

Response from Sharri Markson, Investigations Writer, The Australian:

1. Do you have any reaction to the hostile criticism from China experts, quoted in the Guardian, Sydney Morning Herald and on Twitter? These include Michael Anti from Harvard, Professor Chengxin Pan from Deakin University, Dominic Meagher from the ANU's Centre on China and the World, pro-Uyghur activist Vicky Xu, and the Lowy Institute's Richard McGregor.
2. What do you say to Bob Carr's criticism of your article, quoted in The Guardian that, "This is a case study in a species of journalism we can baptise as 'China panic' ... It's fed a view that Australia is threatened and war is imminent."
3. Why did you describe the document which forms the basis of your article as, 'obtained by the State Department', when it is a 2015 book that has been available on Amazon and is freely available on the internet?
4. What do you say to claims from numerous China experts (including some of those mentioned above) that the book does NOT discuss China's plans to wage biological warfare, but is discussing how China should deal with biological attacks from its enemies?
5. What do you say to claims from China experts that the book was ridiculed in China and that its key thesis was 'nonsense': namely that the SARS epidemic in 2003 was caused by a virus created by the US military.
6. Why did you not consult any of these acknowledged China experts on the significance of this 2015 book before publishing your story?

"The Chinese Foreign Ministry and the Global Times view the document as legitimate and not a conspiracy theory, describing it as an academic text. It was published by Chinese Military Medical Science Press, a Chinese Government-owned publishing house managed by the General Logistics Department of the PLA.

"One author of the paper was the deputy director of China's Bureau of Epidemic Prevention. Another is a prominent military scientist who held a leadership role during the SARS pandemic, reporting to the Ministry for Health and receiving a "Gold Medal" award from the Military Academy Education.

"None of the people you quote are bioweapons experts. I have interviewed multiple high level specialists, whose actual job is biological weapons compliance, and they say this document by 18 military scientists is highly significant, with its instructions on how to unleash a bioweapon attack.

"There are no factual errors in my story. Media Watch is 100% wrong on this just like you were a year ago when you falsely reported that COVID-19 could not have a laboratory origin. Will you apologise and publish a correction?

(<https://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/episodes/batman/12213178>)

"My story states that the document was obtained by the US State Department in May 2020 and was referenced in passing by Pompeo in a piece he wrote for the WSJ in February this year. Since then has it circulated among Chinese dissidents online."