

June 25, 2024

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin,

At the direction of a provision I authored as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024, the Department of Defense (DoD) Office of Inspector General (OIG) last week issued the report “Review of DoD Funds Provided to the People’s Republic of China and Associated Affiliates for Research Activities or Any Foreign Countries for the Enhancement of Pathogens of Pandemic Potential.”

While a number of projects were identified in China, the OIG concluded “the full extent of DoD funds provided to Chinese research laboratories or other foreign countries for research related to enhancement of pathogens of pandemic potential is unknown.” This is due to DoD not sufficiently tracking or monitoring expenditures made from its own contracts and grants. Additionally, Navy officials didn’t even bother responding to the OIG’s specific questions.

A previous Government Accountability Office (GAO) review of federal research funds provided to China by DoD and other federal agencies encountered similar challenges. Four DoD projects were identified, but GAO notes, “the full extent of that funding is not known due to limitations in the data provided.”¹

In the new OIG report, key findings that were uncovered are inexplicably redacted in the version released to the public. The information is not classified or proprietary and is required to be disclosed to the public by the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act.

A program announcement for one of the redacted projects does appear to be listed on the department’s own public website.² The description of the project omits any mention of China or

¹ “FEDERAL RESEARCH: Information on Funding for U.S.- China Research Collaboration and Other International Activities,” Government Accountability Office, September 2022; <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-105313.pdf>.

² “NAK Inhibitors for Combating Dengue, Ebola, COVID-19, and Other Emerging Viral Infections,” award number W81XWH-21-1-0456, Department of Defense Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs website, accessed June 21, 2024; <https://cdmrp.health.mil/search.aspx>.

Proposal Title	Principal Investigator	Proposal Number	Award Number	Institution	Program	Mechanism	Research Topic	Fiscal Year	Award Amount
NAK Inhibitors for Combating Dengue, Ebola, COVID-19, and Other Emerging Viral Infections	EINAV, SHIRIT	PR200918	W81XWH-21-1-0456	Institution: LELAND STANFORD JUNIOR UNIVERSITY, THE	PRMRP	Expansion Award - Funding Level 2	Primary: Drug Development	2020	\$1,638,696.00

the collaboration with a company closely affiliated with China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that may be playing a role in the regime's genocide of ethnic minorities.

It is deeply troubling that the government, especially DoD, cannot account for how much taxpayer money is being sent to China or why and it is hiding what it does know from the public.

For years, I have been investigating how the National Institutes of Health funded risky research in China's Wuhan Institute of Virology and attempted to withhold the truth about what was really going on in Wuhan—which may hold vital clues to the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic—from Congress and the American people.

With DoD secretly funding risky research on dangerous pathogens and diseases in China, this alarming Inspector General investigation demonstrates Washington hasn't learned any lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic.


The Pentagon should allow the OIG to immediately release, in full, an uncensored and unredacted version of the report. There is no reason for playing hide-and-seek with how and where the hard-earned money provided by taxpayers is being spent.

Please provide:

1. An explanation for redacting the information in this report from the public along with the individuals, by title, who recommended the redactions;
2. An explanation as to why the expenditures identified in this report are not included in USAspending.gov, the public database of government expenditures;
3. The reasons the Navy did not cooperate with the OIG's review by completing the questionnaire on funding to China and affiliates for pathogen research; and
4. An explanation for collaborating with a Chinese company affiliated with the PLA that poses a potential threat to U.S. national security and intellectual property.

Thank you for your attention to this request. I would appreciate a response no later than August 1, 2024.

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator