



## Here's What It Would Look Like If China Had To Pay Reparations For COVID-19

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The U.S. and other nations can hold the Chinese government accountable for the 2020 outbreak of coronavirus and ensuing global pandemic through a variety of legal, financial and diplomatic means.

Republican senators and Asian policy experts have proposed a range of options for punishing the Chinese government for its alleged negligence responding to the outbreak and overseeing the Wuhan Institute of Virology, where coronavirus potentially leaked from in late 2019. Since the World Health Organization declared coronavirus a pandemic in March 2020, the virus has killed more than 4 million people worldwide, nations have experienced economic devastation and the prevalence of other health issues such as depression has increased.

“The United States and other nations must hold China to account not because of anger or a desire for retribution,” American Enterprise Institute Senior Fellow John Yoo wrote in December. “By making China pay, they can impose the incentives for the Chinese Communist Party to improve its behavior the next time.”

“Nations may well need to inflict even more forceful measures to compel China to realize the full costs of its recklessness,” he continued.

China has repeatedly said it isn't responsible for the pandemic and has blamed the U.S. for the outbreak, but mounting evidence suggests that the virus originated from the Wuhan Institute of Virology rather than a wet market. In November 2019, before the world knew about coronavirus, three of the lab's researchers were hospitalized with an unknown illness, according to U.S. intelligence reports.

While the U.S. and other aggrieved nations may attempt to ask the international court system to take action against China, such an effort would likely fall flat since Beijing has routinely ignored international law and norms, Yoo argued. Instead, the U.S. could pursue aggressive measures

such as harsh economic sanctions or even canceling some of the more than \$1 trillion worth of treasury debt held by the Chinese.

“China’s expansion in foreign property renders it vulnerable,” Yoo wrote. “The United States could expropriate Chinese property in the United States, even to the point of cancelling Chinese-held treasury debt, and use the proceeds to compensate Americans harmed by the pandemic.”

Republican Sen. Tom Cotton, who was labeled a conspiracy theorist early in the pandemic for pointing out China’s coverup of the outbreak, and several other senators introduced legislation last year that would allow Americans to sue the Chinese government in federal court for its role in the pandemic. A judge could order Chinese assets to be frozen if proven guilty, the bill said.

“By silencing doctors and journalists who tried to warn the world about the coronavirus, the Chinese Communist Party allowed the virus to spread quickly around the globe,” Cotton said in an April 2020 statement. “Their decision to cover up the virus led to thousands of needless deaths and untold economic harm. It’s only appropriate that we hold the Chinese government accountable for the damage it has caused.”

Congress passed similar legislation allowing the families of people killed during the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001 to sue Saudi Arabia for its complicity, Reuters reported in 2017.

Cotton also suggested that the U.S. could revoke China’s permanent most-favored-nation status, which it has held for decades, in a recent interview with the Daily Caller News Foundation. China was granted permanent most-favored-nation status in 2000, giving it membership in the World Trade Organization and access to a number of trade benefits.

The U.S. government could also crack down on awarding visas to Chinese Communist Party officials and demand that international financial institutions stop giving “sweetheart loan deals” to China, Cotton told the DCNF.

Yanzhong Huang, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, said President Joe Biden’s administration could impose sanctions on top Chinese officials, support a United Nations resolution condemning Chinese government or boycott the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics in an editorial recently published in The Washington Post.

But Huang warned that aggressively punishing the nation could drive it further into isolation and cause it to retaliate. This view was echoed by Cato Institute Senior Fellow Doug Bandow who argued that launching an economic war because of the pandemic would “yield an incendiary environment.”

“A crusade to make China pay, no matter how appealing politically, would backfire badly,” Bandow wrote in Foreign Policy Magazine. “Consciously blowing up a relationship already under great strain would be worse than irresponsible. It could become the trigger for a new cold war or worse.”