

Subject: Request from Chinese Academica Sinica

From: "Garrett, Benjamin C." <Benjamin.Garrett@ic.fbi.gov>

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To: "Matt Meselson" <msm@wjh.harvard.edu>

Dear Matt,

Thank you for your message of 08/10/2005, regarding the request from the Chinese Academica Sinica. I know that your trip to China will prove a glorious adventure! My 1998 trip to Harbin with Sheldon Harris was one of the most wonderful adventures of my life. I marveled at the Chinese peasants tending the fields beside the road on the journey to Harbin from Changchun. I loved learning more about the period when Japan occupied China and the odd period when the Last Emperor of China became the Japan's puppet Emperor of Manchukuo. And the tour of Unit 731 was fantastic - although I could not dispell thoughts of the horrors committed there and was disgusted by Japan's continuing failure to apologize for these horrors. I wish you well on your journey!

The request from the Chinese Academica Sinica (CAS) for a briefing on precautions that the PRC might take against bioterrorism strikes me as reasonable. The Chinese will have a room full of Great Minds from the USA, and the fact that the Chinese might wish to exploit these Great Minds this early in the preparations for the 2008 Summer Olympic Games encourages me that the Chinese Government takes these matters seriously.

I was directly involved in the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City and the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens. And I have been involved in a modest amount of discussions with the Italians relative to the 2006 Winter Olympics, to be held in Turin. I was not directly involved in the 2000 Summer Olympics in Australia, but I have studied the preparations for and execution of those games, thanks to excellent cooperation on the part of the Australian Government, which is justly proud of how those games turned out.

Based on these experiences, here are some thoughts I have to share:

1. A comprehensive public health monitoring program should be developed and put in place in advance of the Olympics. This program will help the Government sort out routine public health problems from unusual disease outbreaks. The Australians did just this, and the results were spectacular (or so I was briefed in May 2001). The Aussies knew that certain respiratory and flu-like illnesses routinely appeared in Australia, and they had this information mapped against the various sites. When health officials reported such illnesses during the Olympics, the Aussies used the historical data to help them decide whether the illnesses might be attributed to natural causes. The data shown by the Aussies were rather dramatic, because the clear impression to me was that without the historical data showing seasonal outbreaks by Olympic site, the Government might have worried that the outbreaks were owing to some deliberate acts. This situation was all the more important for Australia because it is home to vectors and pathogens uncommon to many of the Europeans who made up a goodly portion of the visitors - and of the ill. The Australian Public Health Officials were also able to factor in the effects of consumption of large quantities of alcohol - a favorite pastime in Australia with locals and visitors. This alcohol consumption plus the "strange" seafood consumed by many visitors caused a spike in what appeared to be foodborne illnesses. What the Australians were able to do was to have readily available data that could be used to explain illnesses from a seasonal or dietary standpoint. These explanations did not eliminate bioterrorism from the possible causes but they did help place bioterrorism as a potential explanation in perspective. In my business, we refer to this sort of information as "The Totality of the Circumstances". I suggest that the Chinese consider doing some of the same. The food and alcohol angles might be especially important in the PRC because both are prepared and served to standards below wh
(You'll understand this comment better, perhaps, during your visit.)

2. The Government should prepare a Background Information on the detection schemes that might be used by PRC entities in the event biological pathogens or toxins are

believed to be present or need to be considered. For example, during the Salt Lake City Olympics, the US Government had various "biomonitoring" units deployed. My group prepared Background Information on each of these units. This information included what is the pathogen or toxin that might be detected, what is the principle of detection, what are possible false positives, and what are the next steps to be taken in determining whether the response was accurate. We also included points of contact for additional information. When one of these units gave a positive response for anthrax at the Salt Lake City airport, the FBI Director was handed the Background Information and knew what would be happening next, by whom, for what purpose, and when to expect additional results. He left us alone to get the job done. By contrast, the Utah Department of Public Health failed to adopt our suggestion that it prepare something similar for the Governor. When the Governor heard of the positive result at "his airport" (and this happened late at night), he had his driver take him to the Public Health Lab, where he peppered the lab tech with the very questions we had suggested be handled in advance, in writing and during the relative calm of no emergency. The lab tech complained that the Governor kept her from getting into the lab and doing the vital next step of confirmatory analysis. (I think you get the picture here.) We did something similar in Athens, only in this case, our Background Information dealt with the NATO "NBC" team deployed to Greece and designated as the group to conduct analyses on suspicious materials. This team used PCR-type detectors. Our Background Information document pointed to the various false positive/false negative issues associated with these detectors, so that any result might be placed in perspective. But, unlike Salt Lake C never had a detection. The explanation for that is that the Greeks decided to treat anything suspicious as "ordinary" and not bother with any field detectors. Probably a wise decision in one regard. But it shows that the Greek Government hoped to manage the problem by ignoring it. They bet and won.

I know of no sources for information, though, that you might use in preparing your briefing materials for your meetings with the CAS. I believe the Australians posted information on the web, highlighting their preparations for the Games as well as the impact these preparations are believed to have had.

One final thought. The typical approach to dealing with bioterrorism prevention is to let Law Enforcement, the Intelligence Community and Public Health go their separate ways. That approach fails. The Aussies got excellent cooperation among Law Enforcement, Intelligence, and Public Health. We had excellent cooperation for Salt Lake 2002. Athens was remarkable for its lack of cooperation and its good luck!

I recall Anne Harrington fondly from Vector Days, dealing with the Russians. I hope she is enjoying her post-State Department employment and wish her well at The National Academies.

Sally and I are enthused over our upcoming visit to Woods Hole in October. The timing seems perfect for so many reasons! Please give our best regards to Jeanne.

BEN