



# WTH is going on with Chinese disinformation? Assistant Secretary Stilwell on Beijing's role in spreading coronavirus propaganda

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Danielle Pletka: Hi, I'm Danielle Pletka.

Marc Thiessen: I'm Marc Thiessen.

Danielle Pletka: Welcome to our podcast, What the Hell Is Going On? Marc, what the hell is going on?

Marc Thiessen: Well, we're talking today about Chinese disinformation. So we all know now I think polls show 77% of Americans recognize that it was Communist China that is responsible for the spread of the virus around the world and China is unhappy with this and so they have launched a global campaign of lies, pressure, and disinformation around the world. The European Union had a report that they prepared, which had very mild criticism of Beijing, and the Chinese complained and they edited out all the criticism of China. They did the same thing in Australia, your motherland.

Danielle Pletka: My motherland.

Marc Thiessen: That the Australians were pushing for an international investigation and they started putting pressure on the Australians to drop it and the Australians, what did they tell them, Dany?

Danielle Pletka: They told them to get stuffed and bugger off. Marc just likes to give me these opportunities.

Marc Thiessen: Speaking of things getting stuffed and bugging off, Dany, what are your thoughts?

Danielle Pletka: Why thank you, Marc, what a beautiful introduction. It's absolutely fascinating. I think that the period that has elapsed between the end of the Cold War and now has enabled a lot of people to forget what disinformation really is and how pervasive it is. And even when we talk about issues like Russian interference in our elections and the way that Russia seeks to interfere, which is to amplify disagreement, to amplify false stories, people's Facebook pages, Twitter, bots, troll farms, those sorts of things. We don't actually think about that as disinformation. And of course that's what it is. Classic lies propagated by a government for a whole variety of purposes.

- Danielle Pletka: And the Chinese, there are 1.4 billion Chinese; there are a lot of people in China who are capable of propagating this sort of information. In addition, of course, China owns TikTok and China is extremely adept at manipulating social media. I would say that they may even be better than the Russians. And so what we've seen the Chinese do is the first thing they do, the New York Times had a pretty good story on this. First time you've heard me say that, and Marc is going to nod because he I know saw the story and agrees. The New York Times had a pretty good story about how right at the beginning of the outbreak of the virus here in the United States, there were these, I would say borderline hysterical messages that the President was going to lock down the nation and that the National Guard was going to be deployed and that people were going to be forced at gunpoint into their homes. Stores were going to be shut. And the stories may have well have originated with Americans, but there were Chinese bots and others that were amplifying that story and scaring people.
- Marc Thiessen: You're absolutely right, Dany, that there's all this disinformation like we saw in the Russian elections and the amplifying and all the rest, but a lot of it's coming directly and unabashedly from the Chinese government. The foreign ministry spokesman has tweeted out that the virus came from the American army and from soldiers who came to Wuhan in October for some games. The Chinese ambassador just had a column in the Washington Post and I-
- Danielle Pletka: The Chinese ambassador to the US.
- Marc Thiessen: The Chinese ambassador to the United States, column in the Washington Post, in which he just spews lie after lie after lie. He says first, "China has taken strict measures to and made huge sacrifices to keep the virus in check. China's done its best to share information about the virus. On December 27th, the doctor in Hubei province reported three suspicious cases."
- Marc Thiessen: That doctor was arrested. I mean literally he's now turned into a hero, but he was a whistleblower. He takes credit for the fact that they shared the genome of the virus. It was actually a lab in Shanghai that did it, and they shut down the lab after they did it. So I mean they literally lie through their teeth and they even had... The Chinese government actually prepared a cartoon video that they put out. It's called "[Once Upon a Virus](#)" and has two Lego characters. One's a Chinese terracotta warrior and the other's the Statue of Liberty arguing about the virus. Listen to this. ["Once Upon a Virus" plays]
- Marc Thiessen: So I mean they're not hiding it, Dany.
- Danielle Pletka: It's quite remarkable. This story that they put out about a US soldier that attended some games of some kind in Wuhan in October being the source of the virus is so pernicious. And to boot, they're not just selling this story in the United States. They're selling this story all over the world. What happens is this Zhao, this foreign ministry spokesman, makes a particular statement. He is then amplified by all of Chinese embassies around the world, all of China's mouthpieces, and all of Chinese consulates.
- Marc Thiessen: And state media.
- Danielle Pletka: And state media, which we also don't pay enough attention to because the Chinese state media is as bad as Russia TV. And they also are putting this out in different

languages. So they're putting it out in Europe. They put out a video to the Middle East in Arabic propagating this story as well. This is just, I mean I don't want to say it's outrageous because that sounds completely silly and naive, but-

Marc Thiessen: It's outrageous.

Danielle Pletka: But the American people need to be much, much more aware of what this is. If you ask the American people what's Al Jazeera? Anyone who pays attention to foreign policy will say, "It's the mouthpiece of the Qatari government. It's pretty sympathetic to terrorists." You ask people what CGTV is and they'll say, "Uh, don't know."

Marc Thiessen: Yeah, so here's the thing that we're discovering is that communist regimes have been lying from time immemorial. You go back to Stalin and they had the famous, there was even once a coffee table book I almost bought.

Danielle Pletka: I have it.

Marc Thiessen: Oh, do you? Oh, it's awesome. It's showing how they used to airbrush, before there was air brushing, it was literally cutting and pasting and using crayons to draw. And they would take somebody who had fallen out of favor, like one of Stalin's close aides goes to the Gulag. And so they cut him out of all the official pictures and put somebody else in and then that guy dies. He gets taken out. And so you could see these pictures evolve from the original, to the second version, to the third, the fourth, the fifth. And you wonder what Stalin would have done with Photoshop and with Twitter and all these other things.

Marc Thiessen: But the Chinese regime, I think a lot of people, especially younger people, grew up in an age where China was embracing free market economics. And people were saying, "Oh, free market economics is going to change the country. It's going to become more democratic. We're going to have a better relationship with them." And it turns out that they got rid of the Marx, but they didn't get rid of the Leninism. And this is what Leninist regimes do and we have a new generation of Americans now that are being educated in the lies and disinformation of a Leninist totalitarian regime.

Danielle Pletka: Vigilance is the word. People really need to understand. You had an interesting theory about this and then I want to turn to our guest.

Marc Thiessen: A theory which is mine? And now my theory by Marc Thiessen. Now my theory. It is mine. It is my theory.

Danielle Pletka: That's a riff in Monty Python that Marc and I and everyone we know loves.

Marc Thiessen: Enough about you. Go ahead, Dany. Tell me my theory.

Danielle Pletka: Your theory, which is yours, which is an interesting theory is that this is a relatively new phenomenon, that we've seen a real escalation by the Chinese, and that it is rooted not necessarily in a Chinese feeling of strength on the world stage, but a Chinese feeling of weakness.

Marc Thiessen: Absolutely. I think the regime is terrified. Not so much of us, but of its own people. So if the US accusations, as much as there's no Twitter in China, they control the

internet, but information gets through in this day and age. And the more and more that the United States and other countries put out reports, especially the European Union reports of their objective investigations that show this. Not only that this originated in Wuhan, which everybody knows, but the Chinese government tried to cover it up, that they prevented the world from addressing it, that they lied to their own people for months about the dangerousness of the fact that it had human-to-human transmission.

Marc Thiessen: This is going to really destabilize the Chinese regime. I'm not suggesting that there's going to be a popular uprising in China and we're going to have a democratic revolution and it's going to be Tiananmen Square all over again before the crackdown. But Xi Jinping as our scholars here, like Dan Blumenthal and Derek Scissors have talked about, he's really changed the Communist Party into a cult of personality. Much like the old Soviet regimes used to be. And the leaders in the Chinese Communist Party used to be, if you fell out of favor, you'd go to your dacha and you'd have your money and you'd just fall out of public life, but you'd be left undisturbed.

Marc Thiessen: Now they're getting charged with corruption. They're getting thrown in jail. If you're out of favor with Xi, that means there's a lot of resentment and a lot of pressure on Xi internally within the Communist Party. And if he is seen as mismanaging this, and if he is seen as having caused a rift in relations with the world, and if he's seen as having lied to the people and there's popular anger, it could really endanger him.

Danielle Pletka: Well, let's hope so. We've got a perfect guest to talk to about this. General Dave Stilwell, he's the Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. But prior to taking that wear a pinstripe suit job, he served in the Air Force for 35 years. He actually enlisted as a Korean linguist, which is amazing, and he has since actually learned Chinese as well. He retired at the rank of Brigadier General, as the Asia advisor for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, but he served multiple tours of duty in Japan and Korea and he was our defense attaché in Beijing as well. So, we're lucky to have him.

Danielle Pletka: Well, General Stilwell, Dave, it's such a pleasure to have you on the show.

David Stilwell: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity.

Danielle Pletka: Well, we're really delighted that you're able to take the time, given everything that's going on, and you really are in one of the hottest of the hot seats in the US government dealing with, not just the challenge of coronavirus and all that that involves, but of course, the role that China has played in all of this. Then, like the icing with a cherry on top, we've got all that fun stuff going on in North Korea. We've got so much to talk to you about. I know we won't have enough time.

David Stilwell: To think this time last year I was surfing with my buddies in Hawaii, never expecting we would be here. But in my opinion, we'll leave North Korea off the bat for now, but this is a reckoning that needed to happen. I think that things are moving in the positive direction. Unfortunately, with the coronavirus part that really, just unbelievably unfortunate and preventable problem, so I'm happy to discuss.

Danielle Pletka: Well, one of the things that you've talked about, and I think is a great place for us to start is about Chinese disinformation. Because from the get go, part of the challenge that the US government has faced in trying to help Americans deal with the health

challenge is just getting information out of the Chinese. That situation has neither improved, and in fact, not just not improved, but the Chinese are actively trying to steer the conversation in dangerous directions. Can you talk a little bit about the disinformation challenge?

David Stilwell: You bet. I would say that is our biggest challenge in all of this because it all stems from the form of governance that you choose, one that trusts the people and allows the people to think and share ideas and that allows them to express those concerns up vice only a one way conversation that goes from top-down. Disinformation works in the PRC because of the system they have. Unfortunately, it has worked for far too long outside of the PRC as well. It's the nature of our system. I don't like it, but the chance to speak openly like this to you and to others, to media that don't necessarily share my opinions, is important. Being able to now that we have the world's attention, identify how this came to happen. And it came to happen because the system, as we saw with the Soviets, as we saw in the book "1984," does not allow information to flow freely.

David Stilwell: That's how it started, is that we had a relatively minor public health issue in Wuhan, but because people who tried to talk about it were silenced and that information was destroyed or diverted, again, prevented the Chinese from responding soon enough, which got the rest of us sick. Since then, we've had an active disinformation campaign that started off saying, "It wasn't here. It didn't happen in China." By the way, they started off calling it the Wuhan virus in Chinese. That's the language they used.

Danielle Pletka: I think it would be actually worthwhile for folks to hear, give us some examples, some specifics of what it is that the Chinese are up to because it's not just a false narrative, is it? They're playing a whole bunch of different cards.

David Stilwell: The first one, and you're right on that, the first one is a complete asymmetry in information. Just as you or any American can ... you can listen to China Radio International or you can listen to CGTN or RT, but you can also look at your own preferred media outlet. That's not the case in the PRC. What exacerbates this is the fact that they have basically full access to our system and we have basically zero access to theirs. Now, that doesn't mean that Chinese people think that they are seeing the whole picture. They know they're being censored and they know they're being cut off from the rest of the world and they do amazing things, amazingly creative things to get access to that, to jump the firewall. So, kudos to the Chinese people for knowing what's happening there and for demanding access otherwise.

David Stilwell: Now, they're not going to get that access, and so they are doing things to get that access. One thing they do is in China, domestically, I'll talk about US in a second, but domestically, censorship is known and obvious. But they take snapshots of posts just as soon as they come up knowing it's going to get taken down and they still have a record of what was up there, and then they share those things around. Again, you can't control information. It's like water. It's going to leak out of your hands eventually. It is, to everyone's interest, to share information broadly so you're not surprised later or having to explain later. As far as disinformation in the US, you know that in January we announced that Chinese media outlets, five of them, would be designated as foreign missions because that's what they are.

David Stilwell: You and American media are pretty much responsible only to facts. You get judged by how well you report those facts. These are, as defined by foreign missions,

they're responsible to the party, to carry a message from the party to the American people. And that's not the intent, and so they are free, in this country, to spread disinformation and they are doing it at the behest of their government.

Marc Thiessen: Talk a little bit about, there was an interesting story in the New York Times recently about how China has been borrowing Russia's strategies when it comes to disinformation. There was a specific story about how they were spreading messages that the Trump administration was about to lock down the entire country and sort of spread panic here. Tell us about that incident, and also, what are they trying to accomplish with the disinformation campaign here in the United States?

David Stilwell: Sow discord and chaos and all those other things. It's not just the Russians and the Chinese and Iranians doing that. There's American citizens doing it. The era of social media presents us with an entirely different problem that we're going to have to figure out how to address. My original point gets back to education. We're going to have to teach our kids to approach everything with a critical eye. But we have the problem of bots. We have computers that are hijacked, that appear to be what they are not, appear to be human beings. We have trolls who pretty much take anything and present a very negative side to that. One of the things I'm trying to do is reach out to the Board of Education and others through a program called Hometown Diplomat that we used to have during the Cold War era that allowed foreign service officers to reach out to their folks back home and explain what it's like to live overseas and to see these things from a distance.

David Stilwell: I've got a briefing put together now that identifies what a troll farm looks like and what bots look like and how Twitter is vulnerable to certain things. But you don't have to look far right now, the disinformation machine in the PRC is going full tilt. If you've seen what's coming out of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Twitter accounts, especially a guy named Zhao Lijian, one of the spokespeople, if you've studied the 15 logical fallacies, he uses them all.

Danielle Pletka: I think that's absolutely true. Just in the last week, we've seen the Chinese Foreign Ministry attack the government of Australia in more direct ways than in some ways they've attacked us. Referring to Australia as, "The gum on the bottom of our shoe," because Australia has been critical, although they've also tried to disseminate this idea that the American military was responsible for bringing the virus to China.

David Stilwell: Yeah. The Australians, I've got a great respect for them. They started this whole process about five years ago and this is all part of a much larger process that the Chinese Communist Party borrowed from the Soviets, it's called United Front Work, to infiltrate and guide and steer democratic systems because they're vulnerable and they're open. The Prime Minister of Australia looked at his own system to understand where it has been infiltrated, and boy, they were shocked by what they found. If you read the book "Silent Invasion," that came out of that process. You look at our own system and see that we too are vulnerable. We need to take the thought and our democratic process more seriously.

David Stilwell: We have to defend it more ardently. You just can't assume, as we have assumed in our own system and in multilateral systems like the UN, that they are running at the goodwill of all participants. There are those who are going to twist them and steer them in ways that serve their own purposes. There's no doubt, seeing what happened with the WHO and WTO and others, that the PRC has not lived up to its obligations, is in fact, using it to advance its own interests.

- Marc Thiessen: You've got a number of elements going on here at once. You've got the Chinese regime that is trying to intimidate its own population, intimidate the doctors who were reporting the facts about this and all the problems related to that. Then you've got the disinformation that they're spreading both in their population and around the world. But you've also got this campaign of intimidation around the world that is really fascinating. The Chinese regime recently threatened Australia if they went forward with an investigation into the origins of the virus. The Australians basically told them where they could stick their-
- Danielle Pletka: I think the expression we use in Australia, Marc, is bugger off.
- Marc Thiessen: Yeah. They told them to bugger off, but then the European Union recently had a report where they had very mild criticism of China and they basically redacted and took it all out at China's request. Tell us a little bit about this global campaign of intimidation they're having and what does it mean that Australia's standing firm, but European Union is a wet noodle?
- David Stilwell: Well, it is not new and it is only now coming to light because countries like Australia, and increasing the US, are willing to do as John Garnaut from Australia says, shine some sunlight on this problem. Basically expose it and show it. That's all you have to do. The battle is simple. It's just simply bringing to light these things that are happening. For too long, people have feared economic reprisals or worse, or, and I don't fault them, there are those who believe that through contact and exposure that the system would recognize the flaws in authoritarianism and adapt more democratic processes as we saw in Korea, in Taiwan, we saw in Singapore and other places. The key here is simply to identify it.
- David Stilwell: However, this is one of those things where you need to hang together and countries need to feel confident that if they put their hand up and identify this problem, they won't suffer the economic, mostly economic, pain alone that they have support from others. And the US has been very strong in offering that support. Recently, New Zealand came online as well to ask for an investigation through the WHO into the origins of the virus that came from Wuhan.
- Marc Thiessen: Well, that's going to go well. That WHO is going to lead it?
- David Stilwell: It could. With reform and with a new sense of purpose, to re-hone what it's there to do. Then given the negative press it's gotten recently, I think there's sufficient initiative there to change and get back to its original task, which was to keep the world healthy. As we saw some statements that came out early on telling us not to close our borders and not to overreact were very unhelpful. It did not make the world healthier. I think the investigation that will flow from that, both into what the Chinese did and how it happened that this virus came to expose the whole world to such risk, and how the WHO exaggerated the risk instead of mitigating it. Those things will come in time.
- Danielle Pletka: One thing that has, I think, struck a lot of us is that, and maybe we're just late to this game, but the Chinese have changed their approach. That some years ago, China went on a massive charm offensive, inviting businesses in, going out, their diplomats were all over the place. For years, it had been the Taiwanese who were the diplomatic darlings in most of these capitals because the Chinese were sort of Maoist thugs. That image really went away at the beginning of this century. That era seems to be done. The charm offensive seems completely finished, and China has

really taken, not just in this coronavirus issue, but on a whole variety of things, a far more aggressive approach to the world. Is that a Xi Jinping thing or what's going on in your view?

David Stilwell: I would point it to a couple of things. The biggest one is called POSO, the Period of Strategic Opportunity. Back around in the 2000s, this idea was postulated inside the Chinese government that it was about 20 years here where we will have an opportunity to take advantage of these free markets and the fact that people are willing to send businesses to the PRC. Then the margins will continue to shrink as labor costs go up and our own economy takes off and heads toward middle income that margins will become less and that period of strategic opportunity will slacken. That was part of it. We're getting toward the end of that now. The second part is, in 2007, the world financial crisis, the PRC, in fact, and by their own narrative, came out of that stronger.

David Stilwell: They took that as validation for this system of authoritarian government on top of something like kind of a mixed market economy. The era of Xi Jinping has been pretty aggressive and seems to be accelerating the process of pushing China's new found great power status, or as they said in the 19th Party Congress report, China's moving closer to the center of the global stage. Demanding respect and all of those things. You're right. Under the Xi Jinping era, we've seen an acceleration of that. It didn't start then though. Toward the end of the Hu Jintao period, you saw some of that.

David Stilwell: I'm not demonizing them. They've done a good job, but where they've done those things in nefarious ways and ways that violate commitments, we have to point those out and say, "No, you're not special. You have to comply with the things that keep this global system balanced and doesn't favor one side over the other."

Marc Thiessen: It seems like Xi Jinping is doubling down on the Leninism, in Marxism, Leninism. The response to this virus has been just lying to their people, trying to prevent news of the virus getting out, punishing doctors who spread word about it and warned about it. Those are not moves of a confident regime in my view. How brittle is Xi Jinping's regime and his grip on power? Why is he acting like he's so afraid?

David Stilwell: That is a great question. By all counts, the ...

Danielle Pletka: You made Marc's day. He's taking a bow right now, even though you can't see him.

David Stilwell: By all counts, things were going well. But during my time there, '11 to '13, you could see that all was not well. This is part of a more competitive strategic environment that they're in. It's definitely related to this Marxist and Leninist authoritarian approach, but these were just naturally occurring because their economy was booming for a time, but it was going to have to level off at some point. The grand bargain that they made with the people is that, "We're going to insist on authoritarianism and the continued rule of the Communist Party, in exchange, you're going to get rich, your children can look forward to a better life." Now that bargain isn't quite so ironclad, that the chance of improving the lot if your children isn't what it used to be. I would think that that would call for adapting their approach into something that better accounts for the voice of the people, giving them a choice of who their leaders and who they're going to be and how they're governed. Yes, things have changed recently.

- Danielle Pletka: Yeah, and the Chinese government is clearly much more afraid of its own people than it was when they were offering them their side of that bargain. The harmonious rise that they offered and people aren't getting, is good reason for the government to be afraid of discontent. Should we be more worried about that as well? Is that going to manifest itself in the kind of aggression that we are seeing in all of these international institutions against us, against their neighbors, against the Australians as well?
- David Stilwell: That is a really good point. There's always the concerns about diversionary conflict and doing things, stroking nationalism, we are seeing that now. This is what all those Twitter back and forths you're seeing. The funny thing is, you can't read Twitter in China. You do wonder who they're messaging in that case, but similar messages are going out to their own folks. Look, they want to be proud of their culture, and they very much should be, but the way they're conducting themselves globally, and as you say, in their own country should be addressed. The people are the best judges of that. Their voices deserve to be heard. But as these things get more and more stressful, and as this authoritarian Leninist system gets called greater into question and the domestic strains and economic strains become greater, you're right, we need to be concerned about how that will manifest itself outside.
- David Stilwell: The things we can do is to reinforce our own values and work closely with those who share our values in the region. Allies, partners, and like-minded. You mentioned Australia earlier, speaking up and saying, "We're not going to be bullied economically." And we should all be standing up and saying that and supporting them, and demanding that the PRC comply with the rules and laws and the things that they agree to with like WTO on topics of economic coercion. You're also seeing this phenomenon, not in the EU per se, but in European countries, in Sweden, Czech Republic, France, you saw some strong statements there about how the PRC is being a little overly aggressive diplomatically. They're a learning organization. Hopefully, they will take a hint from this and rethink their approach.
- Marc Thiessen: We're going through what could be considered a pandemic Pearl Harbor right now. This virus came to our shores because the Chinese regime lied about it, suppressed information, inhibited our response, didn't share the samples. We're literally locked down in our country because of the totalitarian decisions of the Chinese regime. The American people are unified on this in a way that almost no other topic unifies them. I think 77% of Americans blame the Chinese regime for the spread of the virus, including 90% of Republicans and 69% of Democrats. That's pretty strong bipartisan support. Is this an opportunity for us as a country to come around a new China policy, and what would that China policy look like?
- David Stilwell: Absolutely. But I want to start off with noting that tomorrow marks the beginning of Asian-American and Pacific Islander heritage month. This is a really good opportunity to reinforce, among ourselves, that this is not an Asian problem. It's not a Chinese people problem. It's not even a China problem. It's a governance problem. As you mentioned, it's a Leninist authoritarian system that allowed this thing to spill outside the borders of the PRC. I beg everybody please, it's not about Asian people. Be especially conscious of that in the coming days because the death toll was rising and the damage economically is going to be very hard to recover from. But the beautiful thing is, as you said, once you get the American people on board and you get them motivated and united on something, there is no stopping us.
- David Stilwell: As bad as all this is, I think as you say, it will have some benefits in uniting us and

understanding, and thinking what is most important today. Hanging out with your friends and having a beer on a Friday afternoon. Wouldn't we all love to do that right now? This is a hard time. Some good will come from this, I believe. The approach of the Trump administration hasn't changed and I don't think it will change. It has been this way from the start. If you saw what the President did after Mar-a-Lago with trade, for instance, they had the hundred day trade agreement. A hundred days came and went and there was no agreement. In the past, I was in uniform during previous administrations, we would have taken something less than what we'd asked for and then said we can work with them afterward. The President came in understanding what he was up against.

David Stilwell: Really, a strong negotiator walked away from that deal and walked away until there was something that would benefit Americans writ large in a way that benefits both the PRC and the US. As far as changing the approach, I think the Trump administration is going to just continue the approach. I think people will be listening more closely.

Danielle Pletka: When we talk about a new approach, one of the things that coronavirus has done is it has enabled us to focus a little bit on how dependent our supply chains are on China, whether it's for masks or PPE or medications. But really, that list could continue for quite a while. For most of us who believe in a free economy and free markets, the notion of buying cheap shoes from China is pretty cool. I'd rather get my cheap shoes and my plastic stuff from China. On the other hand, buying most of our antibiotics, our retrovirals and others from China or from China via India seems dangerous. Do you think there's going to be, and would you encourage, a rethink of China's overwhelming role in supply chains? Is it time to build guardrails around where they really over dominate?

David Stilwell: Absolutely. We've known this. We've known this for a long time now. In my early days, investing, I learned about the word diversify. Don't put all your money in one thing. Diversify, that way if one stock takes a hit, the others will carry you through. But the lure of the Chinese market and the cheap manufacturing processes and all those things, look, that lure has been there since Lord Macartney showed up on the shores of China in 1790.

David Stilwell: Honestly, the PRC tried to do that, to develop monopoly control on pretty much anything they could because that gives them power to manipulate others to do what they would prefer. This is going to be a wake up call. I think the conversation is already happening. I'll tell you what, one thing that set alarm bells off in my head is, in 2017 at Davos, Xi Jinping went there and the world hailed him as the leader of globalization.

Danielle Pletka: That was incredible. I remember that.

David Stilwell: Anybody who understands the PRC knows just how ridiculous that whole concept was. The second part is that to think of globalization as a complete good with no downside is also naive. There are things you'd have to do. You have to protect strategic industries. You have to protect those things that you absolutely need, that if there was a shutdown in transportation or of a political crisis, that you would have to be able to. Look, that's obviously, as you mentioned now, but that doesn't mean we have to onshore everything. There are some things that we can share with Canada, Mexico, with like-minded. In my AOR, Southeast Asia has huge advantages in these things.

- David Stilwell: Let's just diversify. Let's look at where we can take manufacturing and markets and spread them out in ways that make more sense. This has made that an obvious outcome.
- Danielle Pletka: I know Marc and I are going to be really eagerly watching the administration rollout a continuation of that approach and the sort of erecting of those better guard rails and the diversification. Absolutely, in Southeast Asia. We have one exit question for you, both Marc and me, and we would be derelict in our responsibilities because we have been spending all of our time talking about one totalitarian dictatorship. We have to ask you about another. Where is Kim Jong Un?
- David Stilwell: I can answer this one with great clarity. I enlisted in the Air Force in 1980. I was a Korean linguist. My job was to do all I could to understand North Korea. Between 1980 and 1994, Kim Il-Sung died three times. I was on K-1 highway in South Korea in June of 1994 when Kim Il-Sung finally left this world. It took three tries. Who knows is the point. Until you see the processions like we saw with Kim Jong-Il on 17th, December, 2011, until we see that. These guys disappear. Xi Jinping disappeared before 2012 for like 60 days and everybody was wondering where he was.
- David Stilwell: That's just how it works in authoritarian regimes, whether it's for the drama to create attention, whether it's because there's some sort of reckoning, or maybe because Kim Jong Un, who is clearly unhealthy, is somehow rehabilitating or worse, I don't know. But in these closed societies, you won't know until you see them announce it.
- Danielle Pletka: Well, we'll be waiting for him to be embalmed behind a glass case. Moment can't come too soon.
- Marc Thiessen: Looking forward to it.
- Danielle Pletka: Thank you so much for sharing the time with us. We know how busy you are. Thank you for your service. We're really grateful.
- David Stilwell: Well, thank you for the opportunity, and stay in touch. Thank you.
- Marc Thiessen: Dany, the Chinese increasingly sound like Baghdad Bob.
- Danielle Pletka: Okay, who is Baghdad Bob?
- Marc Thiessen: Baghdad Bob, for those who don't remember the start of the Iraq War, was the Iraqi military spokesman who was literally standing in the streets of Baghdad with reporters and a press conference saying, "There are no American troops in Baghdad," while American troops were passing behind him. It's like, "No virus in Wuhan. Never, never. Never did it. We're not responsible for this." The Chinese have just been, almost to the point of caricature, been in this disinformation that the US army created this. "It came from American soldiers who came to Wuhan for sporting events." It's just preposterous. I think it's a sign of weakness. I think this regime is brutal. I think that Xi Jinping is worried about survival, and so he's lashing out of the world and he's lying to his people because he's afraid that they're not going to take it anymore.
- Danielle Pletka: I'm not sure you're right. I believe, as we said, in our conversation with General Stilwell, I believe that China is much weaker, certainly than it wants to be and than a

lot of people think it is. I had a conversation with one of our diplomats in Geneva today, and he said the Chinese are overplaying their hands. I think there's a long leap between where China is now and Xi Jinping really being at risk. What I worry about more is that they will continue to overplay their hand, they'll think, "You know what? Now is the time to distract from all of this to the Chinese people. Let's invade Taiwan." That's what I worry about. That they are going to go looking for something to rally their people around the notion that they don't have as much money as they used to. They're not buying those Dolce and Gabbana bags that they like so much, but on the other hand, we are reuniting Taiwan, splittist Taiwan with the Chinese mainland.

- Marc Thiessen: Xi Jinping is someone who has changed the character of the Chinese communist party and turned it into a cult of personality. There are probably some discontent with Xi amongst his own cadre. If there's public outrage over the Wuhan virus and his handling of this, and all of a sudden, the US is blaming them and maybe suing, causing problems, or simply American companies are pulling their supply chains out and moving to other countries and the economy is tanking, that could cause a lot of problems for Xi Jinping.
- Danielle Pletka: It could. I also have been thinking about whether or not there shouldn't be some question about some of these Chinese companies listing on the New York Stock Exchange and the NASDAQ. Because there's really no reason that they should be open to investment from Americans who ...
- Marc Thiessen: We should squeeze them on every front.
- Danielle Pletka: I do agree about that. It's funny, one of the other things that Dave said that resonated with me was that we are not prepared, that since the fall of the Soviet Union, people have really forgotten what disinformation was like. It used to be that, in the old days, the State Department put out an annual report on disinformation. It was focused almost exclusively on the Soviet Union, but the Soviets made a pretty aggressive effort in the days before social media to propagate the notion that the Americans invented AIDS, that there was something called the ethnic bomb, we always used to laugh about that. That the Americans were trying to kill off African populations that might have been more sympathetic to Soviet Union. This is really another version of that, and we're not prepared for it.
- Marc Thiessen: They tried to manipulate our population, the way they manipulate their own population.
- Danielle Pletka: Right. I would say that, especially the younger generations who don't have that history, but who do overwhelmingly occupy social media, TikTok for example, are not prepared for that at all.
- Marc Thiessen: No, absolutely. Did you mean the generation that thinks socialism isn't such a bad thing?
- Danielle Pletka: That generation. All those sweet Bernie Bros.
- Marc Thiessen: Okay, boomer. Yeah.
- Danielle Pletka: If you don't know what the Soviet Union is, if you don't know who Karl Marx was, if

you don't understand this sort of command of information, you are not going to be protected when you propagate information on social media.

Marc Thiessen: Well, I will, in closing, I will say that if there's anything that would wake up people to the dangers of totalitarian socialism, it's being locked in their homes by the coronavirus. Because maybe this generation will wake up to the danger that these totalitarian communist regimes pose, and that'll have some impact on, maybe not on domestic embrace of socialism, but certainly on our understanding of the foreign policy threat it poses.

Danielle Pletka: Well, if we can get their eyes away from Chinese owned TikTok for long enough, perhaps they'll pay attention. Folks, thanks for listening. As always, stay safe and don't hesitate to send us suggestions.

Marc Thiessen: We'll see you soon.