

## The Corona Whodunit: Grotesque from the Grey Zone\*

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### Abstract

*SARS-CoV-2 is not a Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD) for China, but it does offer a range of options in future Grey Zone wars. Biological weapons in conventional wars in the modern-day world offer few tactical uses because of the comparatively long gestation period. However, they offer a perfect deniable weapon to debilitate economies and populations as the experience with Covid has shown. The pandemic has already spurred conflicts within countries and societies to the dream extent of militarists who see, in the event, an opportunity to weaken their opponents.*

### Introduction

The Grey Zone is synonymous with 'The Twilight Zone', a phenomenally successful American television series presented by Rod Serling over five seasons from 1959 to 1964. The show was a combination of science fiction, paranormal, fantasy and horror. Each episode was an independent story dealing with strange and unusual events, an experience described as entering 'the Twilight Zone', and often with a surprise ending and a moral.

The modern term 'disruptive technologies' when applied to the military field refers to those technologies which transform an existing way of war fighting, or in other words bypasses that way. In the same sense, Grey Zone war bypasses familiar or codified ways of war to secure an advantage which may be in the tactical to strategic fields. Examples of Grey Zone war abound right from our epics. In the way of how things evolved, we can offer a

perspective of Grey Zone that is uniquely Indian. *Hiranyakashipu* was the first to prepare for the transitory phase of neither here nor there, as a ruler, seeking a set of clauses where his own conventional and asymmetric capabilities would not get overwhelmed.<sup>1</sup> This led to his denouement at the hands of *Narasimha* who was neither man nor animal, by his bare hands, without weapons, at twilight dusk, which was neither day nor night, on the footsteps of his palace, which was neither indoor nor outdoor, on the lap of the man-lion, which was neither on earth nor in the sky.

In the later human avatars of *Vishnu*, you can see in conflicts, fought in Indian epics, the play of this element of grey in how *Vali* is slain, in how *Indrajit* is slain, in how *Duryodhana* is laid low, in how *Brihannala* defeats the *Kaurava* Phalanx of *Maharathis*, or how *Shikhandi* screens *Bhishma* as a target for Arjuna.<sup>2</sup> There were not just greys of gender, camouflage and strategy but even moral codes of war, commonly accepted and respected. They were clear grey stratagems which we are now calling Grey Zone war.

This pandemic, that is still unfolding before us, offers many shades of Grey/Twilight that scientists and analysts are still struggling a year and more later to get a feel for it. Many theories abound about the virus being the by-product of Chinese experiments to produce a weapon with devastating effects and deniability for use in Grey Zone war. This article comments upon this thesis.

### **The Conspiracy Theory**

It must be the most bizarre idea which, over the days and months, got into textured layering and nuance that we are now witness to what can be called the acknowledging of the plausible. The origin of this SARS-CoV-2 has been a humdinger! In a normal course of our human experience, we could have seen the Spanish Flu, our last experience with a flu virus that ravaged the earth as the immediate precedence. For the name itself reveals how the origins of that one was sought to be initially deflected and denied, and no guesses here, for it was the USA that obfuscated the origins of the last viral devastation to visit humanity, the exact

charge that now USA has joined others in levelling against China with President Biden ordering his intelligence officials with a 90 day window to close this argument in a decisive way. Did the Coronavirus emerge from Wuhan's lab?

Before delving into it further, let us be clear that this SARS-CoV-2 is not a Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD). For China, the order of this probe led to her official spokesperson to contrast it with the last time Pentagon hunted for something, and informed the world about the 'WMDs of Saddam Hussein' which led eventually to a wild goose chase and the totally unnecessary war in the Middle East, a war that USA could have easily fought and cleaned up the Taliban once and for all. Instead, the Pentagon's famed intelligence had the US bark up the wrong tree, as was evident after the war was over. It shattered the international reputation of General Colin Powell as a person, and interlocutor, and US went into a rabbit hole that ended finally when the Inspector General released a damning report, and now the US is pulling out leaving behind a mess in Afghanistan. One would not be wrong to say that a US undistracted from Iraq would have focused much earlier on China, not having a changed Chinese posture and a global pandemic with its supply chain shocks to nudge it to reboot her strategic stakes.

So from where this comes, the Chinese have a point. Why would they now trust Biden's Intelligence Report? Yet, looking at how the 46th POTUS has literally placed his predecessors on the cross hairs as he deftly unknots one issue after another open, one is sanguine that President Joe Biden will leave this clearly settled once and for all. May be to ensure that his own elites and analysts do not waste their energies on another wild goose chase. So, it is Biden's unstated aim to disprove all the controversies and conspiracy theories that now surround the SARS-CoV-2 origin story.

### **An Analysis**

In an ideal world of science, this pandemic should have had several false starts; when from some host to intermediary host to humans that bug must have jumped and fallen back, improving its code, tempering its spike protein sequences to come up

eventually as the now recognised genomic sequence of the Wuhan strain. In nature, such a thing could have happened in ideal settings where host-intermediary-human were in proximity over several months, where the virus, passing through each living organism as bat-pangolin-human, emerged with the perfect strand of Ribonucleic acid (RNA) that became SARS-CoV-2. What we do not have is record from the Chinese of these incidences of zoonotic infections; like how they recently announced a 41-year-old male resident of Zhenjiang, who was hospitalised on 28 April 2021, diagnosed as a H10N3 case of influenza of avian origin on 28 May 2021 and discharged a few days later. This is not one gap, there are several others, for here the human zoonotic phase would have involved several such cross infections before what epidemiologists call 'case zero', where the first human would have received the perfected viral strain which then jumped from human to another human.

There is equally the possibility that Dr Shi Zhengli, the top virologist who heads the Centre for Emerging Diseases at the Wuhan Institute of Virology<sup>3</sup> is aware of certain facts which she has been economical about. We know the World Health Organisation (WHO) initially advised wrongly about human-to-human transmission after the Wuhan outbreak<sup>4</sup> became an International Outbreak of concern before being officially declared as a pandemic. We also know that initially many scientists globally thought the virus spread through only droplets but the experience from several cruise liners was to suggest that it was a surface contaminant too. We know now that aerosol happens, surface contaminant is not a route for infection.<sup>5</sup> Dr Goldman, a microbiologist at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, found that SARS-CoV-2 rarely passed on that way for various reasons and his findings were published in *Lancet Infectious Diseases* in July 2020! Yet, no real effort has been made to unearth the reasons why the Chinese and the WHO allowed the world to be misled initially.<sup>6</sup>

**The Chinese Puzzle.** We know that China tried to deny its own Wuhan medical fraternity about this novel coronavirus including how it ill-treated the ophthalmologist who opened the eyes of the world through Chinese social media to the true horrors of this

pandemic - Dr Li Wenliang!<sup>7</sup> So two things make China take a bad place and convert it into a swamp — its initial denial about this now becoming a pandemic possibility — and its treatment of its own home-grown medical professionals who rang warning bells in Wuhan about this. Dr Shi maintained her Sphinx-like stance, unwilling to engage with her scientific community peers even.<sup>8</sup> When Wuhan had the laboratory infrastructure, when Wuhan was the place where case zero and the epidemic outbreak happened, why did a Virology Centre from Shanghai code the genome of the novel coronavirus (Fudan University)<sup>9</sup>? So from these early responses of the Chinese, we could clearly see that Chinese had more to conceal than to reveal. Could this be a coronavirus their Wuhan lab was dabbling with for scientific research purposes, one that accidentally obtained a human host? A laboratory scientist, or group of scientists, then became the group from where case zero emerged? Will China reveal Wuhan laboratory personnel's health records? Will US be able to obtain it? For, this would be the only way we can bury this ghost of it being a virus associated with a laboratory, one that emerged from serious lapses in a Bio Hazard Level 4 laboratory, where its human workers interacted with wild zoonotic viruses being studied that were bat in origin and due to proximity and leaks in protocols, the viruses were to treat their human handlers as intermediary and perfect themselves before latching on to one of them as human host? So, did the coronavirus jump from Petri dish to human?

Why one would wish to rule out the SARS-CoV-2 as a bioweapon is because it does not meet the basic qualities that scientists and military experts seek in a bioweapon.<sup>10</sup> The main issue is how unpredictable this novel coronavirus has been. It has shown very selective evidence so far of being a 'super spreader'; it needs certain conditions, that are still being studied, which need to be met for the virus to infect more than one person from one encounter with a host. For both outdoor and indoor events, the factors are the proverbial Swiss cheese model where the holes often do not match at all! That is one main reason why, in all probability, epidemiologists who favoured the natural herd immunity theory failed glaringly, because the virus appears to not run through populations the way it possibly could. That is also why, in actual ground situation, there are many unaffected by

SARS-CoV-2 for whom this is just one big hoax, while the unfortunate few who suffered it will remain haunted by it equally! So suffice to say, no military general worth his salt will accept such a bioweapon, one that is uncontrolled in its behaviour, in its infectivity, virulence, its incubation period, transmissibility, stability, and lethality. Just take the Indian variant studied which is called 1.617. This was weeks ago and now we see that it is 1.617.2 and 1.617.1 christened after Greek alphabet as delta and kappa respectively by WHO's new nomenclature for variants of concern, after sensitivities arose over taking the place of origin of variants to refer to them. Technically, 1.617 is the variant; the 1 and 2 are sub variants of this variant but now notified as individually of equal concern with unique characteristics. The amounts of variants, and the half a dozen concern causing ones, in the past one year have shown what we can only ascribe as natural properties of RNA viruses as they drift and shift with infections through natural pools of living organisms. While many dismissed Russian vaccine efforts for cats that appear to suffer SARS-CoV-2 from us humans, though with no serious consequences, the probability of our cats becoming reservoirs and then recycling the virus from them to us cannot be ruled out, so I would not say the Russian efforts are a wild goose chase. It reinforces the theory that this novel coronavirus is a natural one and not human engineered. However, that being said, there is also the case that without Case Zero, without health records from Wuhan's Institute of Virology, without an epidemiological map of the outbreak in Wuhan, it will never be absolutely sure that Chinese virologists had no role in this pandemic.

One wishes that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Politburo understands why it is in China's interests to part with all this information. Because this is not the last pandemic, with climate change on anvil, with clear challenges ahead, the chances of Chinese wet markets offering inter species jump for viruses as zoonotic or exotic to be the vehicle for a future pandemic is obvious. This scientific reality is why Wuhan got international support for its virology centre in the first place? It is also why Taiwanese scientists are always nervously monitoring new fevers or rashes across the mainland. Can President Biden squeeze from President Xi this clear evidence that we need? Can we allow

China to suffer sanctions in microbiology and virology to enforce this or will that boomerang by creating a bamboo curtain that will blind us completely to future outbreaks?

### **Conclusion**

From Spanish Flu to SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the biggest difference has clearly been science. Advances that made us model, predict, test, trace, and treat, even without specific biologics and antiviral agents in our armoury, have largely reduced the footprint of this bug in mortality and morbidity. If our response had been more mature, one may have saved more than 60 per cent of the casualties we have now suffered. Our candidate vaccines for COVID-19 are a clear success. It is sure that we will come up with treatments that would reverse the changes that make Covid Pneumonia or Covid end organ damage through blood clotting such killers. We will also learn to deal with other physiological disturbances and other end arterial and tissue damages.

It is clear that no matter how advanced we have emerged, we are nowhere near mimicking Mother Nature and conjuring such a predatory pathogen as SARS-CoV-2! However, it is a threat which lies in the realm of Grey Zone war.

The pandemic has already spurred conflicts within countries and societies to the dream extent of militarists who plan psychological operations (PsyOps). If you see USA, it is swords drawn between Red States versus Blue States, what with Anti Vaxxers, QAnon and other fringe groups rallying to deny various scientific aspects of this pandemic as conspiracies. China itself underwent great pain as she suffered market trust and logistics integrity, which has given rise to decoupling programs from Japan, Taiwan, Korea, and USA amongst others. If one can look at this pandemic as a daisy cutter that unsettled every presumption of geopolitics then one can be in awe of Grey Zone possibilities in the future, offered by biological agents to players among their range of options. In fact, looking at Southeast Asia and China as populations where wet markets, wild or undomesticated animal flesh is cooked at the dining table, without processing procedures of Western Meat Factories, one can wager that these regions offer

an ideal setting screen for a biological foray for weaponising a zoonotic bug and setting it upon an unsuspecting population with perfectly plausible deniability. It would be a temptation for any international strategist in aiming to disable coastal China, or for that matter in the larger Asiatic Rim to cripple any island or peninsular population, before gaming troop movements under Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) guise to temporarily occupy such vantage territory. Quad, First Island Chain Nations and People's Liberation Army (PLA) planners must be already seized of this prospect and will invest in such potential inevitably going forward! The bug will not be transient buzz; it will forever now be a bugging concern for all manner of strategists and futurists!

Lastly, for those that must keep the peace in the Grey Zone war environment, it would do much good if the unknown unknowns of the Grey Zone are dealt with not with paranoia but prescience. Prescience is a judicious mix of imagination, anticipation, and inspiration. At Kurukshetra, *Krishna* using the solar eclipse to spot *Jayadratha* to enable *Arjuna* to slay him is example of prescience<sup>1</sup> *as much as the dash of India's Finest which is being commemorated this year as the golden jubilee of a military feat that has no parallel in the annals of modern warfare — the Surrender at Dacca!*

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In the Vishnu Purana , Hiranyakashipu was a demon king who got a boon from the Gods which stipulated that he could not be killed by an animal or a human, by day or by night, by no weapon, neither in his house or outside it and neither in the air or on ground.

<sup>2</sup> Details of all these are available on the internet for those unfamiliar with Indian epics and mythology.

<sup>3</sup> David Cranoski, "Inside the Chinese lab poised to study world's most dangerous pathogens", *Nature*, Feb 23, 2017. Inside the Chinese lab poised to study world's most dangerous pathogens | Nature

<sup>4</sup> WHO (On Twitter) World Health Organization (WHO) on Twitter: "Preliminary investigations conducted by the Chinese authorities have found no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission of the novel



#coronavirus (2019-nCoV) identified in #Wuhan, #China????.  
<https://t.co/Fnl5P877VG>" / Twitter

<sup>5</sup> Dyani Lewis, "COVID-19 rarely spreads through surfaces. So why are we still deep cleaning?". Nature, Jan 29, 2021. COVID-19 rarely spreads through surfaces. So why are we still deep cleaning? (nature.com)

<sup>6</sup> Barnani Chakriborthy, Mar 20, 2020, Fox News, China's relationship with WHO chief in wake of coronavirus outbreak under the microscope | Fox News

<sup>7</sup> Ken Jin Lee "Coronavirus kills Chinese whistleblower ophthalmologist - American Academy of Ophthalmology (aao.org)

<sup>8</sup> The Wire. Wuhan Scientist Rules Out Theories That Novel Coronavirus Originated in Lab - The Wire Science

<sup>9</sup> Lisa Scherring, "China releases genetic data on new coronavirus, now deadly". Jan 11, 2020.CIDRAP, University of Minnesota, <https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2020/01/china-releases-genetic-data-new-coronavirus-now-deadly>

<sup>10</sup> NATO Handbook On The Medical Aspects Of NBC Defensive Operations. Amedp-6(B). FM 8-9 Part II/Chptr 1 Introduction (fas.org)

<sup>11</sup> In the epic, The Mahabharata, Jayadratha, the king of Sindhu Desa (Indus Valley) killed Abimanyu, son of Arjuna on the 13th day of the war. Arjuna was furious and vowed to kill Jayadratha before sunset the next day or failing that, to kill himself. The whole Kaurava army gave Jayadratha full protection to insure Arjuna's death. When the sun appeared to set, Jayadratha poked his head out to show that he was victorious. Suddenly the sun reappeared in the sky and Arjuna shot Jayadratha down. The story goes that Krishna hid the sun. Actually, Krishna tricked Jayadratha with the knowledge of the solar eclipse happening on that day. This was Grey Zone War in that age. The moral imperative of subterfuge is a grey subject.

\* This article has been derived from Indiarubberman.com from a post titled 'WMD: The Corona Whodunnit?' dated 02 Jun 2021 at <https://indiarubbermancom.home.blog/2021/06/02/wmd-the-corona-whodunnit/>

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