

# **FORT DETRICK:** **STATE-SPONSORED DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN** **AND** **ROLE OF RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION ECOSYSTEM**



**If you can't convince them, confuse them.**

**-Sun Tzu**

**(Art of *info*-War)**

# Preface

It would be close to two years since the pandemic started, and after millions of deaths and countless losses that could never be quantified, many are still looking for closure. One question that hangs above all is, how did it all start.

Although a simple and basic question, the origin of the virus has become such a contentious topic – or rather has been made into one – that it is now impossible to discuss this topic without stumbling upon political landmines. The basic questions, which could have and should have been answered based on hard facts, have been couched in so many sensitive wrappers – from geo-political to racism – that no one would like to burn their fingers by wading into it.

However, the quest of origin of virus is not merely an epistemological quest, but an existential one.

Where and how the virus originated would be the most significant vector to guide not only how to deal with the virus, but more importantly how to prepare for the future. If indeed it has a zoonotic origin, as was initially claimed by China and propagated by several ‘prominent scientists’ (with questionable affiliation with the Wuhan Lab and the virus research), it would and should guide a gamut of human behaviour for the mankind. This will make the climate challenge issue an emergency of gigantic proportion – which will not only dictate which kind of fuel to use – but most likely which kind of life to adapt going forward.

However, if the virus indeed jumped out of the lab (according to some new facts hinting at an equally possible lab leak, if not more), the responses would be totally different. It would take the debate more in the realm of the contours of scientific research and their cost/benefit analysis of game of fruition and so forth. Unfortunately, there is no effort towards a serious exploration.

On the contrary.

Until the zoonotic origin was the prime currency, the Chinese establishment (CCP/ and its mouthpieces) went along, reinforcing the narrative. Any question was countered with liberal accusations of racism and geopolitics. However, once the lab-leak became a possibility, the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) faith in the theory of natural origin evaporated. If the virus could leak from Wuhan, it might as well have leaked from Italy, or Spain, France, or Hawaii, or maybe Fort Detrick (Having settled to this location, after the others were found to be less appealing.)

It was probably the funniest attempt in history on narrative setting – where the CCP propaganda was playing both sides – claiming natural origin on even days, and Fort Detrick on odd days. The Chinese scientists being told to reinforce the natural origin narrative being pushed by the pliant scientists from the US with ‘pieces of evidence’, while the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) would be pushing Fort Detrick for virus origin.

Those who know China would understand that such contradictions do not trouble the CCP’s world view. But this contradiction creates big dissonance to ordinary minds.

Unfortunately, due to unfathomable reasons most of the mainstream media/ global news conglomerates, influential scientists and political leaders have decided to play along. Somehow everyone seems to have resigned to the fate that one may never know the true origin – without having made any serious efforts or asking the hard questions. On this topic, no one seems curious, even the otherwise-curious media.

The only people fighting this battle are common netizens, made possible by the democratization of the internet. One journalist’s thought-provoking essay on blogging site Medium could rekindle the debate. A group of OSINT volunteers, appropriately named as DRASTIC, unearthed so many skeletons that the CCP and their sympathizers could no longer push the natural origin with a straight face, which forced the CCP to change the gear of narrative.

While it would seem like an uphill task to switch narratives so easily, the Chinese machinery showed that with enough resources and with help of strategic partners, one could at least clutter the disclosure enough so that everyone resigns to the fate that we may never know the truth.

This report is yet another effort of the David against Goliath – the OSINT against CCP’s global machinery. And this is yet another attempt to keep the questions alive about the actual origin of the virus. To reiterate that the questions won’t cease, how so ever long it takes.

#### **Disclaimer:**

It must be emphasized that this report doesn’t make any statement about the actual origin of the virus – from nature, from Wuhan, or one of the other paces between Europe and the US (and possibly elsewhere.)

This report concerns itself specifically about the exercise in the narrative building by the CCP and their sympathizers. This report is an effort to counter the confusion conspicuously created to hide the truth. This report has been made with a belief that someday, sooner or later, the truth would come out.

Truth has a tendency to surface.



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# Introduction

#FortDetrick has been in trends for over a year now. It appears to be the final destination chosen for pinning the origin of the virus by the CCP machinery after it tried to make Italy, Spain, and Hawaii the source of origin. Fort Detrick (FD) provided a more convincing background, given that it hosts a bio-research facility in addition to a recent incident at the place regarding its safety issues.

While not going into the merit of the claims, what was conspicuous is that the claim of this virus origin at FD was initiated by a set of well-known fake news/ propaganda outlets. The individuals and the 'news sites' were found to have been circulating not once but repeatedly. And these fake news sites were given wide publicity and legitimacy by none other than Chinese officials.

It was also not surprising that the propaganda sites used for this narrative building had a Russian imprint. What was surprising, however, some of the media platforms linked with Pakistan. None less than the Pakistan PM and ruling party PTI. This would be considered as the next stage in Pakistani-linked info war as so far what we have noticed is that their target is almost exclusively India. This would be the first time that their footprint is seen at global dis-info nexus, along with China and other countries.

Quite a jump, one must say!

This fake narrative building had all the ingredients – Chinese 'experts', anonymous researchers at Fort Detrick and of course Facebook and Russian linked media. However, what was unique about this was the direct involvement of Chinese government officials and state media. This was taking the information warfare to an altogether new level.

## **Part I: Sowing the Seeds**



# **Chapter 1: an idea is the Most Resilient thing**

This all started around 5000 years ago.

Little more specific?

January 2020, when the COVID-19 was still not known as COVID-19.

It all started with insinuating remark by a Russian politician. On January 27, 2020 Russian politician Vladimir Zhirinovskiy claimed that COVID-19 virus came from the USA, that it was a biological-war against China. <sup>[1]</sup> Zhirinovskiy is one of the founders of the Liberal Democratic Party of Soviet Union, the second registered party in the Soviet Union, and therefore the first officially sanctioned opposition party. His party later became Liberal Democratic Party of Russia following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

As they say, an idea is the most resilient thing.

In few days, the biological warfare found an origin. Four days later, on 31<sup>st</sup> Jan 2020, an anonymous handle F\*ck Your Jesus (@Clint21484252), while commenting on the former US President Donald Trump's tweet claimed that the virus originated at Fort Detrick. <sup>[2]</sup> It was before Trump was barred from social media. The user @Clint21484252 is an account with zero follower and is dormant since February 2020.



Within a month a Shanghai based 'expert' of US origin Larry Romanoff published many articles, providing details about the virus originated from the US. In course of time, two witness emerged – 'ground zero' patients – Kenneth & Koby, both living around 30 minutes from Fort Detrick. Now all it needed was an insider, and lo and

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2020/01/27/n\\_13965710.shtml](https://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2020/01/27/n_13965710.shtml)

<sup>2</sup> <https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1223104150856032257>

behold, and an 'Indian researcher' Samantha Hill came up in August 2020, providing an 'inside account' of leak from the Fort Detrick through her Facebook post. Along the way she also fabricated a Guide who was killed by the Americans to hide the truth. Confidentially, all the comments on her posts were Chinese and the post eventually got viral on Chinese social media. Now it was left to the Chinese officials from Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Chinese State media to push this idea in public domain.

The story had all ingredients- from Russia to Facebook to Chinese govt officials and state media.

But the virus didn't simply originate at Fort Detrick. It first tried to be born at various other places, as per Chinese state media. It only settled for Fort Detrick eventually.

## Chapter 2: a Long Journey of a Virus

As the legends would have it, the virus did not arrive directly at Fort Detrick. It tried to get its roots in Spain, Italy, and France in the sewage lines, and having not found it conducive environment, tried the better climates of Hawaii. Every time the learned Chinese officials thought that they had their 'gotcha' moment. And yet, somehow it didn't happen.

### ***The virus originated in Italy...***

On 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020, Global Times claimed <sup>[3]</sup> that coronavirus was spreading in Italy as early as November 2019. This comes just after Italy surpassed China for the most number of deaths related to covid-19 on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2020. <sup>[4]</sup>

### ***Then the virus originated in Spain...***

On 26<sup>th</sup> June 2020, Global times published an article <sup>[5]</sup> on their website which pointed that SARS-CoV-2 originated in Spain back in March 2019. It referenced an article <sup>[6]</sup> posted by University of Barcelona that showed presence of SARS-CoV-2 virus in samples of waste water in Barcelona, collected in march 2019.

Later that day Professor Francois Balloux, director of the UCL Genetics Institute in London remarked that the sample likely got mixed-up/contaminated. <sup>[7]</sup> But GT never bothered to correct the impressions.

On the contrary.

On 9<sup>th</sup> July 2020, Global Times published an article wherein they stated that the virus was already present in sewage in Italy and other European countries. The article also claimed that researchers had found presence of the virus in samples of wastewater in Barcelona, Netherlands, France, Australia and elsewhere even before it came to the notice in late 2019. <sup>[8]</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://twitter.com/globaltimesnews/status/1241559268190343168>

<sup>4</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/19/europe/italy-death-toll-intl/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1192756.shtml>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.ub.edu/web/ub/en/menu\\_eines/noticies/2020/06/042.html](https://www.ub.edu/web/ub/en/menu_eines/noticies/2020/06/042.html)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/06/26/scientists-barcelona-find-covid-19-waste-water-march-2019-nine/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1193977.shtml>

### ***It was in Brazil, but originated in Europe...***

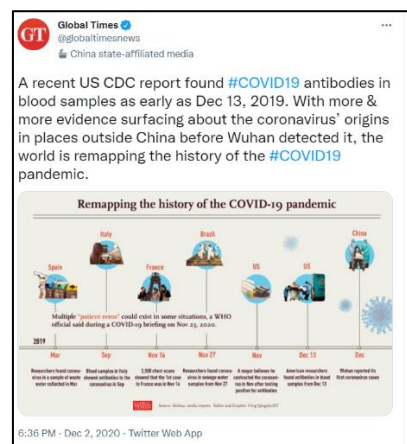
On 31<sup>st</sup> July 2020, CGTN posted an article titled “Study suggests 76% of Brazilian coronavirus strains had origins in Europe” referencing an article published on science <sup>[9]</sup> and concluded that SARS-CoV-2 strains in Brazil had their origins in three groups that were introduced from Europe in late February and early March, indicating transmission was already established in Brazil by early March 2020. <sup>[10]</sup>

### ***Ah, it also might have originated in Indian Subcontinent...***

On 1<sup>st</sup> December 2020, Global times published an article taking reference from a study <sup>[11]</sup> (now deleted) by three Chinese scientists that pointed early human to human transmission of SARS-CoV-2 started in Indian subcontinent.

The study was first posted on SSRN.com, the preprint platform of the medical journal The Lancet, but it was later withdrawn as it was not peer reviewed and may have lacked data, or are not solid or deliberate enough to draw a conclusion. <sup>[12]</sup>

In case there was confusion, on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2020, Global Times shared a picture showing the timeline of the history of COVID-19 pandemic. The graphic depicts the number of coronavirus cases emerging in other countries way before it emerged in China in December 2019. <sup>[13]</sup>



*Global Times' post depicting COVID-19 cases in other countries before China*

*But these places still didn't work out. So finally, the virus originated at Fort Detrick.*

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.science.org/doi/full/10.1126/science.abd2161>

<sup>10</sup> <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-07-31/Study-suggests-76-of-Brazilian-virus-strains-had-origins-in-Europe-Szs9bAizle/index.html>

<sup>11</sup> <https://retractionwatch.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/SSRN-id3724275.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1208661.shtml>

<sup>13</sup> <https://twitter.com/globaltimesnews/status/1334121718319783938>

## **What is Fort Detrick?**

The United States Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USMRIID) is USA's leading laboratory for medical biological defense research for counter-measures against biological warfare. The lab is located in Fort Detrick, Maryland which is almost 80 KMs from Washington DC.

However, the location now finds itself as one of the hot topics globally, as a part of several conspiracies cultivated over the origination of COVID-19.

## **USMRIID shuts down & reopens (partially):**

On July 18, 2019, the USMRIID at Fort Detrick was shut down after Centre for Disease Control (CDC) found out that the standard operating procedures in the organization failed to meet bio-safety standards. The news was first reported by Fredrick News Post on August 2, 2019. <sup>[14]</sup>

Separately, news of mysterious illness linked to e-cigarettes surfaced in the US in August 2019. Over 193 cases emerged in 22 States between June 28-August 20, 2019. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and CDC found that the cause of severe lung illness was associated with e-cigarette. The commonality among the all the patients was they all vaped from e-cigarettes. <sup>[15]</sup> The fact that it was spread across 22 States in August 2019, if indeed it was Covid, the first crisis would have been in the US, not in Wuhan. If one were to believe that the virus was then exported to Wuhan, it still would not explain why it didn't spread in the US as well.

Meanwhile, the CDC ordered reopening USMRIID lab at Fort Detrick partially on November 26, 2019. The lab reopened after the suspension of four months with limited operations. <sup>[16]</sup>

However, should we ignore the facts, it did provide a smoking gun: an incident at a biological research Lab and the presence of lung diseases. The fact that the diesels were from another smoking gun (vaping) was beside the point for Fort Detrick narrative.

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<sup>14</sup> [https://www.fredericknewspost.com/news/health/military-institute-s-research-halted-at-fort-detrick-after-failed/article\\_767f3459-59c2-510f-9067-bb215db4396d.html](https://www.fredericknewspost.com/news/health/military-institute-s-research-halted-at-fort-detrick-after-failed/article_767f3459-59c2-510f-9067-bb215db4396d.html)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/s0821-cdc-fda-states-e-cigarettes.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.kff.org/news-summary/armys-infectious-disease-research-center-to-reopen-with-limited-operations-more-details-on-usamriid-shutdown-emerge/>

## Chapter 3: the Shanghai ‘Expert’

The first detailed exposition of the Fort Detrick origin of virus was made by a Shanghai based expert Larry Romanoff. He is a businessman-turned management Guru – turned Virus expert, and first to come up with the idea of Fort Detrick in March 2020 itself, in an article published on Global Research. The Global Research is part of an elaborate disinformation network, where Romanoff had as many as 72 articles. As per the description available on [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca), Larry Romanoff is a retired Management Consultant and Businessman. He has held senior executive positions in international consulting firms, and owned an international import-export business. He has been mentioned as a visiting professor at Shanghai’s Fudan University, presenting case studies in international affairs to senior EMBA classes.

Mr. Romanoff lives in Shanghai and is currently writing a series of ten books related to China and the West.

However, these details could not be verified from the open source – the platform doesn’t provide specifics about his past employer or his business details. His name does not appear on the faculty list of Fudan University. It is worthwhile to note that on September 20, 2021, a French website ‘*France Inter*’ carried an article - “*Larry Romanoff, the false nose of the Chinese disinformation operation on Covid-19*”, essentially declaring that Larry is fake expert. <sup>[17]</sup>

### Larry’s articles re-published on other Russian media:

Larry’s article on COVID-19 initially published on the Global Research were republished on other Russian websites as well. While all of his articles on the Global Research have now been deleted, his articles on COVID-19 continues to exist on those Russian websites.

I) **“Fort Detrick Army Laboratory Pandemic”** (published on March 17, 2020) <sup>[18]</sup>

II) **“Has COVID-19 escaped the Fort Detrick vaccine trial? Evidence that the virus originated in the US biological weapons laboratory”** (published on March 11, 2020) <sup>[19]</sup>

III) **“Shock: Americans were sick with “Chinese coronavirus” back in September & hid”** (March 14, 2020) <sup>[20]</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.franceinter.fr/monde/larry-romanoff-le-faux-nez-de-l-operation-de-desinformation-chinoise-sur-le-covid-19>

<sup>18</sup> <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/55893>

<sup>19</sup> <https://alexandr-palkin.livejournal.com/10348225.html>

<sup>20</sup> <https://svpressa.ru/health/article/259735/>



Larry has written (June 2020) similar article on Russian website '*Russia Insider*', a website launched in September 2014 by some American expatriates living in Russia. In his ***"Was COVID-19 Created in a US Lab?"***, he alluded to the USA's history of using bio-weapons and collated it with fact that the virus may have escaped from one of their labs. <sup>[21]</sup>

Russia Insider has been described as a pro-Kremlin media front promoting fake news and propaganda through its platform. The founder of the website is Charles Bausman, an expatriate residing in Russia, who previously worked as the Junior Producer in NBC's Moscow bureau. <sup>[22]</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> <https://russia-insider.com/en/was-covid-19-created-us-lab/ri30716>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/rosiegray/expats-launch-new-site-to-defend-russia#.exzVQve60>

## Chapter 4: the Mysterious 'Indian' Researcher

On 11<sup>th</sup> August 2020, a Facebook account named Samantha Hill, published a long post, more like a first-hand testimony about the 'actual origin' of COVID-19. The author referred itself as an anonymous Indian girl who worked at Fort Detrick and had returned to India from the US. It is obvious that whoever did this, had very poor knowledge of India, else it would have been Samanthabai Hill at least!

**Claim:** The user, apart from insinuating that the virus originated at the US Lab, also claimed that she and her advisor Dr. Frank Plummer knew everything about the COVID-19 and that was the reason he was assassinated when he was flying from Kenya to China! It also claimed that the US had transported the virus into the seafood market in Wuhan, China through illicit means.

**Fact:** The fabrication which is woven around the fact is the most effective. Dr. Frank Plummer was a Canada based Scientist who led Canada's National Microbiology Laboratory for several years. He was known for his break-through research on the study of HIV. Dr. Plummer passed away due to a Heart attack in February 2020 during his trip to Kenya where he went to attend an event. <sup>[23]</sup>

The Samantha Hill account is now deleted; however, its archived version is still available. <sup>[24]</sup> And surprisingly, on the Indian sounding handle's post all comments are by Chinese Facebook handles.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-51317386>

<sup>24</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20200812094746/https://www.facebook.com/people/Samantha-Hill/100054038551198>



The FB post by the anonymous Indian girl [25]

There is a general sense that on social media anyone can come across any random content. And while this is true in broader terms, it doesn't really operate like this. The content most often travels through the links. It is possible that a Chinese netizen would be connected to someone who could be connected to Samantha Hill (presuming it to be a real entity), and therefore came across the post. But even in those scenarios, the original network of the user is almost always the first ones to respond, and if the content goes viral, it should have a fair amount of diverse user base, including the original network of the user.

However, as is the case with most propaganda posts, the spread is driven by a set of handles, which are mostly connected with each other. The same is the case with this post.

## **PART-II: Tending to the Crop**

*The narrative building doesn't happen in vacuum. One needs to create an entire eco-system. That includes a set of 'news platforms', a number of 'experts' or at least White Faces, and a message through all major social media – Facebook, YouTube and Twitter among others. The Chinese Communist Party, despite its vast resources and a complete dominance over the domestic audience, still hasn't mastered the art of global eco-system, though its learning fast. But till it develops its own ecosystem, it has to rely on friends. And friends, it has few.*

## **Chapter 5: the Russian DisInformation System**

As noted at the beginning, Russian politician Vladimir Zhirinovsky proposed theories about the origin of COVID-19 virus from the USA. He had left the details for others to fulfill, which was duly filled in by various ‘experts’ of Chinese state media, such as Romanoff. One of the key platforms that pushed these stories was being run from Canada – Centre for Research on Globalization, which ostensibly has Russian footprints. Zhirinovsky has traditionally known to be an erratic politician who comes up with radical ideas on most issues and hence remains sidelined in Russian politics. He is famously known to indulge in dramatics and startling news creation to gain popularity and draw attention.

### **Global Research**

Centre for Research on Globalization is a Montreal based website set up in September, 2001. Globalresearch.ca is the official English website of Centre for Research on Globalization, a Think-tank which owns Global Research TV and The Global Research News Hour. In May 2015, Global Research also established Asia-Pacific Research (APR) website, an independent media and research initiative with an editorial team based in Asia, the EU and North America. <sup>[26]</sup> The website is owned by a former left-wing Canadian Economist & Author Michel Chossudovsky, also a professor Emeritus of Economics at the University of Ottawa. Although the Globalresearch.ca has been portrayed as a Canadian website, various Canadian media have reported it to be a Russian misinformation dissemination operation. <sup>[27]</sup> <sup>[28]</sup>

Earlier, in 2017, Globalresearch.ca was under the surveillance of NATO's Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence or StratCom for spreading pro-Russia propaganda and disinformation. <sup>[29]</sup> In August 2020, US State Department released a report that stated Globalresearch.ca had published/re-published articles of seven writers who don't even exist and were created by Russian military intelligence. <sup>[30]</sup> Globalresearch.ca was also exposed by a Canadian online fact-checked magazine

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.globalresearch.ca/about-2>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/science/russian-disinformation-global-research-website-1.5767208>

<sup>28</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/6793733/coronavirus-conspiracy-theories-russia-china/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/nato-research-centre-sets-sights-on-canadian-website-over-pro-russian-disinformation/article37015521/?ref=premium>

<sup>30</sup> [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Pillars-of-Russia%E2%80%99s-Disinformation-and-Propaganda-Ecosystem\\_08-04-20.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Pillars-of-Russia%E2%80%99s-Disinformation-and-Propaganda-Ecosystem_08-04-20.pdf)

TheWalrus.ca for propagating outlandish conspiracy theories. [31]

GlobalResearch founder Michel Chossudovsky has written for various Russian media such as Sputnik News and Voice of Russia (that later merged with Ruptly) [32]

### **Global Research and Larry Romanoff**

**On February 6, 2020** - Romanoff wrote the first article on COVID-19 ***“China’s Coronavirus – How the Western Media Spin the News”*** defending China over the lab leak theory. In the article he also mentioned that CIA and NED created thousands of accounts on Weibo and WeChat, purporting to belong to native Chinese residents in China but which are mostly managed out of Langley, Virginia, and which they use in attempts to promote disaffection in China. He however did not provide details for any of his claims. [33]

**On February 24, 2020** - he wrote another article ***“COVID-19 May Have Originated from the US? Japanese TV Broadcast”*** referencing a Global Times article [34] that stated TV Asahi Corporation of Japan reporting that the US government may have failed to grasp how rampant the virus had become on the US soil. He did not mention the reference of Asahi TV report anywhere in the article. [35]

**On March 4, 2020**- He wrote an article on Globalresearch.ca titled *“Why Is the US Apparently Not Testing for the COVID-19 Coronavirus?”* In the article it was for the first time that he mentioned about Fort Detrick. He highlighted that Fort Detrick shut down in 2019, thereby indirectly suggesting that virus may have escaped from FD lab. [36]

**On March 11, 2020**- Another article by Larry Romanoff titled *“COVID-19: Further Evidence that the Virus Originated in the US”, repeated Fort Detrick as origin place for virus*. This article was shared by Chinese MOFA Spox Lijian Zhao two days later on Twitter (March 13, 2020), and later was recycled by Chinese MOFA and media for

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<sup>31</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20180206190739/https://thewalrus.ca/why-google-has-a-responsibility-to-fight-fake-news/>

<sup>32</sup> [https://sputniknews.com/tag\\_Michel\\_Chossudovsky/](https://sputniknews.com/tag_Michel_Chossudovsky/)

<sup>33</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20200331145329/https://www.globalresearch.ca/china-coronavirus-how-western-media-spin-news/5702888>

<sup>34</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20211006204339/http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0223/c90000-9661026.html>

<sup>35</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20200329011551/https://www.globalresearch.ca/covid-19-originated-us-japanese-tv-broadcast/5704493>

<sup>36</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20200323170625/https://www.globalresearch.ca/why-us-apparently-not-testing-covid-19-coronavirus/5705721>



pushing the Fort Detrick story in 2021. [37]

**On March 21, 2020**, Larry Romanoff wrote another article on Globalresearch, this time shedding light on the initial covid cases in South Korea and Italy. Through his article, Larry again attempted to create more dilemma over the origination of virus and not possibly from China. [38]

### **His articles get deleted from Global research!**

- First ever article published by Larry Romanoff on Global research's website was on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2019. [39]
- He goes on to write many articles in till 10<sup>th</sup> April 2020 - 72 to be exact. [40]
- However, since April 17, 2020 – his articles get deleted from the Website. Two of his articles on COVID-19 dated March 21 & 26 were removed first. His article insinuating Fort Detrick was deleted from the website on April 23, 2020. And all of his articles were removed from the website by 26<sup>th</sup> Feb 2021. [41]



*Timeline of removal of Larry's articles*

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<sup>37</sup><https://web.archive.org/web/20200331113313/https://www.globalresearch.ca/covid-19-further-evidence-virus-originated-us/5706078>

<sup>38</sup><https://web.archive.org/web/20200325205328/https://www.globalresearch.ca/covid-usa-targeting-italy-and-south-korea/5707042>

<sup>39</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20191004174151/https://www.globalresearch.ca/author/larry-romanoff>

<sup>40</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20200417080850/https://www.globalresearch.ca/author/larry-romanoff>

<sup>41</sup><https://web.archive.org/web/20210226164703/https://www.globalresearch.ca/author/larry-romanoff>

## Some push-back:

Soon after the Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lijian Zhao shared Larry's Global Research article (of March 11) on his Twitter, some news media reported that the Chinese diplomat was pushing conspiracy theory. [42] Twitter users also called out Zhao's conspiracy theory. [43] [44] After which the story was put on back burner for a while, to be recycled again.



## Larry Finds another Home - BluemoonofShanghai

Soon after the clean-up drive of Larry's article on Global research had begun, a website domain with the name Bluemoonofshanghai.com [45] got registered on October 22, 2020. [46] All the articles by Larry started getting re-published on the website at a regular frequency. [47] At present, all the publications by Larry in English and other languages and his audio interview are available on the website.

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ryanhatesthis/chinese-diplomats-are-pushing-conspiracy-theories-that-the>

<sup>43</sup> [https://twitter.com/tony\\_zy/status/1238199935905955845](https://twitter.com/tony_zy/status/1238199935905955845)

<sup>44</sup> <https://twitter.com/wearytolove/status/1237654661659648000>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.bluemoonofshanghai.com/>

<sup>46</sup> <https://who.is/whois/bluemoonofshanghai.com>

<sup>47</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20201129051902/http://www.bluemoonofshanghai.com/>

## **Chapter 6: After Virus, Fake News Goes to Italy**

On March 22, 2020 an Italian Journalist Fabio Giuseppe Carlo Carisio wrote an article “CoVid-19 BioWeapon: DEEP STATE-CIA-NOW - Top Secret Military Missions in Ukraine, Fort Detrick, Sigonella, Wuhan, Modena” on his website Gospa News.<sup>[48]</sup> In the article, he highlighted the USA’s history of creating bio-weapons like that of COVID-19. He also highlighted that USMRID in Fort Detrick was shut down in July 2019 as the lab was *involved in research stemming from the recent Pentagon concern over the use of bats. as bio-weapons.*<sup>[49]</sup>

### **Who is Fabio Giuseppe Carlo?**

Fabio Giuseppe Carlo Carisio is a freelance journalist from Borgosesia, Italy. He is the Founder and Editor of an online portal “Art & Wine news” which he founded in 2006. In July 2018 he founded **Gospa News**, focused on geopolitics, terrorism, Middle East and military intelligence. From ‘art and wine’ to geo-politics is a journey not many brave hearts could undertake. He is also a correspondent from Italy for the French news site Réseau International. His reports have been published on Réseau International, Sputnik Italia, and Maurizio Blondet.<sup>[50]</sup> Since 2019 he became the Italy correspondent of the American geopolitics and military intelligence site Veterans Today.

### **Veterans Today:**

Another portal that promoted Fabio Giuseppe’s article “CoVid-19 BioWeapon: DEEP STATE-CIA-NWO Top Secret Military Missions in Ukraine, Fort Detrick, Sigonella, Wuhan, Modena” was Veterans Today. Fabio is the Italy correspondent of Veterans Today (VT);<sup>[51]</sup> which shared his article on Twitter on March 24, 2020.<sup>[52]</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> <https://www.gospanews.net/>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.gospanews.net/2020/03/22/coronavirus-bioarma-7-missioni-militari-top-secret-laboratori-nei-paesi-dei-golpe-soros-biologi-usa-a-sigonella-cremazioni-in-italia/>

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.art-wine.eu/wine-events-2/>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/fabiogiuseppcarlo.carisio>

<sup>52</sup> <https://twitter.com/veteranstoday/status/1242383230642388992>

## What is Veterans Today?

VeteransToday.com (VT) is an independent alternative journal for the clandestine services focused on U.S. Foreign Policy and Military Issues. The organisation was founded in 2003, and since then its run through a private US-based Limited Liability Company. The website is managed by a veteran of the Vietnam war Gordon Duff, who is also the CEO of American Defense Solutions Inc (ADSI), a private intelligence organization which he started managing from 2004. His tenure at ADSI as its CEO spanned for 12 years and 7 months until April 2017. <sup>[53]</sup> Veterans Today republished Fabio's article in English on its portal on April 3, 2020, which has garnered more than 22,500+ till date. <sup>[54]</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/in/gordon-duff-b52323154/>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.veteranstoday.com/2020/04/03/covid-19-bioweapon-top-secret-military-missions-deep-state-cia-nwo-in-ukraine-fort-detrick-sigonella-wuhan-modena/>

## **Chapter 7: BeforeltsNews & Russia News Now**

The platform, true to its name, establishes that ‘(even) before its news, its fake news. And as per the “About” section on its website, BeforeltsNews is a “community of individuals who report on what's going on around them, from all around the world. Real time information, commentary, analysis and opinion are collaboratively provided by trusted individuals around the world using the power of the internet to distribute and participate within news stories.” [55]

Fabio’s article was republished on BeforeltsNews on March 26, 2020. [56]

The platform was founded in 2010 likely by Chris Kitze, an American entrepreneur who runs several companies such as Coin Apps Inc., Flying Disc Investments, Alphabit Digital Currency Fund etc. However, he does not mention himself as the founder of BeforeltsNews on his LinkedIn ID. [57] Although he has appeared as the founder of the platform in one of the interviews on February 19, 2021. [58] Moreover, in one of the articles published on April 23, 2013, BeforeltsNews mentioned Chris Kitze as its founder. [59]



*Chris Kitze on an interview on the Pete Santilli show*

There is no detail about the CEO and Vice President of the platform present on the website of BeforeltsNews. Employment of Steve Johnson can be confirmed through

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<sup>55</sup> <https://beforeitsnews.com/v3/about/>



<sup>56</sup> <https://beforeitsnews.com/health/2020/03/covid-19-bioweapon-deep-state-cia-nwo-top-secret-military-missions-in-ukraine-fort-detrick-sigonella-wuhan-modena-videos-3016425.html>

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/in/chriskitze/>

<sup>58</sup> <https://rumble.com/ve0j27-pete-santilli-interviews-beforeitsnews.com-founder-chris-kitze-friday-feb-1.html>

<sup>59</sup> <https://beforeitsnews.com/alternative/2013/04/important-message-from-chris-kitze-founder-beforeitsnews-com-unsene-com-2627744.html>

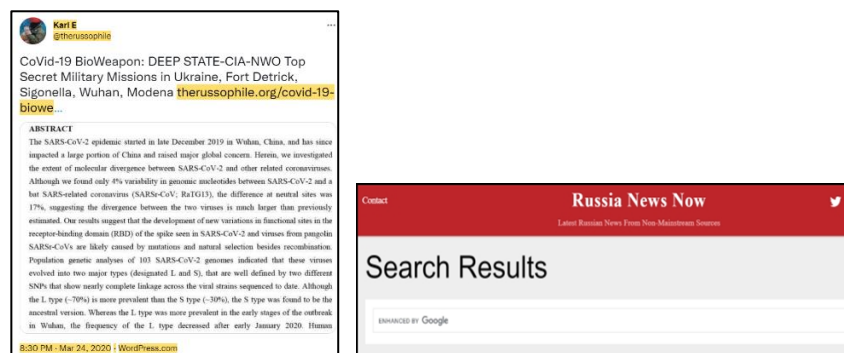
the LinkedIn ID that mentions his association with BeforeItsNews since March 2010. [60]. The details about Robert Thomson could not be verified.

Key Executives	
Name & Title	Bio
 <b>Robert Thomson</b> CEO / President	Robert Thomson serves as the CEO / President of Before It's News.
 <b>Steve Johnson</b> Vice President	Steve Johnson serves as the Vice President of Before Its News. Steve started at Before Its... <a href="#">read more</a>

*Details of BeforeItsNews CEO & VP [61]*

## **Russia News Now**

Russia New Now was also one of the early media outlets to have covered *Fabio Giuseppe's* article on its portal. The article was also shared by its Twitter on the same day. [62] However, the article was later deleted from the website. [63] Russia News Now also publishes news that are concerned with Russian interests, like Syria, China, Iran etc. As per the [who.is details](#), the website domain was registered in 2013 while its [Facebook page](#) was created on November 1, 2014.



*Russia News Now's tweet of Fabio's article republication on its website which later got deleted*

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/in/steve-johnson-47a3206a/>

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.comparably.com/companies/before-its>

<sup>62</sup> <https://twitter.com/therussophile/status/1242466321666682881>

<sup>63</sup> <https://therussophile.org/covid-19-bioweapon-deep-state-cia-nwo-top-secret-military-missions-in-ukraine-fort-detrick-sigonella-wuhan-modena.html/#gsc.tab=0>



## **PART-III: Reaping the Harvest**

*As noted above, the first attempt at pushing Fort Detrick was done in early 2020 itself, with Chinese MoFA Spox and Wolf Warrior Diplomat Lijian Zhao tweeting the fake news of Larry Romanoff. However, the project was put on hold for likely two reasons. First, there was an instant pushback against the fake news, and secondly, the CPC was busy pushing the natural origin.*

*Therefore, it was decided to weave the Fort Detrick in the background, to be used when needed. And in this regard, they were quite visionary. Despite the push for natural origin of virus, the possibility of a lab leak surfaced again with more evidences. And in January 2021, a series of developments made it difficult to ignore the call of more investigations. And hence, the next best strategy was to confuse 'em. Fort Detrick was a suitable distraction, after Italy, Spain and France were found unworthy candidate.*

## Chapter 8: Why Now?

Even since the virus became public, the questions about its origin have remained among the most seriously debated topic. Despite an avalanche of misinformation right from the most powerful and influential entities declaring it ‘natural origin’, by the end of 2020 the murmur started once again about the many loopholes in zoonotic/ natural origin theory, not to mention the emergence of new evidence about the vested interests and collusion by the people who were the top votaries of natural origin.

It is rather unfortunate that the then US President Donald Trump also weighed on the side of lab leak, which was then countered simply because it came from him! And hence, anyone else raising questions would be threatened to be put in his club, not a very favourable place to be. Nonetheless, some still kept raising questions.

In January 2021, a series of related developments brought back the virus origin debate in the focus:

1. On January 3, Matthew Pottinger, Former Deputy National Security Advisor of the United States claimed that the most credible theory about the origin of the coronavirus is that it escaped from a laboratory from China. <sup>[64]</sup>
2. On January 4, the New York Magazine published a long article titled “The Lab Leak Hypothesis”, bringing back all the aspects which were overlooked and been pushed down. <sup>[65]</sup>
3. On Jan 14, 2021 World Health Organization (WHO) team of 10 members arrived in Wuhan, China to start its investigation into the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic. <sup>[66]</sup>
4. On January 15, 2021 the U.S. Department of State pens down a Fact Sheet describing activity at the Wuhan Institute of Virology casting aspersions on China’s transparency and added that their revelations have just scratched the surface of what is still hidden about COVID-19’s origin in China. <sup>[67]</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9106951/Lab-leak-credible-source-coronavirus-outbreak-says-government-official.html>

<sup>65</sup> <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/coronavirus-lab-escape-theory.html>

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55657781>

<sup>67</sup> <https://2017-2021.state.gov/fact-sheet-activity-at-the-wuhan-institute-of-virology/index.html>

## Chapter 9: Time to Change Narrative

The time of being defensive (pushing natural origin) was gone. The Wolf Warrior Diplomats of PRC decided that offence was best defence. If they claim that virus originated some other place, the other country would need to explain. And having tried Spain, Italy, France and other places, they now settled for Fort Detrick – which was a lab and had an incidence in the past.

### Samantha Hill Conspiracy Recycled:

As noted above, all the smoking guns – Larry's articles, Samantha's FB post were planted in 2020, but were not pushed for obvious reasons. The FB post of Samantha Hill was shared on one of the Chinese websites on 17.08.2020, but did not find traction. It was only months later that it had circulated again on Twitter and Chinese social media Zhihu in 2021, after which it became viral. [68] While the post dates to August 2020, it found first major publicity in China in January 2021. The screenshot of the post was further shared on Chinese social media platform Zhihu.com on January 19, 2021. After this, several Chinese social media users shared the same screenshot on Zhihu. [69] [70] [71]



*FB post of Samantha Hill shared on Zhihu*

68 <https://3g.163.com/dy/article/FK7RSUEC0532M15A.html>

69 <https://www.zhihu.com/question/440183834/answer/1686805002>

70 <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/345554068>

71 <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/346029930>

As noted above, the FB post was first popularised on the Chinese media. It was imperative that the Chinese audience first believe in the story. The faith of domestic audience is crucial for the survival of Communist Party of China (CPC). If the Chinese people were to find out that virus somehow leaked at Wuhan and that their sufferings were because of their own leaders, they may not be forgiving.

### **The ‘Ground Zero Patient’ Kenneth Recycled**

Around the same time, January 19-20, 2021, a video was recycled on YouTube, of an American man named Kenneth claiming that he lived near Washington DC and FD, and had contracted COVID-19. It is important to note that the video was originally posted on June 20, 2020 on the YouTube channel of Dr. John Campbell, <sup>[72]</sup> apparently a retired Nurse from the University of Cumbria, England. The video spanned 31 mins and 10 secs, and in the end section Kenneth claims that apart from him, 20-30 other patients who fell ill during that time, and believe they had COVID-19 when the disease didn’t officially exist. The clip taken out of context, and was recycled in January 2021 by the pro-China handles to push the Fort Detrick lab. It was extensively circulated on Twitter by two handles: @smithhoons & @BarbadosTenny (both of which stand suspended). However, the story got a boost in January 2021, at the same time a number of anonymous handles were pushing Fort Detrick. The story of Kenneth was tweeted and retweeted 1691 times!

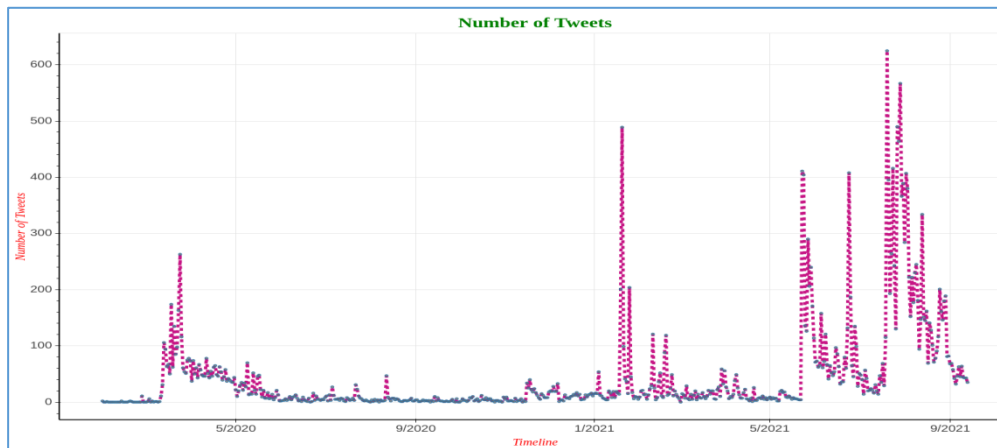
### **Origin of Fort Detrick on Twitter**

To understand from where the Fort Detrick narrative started, data was extracted from Twitter using “Fort Detrick” and “Covid” keywords between July 2019 (when the incidence took place at Fort Detrick) and September 2021. When plotted along the graph, the data tells an interesting story. Surprisingly, there is no discussion of Fort Detrick when the incidence actually happens in July 2019, till the end of year. There are small set of peaks in the early 2020 in the month of March, which suggests that the narrative of Fort Detrick was pushed back then. This also coincides with Lijian Zhao’s posting the Larry’s article on Global Research – a fake tweet of an article by a fake expert on a fake news site! However, it quickly died down, supposedly after the narrative of natural origin of covid was established.

However, as the questions start re-surfacing in January 2021, Fort Detrick comes back into conversation in January. It again kind of dies down, but there is distinct pattern since June/July 2021 – which is also seen in the narrative push by Chinese MOFA and State Media – as we will see subsequently.

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<sup>72</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBgaKOfgYmo&ab\\_chann-12-el=Dr.JohnCampbell](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBgaKOfgYmo&ab_chann-12-el=Dr.JohnCampbell)



Tweets' timeline of Fort Detrick and COVID keyword

It is worth mentioning that after March/April 2021, a series of fresh articles on the possibility of lab leak from Wuhan started appearing again, including one by Nicholas Wade, whose article practically reopened the lab leak debate, which was later republished in The Bulletin.<sup>[73]</sup> And as one would expect, the Fort Detrick story comes back into circulation, every time there is a serious questioning about the lab leak. To check this hypothesis, we collected Twitter data for both the 'lab leak' and 'Fort Detrick'.

<sup>73</sup> <https://thebulletin.org/2021/05/the-origin-of-covid-did-people-or-nature-open-pandoras-box-at-wuhan/>

## Chapter 10: My Lab v/s Your Lab

### (Phase I: January - June, 2021)

It is interesting to note that whenever there was a peak in the ‘Lab-Leak’ and demands increased for more investigation/ details from Wuhan Lab, the Fort Detrick narrative would start peaking at around the same time. This pattern continued from January to June 2021. Important to note that the Chinese officials would push back on Fort Detrick when, and only when, some US State official or prominent politician would demand an investigation on Wuhan Lab. However, by June/July the Chinese officials shifted gears, and went on full throttle to establish Fort Detrick as origin place for virus – once and for all.

As we noted earlier, every single peak for Fort Detrick comes as a reaction. January 2021 had fair share of ‘triggers’ and hence there were also several push-backs. The pattern was same – an anonymous/ fake handle post, pushed by the WuMao/ Tankies; and a fake ‘news article’ pushed by Chinese MOFA officials.

### Street Great Wall Defender: a Perfect Symbol

The Twitter handle Street Great Wall Defender (@Dragondescendan) is a perfect symbol of the DisInfo machinery. The Twitter handle *@Dragondescendan* was created in December 2020, supports CPC, wants to “build a community with a shared future for mankind”, uses a pic of a Russian General Valery Vasilyevich Gerasimov as Display Picture; and constantly retweets Global Times! If you still have doubts, the handle tries to tell you that all is well in Tibet & Xinjiang.



On Jan 19, 2021 this handle pushes the Fort Detrick narrative, that was simultaneously being pushed in the Chinese social media. The post got 82 Retweets



& 333 likes between January 19-20, 2021. <sup>[74]</sup> @Dragondescendan also tweeted the screenshot of a Facebook post of the Indian ‘Samantha Hill’ on January 19, 2021. <sup>[75]</sup>

### **Again...**

The above post coincides with the first observed peak of #FortDetrick in 2021. The Pattern continues: whenever there is a call for more information about the virus origin, the trend starts. For example, the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) broke a story on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2021, where it mentioned that three researchers from China’s Wuhan Institute of Virology became sick in November 2019 with symptoms consistent with both covid-19 and seasonal illness and sought hospital care. <sup>[76]</sup> Next day, Chinese spokesperson Lijian Zhao refuted the claims of Wall Street Journal terming it a false and full of lies. <sup>[77]</sup> Bloomberg dully reported that into an article on May 24, stating that China accused the US for hyping the Wuhan lab theory. <sup>[78]</sup> And lo and behold, #FortDetrick as a source of Covid-19 starts trending again!

### **And again...**

Likewise, few days after WSJ’s story, the U.S. president Biden on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2021 ordered the US Intelligence community to double their efforts in finding about the origin of Covid-19. <sup>[79]</sup> The next day PRC Embassy in US, rather figuratively, said that “*smear campaign and blame shifting are making a comeback, and the conspiracy theory of "lab leak" is resurfacing*”. And next, #Fort Detrick trends again!

This pattern is seen throughout the first half of 2021. Whenever there is a serious question about the role of Wuhan, as if on cue, #FortDetrick starts trending.

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<sup>74</sup> <https://twitter.com/Dragondescendan/status/1351562895549558784>

<sup>75</sup> <https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1351591352706895872>

<sup>76</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/articles/intelligence-on-sick-staff-at-wuhan-lab-fuels-debate-on-covid-19-origin-11621796228>

<sup>77</sup> <https://twitter.com/globaltimesnews/status/1396742745784422402>

<sup>78</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-05-24/china-accuses-u-s-of-hyping-theory-coronavirus-escaped-from-lab->

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/05/26/statement-by-president-joe-biden-on-the-investigation-into-the-origins-of-covid-19/>

## **Chapter 11: the Propaganda Machinery had it enough!**

### **Chinese MOFA Comes to Front:**

On 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2021, Congressman Mike Gallagher- US Representative for Wisconsin, introduced the COVID-19 Act of 2021, a bill that would authorize sanctions and other restrictions on Chinese Communist Party (CCP) affiliated scientists if the CCP fails to allow a transparent, international investigation into the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV). [80]

By this time the Chinese propaganda had it enough.

In response to Gallagher's drive, Chinese spokesperson Lijian Zhao in a press event demanded: "*why not go to Fort Detrick to find out*"; adding for good measure "*why EVALI broke out in Wisconsin around the same time research was suspended at Fort Detrick*". [81] The official handle of China's Foreign Ministry (@MFA\_China) also tweeted the video of Lijian Zhao countering the allegations of Mike Gallagher. [82] Later, Lijian Zhao posted the video on his personal Twitter handle as well, which got a traction of 238 RTs, 14 quoted RTs and 967 likes.



On July 16, 2021, WHO proposed a second phase of studies into the origins of the coronavirus in China, including audits of laboratories and research centers operating

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<sup>80</sup> <https://gallagher.house.gov/media/press-releases/gallagher-introduces-bill-sanction-china-lack-covid-19-transparency>

<sup>81</sup> <https://twitter.com/zlj517/status/1407888700223090689>

<sup>82</sup> <https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1407884042129731589>

in Wuhan. <sup>[83]</sup> Earlier in a press conference on WHO's Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus asked China to provide raw data from the Wuhan Institute of Virology. He also marks that "Lab accidents can happen and is common". <sup>[84]</sup> China rejected WHO's phase-2 COVID-19 origins study, calling it '*lack of respect for common sense, arrogant toward science*' and said that the next stage study should be carried out in more countries and places around the world on the basis of wide consultations among member states, not in places that have already been inspected. <sup>[85]</sup> And the Fort Detrick was implied, as it started trending again even though it was not mentioned by name.

### **Taking a notch above: the Gear Shift**

By now the Chinese DisInfo machinery realises that push is coming to shove, and they need to up the game. Since June-end/ July 2021, the narrative about the Fort Detrick is pushed strongly. While MOFA officials, particularly Lijian Zhao had been running a one-man crusade since 2020, now the whole machinery came together for the great rejuvenation of this narrative. The state apparatus had already managed to push this fabrication inside China with almost a complete control on communication. Now was the time to mobilise the Chinese public, whose sentiments might have been getting hurt because of accusations. To provide it a feel of grass-root campaign, an online petition was launched seeking investigation into Fort Detrick.

### **The Petition and the Might of State Propaganda**

A petition was filed on July 17, 2021, <sup>[86]</sup> on [Huangniu.com](https://www.huangniu.com/), a Chinese portal established in November 2007 under the approval of People's Daily and the State Council Information Office, with investments from both People.com.cn and Global Times. The petition urged the WHO to probe the U.S. Fort Detrick biolab. The petition was circulated through the Chinese social media platforms such as WeChat and Weibo, and garnered 25 million signatures online till its closure. It also got

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<sup>83</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/who-proposes-fresh-mission-china-lab-audits-diplomats-2021-07-16/>

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/china-should-provide-raw-data-pandemics-origins-whos-tedros-2021-07-15/>

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202107/1229401.shtml>

<sup>86</sup> <https://vote.huangniu.com/af96c/index.html?sign=falsehttps://vote.huangniu.com/af96c/index.html?sign=false>

sufficient state patronage, and the State news agency Xinhuanet <sup>[87]</sup> also published the story, other than China Daily HK <sup>[88]</sup>, and as expected Global Times. <sup>[89]</sup>



*The petition filed by Global Times for investigation of FD*

The launch of petition seems to have spurred the momentum. Every concerned MOFA official and State media was pushing on the same line. In fact, the tempo was so high, that there seemed some competition between Lilian Zhao and Hu Xijin, as to who could push more.

### **Savour this**

- ❖ Lijian Zhao posted (July 19) a tweet asking US why hasn't the US invited WHO to Fort Detrick for a thorough probe. <sup>[90]</sup>  
[Zhao -1 Hu - 0]
- ❖ Hu Xijin (@HuXijin\_GT), the Editor-in-chief of the Global Times expressed disappointment (Jul 24) over USA's rejection of Fort Detrick investigation.  
[Zhao -1 Hu - 1]
- ❖ Hu also shared the petition that had crossed 10 million signatures by that time. His tweet got RTs-210, 34 QRTs and 932 likes. <sup>[91]</sup>  
[Zhao -1 Hu - 2]
- ❖ Global Times, (Editor-in-Chief - Hu Xijin), also posted Tweet on July 24, 2021 asking for a probe into Fort Detrick. <sup>[92]</sup>  
[Zhao -1 Hu - 3]

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<sup>87</sup> [https://web.archive.org/web/20210808155520/http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-08/07/c\\_1310114547.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20210808155520/http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-08/07/c_1310114547.htm)

<sup>88</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20210722160643/https://www.chinadailyhk.com/article/229852>

<sup>89</sup> <https://twitter.com/globaltimesnews/status/1420067759409352706>

<sup>90</sup> <https://twitter.com/zlj517/status/1417109671752572929>

<sup>91</sup> <https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1418953332136181760>

<sup>92</sup> <https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1418953332136181760>

- ❖ Hu's Global Times again shared (Jul 28) the petition (by then signed by 15 million Chinese netizens) seeking an investigation of Fort Detrick on COVID-19 origins. [93]

[Zhao -1 Hu – 4]

- ❖ On 26<sup>th</sup> July 2021, Lijian Zhao tweeted again that WHO experts should go to Fort Detrick so as to reveal the truth, reinforcing China's claim about virus origin. [94]

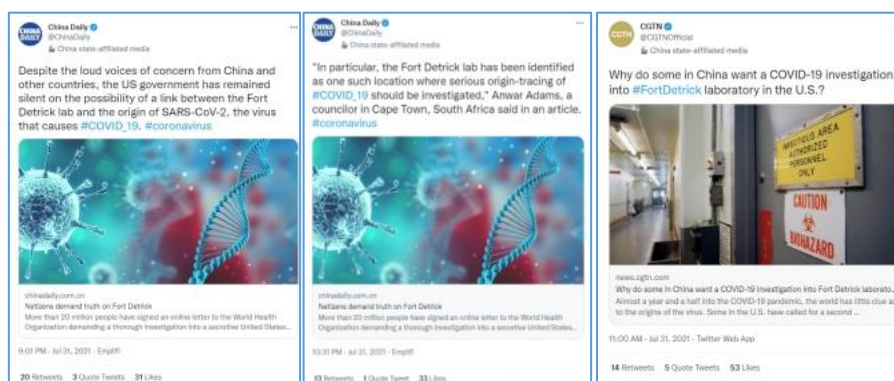
[Zhao -2 Hu – 4]

- ❖ Lijian Zhao again tweeted (July 29) accusing the US of hiding the number of deaths due to COVID-19 and reinforcing that WHO shall probe FD. That tweet got 44 RTs and 6 QRT and 243 likes. [95]

[Zhao -3 Hu – 4]

## Now was not a time to shy

Chinese state media China Daily posted a video presenting how FD was shut down under mysterious circumstances in July 2019 and it could be the origin of COVID-19. The tweet got 70 RTs, 13 QRTs and 70 likes with 3.4k views on the video. [96] Chinese media houses including @CGTNOfficial and @ChinaDaily tweeted seeking investigation of Fort Detrick lab for COVID-19 origin.



On August 1, 2021, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying (@SpokespersonCHN) again put her weight behind, and asked for opening the Fort Detrick lab for investigation of COVID-19 origin. The tweet had 318 RTs, 30 QRTs and 1301 likes. [97] She also shared an article ***"Open Fort Detrick for Global Covid-19 Origins Tracing"*** written by a Philippine Journalist Herman Tiu Laurel on Sovereign

<sup>93</sup> <https://twitter.com/globaltimesnews/status/1420067759409352706>

<sup>94</sup> <https://twitter.com/zlj517/status/1419667866140377088>

<sup>95</sup> <https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1420748683826524165>

<sup>96</sup> <https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1421085764171960327>

<sup>97</sup> <https://twitter.com/SpokespersonCHN/status/1421827435679473664>

PH, a news & media website. Laurel is a broadcast journalist and former Administrator of the Philippine Refugee Processing Centre. In his article, Herman cited that COVID-19 cases had already emerged in other countries like Italy, Spain, France and the US even before it was first reported in Wuhan. He also slammed the US for politicizing the origin of COVID-19 and urged WHO to launch an investigation on Fort Detrick.<sup>[98]</sup>

Hua again Tweeted on August 2, bringing back the online Petition. By that time, the petition had already crossed 20 million signatures.<sup>[99]</sup> On August 3, 2021 Lijian Zhao again came up with another tweet with a cartoon showing Fort Detrick as the origin of SARS-CoV-2.<sup>[100]</sup> Just so that the credit remains in his name, Zhao continues and again posted a cartoon on August 6, 2021 on twitter.<sup>[101]</sup> Zhao scored a home run on August 7, while sharing an article published by Chinese state-run media Global times mocking US President Joe Biden for the hunt for the origins of the virus.<sup>[102]</sup> Hua did a redouble, pushing the same GT article by late evening.<sup>[103]</sup>

[Zhao -5 Hu -4 Hua -3]

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<sup>98</sup> <https://sovereignph.com/2021/07/23/open-fort-detrick-for-global-covid-19-origins-tracing/>

<sup>99</sup> <https://twitter.com/SpokespersonCHN/status/1422136595650543617>

<sup>100</sup> <https://twitter.com/zlj517/status/1422552527489413120>

<sup>101</sup> <https://twitter.com/zlj517/status/1423664760394973203>

<sup>102</sup> <https://twitter.com/zlj517/status/1423899521830948865>

<sup>103</sup> <https://twitter.com/SpokespersonCHN/status/1423990360590540808>



## Chapter 12: More ‘Experts’ Weigh-in

Chinese state media and MOFA officials also got some good help from a number of useful experts. Chinese state media has a good reserve of such foreign experts.

### (I) Nathan Rich

Nathan Rich aka Hotpot King, is an American Vlogger presently in Shanghai. As per one of his interviews, he first visited China in 2012 as the technical director of an American special effects company. before joining a Beijing based visual company Base FX as Chief Technology Officer (CTO). <sup>[104]</sup> He left the company and started a content company ‘Team Hotpot’, and switched to YouTube for curating pro-China content on his channel (with 493k subscribers). A collage of his videos could give you a flavour about the standing of Nathan in the comity of experts: Hong Kong wants Chinese leadership; Taiwan is not a country; and a slew of videos ‘dissecting’ CNN & BBC.



Nathan posted on Twitter through his handle @NathanRichHGDW stating he would debunk the conspiracy of Fort Detrick. <sup>[105]</sup> He followed up with a video <sup>[106]</sup> on his YT channel, which garnered 72,655 views. He essentially mocked BBC for its anti-China reporting and insinuated that origin of COVID-19 was the Fort Detrick lab.

<sup>104</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/%E4%BB%8E%E6%B5%81%E6%B5%AA%E6%B1%89%E5%88%B0cto%E7%81%AB%E9%94%85%E5%A4%A7%E7%8E%8Bnathan-rich%E7%9A%84%E9%9D%9E%E5%85%B8%E5%9E%8B%E8%81%8C%E5%9C%BA%E4%B9%8B%E8%B7%AF23-nolan-chen-yi/?originalSubdomain=cn>

<sup>105</sup> <https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1407995936052191232>

<sup>106</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yVWyzTo5njY&ab\\_channel=NathanRich](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yVWyzTo5njY&ab_channel=NathanRich)

This was not the first time Nathan made a video on the origin of COVID-19. He had already posted two videos on the origination of COVID-19 at Fort Detrick on March 16, 2020<sup>[107]</sup> and January 20, 2021. <sup>[108]</sup>

## (II) Danny Haiphong

Danny Haiphong (@SpiritofHo) a self-proclaimed social activist, writer, and political analyst tweeted in support of China indicating the virus originated in the US. According to his Twitter bio, Danny Haiphong is the co-editor of Friends of socialist China; co-host of the Left Lens; and a weekly contributor to Black Agenda Report. His articles have also appeared in MintPressNews, CounterPunch (!), The American Herald Tribune, The Center for Global Research (ouch!) and The Herald (Zimbabwe). Haiphong has frequently appeared on Black Agenda Radio, CPRNews with Don Debar, The Taylor Report, RT, and Sputnik International. His work was recently featured in former Congresswoman and Green Party presidential candidate Cynthia McKinney's latest book How the U.S. Creates "Shithole Countries (2018). <sup>[109]</sup>



*Danny Haiphong's tweet asking to investigate Fort Detrick <sup>[110]</sup>*

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<sup>107</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3J6zm6zgah0>

<sup>108</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdKI5qOF\\_a8&t=72s&ab\\_channel=NathanRich](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdKI5qOF_a8&t=72s&ab_channel=NathanRich)

<sup>109</sup> <https://peoplesforum.org/instructor/danny-haiphong/>

<sup>110</sup> <https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1420011611834703873>



### (III) Jason Lightfoot

Jason Lightfoot, a Youtuber posted a video (Jul 30) on his channel LivinginChina <sup>[111]</sup> (which has subscribers' count of 176k), blaming the US and its lab at Fort Detrick for creating COVID-19. His video garnered 155,625 views, <sup>[112]</sup> while his tweet got 41 RTs, 11 QRTs and 124 likes. <sup>[113]</sup> He is a YouTube vlogger. He has been accused of promoting Communist party agenda and portray China in a good light in Xinxiang etc. He has been exposed by BBC on a report on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2021- The foreigners in China's disinformation drive. <sup>[114]</sup>

An excerpt from the BBC article:

*Jason Lightfoot is also on the list of global stringers on CGTN website. The station billed him as a vlogger critical of "distorted reports" by Western media outlets. Mr. Lightfoot recently appeared in a number of CGTN videos alongside multiple staff reporters on a visit to Hainan. CGTN says in one such video that Mr. Lightfoot "is grateful to CGTN for giving him the experience to explore Hainan" and that CGTN staff and expat vloggers "enjoyed working together, producing livestreams and videos as a team".*

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<sup>111</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATqrBpalTMc>

<sup>112</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATqrBpalTMc&ab\\_channel=LivinginChina](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATqrBpalTMc&ab_channel=LivinginChina)

<sup>113</sup> <https://twitter.com/LivingChina/status/1421092504330461186>

<sup>114</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57780023>

## **Chapter 13: Natural Origin, If you will; else your lab!**

While on one hand the MOFA machinery, Troll Army, Wumao, and Tankie networks were busy pushing Fort Detrick (which would technically be a lab leak), the Chinese scientists and health experts (and their Western cronies) kept claiming that it was natural origin.

### **The Natural Origin Continues:**

**On 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2020**, George Fu Gao, Director of China's Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CCDC) said that the new 2019-nCoV virus originated from wild animals illegally sold at a seafood market and it first spread from animals to humans. [115]

**On 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2020**, five Chinese researchers published an article where they claimed that the new identified coronavirus may have spread from snakes to human. [116]

**On 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2020**, twenty-nine Chinese health experts including that from Chinese CDC published an article where they all pointed Bats for Covid-19 origin. [117]

**On 6<sup>th</sup> March 2020**, China's state affiliated media – China Xinhua News tweeted, in an attempt to bust rumours where it reaffirms that the virus has natural origin. [118]

**On 8<sup>th</sup> March 2020**, China's state-run media Global Times publishes an article based on a Chinese study that reinforces China's claim on origin of Covid-19 virus – natural origin. [119]

**On 29<sup>th</sup> March 2020**, China's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) published an article titled *“International research team: the new coronavirus originates from nature and cannot be manufactured by man”*, where it has provided links to fortify China's claim that the virus originated naturally and not man-made. [120]

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<sup>115</sup> <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-01-22/Nine-deaths-440-confirmed-coronavirus-cases-in-China-NsfW5dt6eY/index.html>

<sup>116</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jmv.25682>

<sup>117</sup> <https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.01.22.914952v1>

<sup>118</sup> <https://twitter.com/XHNews/status/1235887646485831680>

<sup>119</sup> <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1181938.shtml>

<sup>120</sup> [https://www.ccdi.gov.cn/yaowen/202003/t20200329\\_214408.html](https://www.ccdi.gov.cn/yaowen/202003/t20200329_214408.html)

**On 28<sup>th</sup> April 2020**, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng spoke with Janis Mackey Frayer of the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) at an exclusive interview and pressed that Covid-19 is having a natural origin, asserting his claim by giving reference to an article <sup>[121]</sup> published on The Lancet where 27 professional experts stated that covid has a zoonotic origin. The transcript is uploaded by the Ministry of the foreign affairs of the People Republic of China. <sup>[122]</sup>

**On 18<sup>th</sup> May 2020**, Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention posted an article on its website concluding that the SARS-CoV-2 is of Natural Origin. <sup>[123]</sup>

A research paper published on May 10, 2020 on “cell.com” titled “*A Novel Bat Coronavirus Closely Related to SARS-CoV-2 Contains Natural Insertions at the S1/S2 Cleavage Site of the Spike Protein*” suggests that the Coronavirus has a zoonotic origin. <sup>[124]</sup>

All the authors, barring one, are having their affiliations to China.

**On 8 Jan 2021**, two of the Chinese virologists Peng Zhou & Zheng-Li Shir affiliated with Wuhan Institute of Virology published another article, reaffirming the natural origin of virus (“SARS-CoV-2 spillover events”) stating that transmission of SARS-CoV-2 may likely occurred from bat and/or pangolin through unidentified intermediate host animals. <sup>[125]</sup>

The same virologists had earlier published on nature.com an article on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2020 titled “*A pneumonia outbreak associated with a new coronavirus of probable bat origin*” and pointed that SARS-CoV-2 may have originated in bats. <sup>[126]</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30418-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30418-9/fulltext)

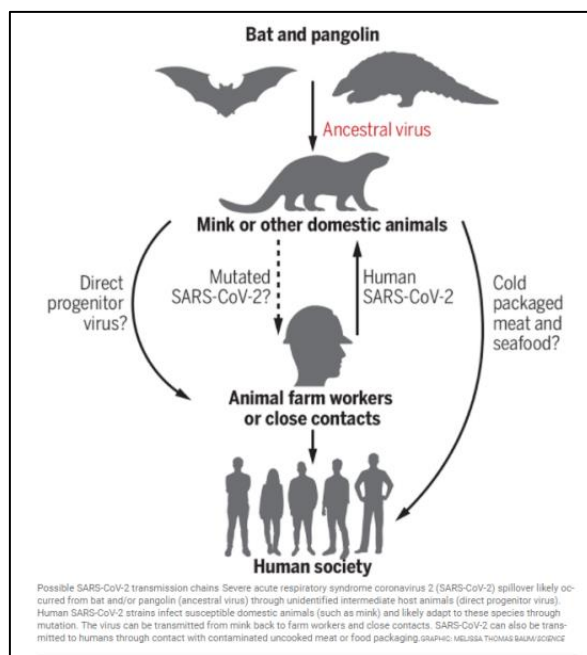
<sup>122</sup> [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjbxw/t1775016.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1775016.shtml)

<sup>123</sup> [https://www.chinacdc.cn/gwxx/202005/t20200518\\_216763.html](https://www.chinacdc.cn/gwxx/202005/t20200518_216763.html)

<sup>124</sup> [https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822\(20\)30662-X](https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822(20)30662-X)

<sup>125</sup> <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abf6097>

<sup>126</sup> <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-020-2012-7>

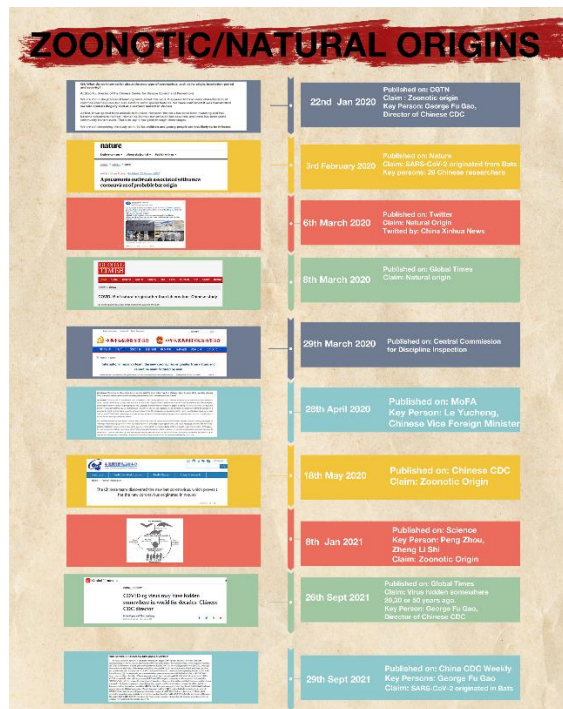


A set of Chinese researchers/authors published another article on June 09, 2021 titled *"Identification of novel bat coronaviruses sheds light on the evolutionary origins of SARS-CoV-2 and related viruses"* which again cements the zoonotic link of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. <sup>[127]</sup>

**On 29<sup>th</sup> September 2021**, Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in one of their weekly publications, mentioned that the virus could have more likely originated from bats. <sup>[128]</sup>

<sup>127</sup> [https://www.cell.com/cell/fulltext/S0092-8674\(21\)00709-1](https://www.cell.com/cell/fulltext/S0092-8674(21)00709-1)

<sup>128</sup> <http://weekly.chinacdc.cn/en/article/doi/10.46234/ccdcw2021.210>



**And...**

This is the same timeline when Chinese Spox and state media was also pushing the Fort Detrick narrative, not bothering to explain that if the virus had natural origin, how could it possibly start from another Lab! Chinese Spox Lijian Zhao was also propelling the covid origin narrative by quoting the fake article on Globalresearch.ca by Larry Romanoff. This was the time when Chinese social media was pushing the Facebook post of Samantha Hill. And no less than 25 million Chinese wanted to investigate Fort Detrick Lab, for a virus that their own scientists were claiming to have natural origin!



To a lay person this narrative making exercise - full of contradictions and inconsistencies – would be incomprehensible.

But not to a 'China expert'. He (mostly he) could instantly comprehend him through an analogy of game of Go, or strategic thinking coming straight from Sun Tzu. For a China expert, this contradiction could simply because of the Yin and Yang; or may be because of the 'dialectic thought process' that CPC adopted following Marx, who adopted following Hegel. A China expert could also try and explain this to you as a 500-year futuristic vision!

If nothing else, it is disinformation with Chinese characteristic.

But you may not understand it, unless you have spent 50 years in China, can quote from Chinese classics, play game of Go, and above all have President Xi Jin Ping's authoritative commentaries on Marxism in your bookshelf. Or believe 'China Experts'. They can spin anything.

## **PART IV: #FortDetrick – data analysis**

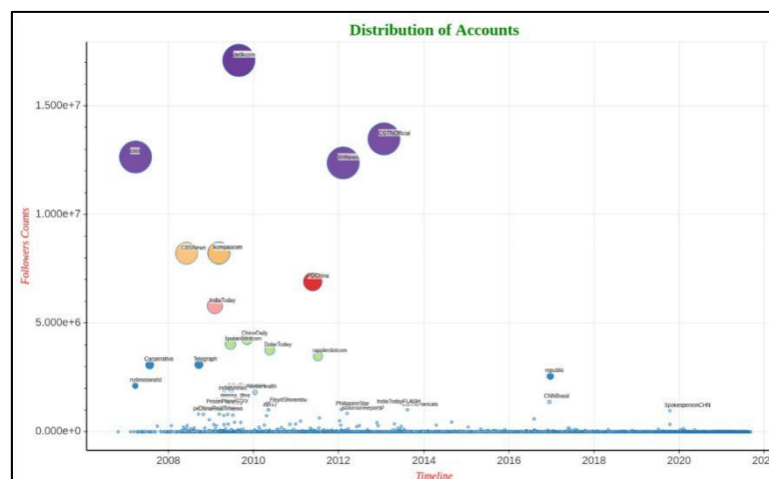
*While we mapped all the networks/platforms and individuals involved in pushing the agenda, the initial impetus came from #FortDetrick, which was found to be trending on and off. It was the trending of the hashtag that got us curious, which led us to dig around. The data that came with the hashtag was telling its own story – story of inorganic trends. It also told us about the key players and the networks surrounding them.*

## Chapter 14: The State Machinery'd Direct Involvement

While fake news/ dis-info may not be limited to any one country, it is rarely seen that the State is directly involved in pushing misinformation – except in the case of ‘iron-brothers’ China and Pakistan. (For earlier Pak state involvement, pls refer *DisInfo Lab Report ‘SAUSMF’*).<sup>[129]</sup> In the present trend also, it was mostly the Chinese MOFA officials who led the trend.

### Analysis of the accounts who pushed Fort Detrick narrative:

The below account distribution plot again shows that, as is case with most artificially pushed narratives, most of the accounts are small except major Chinese media and MOFA handles. Some of the key Chinese handles which led this trend push include XHNews, CGTNOfficial, CNN, PDChina, ChinaDaily, CBSNews, & CGTNFrancais, etc.



Bubble Chart showing Major accounts

Interesting to note that some East Asian media was also used in pushing the agenda. Other than Philippines media noted above, a good number of Indonesian media was also found to be participating in the drive, such as @detikcom<sup>[130]</sup>, @kompascom<sup>[131]</sup>, @liputan6dotcom<sup>[132]</sup>, @rapplerdotcom<sup>[133]</sup>.

<sup>129</sup> <https://thedisinfo.org/the-anatomy-of-pakistans-5th-generation-warfare/>

<sup>130</sup> <https://twitter.com/detikcom/status/1397800550335385604>

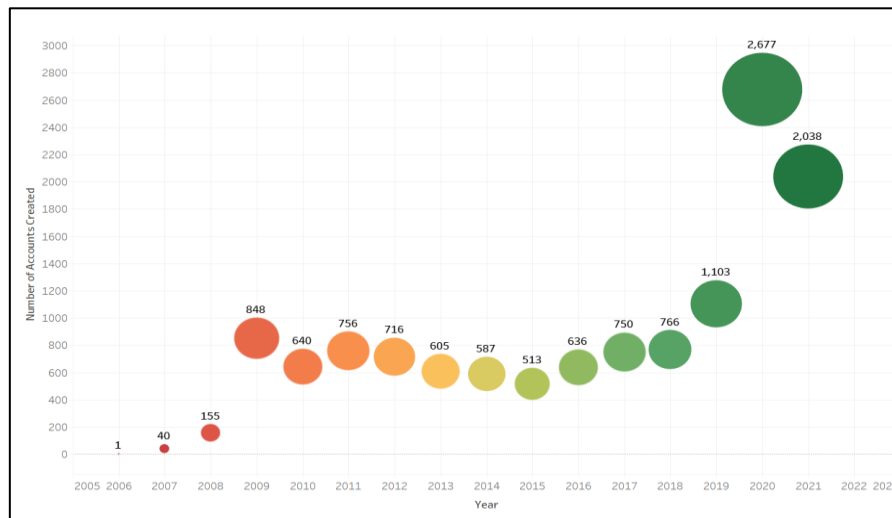
<sup>131</sup> <https://www.kompas.com/global/read/2021/07/20/140258870/2-juta-lebih-netizen-china-ajukan-petisi-desak-who-selidiki-lab-as>

<sup>132</sup> [https://www.liputan6.com/cek-fakta/read/4228406/cek-fakta-teori-konspirasi-covid-19-dari-fort-detrick-hingga-uang-digital-faktanya?utm\\_source=dlvr.it&utm\\_medium=twitter](https://www.liputan6.com/cek-fakta/read/4228406/cek-fakta-teori-konspirasi-covid-19-dari-fort-detrick-hingga-uang-digital-faktanya?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter)

<sup>133</sup> <https://twitter.com/rapplerdotcom/status/1430709215421739009>

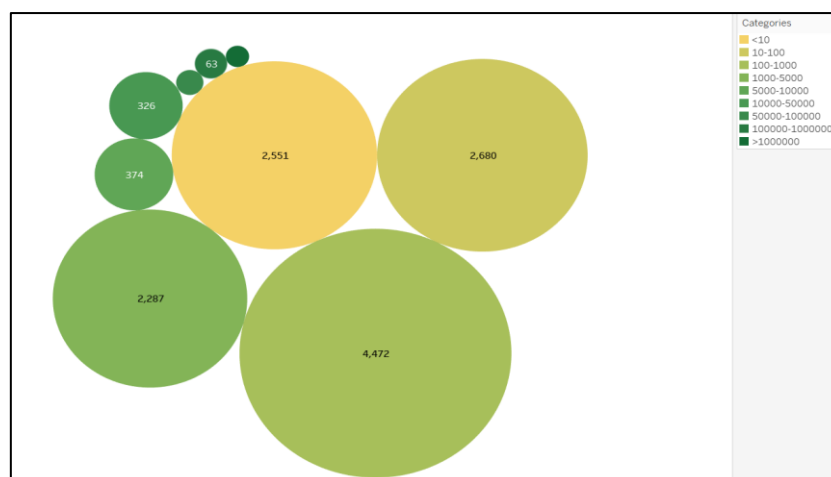


As noted above, confirming the artificial trend, of which 36% of the handles were created just between 2020 and 2021, and around 51 % handles are created after 2018.



Number of Accounts' Distribution based on their year of creation

As shown below, around 40 % accounts are very small accounts having less than 100 followers, and almost 76% accounts have less than 1000 followers. This again implies that many smaller handles were involved in the amplification of this narrative either via tweeting or retweeting big accounts, a signature for inorganic trends. The ratio of re-tweets per post was also significantly high, affirming with the general pattern of artificially boosted trends.



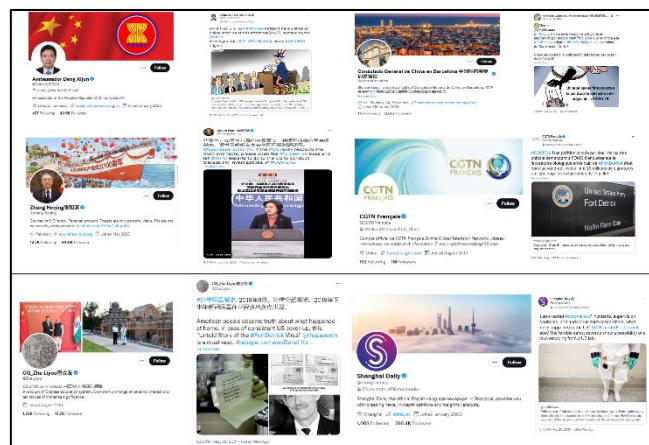
*the distribution of accounts based on their followers' count.*

As noted above, most influential accounts gaining the most number of tweets are the official Chinese handles including Chinese state affiliated media and Chinese diplomats.

Handles	No. of Tweets	Retweet Count
ChinaDaily	14	547
SpokespersonCHN	1	323
zlj517	6	285
PrisonPlanet	1	267
XHNews	4	241
globaltimesnews	2	224
AmbassadeChine	3	224
CGTNOfficial	4	223
HuXijin_GT	1	213
nytimesworld	1	198
CE_ChinaEconomy	3	174
SenTomCotton	1	167
Echinanews	1	156
zhang_heqing	34	105
ajamubarak	1	84
MFA_China	1	55
JChengWSJ	5	54
FloydShivambu	1	45

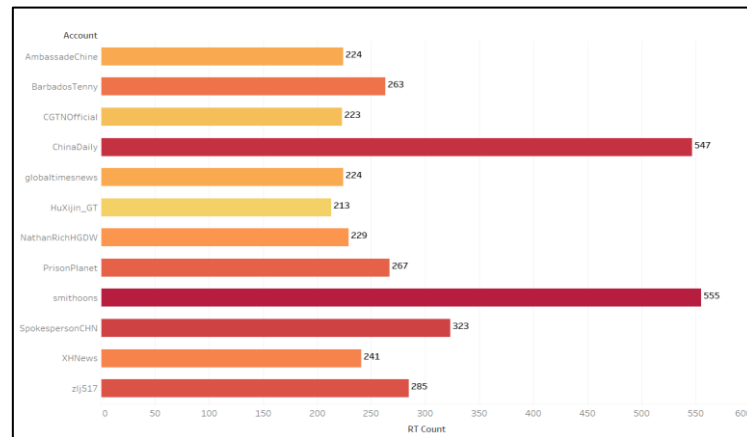


Chinese officials and Ambassadors tweeting on FD theory



Chinese officials and Ambassadors tweeting on FD theory

In this data we again find that the Chinese diplomat in Pakistan @zhang\_heqing is the one to be tweeting most on this narrative whereas @ChinaDaily gets the most number of retweets. Among the top handles are also some handles which are tweeting against the Chinese propaganda narrative on FortDetrick like @SenTomCotton, @LawrenceSellin etc. The below bar chart shows the most retweeted handles.



Other than major Chinese official handles, some of the handles which got maximum push included fake Chinese propaganda such as @smithoons & @BarbadosT (both of which got suspended eventually). The handle @smithoons alone tweeted/retweeted 1295 times in year 2021 and the handle @BarbadosTenny tweeted/retweeted 604 times in years 2020 and 2021 combined. The below images show the accounts which were tweeting/retweeted most frequently on this topic and amplifying it on Twitter.

Created at	Name	Screen Name	Verified	Followers Count	Tweet Count
Sun Feb 02 16:13:23 +0000 2014	All About Luwuk	InfoLwk	No	99	1008
Thu Sep 10 06:04:59 +0000 2020	Tenny Barbados	BarbadosTenny	No	116	443
Sat Oct 06 12:33:19 +0000 2012	Occupy Schagen	OccupySchagen	No	9145	53
Wed Nov 09 17:34:56 +0000 2016	Remington	deerhyde	No	370	41
Sat Dec 01 18:45:13 +0000 2018	Gordon Bird	GordonBird14	No	53	27
Sun Apr 05 10:51:04 +0000 2020	Me4Xi	Me4Xi	No	81	27
Wed Jun 10 02:24:17 +0000 2020	ONE	ONE54172071	No	0	24

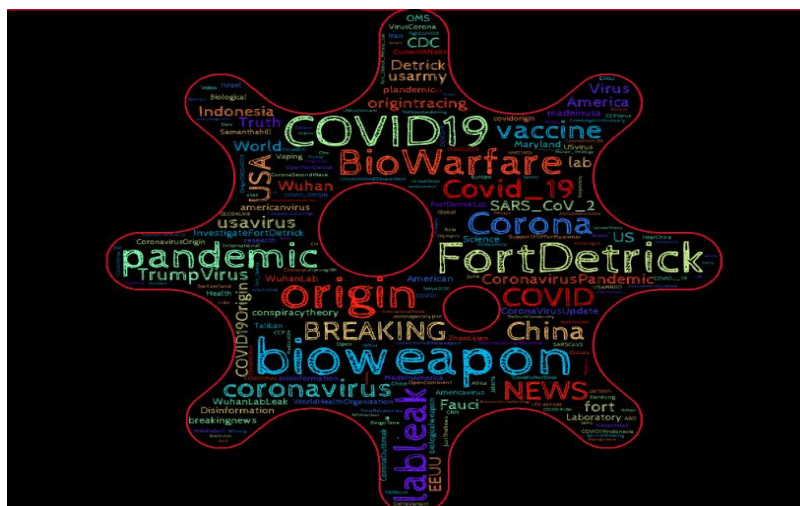
Top active handles in year 2020

Created at	Name	Screen Name	Verified	Followers Count	Tweet Count
Wed Jan 20 08:49:51 +0000 2021	Pete Smithoons	smithoons	No	646	1295
Mon May 04 07:38:02 +0000 2020	以正视听	Aovin_Dylan	No	5	265
Thu Sep 10 06:04:59 +0000 2020	Tenny Barbados	BarbadosTenny	No	116	161
Sun Jul 31 03:00:15 +0000 2016	Monkey King	earth_speaker	No	6	153
Mon Mar 23 01:21:25 +0000 2009	no justice - just us. 🇺🇸	billm9	No	3821	143
Sun Apr 05 03:25:34 +0000 2020	JT2021	Jacky202019	No	48	120
Tue May 16 20:39:45 +0000 2017	xiang zhang	xcz1957	No	268	108
Sun Jun 06 23:05:23 +0000 2021	David	David49932063	No	9	95
Mon Jul 21 20:22:26 +0000 2014	Fernando Chau	fchaumac_chau	No	381	87
Wed Jun 17 22:39:06 +0000 2020	auxin	auxin25979665	No	0	67
Mon Jun 08 22:28:20 +0000 2020	Optimal Win	OptimalWin	No	177	46
Mon Mar 30 07:19:52 +0000 2020	DanCDO7大牛🇨🇳🇺🇸🇺🇸🇺🇸🇺🇸🇺🇸	DanCDO7	No	916	39
Sun Jun 14 09:40:23 +0000 2020	World Citizen	WorldCi73543373	No	1339	39
Mon May 24 14:59:59 +0000 2021	The Brushfires Project	BrushfiresTeam	No	210	38
Wed Jan 20 04:41:14 +0000 2021	Curiously Curious	justcurious1313	No	963	38

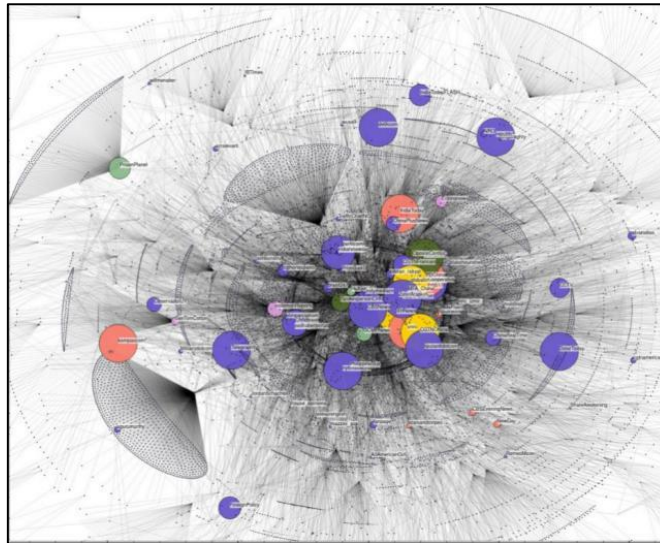
### *Top active handles in year 2021*

Again, from the above data we can see that the most active handles are small handles who are actively amplifying the narrative on Fort Detrick.

It should be recalled that there was, rightly, huge uproar when the virus was called Chinese virus or even Wuhan virus. However, the word-cloud shows the key words that were used to push the narrative of Fort Derrick also used such loaders words as USA Virus, Bio Weapon, made in USA, and even Trump-Virus; frequently occurring in these tweets. Apparently, racism works unidirectional. Interestingly, we also see some key words such as misinformation, Wuhan, China and Lab-leak which suggests that there was some effort to counter these narratives as well, but rather insignificant.



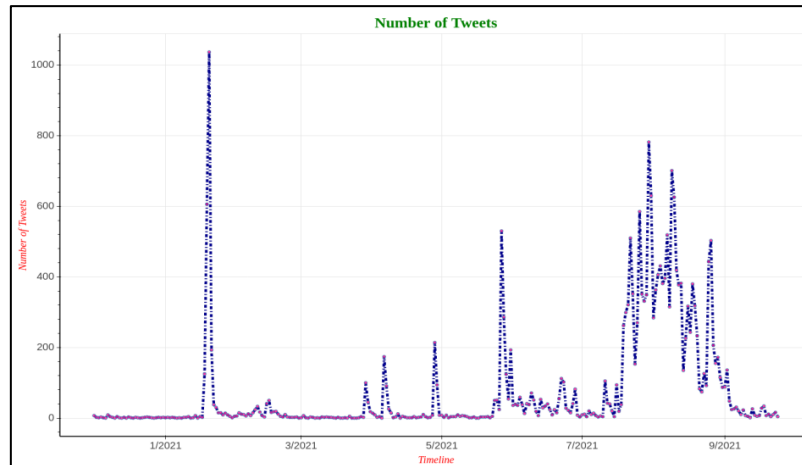
Below is the Network plot for the Fort Detrick and Covid. The network reiterates the same pattern – that the narrative is pushed by a set of major accounts which are mostly Chinese officials/ media accounts, which have their own clusters of nodes who retweet these handles. There is a dense and complex inter-connected internal network of small handles which retweets all the big handles and amplifies their tweets.



Verified Handles tweeting about Fort Detrick

## **Chapter 15: the Patterns for #FortDetrick in 2021**

From our initial analysis we found that while the narrative of Fort Detrick started in 2020, it was extensively pushed in 2021 by many official Chinese handles. Thus, we did an additional analysis of #FortDetrick from Twitter to gauge the pattern since it started getting pushed from early this year.

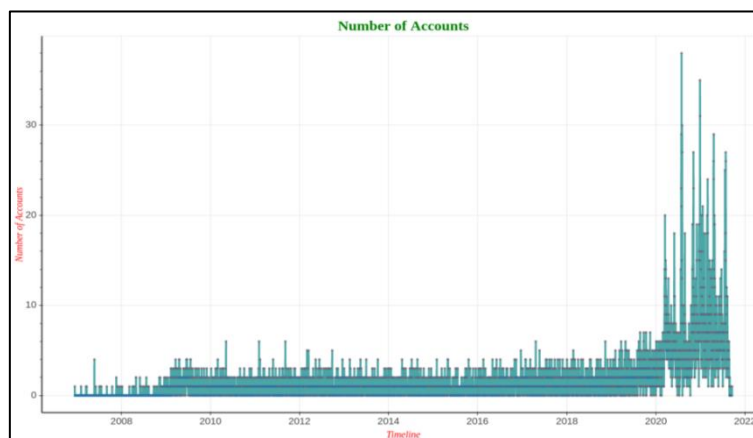


Tweet Timeline

- The dataset is collected on the hashtag #FortDetrick between the date December 2020 and September 2021.
- Total number of tweets collected - 21734
- Number of unique Tweets- 5463, Retweets-16271

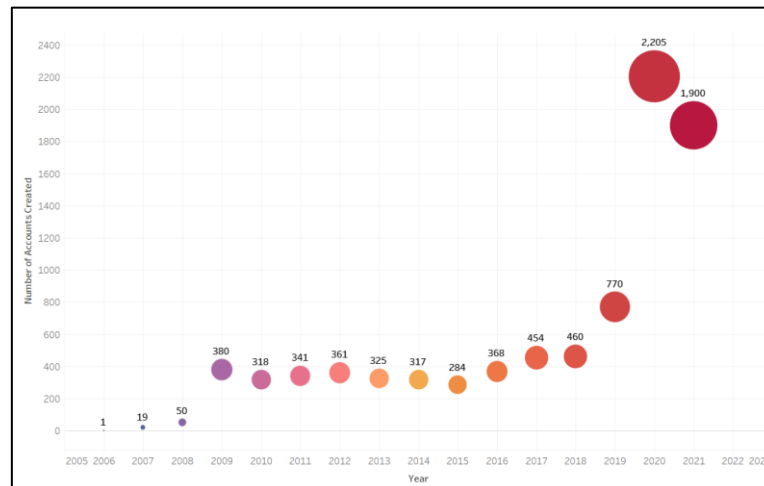
We observed multiple peaks in the Tweet timeline plot starting from Jan 20, 2021 till September 2021. The hashtag has been used throughout the year with the peaks showing particular days when it was amplified.

### **Plot of accounts' creation timeline:**

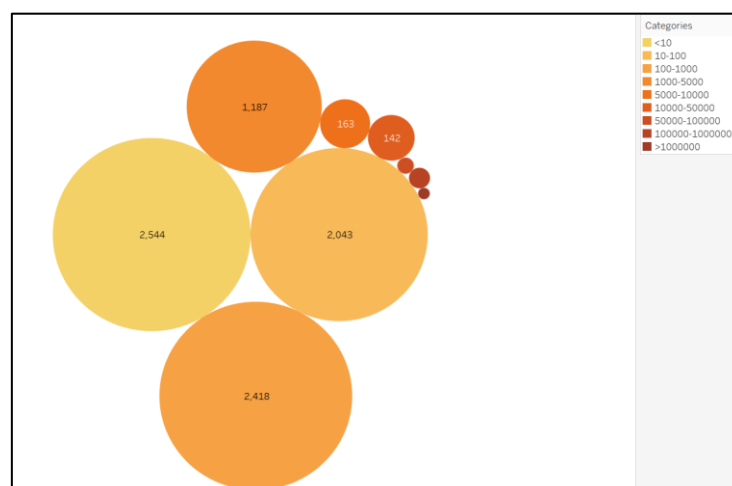




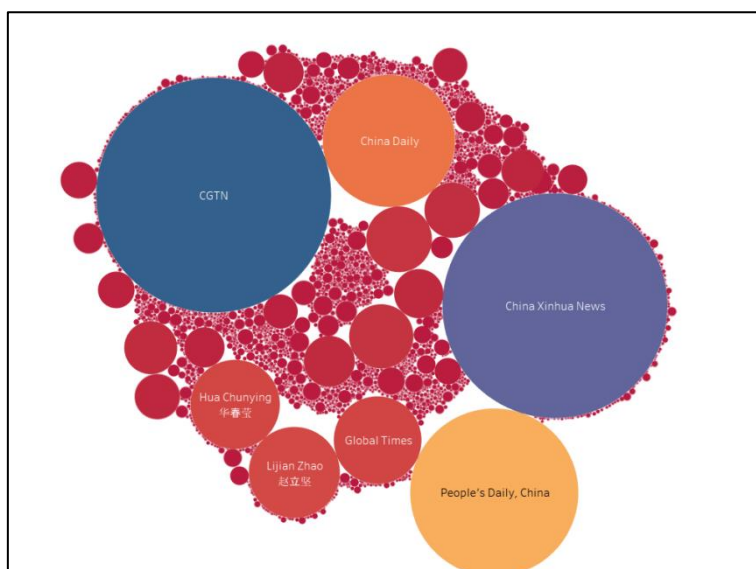
The initial discussion of the topic (2020) did not have much traction except on and off peaks. But since Jan 2021, the traction increased, and it is clear that a large number noise was due to the accounts created from 2020 to 2021; i.e., accounts created for the purpose. The total number of unique accounts were - 8553, out of which 4105 accounts (48%) were created between 2020 and 2021. This type of pattern is common amongst all inorganic/ artificially amplified trends.



Another typical pattern: involvement of disproportionately larger number of handles with insignificant followers. In other words, a combination of trolls (Wumaos/ Tankies). It is observed that around 54% accounts are small accounts having less than 100 followers. 82% accounts fall under less than 1000 followers' category. Such accounts are used for amplifying a hashtag which is evident as the number of retweets is 3 times the number of tweets.



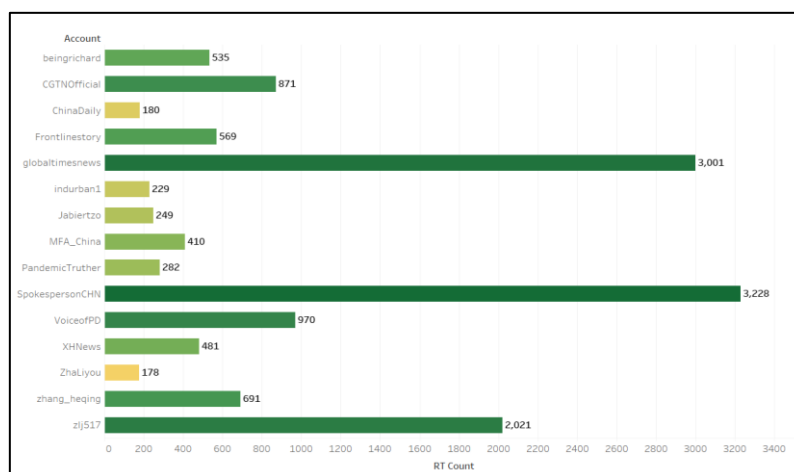
Below plot shows the distribution of these accounts based on their followers' count.



Bubble plot distribution of Accounts

From the above distribution we see that only few major handles driving the narrative repeatedly, and almost all such accounts are Chinese official handles – MOFA or state media - @CGTNOfficial, @XHNews, @PDChina, @ChinaDaily, @globaltimesnews, @zlj517(Lijian Zhao), @CGTNFrancais, @ChinaPlusNews, @Echinanews, @cgtnenespanol, @SpokespersonCHN, @MFA\_China, @Shanghaidaily, @arsched.

The below bar chart shows the most retweeted accounts.



Another interesting fact:

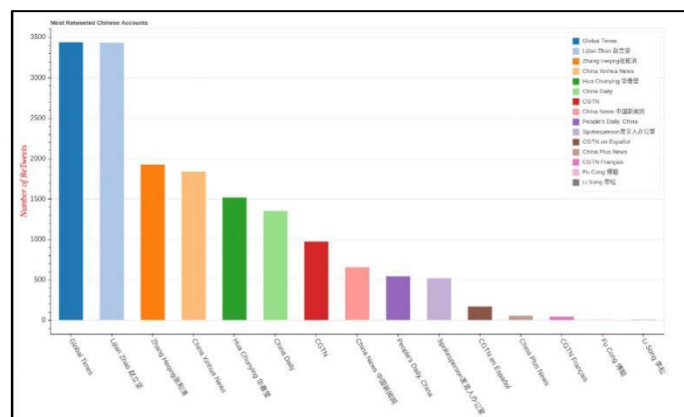
About 101 Verified accounts tweeted on this hashtag, out of which 17 Verified accounts were created between 2020 and 2021 - all Chinese official accounts. This indicates that there was a strong push from the Chinese government to increase the arsenal of their verified Twitter handles. Whether this drive was meant only for this trend, or it is going to be used in other narrative wars will be seen in future. But one thing is confirmed – Chinese government is not going to hesitate in deploying state



machinery openly even for pushing disinformation. A next level of info-war is on horizon.

dates	Name	Screen Name	Location
2020-01-20 11:06:20+00:00	Ambassador Deng Xijun	China2ASEAN	Jakarta, Indonesia
2020-02-05 09:31:23+00:00	Chinese Consulate General in Edinburgh	chinacgedi	55 Corstorphine Rd, Edinburgh
2020-02-14 12:37:12+00:00	Consulado General de China en Barcelona 中国驻巴塞...	ConsulChinaBon	Av. Tibidabo, 34, Barcelona
2020-02-24 10:00:22+00:00	Chinese Embassy in CZ	ChineseEmbCZ	Pelškova 18, 160 00 Praha 6
2020-02-28 14:55:12+00:00	Generalkonsul Du Xiaohui	GeneralkonsulDu	Location not provided
2020-03-30 10:55:57+00:00	Wang Xiaojian	ChinaSpor_India	Chinese Embassy in India
2020-05-05 04:33:36+00:00	China Daily World	ChinaDailyWorld	Location not provided
2020-05-06 11:40:07+00:00	China Daily Hong Kong	CDHKedition	Hong Kong
2020-05-12 08:17:17+00:00	Developing China	DevelopingChina	Location not provided
2020-05-14 10:34:17+00:00	Zhang Heqing 张和清	zhang_heqing	Pakistan
2020-06-17 20:37:31+00:00	Li Song 李松	Amb_LiSong	Switzerland
2020-06-18 00:45:39+00:00	Fu Cong 傅聪	FuCong17	Location not provided
2020-12-30 08:28:56+00:00	Holden Chow	holden_chow	Hong Kong SAR
2021-01-21 06:24:43+00:00	Chinese Embassy in Fiji	ChineseEmb_FJ	Suva, Fiji
2021-01-29 15:12:48+00:00	Wei Hongtian	WeiHongtian	Grenada
2021-02-09 10:35:21+00:00	Dominic Lee 李持敬	dominctsz	Hong Kong
2021-05-14 19:09:40+00:00	Chinese Embassy in Switzerland	ChinaEmbCH	Bern, Switzerland

Verified Chinese handles created between 2020-21



Most retweeted Chinese Official accounts

Again, we see that, most influential accounts gaining the most number of retweets as well as having the most number of tweets are the official Chinese handles including Chinese state affiliated media and Chinese diplomats.

Handles	No. of Tweets	Retweet Count
SpokespersonCHN	19	3228
globaltimesnews	41	3001
zlj517	25	2021
CGTNOfficial	25	871
zhang_heqing	125	691
XHNews	7	481
MFA_China	9	410
ChinaDaily	4	180
ZhaLiyu	52	178
EmbaixadaChina	4	169
China2ASEAN	6	102
thouse_opinions	9	84
Echinanews	6	79
PDChina	1	77
ChinaPlusNews	11	49

Two of the accounts which stand out most are @zhang\_heqing who used this hashtag 125 times and @ZhaLiyu who used this hashtag 52 times. It's kind of befitting that the most active handles happen to be Chinese diplomats in India and Pakistan!



Most active accounts on #FortDetrick

## Side Story 1: Pakistan

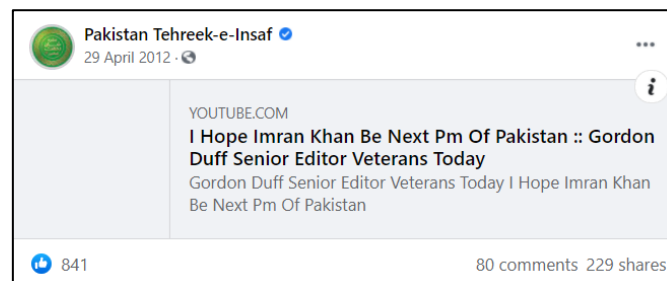
If there is DisInfo, how far Pakistani establishment could be.

Veterans Today's editorial board consists of luminaries from varied backgrounds including defense, journalism, and retired personnel from Intelligence agencies. The members are from countries like Russia, USA, Pakistan, Japan, Syria, Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia, UK, France, Switzerland, Vietnam, Thailand, NZ, Germany etc. The editorial board of Veterans Today also comprises of some of high-profile individuals from Pakistan including former DG ISI (late) Lt. General Hamid Gul and current Prime Minister Imran Khan! Other prominent Pakistani names include Admiral, retired Army Generals, Journalists, and Authors. <sup>[134]</sup>



*The editorial board of Veterans Today*

While any website/ platform can claim any names, and hence the actual relations of Pak PM Imran Khan with VT is not clear (unless it includes cricket veterans), but the official Facebook page of Imran Khan's party PTI has shared a video of VT's founder Gordon Duff, who wished Imran Khan to be the next PM of Pakistan. <sup>[135]</sup> It is therefore unlikely that the PTI is unaware of the claim of the website. The video is no more available on YouTube now. Gordon Duff could be yet another 'foreign experts', like Paul Adams from UK, who had suddenly mushroomed before the General Election in Pakistan, all supporting Imran Khan.



*Gordon Duff's video posted on PTI's FB page*

<sup>134</sup> <https://www.veteranstoday.com/editorial-board/>

<sup>135</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/151626539526/posts/d41d8cd9/394823127215841/>

As one would expect, the only *raison d'être* for Pakistani luminaries to be present on any platform is to keep pushing anti-India agenda. And Veterans Today doesn't disappoint either. The propaganda website has fake news concerning India as well, and lest there should be any doubt, Kashmir would be of essence! Here are small samples:

Article on August 15, 2021 written by a Pakistani 'Journalist' Sajjad Shaukat stating that "*Kashmiris observed India's Independence Day as Black Day*". <sup>[136]</sup> Shaukat, as expected, is duly found on other propaganda platforms such as BeforeitsNews, Veterans Today, Pakistan Today, Pakistan Observer, Daily Times, Modern Diplomacy, The Nations and The Frontier Post. He apparently has authored two books: *US vs Islamic Militants*; & *Invisible Balance of Power: Dangerous Shift in International Relations*.

Article by Asif Haroon Raja on February 16, 2012, among other things claiming that it was India behind the Mumbai terrorist attacks. <sup>[137]</sup> "*India's RAW in connivance with Mossad and CIA engineered Mumbai attacks drama on 26 November 2008, blamed Pakistan*".

While 5<sup>th</sup> Generation Warfare has become a forte for Pak establishment in recent times, the reach and scope of Pakistani disinformation network is rather astonishing. Apart from running their own local fabrication groups targeted at India, it appears that Pakistan is also trying to get a high seat at the global disinformation table.

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<sup>136</sup> <https://www.veteranstoday.com/2021/08/15/kashmiris-observing-indias-independence-as-black-day/>-

<sup>137</sup> <https://www.veteranstodayarchives.com/2012/02/16/water-terrorism-by-india-to-overawe-pakistan/>-

## **Side Story 2: The Biggest Misinformation Campaign of Our Time**

The narrative shaping about the origin of virus in itself is probably the biggest DisInfo story of our time. It involves some of the biggest names from scientists to science journals. The push for 'natural origin' even before it had been established with any level of certainty should not be considered less than a crime against humanity.

However, the fact that those same set of 'scientists' and opinion makers are not only thriving but continue to push the natural origin without ever having to apologize or explain their conflicting interests and association with Wuhan Lab in particular and Chinese government in general, shows the power they wield. That despite so much of questions being raised and so many new evidences surfacing, the arguments about lab leak are drowned by calling them conspiracy theories is evidence of the lasting impact of information warfare, howsoever botched up and full of contradiction that might be. The idea is simply to create enough confusion that pursuit of truth becomes a hopeless task.

A great deal of work on the topic has been done by individuals and OSINT community voluntarily, which is also the biggest hope that even if the entire crooked machinery – from the top scientists to their cronies to top journals and media – pushed a fake narrative, there will always be individuals and groups who would fight for truth and bring it out. Some of the most important work was done of an OSINT community called DRASTIC, including some Indian members such as The Seeker and Dr. Monali Rahalkar and Dr. Rahul Bahulikar. Science Reporters like Nicholas Wade put their careers at risk by going public against the prevailing narrative of the time that the high and mighty were pushing. That he had to resort to a blog article tells a lot about the power that the entrenched machinery holds. That the blog article became viral and pushed back in a big way is also a testimony to the fact that the truth has a tendency to surface. <sup>[138]</sup>

The story is far from over, and would probably be the biggest story of info-war of our time about how the whole narrative about the virus origin was manipulated from the very beginning. Only time will tell whether this ever comes to light. We are not holding our breaths.

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<sup>138</sup> <https://nicholaswade.medium.com/origin-of-covid-following-the-clues-6f03564c038>

## **CONCLUSION**

The scale of disinformation is huge. However, the most worrisome trend was involvement of large number of government officials. While on the face of it may look crude, but the fact that the government officials are saying something makes it news-worthy, irrespective of the merit of the claims. This is a technique mastered by the iron-brother of China, i.e., Pakistan. As has been established repeatedly, the Pakistani govt officials have liberated themselves from the shackles of truth, and are therefore in possession of infinite powers of creative claims. Despite the fact that most of their lies are outrageous on the face itself, the media tends to give it space, which makes its reach wider. With help of some pliant media, the news is further circulated, diminishing the gap of fact and fiction.

The involvement of state media also provides a measure of immunity against fact-check. If a verified handle belonging to Chinese MOFA is spreading fake news, it is unlikely that Twitter or other social media would take action, the way they might do with other handles. This would take the fake news and disinformation to next level, a disinformation with Chinese characteristics!

So far, no one seems to be able to understand, leave aside provide a solution, to this kind of misinformation. Many shrug it off, claiming that no one believed such outlandish government sponsored propaganda. But this argument misses the point that the main target of such propaganda are lay persons, who think of Chinese media as yet another media, not knowing the role of Party and State. In course of time, it will be perfected with a combination of official and fake handles, where part of the fake narrative could be pushed by fake handles and amplified by the officials and state media. We are already having a glimpse on the narrative through the ongoing border conflict between India and China.

So far no country seem to have a coherent strategy to deal with it. Most of the fight against info-war/ disinformation is being carried out by individuals/ group fact-check with the help of OSINT. But as we have seen recently during the Muslim Brotherhood propaganda against India, the fact-check is not effective as many provide fake videos/ posters kept getting recycled. The governments need to recalibrate their strategy and dedicate resources in this war.

Meanwhile, we and many other fact-checkers/ OSINT groups would keep fighting the battles that we can fight. As is case with all types of info-wars, including that of Sun Tzu's, the awareness is the only antidote. Truth should and shall remain the only weapon. Hopefully, truth has a tendency to surface.