

# Coronavirus: China Floods Europe With Defective Medical Equipment

by **Soeren Kern**

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- In Spain, the Ministry of Health revealed that 640,000 coronavirus tests that it had purchased from a Chinese supplier were defective. In addition, a further million coronavirus tests delivered to Spain on March 30 by another Chinese manufacturer were also defective.
- The Czech news site *iRozhlas* reported that 300,000 coronavirus test kits delivered by China had an error rate of 80%. The Czech Ministry of Interior had paid \$2.1 million for the kits.
- A spokesperson for a hospital in Dutch city of Eindhoven said that Chinese suppliers were selling "a lot of junk... at high prices."
- "No. 10 [the residence of the British prime minister] believes China is seeking to build its economic power during the pandemic with 'predatory offers of help' to countries around the world." — *The Daily Mail*, March 28, 2020.
- "The brutal truth is that China seems to flout the normal rules of behavior in every area of life — from healthcare to trade and from currency manipulation to internal repression. For too long, nations have lamely kowtowed to China in the desperate hope of winning trade deals. But once we get clear of this terrible pandemic, it is imperative that we all rethink that relationship and put it on a much more balanced and honest basis." — Former UK Conservative Party leader Iain Duncan Smith.



A growing number of European countries are reporting that millions of pieces of medical equipment donated by, or purchased from, China to defeat the coronavirus pandemic are defective and unusable. Pictures: Workers sort out personal protective equipment received from China at a warehouse in Valencia, Spain, on March 25, 2020. (Photo by Juan Carlos Cardenas/Pool/AFP via Getty Images)

As the coronavirus rages across Europe, a growing number of countries are reporting that millions of pieces of medical equipment donated by, or purchased from, China to defeat the pandemic are defective and unusable.

The revelations are fueling distrust of a public relations effort by Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Communist Party to **portray** China as the world's new humanitarian superpower.

On March 28, the Netherlands was forced to **recall** 1.3 million face masks produced in China because they did not meet the minimum safety standards for medical personnel. The so-called KN95 masks are a less expensive Chinese alternative to the American-standard N95 mask, which currently is in short supply around the world. The KN95 does not fit on the face as tightly as the N95, thus potentially exposing medical personnel to the coronavirus.

More than 500,000 of the KN95 masks had already been distributed to Dutch hospitals before the recall was enacted. "When the masks were delivered to our hospital, I immediately rejected them," a hospital worker **told** the Dutch public

broadcaster NOS. "If those masks do not seal properly, the virus particles can simply pass through. We cannot use them. They are unsafe for our people."

In a written statement, the Dutch Ministry of Health **explained**:

"A first shipment from a Chinese manufacturer was partly delivered last Saturday. These are masks with a KN95 quality certificate. During an inspection this shipment was found not to meet our quality standard. Part of this shipment had already been delivered to healthcare providers; the rest of the cargo was immediately withheld and not further distributed.

"A second test also showed that the masks did not meet our quality standard. It has now been decided that this entire shipment will not be used. New shipments will undergo additional tests."

The Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* **reported** on March 17 that the Netherlands had only a few days' supply of masks: "All hope is now for that one cargo plane from China on Wednesday." The substandard quality of the masks delivered by China has left the Netherlands shattered. A spokesperson for a hospital in Dutch city of Eindhoven **said** that Chinese suppliers were selling "a lot of junk...at high prices."

In Spain, meanwhile, the Ministry of Health on March 26 **revealed** that 640,000 coronavirus tests that it had purchased from a Chinese vendor were defective. The tests, manufactured by Shenzhen Bioeasy Biotechnology Company in Guangdong province, had an accurate detection rate of less than 30%.

On April 2, the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* **reported** that it had been presented with leaked documents which **showed** that Bioeasy had lied to the Spanish government about the accuracy of the tests. Bioeasy had claimed, in writing, that its tests had an accurate detection rate of 92%.

Also on April 2, the Spanish government **revealed** that a further million coronavirus tests delivered to Spain on March 30 by another Chinese manufacturer were also defective. The tests apparently required between five and six days to detect whether a patient is infected with coronavirus and were therefore useless to diagnose the disease in a timely manner.

On March 25, the Spanish government **announced** that it had purchased medical supplies from China in the amount of €432 million (\$470 million), and that Chinese

vendors demanded that they be paid up front before the deliveries were made. Spanish Health Minister Salvador Illa **explained**:

"We have bought and paid for 550 million masks, which will start arriving now and will continue to arrive for the next eight weeks. 11 million gloves will arrive in the next five weeks. As for rapid tests, we have acquired 5.5 million for the months of March and April. In addition, we will receive 950 respirators during the months of April to June. We are managing the purchase of more equipment."

It is not at all clear how the Spanish government will be able to guarantee the quality of these new mass purchases, or how it would obtain compensation if the products from China were again substandard.

On March 28, the French government, which apparently has only a few weeks' worth of supplies, **announced** that it had ordered more than one billion face masks from China. It is unclear whether the quality control problems experienced by other European countries would affect France's purchasing plans.

Other countries — in Europe and beyond — have also criticized the quality of Chinese medical supplies:

- **Slovakia.** On April 1, Prime Minister Igor Matovič **said** that more than a million coronavirus tests supplied by China for a cash payment of €15 million (\$16 million) were inaccurate and unable to detect COVID-19. "We have a ton of tests and no use for them," he **said**. "They should just be thrown straight into the Danube." China **accused** Slovakian medical personnel of using the tests incorrectly.
- **Malaysia.** On March 28, Malaysia **received** a consignment of medical equipment donated by China, consisting of test kits, medical face masks, surgical masks and other personal protective equipment. A senior official in the Ministry of Health, Noor Hisham Abdullah, **said** that the test kits would be evaluated for accuracy after previous test kits from China were found to be defective: "This is a different brand from the one we tested earlier. We will assess the new test kit which is FDA-approved. I was assured by the Chinese ambassador that this is more accurate than the other one we tested." Abdullah previously **stated** that the accuracy of the Chinese tests was "not very good."

- **Turkey.** On March 27, Turkish Health Minister Fahrettin Koca **said** that Turkey had tried some Chinese-made coronavirus tests but authorities "weren't happy about them." Professor Ateş Kara, a member of the Turkish Health Ministry's coronavirus task force, **added** that the batch of testing kits were only 30 to 35% accurate: "We have tried them. They don't work. Spain has made a huge mistake by using them."
- **Czech Republic.** On March 23, the Czech news site *iRozhlas* **reported** that 300,000 coronavirus test kits delivered by China had an error rate of 80%. The Czech Ministry of Interior had paid \$2.1 million for the kits. On March 15, Czech media **revealed** that Chinese suppliers had swindled the Czech government after it paid upfront for the supply of five million face masks, which were supposed to have been delivered on March 16.

On March 30, China **urged** European countries not to "politicize" concerns about the quality of medical supplies from China. "Problems should be properly solved based on facts, not political interpretations," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said.

On April 1, the Chinese government reversed course and **announced** that it was increasing its oversight of exports of coronavirus test kits made in China. Chinese exporters of coronavirus tests must now obtain a certificate from the National Medical Products Administration (NMPA) in order to be cleared by China's customs agency.

Meanwhile, the Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei **announced** that it would stop donating masks to European countries as a result of allegedly derogatory comments by the EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell.

On March 24, Borrell had **written** in a blog post that China was engaging in a "politics of generosity" as well as a "global battle of narratives."

On March 26, a Huawei official **told** the Brussels-based news service Euractiv that due to Borrell's comments, the company would be ending its donation program because it did not want to become involved in a geopolitical power play between the U.S. and China.

On March 28, Huawei paid for sponsored content in the publication *Politico Europe*. Huawei's Chief Representative to the EU, Abraham Liu, **wrote**:

"Let me be clear — we have never sought to gain any publicity or favor in any country by what we are doing. We made a conscious decision not to publicize things. Our help is not conditional and not a part of any business or geopolitical strategy as some have suggested. We are a private company. We are trying to help people to the best of our abilities. That's all. There is no hidden agenda. We don't want anything in return."

On March 30, the BBC **reported** that Huawei was acting as if nothing had really changed since the coronavirus crisis began:

"That may be naive on the company's part. While nothing has really changed when it comes to the technical and security issues around Huawei's equipment, the political climate for the company has certainly worsened.

"A story in the *Mail on Sunday* at the weekend had Downing Street warning China 'faced a reckoning' over its handling of the coronavirus.

"And that is likely to embolden those MPs who have been telling the government no Chinese company should be allowed a role in the UK's vital infrastructure."

On March 29, the British newspaper *Daily Mail* **reported** that British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his allies in parliament had "turned" on China because of the coronavirus crisis:

"Ministers and senior Downing Street officials said the Communist state now faces a 'reckoning' over its handling of the outbreak and risks becoming a 'pariah state.'

"They are furious over China's campaign of misinformation, attempts to exploit the pandemic for economic gain and atrocious animal rights abuses blamed by experts for the outbreak."

On January 28, Johnson had **granted** Huawei a role in Britain's 5G mobile network, frustrating efforts by the United States to exclude the company from the West's next-generation communications, which, it seems, can also be used for **spying**. The London-based *Financial Times* **reported** that U.S President Donald J. Trump vented "apoplectic fury" at Johnson in a tense phone call. Johnson is now facing pressure from his Cabinet as well as from Members of Parliament to reverse his decision.

After Chinese officials blamed the United States and Italy for starting the coronavirus pandemic, the *Daily Mail* **quoted** a British government source as saying:

"There is a disgusting disinformation campaign going on and it is unacceptable. They [the Chinese government] know they have got this badly wrong and rather than owning it they are spreading lies."

The newspaper **continued**:

"Mr. Johnson has been warned by scientific advisers that China's officially declared statistics on the number of cases of coronavirus could be 'downplayed by a factor of 15 to 40 times.' And No. 10 believes China is seeking to build its economic power during the pandemic with 'predatory offers of help' to countries around the world.

"A major review of British foreign policy has been shelved due to the Covid-19 outbreak and will not report until the impact of the virus can be assessed. A government source close to the review said: 'It is going to be back to the diplomatic drawing board after this. Rethink is an understatement.'

"Another source said: 'There has to be a reckoning when this is over.' Yet another added: 'The anger goes right to the top.'

"A senior Cabinet Minister said: 'We can't stand by and allow the Chinese state's desire for secrecy to ruin the world's economy and then come back like nothing has happened. We're allowing companies like Huawei not just into our economy, but to be a crucial part of our infrastructure.'"

In an article published by *The Mail on Sunday* on March 29, former Tory Party leader Iain Duncan Smith **wrote**:

"All issues can and will be discussed, except for one, it seems — our future relationship with China.

"The moment anyone mentions China, people shift uncomfortably in their seats and shake their heads. Yet I believe it is vital that we start to discuss how dependent we have become on this totalitarian state.

"For this is a country which ignores human rights in the pursuit of its ruthless internal and external strategic objectives. However, such facts seem to have been swept aside in our rush to do business with China.

"Remember how George Osborne [Chancellor of the Exchequer under Prime Minister David Cameron from 2010 to 2016] made our relationship with China a major plank of UK Government policy? So determined were Ministers to increase trade that they were prepared to do whatever was necessary.

"Indeed, I am told that privately this was referred to as Project Kow-Tow — a word defined by the Collins dictionary as 'to be servile or obsequious.'

"We were not alone. Countless national leaders over recent years have brushed aside China's appalling human rights behavior in the blind pursuit of trade deals with Beijing....

"Thanks to Project Kow-Tow, the UK's annual trade deficit with China is £22.1 billion (\$27.4 billion). But we are not alone in being in hock to Beijing.

"For China has racked up a global trade surplus of £339 billion (\$420 billion). Distressingly, the West has watched as many key areas of production have moved to China....

"The brutal truth is that China seems to flout the normal rules of behavior in every area of life — from healthcare to trade and from currency manipulation to internal repression.

"For too long, nations have lamely kowtowed to China in the desperate hope of winning trade deals.

"But once we get clear of this terrible pandemic, it is imperative that we all rethink that relationship and put it on a much more balanced and honest basis."

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