US snatches masks from Germany in act of 'modern piracy' – Berlin senator

By: RT
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With Covid-19 infections climbing, Washington has diverted shipments of vital protective masks from its allies in Germany and Canada to the US. A Berlin senator described the move as "modern piracy."

As confirmed coronavirus cases passed 250,000 in the US this week, the White House pressured safety gear manufacturer 3M to step up imports of protective masks from its Chinese factories. Trump publicly promised on Thursday that 3M would *"have a big price to pay"* if it didn't increase supply to the US.

> We hit 3M hard today after seeing what they were doing with their Masks. "P Act" all the way. Big surprise to many in government as to what they were doing - will have a big price to pay!

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) [April 3, 2020](#)

But behind the scenes, American officials were acquiring these masks by more underhand means.

A delivery of 200,000 masks left a 3M factory in China this week and arrived in Bangkok, Thailand, from where they were supposed to be sent to the German capital. The masks never got to Berlin, and police in the city told Der Tagesspiegel that the shipment was instead bound for the US. Berlin's Senator for the Interior Andreas Geisel confirmed on Friday that the masks had been *"confiscated."*

"We consider this an act of modern piracy. This is not how you deal with transatlantic partners," Geisel said.

Berlin says that US confiscated 200,000 masks (FFP2 and FFP3) at airport in Bangkok that were ordered for Berlin police. Masks were produced by a 3M factory (US company) in China. City of Berlin says this is "modern piracy" and urges Merkel government to address this with the US. https://t.co/2kXfFCGOHq
— Daniel Drepper (@danieldrepper) April 3, 2020

Berlin police chief Barbara Slowik told Tagesspiegel that she believes 3M redirected the shipment because of the US government's export ban. The company denied the charge, while a White House spokesman told another German newspaper that the accusation of piracy was *"completely wrong."*

Yet Germany isn't the only country to see its shipments apparently nabbed by the Americans. In Canada last week, Le Journal de Montreal reported that a shipment of masks bound for hospitals in the city was diverted to the US state of Ohio. Shipping firm DHL later attributed this to a *"computer error,"* but Montreal hospital supplier Fan Zhou claimed his order eventually arrived 10,000 masks short.

As a planeload of masks was loaded up and prepared for departure from Shanghai to France this week, American buyers turned up on the tarmac at the last minute to purchase the shipment for three times its value. *"A French order was bought out with cash by Americans on the tarmac, and the plane that was to fly to France took off for the US instead,"* Rénaud Muselier, the head of the southeastern Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region told RT France on Wednesday. Then, as now, Washington officials denied having any involvement.
Also on rt.com 'America First': Covid-19 exposes cracks in Trans-Atlantic solidarity as US snatches up France-bound masks
The US, Germany, and France are all among the six worst-affected countries worldwide, with 260,000, 90,000 and 64,000 confirmed cases of Covid-19 respectively. As of Friday, 6,800 people have died in the US, while 6,500 French and 1,200 Germans have perished.

Despite the apparent mask-grabbing, the US is not the only country scrambling to secure its own stocks at the expense of its allies.

As the global pandemic hammered Italy in earnest last month, Germany banned the export of medical equipment – including masks, goggles, and gloves – before lifting the restriction several weeks later. France issued a similar ban, and the EU imposed controls on exports beyond the bloc.

In Berlin, Geisel described the global market for masks as a *"Wild West"* scenario. Even though American officials deny using underhand tricks to acquire safety gear, one Department of Homeland Security official told Reuters earlier this week that the US would not stop snapping up masks *"until we have way too much."*

"We've gotten our hands on every bit of it that we can," the official said.