

NR PLUS WORLD

# China Boomeranging

By VICTOR DAVIS HANSON | March 17, 2020 6:30 AM



LISTEN TO THIS ARTICLE



Chinese president Xi Jinping arrives to speak at the Communist Party congress in Beijing, October 18, 2017. (China Daily/via Reuters)

Its bad behavior in the wake of COVID-19 will leave it in its weakest global position in memory. And the U.S. will emerge stronger.

You have 3 free articles remaining.

NRPLUS MEMBER ARTICLE



SOMETIME in late November the Chinese Communist Party apparat was aware that the ingredients of some sort of an epidemic were brewing in Wuhan. Soon after, it was also clear to them that a new type of coronavirus was on the loose, a threat they might have taken more seriously given the similar Chinese origins of the prior toxic SARS coronavirus and the resources of a Level 4 virology lab

nearby.

Yet the government initially hid all that knowledge from its own people in particular and in general from the world at large. Translated into American terms, that disingenuousness ensured that over 10,000 Chinese nationals and foreigners living in China flew every day on direct flights into the United States (Washington and California especially) from late November to the beginning of February, until the Trump travel ban of January 31.

All this laxity was also known to the Communist apparat in Beijing, which must have been amused when Trump was roundly damned by his liberal critics as a xenophobe and racist for finally daring to stop the influx on January 31 — the first major leader to enact such a total ban.

Yet, no thanks to the Chinese, America, so far, has been comparatively lucky — despite the grave risks of damaging a multi-trillion-dollar economy with the strictest quarantining, isolation policies, and social distancing in its history. Half the country lives in the interior away from ports of entry on the coasts. Medical care, sanitation, hygiene, and meat markets operate on different premises than in China, the supposed fated global hegemon. Transparency in a consensual society together with a free-market economy is encouraging tens of millions of citizens to work in tandem and independently to figure out creative ways to ameliorate the epidemic, politically, medically, socially, and economically. The result is that as of mid-March, the U.S., the world's foremost

immigration destination and among the most visited of nations, had suffered fewer virus fatalities than some European countries a fifth or sixth of its population size.

No doubt when mass testing begins, the figures of known cases will soar, and fatalities will rise. Yet while we know pretty well the number of Americans who have died from the virus, we have in truth little idea of how many now carry it or how many have recovered from it, without knowing what sickened them or even whether they were ostensibly sick at all. In other words, the rate of new cases identified by testing may exceed the rate of new deaths, apprising us of a more precise — and perhaps lower — degree of viral toxicity.

Whereas annual flu toxicity is adjudicated by modeling case numbers, and by sophisticated and learned guesses at the number of likely infections, so far the death rate of the coronavirus is calibrated a bit differently — apparently predicated *both* on known deaths and known cases. When we make facile comparisons between the flu and coronaviruses, they may prove valid, but for now it's still wise to remember that annual flu cases could be fewer than what is guessed at through modeling each year, and corona infections may be higher than the current known numbers of confirmed positives. The former reality might mean that the flu is at times a little more lethal than we think and the corona virus a little less deadly. That is not to suggest that most strains of flu are as lethal as the coronavirus, only that for the vast majority of Americans the current U.S. COVID-19 case-to-fatality ratio of 2 percent may eventually prove less, and influenza's commonly cited 0.01 lethality rate may prove higher. In any case, 98–99 percent of

Americans may well recover from the coronavirus — a rate that is not typical of most of history's plagues.

The realities are paradoxical: If the coronavirus infects as many Americans as an average flu strain, then ten times more Americans could die — mostly over the age of 65 — even as the vast majority of all Americans will not. Statistics change hourly, but the CDC as of the afternoon of March 16 reports that there are currently 3,437 cases of known coronavirus infections and 68 deaths attributed to the virus, or about two deaths per 100 infected — the majority of them again likely over 65.

To the degree that we are suffering death and economic hurt from COVID-19, we can also attribute the toll to the Chinese Communist Party. Had it just called in the international medical community in late November, instituted early quarantines, and allowed its own citizens to use email and social media to apprise and warn others of the new disease, then the world and the U.S. would probably not have found themselves in the current panic. The reasons China did not act more responsibly may be inherent in communist governments, or they may involve more Byzantine causes left to be disclosed.

Add in the proximity of a Level 4 virology lab nearby Ground Zero of COVID-19, which fueled Internet conspiracy theories; the weird rumors about quite strange animals such as snakes and pangolins birthing the infection in primeval open meat markets stocked with live animals in filthy conditions in cages; and pirated videos of supposed patients dropping comatose in crowded hospital hallways. With all of that, we had the ingredients of a Hollywood zombie movie, adding to the frenzy.

You have 3 free articles remaining.



Plus, 2020 is an election year — echoing how the 1976 swine flu was politicized. The Left and its media appendages saw COVID-19 as able to do what John Brennan, James Clapper, James Comey, and Andrew McCabe, the Mueller team, and impeachment could not: destroy the hated Trump presidency.

China will rue what it begat.

That is, it will come to appreciate fully that the supposed efficiency, ruthlessness, and autocracy of the Communist Party — what had so impressed foolish American journalists who once marveled at Beijing's ability to enact by fiat liberal pet projects such as high-speed rail and solar industries — were China's worst enemies, ensuring that the virus would spread and that China's international reputation would be ruined.

The coronavirus could be the straw that breaks the proverbial back of the Chinese camel, stooped under the recent weight of a trade war with the U.S., the revelation of 1 million Uighurs in reeducation camps, the crackdown on Hong Kong democracy protesters, and news of the sprawling Chinese internal-surveillance apparatus. The world is now both terrified and put off by China, and such anathemas will only harm its already suspect and misbegotten Silk Road neocolonial schemes.

Here in the U.S., COVID-19 will create bipartisan pressure to adopt policies of keeping key U.S. industries — such as medical supplies, pharmaceuticals, and military applied high-tech — in America.

Americans will not again wish to outsource the vast majority of their chemotherapy-drug, antibiotic, and heart-medicine production to a government that cannot be trusted and that sees such globalized output as a weapon to be used in extremis.

You have 3 free articles remaining.



Although we cannot see it now, spin-off effects from the panic and frenzy will eventually fuel more economic recovery. Oil prices are nearing record modern lows, ensuring cheap gas for spring and summer American drivers. Cheap mortgages and car loans likewise will spur buying, as will relief once the virus wanes and splurging ensue.

It will be salutary for Americans to once again appreciate the value of muscular labor, as those who grow food, transport it, and provide us energy and sanitation while protecting us from danger, foreign and domestic, have allowed millions of Americans to stay home, sequestered and quarantined but safe with plenty of food, water, and uninterrupted sanitation and public safety. In these days of crisis, we should not forget that millions of often unmentioned Americans have made us the world's greatest energy and most diverse food producer — a singular position that China, with over four times our population, envies.

Before the outbreak, China was trying to game its trade war in terms of how best to hurt the hated Trump administration. Ironically, its abhorrence only strengthened the U.S. in ways no one in the pre-COVID-19 days could have imagined.

Call it paradox, irony, karma, or even tragedy, but China emerges from its deceit about the coronavirus outbreak in its weakest position since its Westernization began under Deng Xiaoping. And the U.S., after some rocky months ahead, if it stays calm, will likely reemerge in its strongest state in memory vis-à-vis its rivals.



NRO contributor **VICTOR DAVIS HANSON** is the Martin and Illie Anderson Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution and the author, most recently, of *The Case for Trump*. [@vdhanson](#)