I'm just wondering, why do you think that they reached that conclusion? Is it because they actually know what a conspiracy looks like and they understand that it's a crime itself? I mean, what's your impression from Australia of that revelation?

Sharri Markson:

Look, I think, David, I wish I could ask you that question now because you've had intimate dealings with each of these agencies, or at least many of the agencies. So you know how they're all reacting. I would love for you to share that if you can. You literally were dealing with these individuals.

David Asher:

Of course, but unfortunately, I can't really comment even on the veracity of the conclusion, but it's just interesting to me as a criminal investigator as part of my work was with the DA and the FBI and the biggest Asian organized crime case to the FBI in history, probably history of the world. Royal Charm, Smoking Dragon. They definitely targeted Chinese organized crime in partnership with Chinese government, and the government in North Korea.

And I came to develop a deep respect for the investigative capabilities of the FBI. And despite the fact that they've been much maligned here in Washington for possibly improperly investigating President Trump by some people's standards. But the reality is when they do an investigation, they collect evidence, they don't just collect intelligence. Evidence is a lot more powerful than intelligence.

I've been involved in the intelligence business too, as you know, and the standard of evidence that has to be presented in a criminal court, which is what the FBI is held to and any investigation, even when involving intelligence is extraordinarily higher than the other agencies in the intelligence community. And so for them to have moderate confidence seems to be pretty significant. What do you think?

Sharri Markson:

I think just before we move on, I just think that there is still evidence or intelligence that hasn't been released yet. That's something John Ratcliffe, former Director of National Intelligence, said on the record on camera, in an interview I did with him for a documentary with Sky News Australia that is based on my book. And he, on the record said there is still very strong intelligence that hasn't been made public yet. And so perhaps that is part of why the FBI is forming its assessment with moderate confidence, that this was a lab leak. I think we need to see what other intelligence there is. And Joe Biden has promised transparency. And if there is, as John Ratcliffe says, and he would know as the former Director of National Intelligence, then I think we need to see that, we need to know what other evidence there is.
And it's not just him, there are many people I've interviewed who say, yes, there is still quite big pieces of evidence that haven't been released yet. And I think the public deserves internationally, five million people have died. This is why we're examining this. Why we need to know the truth. We launch big murder investigations when just one person has died. We've had five million people die, let alone all the people suffering long COVID, not to mention the economies that have been decimated and businesses and jobs lost. So I think it's about time that the Biden administration commits to the transparency that it pledged and does release, declassify some of that extra evidence that does give an indication about where the virus and how the virus started.

David Asher:

As I think you may know Dr. Fauci among others is going to be testifying for the Senate Health and Environment, Labor and Pension Committee, the Health Committee this Thursday here in Washington. What would you want to ask Dr. Fauci if you were a U.S. Senator with him up there under oath?

Sharri Markson:

He needs a proper interrogation and it needs to be done. I think the problem is... And Rand Paul did such a great job, of course, but the problem is you need, I think, scientists to ask the questions of him so that he can't wiggle out by pretending he knows more than a politician does. There's so much to ask him about why he lifted the ban on gain-of-function research in 2017. Did he get permission from anyone? Remember the Obama administration had banned gain-of-function research, lifted my reporting in the book. Everyone says it was Fauci in a meeting in the Office of Science and Technology Policy in the White House. That meeting when it was lifted, who did he tell? Did he tell? Anyone in the book I write that he didn't even tell his immediate boss, Health Secretary, Alex Azar. Why did he keep this secret?

What permission did he get? Did he inform anyone about why it was so risky? Another key point is that in the early days of the pandemic, when he was sitting in the Oval Office as the top coronavirus advisor to the president, and they were talking about how this pandemic started, he didn't mention that there was this lab in Wuhan that was doing research on coronaviruses. This was left to other people like Miles Yu, who's also at the Hudson Institute now. He was Pompeo's Chief China advisor, like Matt Pottinger. It was left to other people and like journalists like myself to try and unpick all of these details when he had a lot of knowledge about this. And he was literally sitting there in the Oval Office and didn't say a word. So there's a lot of questions. What information does the NIH have?

I mean, why hasn't the NIH opened its records about what other proposals it might have from EcoHealth or the Wuhan Institute of Virology about what other projects they may have been planning or intending to undertake that they might have been submitted that may not have been funded. There's so much we need to know here. And I really think that it needs to be not just politicians, but there need to be virologists as well, who are able to properly question him. I don't know if that's ever going to be possible, but that really needs to happen, so he can't get away with saying this isn't gain-of-function. So he can't get away with in effect lying.

David Asher:

What do you think about this EcoHealth Alliance and its role in this entire conspiracy and coverup? How do you, as an outsider looking into the U.S., how would you explain to our listeners and your readers the
importance of the EcoHealth Alliance and Peter Daszak and how they've been able to get away with reporting almost nothing? The only thing that's easy to come out are things of Freedom of Information Act or leaks. I mean, the fact that Project Diffuse was centered on creating a bat-born coronavirus by inserting a foreign cleavage site, which people don't know what that means. It basically allows the spike protein to bind efficiently to ACE2 in human lungs. One of the distinguished features of COVID-19. I mean, is EcoHealth Alliance essentially getting away with murder as well?

Sharri Markson:

I think the problem is how can the United States fund coronavirus research? And so just to put this really simply at the same time that the United States government, the Obama administration had banned gain-of-function research in the United States, the U.S. was funding this research and others that wouldn't fall into the definition of gain-of-function, but was still risky research involving coronaviruses and genetically manipulating them. The U.S. funding was still happening in China and this is the key point in laboratories where they had no oversight. So I think the questions here are almost not for EcoHealth, but for the United States government. How could it have funded research in the laboratories where it had no oversight, where it still has no oversight, where we still can't get hold of the virus database that has a section on unpublished viruses, even when five million people have died and the pandemic's upended the world?

It's such a crucial question and it's not just China that isn't being transparent here, it's many agencies and many governments in the west. And I really think we're owed an explanation about why this funding was happening in Wuhan, in labs where there was zero oversight, and where the U.S. knew it wasn't going to have oversight. This wasn't just a shock. We know from those cables that Josh Rogin first reported in *The Washington Post*, we know from those cables reading them that back in 2018, U.S. officials were warning the State Department and Washington that the Wuhan Institute of Virology was limiting international cooperation. We knew the French had been kicked out.

So again, why was money still flowing down and checked? And that's not to say I'm not critical of EcoHealth, of course I am. And you read the book and you can see that. But my main criticism is for the funding. And just another point in EcoHealth, its members and its board members are international, including in Australia. So this is not just the United States agency, there are some people in Australia who are part of EcoHealth Alliance as well.

David Asher:

Why do you think we haven't seen, even in this latest DNI, distorted report, I could say something worse about it actually than that, but it's really horrible. Why don't-

Sharri Markson:

Well, how would you describe the report?

David Asher:

I mean, based on your research, including your research that you drew on the fact sheet that I helped prepare for Secretary Pompeo and Director Ratcliffe, which was released on January 15th of this year,
publicly that laid out... That not only was EcoHealth, we didn't explain EcoHealth's role, we explained the role that People's Liberation Army and funding classified research that was totally concurrent and interlaced, whether we knew it or not, with the research that our government was funding and perhaps your government as well.

I mean, has anyone thought that maybe the People's Liberation Army's involvement in creating COVID-19 or the predecessor creating essentially the capability tied to their biological weapons program might be significant, and it might explain why they'd want to cover this up? How has the reaction been to that fact? Because it is a fact, I mean, I can't believe people are trying to... Essentially, that's the most significant indicator of motivation in my mind for coverup. I don't know what you're feeling is based on what you learned in the course of your research.

Sharri Markson:

You would know, I mean, you're a veteran weapons investigator. You've spent a career specializing in this, but I think it's interesting that early last year it was a conspiracy to suggest that the virus might have leaked from a laboratory. Now that's not a conspiracy, but any suggestion that it might have been a bioweapons program is still a conspiracy. And as you say, even the intelligence agencies ruled that out. So we might have a different view in a year's time and that's why I think it's important all of the time to just look at the evidence and the facts in front of you and not be swayed by what is popular or fashionable public opinion, because that won't be to the benefit of society. You've just got to look at the evidence and I don't think we've seen any evidence categorically that SARS-CoV-2 is a bio weapon, or was definitely from a bio weapons program.

But what I've done in the book and I have a chapter on this is I look at the public information, including bringing some new information to light, but I look at the public information about what China was doing, what its military was doing. And coronavirus research was part of what the Chinese military were exploring. That's just a matter of fact. And I go through this in some detail, there were Chinese military scientists working with the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Their names are listed side by side on published scientific papers, including research with Shizhang Lee, one of the military scientists, decorated military scientists, I've already mentioned was doing coronavirus and MERS research with Shizhang Lee. Oh, and by the way, with American institutions as well-funded in part by the NIH, this is part of the story as well.

NIH is literally funding coronavirus research that was being undertaken in conjunction with the Chinese military. When I found this out while I was writing my book, I mean, I wrote the story, we put it on the front page of the Australian newspaper, because it's so explosive that that was happening. How could that happen? But to go back to your point, there's also this document that I know you've now read, the Chinese government's official submission in 2011 to the Biological Weapons Convention was something Miles Yu first told me in an interview for the book about the existence of this document. But he hadn't been able to get hold of it and he said, neither had the state department been able to get hold of the actual document. So I got my research team onto it and Jack Hazelwood, a researcher based in the UK, managed to track the document down.

It was in the back and it was buried in the United Nations website. And you can see how many times it had been downloaded. It was something like four or five times when we found it and you can see the dates. It wasn't any time recently, it was extraordinary. And this document is so significant because this isn't... No one can say, "Oh, this is a conspiracy," which people have attacked me over, but this is the
Chinese government's official submission to the 2011 United Nations Biological Weapons Convention. It was their last detailed submission. The conferences only happen every five years. And in it, they discuss the advancements and developments in scientific research. They don't admit they're doing it, but they discuss the advancements, and they talk about coronavirus research, they talk about coronavirus research, they talk about the creation of man-made pathogens. There's a line, or couple of lines in there, that specifically says, "This poses a latent threat to mankind." They talk about research in the area of targeting viruses to specific races. Truly despicable. So, such a breathtaking document. And it gives an insight into China's potential bioweapons program and why there would be an interest in coronaviruses. Because many experts had said to me, "Oh, coronaviruses make useless bioweapon. That doesn't make sense." But actually this document kind of lays it all out, and I quote it all in the book. So that was just the most terrifying find. And to think China had presented that to the United Nations Biological Weapons Convention in 2011. What did everyone do with that information? Like what did our governments do with it? I'd love to know.

**David Asher:**

Well, I mean, I can assure you one thing, and I'm not saying you got anything wrong in your book, but we certainly knew about this declaration. And that was the thing. When I mentioned the possibility of a genetically selected agent Acting Under Secretary Chris Ford, he blew up at me and said, "It's ludicrous." And I sent him that document actually, that was internal to the State Department. We figured out later on it was available somewhere on the internet, but we didn't know that so we treated it as essentially confidential. But it's quite explosive. It reads like a blueprint of the program that they've actually pursued. And if you just match that document up, which you do in your book very well, with what the Chinese research actually has been publicly from the [crosstalk 00:46:49].

**Sharri Markson:**

Yes.

**David Asher:**

You can see that they did almost everything that they talked about. Now, we have no evidence about a genetically selected agent. We don't believe this was a genetically selected agent. We don't even necessarily believe that was a, quote unquote, bioweapon. All we said it was funded by the military. And we didn't say it was funded for defensive reasons. That was basically as far as I can go in terms of elaborating here. You're not interviewing me for a change, but I think it's important to comment that we did point out that this was a military funded program. It was classified. And if it was bio-defensive, they could have just declared it under the biological weapons convention. They certainly didn't. They said specifically that there were no military funded programs at the Wuhan Institute. And now even The Washington Post six or eight months ago came out with the handbook for managing classified programs, that was actually posted on the Wuhan Institute's website in Chinese, something we figured out early on.

And it was clear to us when our own IC was saying that there weren't military programs. I'm like, "Well, why do they have a 2002-era manual on how to run classified programs when they don't have classified programs?" I mean, a lot of this stuff, it's interesting. What you've done is you've pierced the veil of a lot
of information, that in other circumstances might be considered state secrets, just based by being a
dogged investigative journalist, which I give you great credit for. I mean, if we have a coronavirus
commission in the United States, we should certainly have you testify. I want to ask you-

Sharri Markson:

[crosstalk 00:48:26] you know how many times I've pursued you for various bits and pieces and
information.

David Asher:

Yeah, [crosstalk 00:48:33]. I'm working on it with our many friends on Capitol Hill. This time it's for
Democrats and Republicans. So we're getting some bipartisan push. What lesson do you think the
Chinese government, as we sort of conclude the Q&A here, has learned from its ability to get away with,
at the very least, a COVID cover up, for whatever motivation? And what does it tell you about the future
of biological warfare as a threat emerging in the world today? What did you learn in that regard? At
Hudson we're big on thinking ahead. Our founder Herman Kahn wrote the famous book on “thinking the
unthinkable” about nuclear war. Not because he wanted nuclear war, he wanted to prevent it. We want
to prevent biological war. What lessons have you learned and what lessons do you think the Chinese
government's learned about biology as a pathway for warfare just from this experience?

Sharri Markson:

Yeah. Well, I just have to say at the start, I'm not any great strategic thinker. I'm a great investigative
journalist, but I'm not a great strategic thinker. But what I strongly think from having done this
investigation is that it's not even just the biological warfare programs. We have seen so much risky
coronavirus research. Extremely risky coronavirus research which involves creating new coronaviruses
that might be more deadly, more transmissible to humans, with new functions, like the ability to infect
humans, which is literally gain of function research, which is why it's difficult for Fauci to argue against
it. But even that research alone poses, as the Chinese said in that document, poses a risk to humankind.
And yet we've turned a blind eye to this in the interests of international scientific cooperation.

No government has wanted to say, "Let's stop funding a particular nation, a particular country." Scientific cooperation, international scientific cooperation has been untouchable. Right? And we've funded it of course as well, but even so it's just been untouchable. So all of our know-how and our
developments in Australia and the United States and Europe end up in the hands of Chinese scientists.
And that's fine, they might be completely innocent with good motivations. But what we now know
under Xi Jinping's civil-military fusion is that there is no separation anymore between the Chinese
military and science. Any developments can be used willingly or unwillingly for the development and
advancement of China's military modernization. So I think looking forward, we are going to have much
greater problems unless there is a rethink of cooperation in the scientific community, particularly in not
just coronavirus research and virus research, but other fields that would be applicable to military as
well.

Just very briefly on this topic, one of the other topics I've explored in great detail, is China's recruitment
programs like the Thousand Talent’s Plan. And I've done a lot of reporting on that. And that is literally
the Chinese government recruiting people in the West, and they pay them a salary and it's usually kept
secret. And I've done big exposés on it and literally named people, in The Australian newspaper, Australian academics who were part of this program, and was able to show that their inventions and research funded by the Australian taxpayer had then been patented in China. And you don't know for what other military use, what other dual use it's been used for. So I think looking forward this is the greatest threat, is how potentially innocent, or it's now naive, collaboration. And we can't turn a blind eye to it anymore, and there needs to be new policy settings. Again, that's not something that I have the knowledge or ability to have developed, but clearly there's a massive problem here.

David Asher:

Yeah. I certainly agree and appreciate you laying that out. I just want to recommend again to our viewers that what happened in Wuhan, actually What Really Happened in Wuhan, is the title of the book. And Sharri Markson, you really get at it better than anyone in the whole world in terms of detail, and the sort of tapestry you wove was beautifully written, in my mind. And our president of Hudson, John Walters, read the book as well and wanted me to thank you for appearing today, and for your great journalism and leadership, frankly, on an issue that's extraordinarily important in the future of the world.

Thank you.

David Asher:

And we can't forget. I know you lost your grandmother, tragically, to coronavirus, so it started in your family. And so you've experienced it, as have so many of us with friends and family. And we at least owe it to their memory to not forget what really happened in Wuhan. So thank you.

Sharri Markson:

Thank you. Can I just thank you, David, for your incredible generosity of time through the process that I was investigating this topic for the book, and generally. I'm so grateful to have met you and to hear the stories of what went on behind the scenes in the state department, as you quite heroically and bravely were trying to investigate this topic, and others like Tom DiNanno, of course, and others whose stories I tell in that chapter called "Can of Worms" in the book. But you really were so generous with your time, especially to an Australian journalist. So I'm really grateful for that as well. And of course for your ongoing commitment to get to the bottom of this, and your attention to detail and how much you're across it. So thank you so much.

David Asher:

And I can assure you and our supporters, at Hudson Institute we're hardly stopping. We're actually going to accelerate our investigative work and try to really work with the U.S. Congress to develop legislation to try to introduce things like risk controls, counterintelligence estimates, inspector general functions inside the National Institute Health as she has nothing, frankly. I mean, they didn't even read the declassified fact sheet as far as I'm concerned, that I can tell. And those are facts. When we put out a fact sheet, and I as someone who will probably have to testify under oath as to the authenticity of the information, and more than happy to do so. A fact sheet's a fact sheet. I'm glad you were able to integrate that into your great story. And good day to you, and all the best. Thank you.
Sharri Markson:

Thank you so much