

Analysing Covid-19 as a Modern Strategy in International Power Game

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Abstract— ‘New Coronavirus’ or ‘COVID-19’ is identified as a ‘pandemic’ by the World Health Organization. Apart from the concerns on health security of world population, this pandemic was able to create chaos in the international power game since Western politics accused China for the invention of the virus. However, who is responsible? is yet a mystery to be resolved. Therefore, the problem statement of this study is to find out “whether COVID-19 is a bioweapon China used as a modern strategy in world power game?”. In order to find feasible solutions, this study consists of the research questions of; whether ‘COVID-19’ is a natural virus? Or an artificially constructed virus? Or a virus invented to be used as a biological weapon? the pros and cons for China as a result of ‘COVID-19’? With these, the weightage of this research will be more to reveal the pragmatism behind accusations inline to international power game. Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyse the relevance of this pandemic in international power game. It is also important to note that this is an explorative study and in order to achieve the research goals, the research methodology adopted in this study is qualitative, based on secondary sources of media and internet. Ultimately, it is the prime objective of this study is to understand new global geopolitical realities of superpowers by means of soft power rivalry and further to navigate its’ impact on State security.

Keywords: Covid-19, Biological Weapon, International Power Game

Introduction

‘New Coronavirus’ or ‘COVID-19’ is named as a world pandemic situation. The word ‘pandemic’ is a combination of two Greek terms ‘pan’ which means "all" and ‘demos’ means "people". It is defined as “an epidemic occurring worldwide, or

over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people”. (Kelly 2020) The classical definition excludes population immunity, virology or disease severity whereas seasonal epidemics are also not considered pandemics.

Throughout human history, there have been a number of pandemics of diseases such as smallpox and tuberculosis. The most fatal pandemic in recorded history was the Black Death (also known as ‘*The Plague*’), which killed millions of people in the 14th century. The term was not used yet but was for later pandemics including the 1918 influenza pandemic (*Spanishflu*) and current pandemics include HIV/AIDS and COVID-19. However, WHO believes that changing the language does not change anything about how the virus is behaving, but the they hoped it will change how countries tackle it.

Beginning in December 2019, in the region of Wuhan, China, a new (“*novel*”) coronavirus began appearing in human beings. It was named COVID-19, a shortened form of “coronavirus disease of 2019.” This new virus spreaded incredibly quickly between people, and it is said that due to its newness, no one on earth has an immunity to COVID-19, because no one had COVID-19 until 2019. While it was initially seen to be an epidemic in China, the virus spread worldwide within months. “*The WHO declared Covid-19 a pandemic in March, and by the end of that month, the world saw more than a half-million people infected and nearly 30,000 deaths. The infection rate in the US and other nations was still spiking*” (MPH Online 2020)

The COVID-19 pandemic is identified as a potential tragedy in U.S.-China relations and a potential tragedy for the world power game. The nature of the two countries’ political realities in

2020 have led to initial mismanagement of the crisis. And the interactions between the two sides, and with other actors, such as the World Health Organization, seems so far worthless as opportunities for cooperation to tackle the common threat.

Research Design

Despite the fact 'COVID-19' is a natural virus or an artificially constructed virus or a biological weapon, it is yet a mystery who is responsible? Therefore, the problem statement, hypothesis and design of this research are as follows;

Research Problem- Mainly focus to solve "Whether COVID-19 is a bioweapon China used as a modern strategy in world power game?"

Research Questions:

- Whether 'COVID-19' is a natural virus? Or an artificially constructed virus? Or is it a virus invented to be used as a biological weapon?
- Whether the virus was accidentally released from laboratories? (prior to achieve its ultimate objective. If, it was invented as a bioweapon?)
- Whether the negative impacts occurred to China due to COVID-19 is major than its impact to U.S.?

Hypothesis- COVID-19 is a laboratory constructed virus by China and it seems to have been accidentally disclosed to the world during experiments. It cannot be called as a 'Biological Weapon' invented by China to use against U.S., because COVID-19, as a whole, has negatively affected to China than to U.S.

Research Objectives- In order to answer the above problem, statement an extensive study of how 'COVID-19' affect geopolitics, with disclosure of relationship between pandemics and world power game is required. Therefore, this study aims to:

- Understand the origin of 'COVID-19'
- Understand the nature and impact of biological weapons
- Understand the new global geopolitical realities of superpowers
- Ultimately, to analyse the impact of 'COVID-19' to China versus U.S.
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Biological Weapon

Biological Weapon is also known as 'Biological Warfare' and sometimes as 'Germ Weapons' too. A biological attack can potentially result in an epidemic or a pandemic, therefore creating a massive disruption in the society, and complexifying the response of health authorities.

As per the definition of WHO (2020), "*Biological weapons are microorganisms like virus, bacteria, fungi, or other toxins that are produced and released deliberately to cause disease and death in humans, animals or plants. Biological agents, like anthrax, botulinum toxin and plague can pose a difficult public health challenge causing large numbers of deaths in a short amount of time while being difficult to contain. Bioterrorism attacks could also result in an epidemic, for example if Ebola or Lassa viruses were used as the biological agents. Biological weapons is a subset of a larger class of weapons referred to as weapons of mass destruction, which also includes chemical, nuclear and radiological weapons. The use of biological agents is a serious problem, and the risk of using these agents in a bioterrorist attack is increasing*".

It is imperative to note that Biological Weapons can cause widespread casualties with minimal logistic requirements. It is proven that these agents are easy to produce, economical for deployment and selective to the target. Afzal (2020) elaborate the cost effectiveness of Bioweapons as, "*cost of 50% casualties per meter square is US\$ 1 as compared to conventional weapons US\$2000, nuclear armaments US\$ 800, chemical agents US\$ 600*".

Furthermore, if biological weapons are Weapons of Mass Destruction as per the explained by WHO, it means that they have the objective of causing public panic, leading to social disruption and eventually mass destruction, they are also known to be efficient for isolated assassination. "*One of the most recent cases demonstrating this probability is the Anthrax letters in 2001 in the USA, when letters full of Anthrax bio-agent were specifically sent to US politicians and journalists*". (Guillouet-Lamy, 2020). In legal backdrop, Geneva Protocol 1925 has banned biological weapons and 1972 Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) governs the legality of biological weapons. As per Article VII of the BWC, "*Each State Party to this Convention undertakes to provide or support assistance, in accordance with the United Nations Charter, to any Party to the*

Convention which so requests, if the Security Council decides that such Party has been exposed to danger as a result of violation of the Convention.” (GCSP 2020) In other words, there is a legal obligation for all States Parties to assist any other State Party that would suffer from a biological attack. The Convention bans the use of biological weapons in war and prohibits the development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, or transfer of such weapons. However, the proliferation of biological weapons is difficult to detect and quantify. It is also vital to note that the major backdrop in the Convention is that upto date, there are no verification or inspection procedures to prove the signatories comply with the Convention. As per Guillouet-Lamy (2020) points out, “16 Member States of the UN still had not signed nor ratified the treaty by 2013”.

A. What requires qualifying as a ‘Biological Weapon’?

Biological Weapons are one of the four Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Biological weapons differ from other Weapons of Mass Destruction (nuclear, radiological and chemical) in different ways. According to Guillouet- Lamy (2020) highlights: *“First, the effects of a biological attack can take several days to several weeks to appear which makes it difficult to anticipate and respond. Second, contrary to other WMD, bioweapons can only target the living things (humans, crops and livestock) and have no impact on infrastructures or equipment. Finally, contrary to a nuclear program for instance, developing a biological warfare program does not necessarily require significant technical and financial investments and capabilities. Finally, biological weapons are not to be confused with biological agents, which represent one of the elements that composes a biological weapon. Indeed, not all biological agents have been, or can be, turned into a weapon. The weaponization process of a biological agent is specific and not so common”.*

It is found that a biological weapon has 3 components: 1) a biological agent 2) some additives to support the stability and dissemination of the agent 3) a delivery system. As per the article of Guillouet- Lamy (2020); biological agents are divided into two types: pathogens and toxins. Pathogens are disease-causing organisms such as Bacteria (which can cause diseases such as plague or anthrax),

Rickettsia, Viruses, and Fungi (which can cause crops’ diseases like rice blast or cereal rust). On the other hand, toxins are poisonous substances produced by living things like snakes, insects, spiders, plants, etc. Although toxins are not self-replicating, their toxic power is high, and they are extremely lethal even in small quantities. It is evident that a biological agent alone cannot be turned into a weapon. After adding some additives to stabilize the agent, it requires to be combined to a delivery system, which gives to the agent its full destruction capacity. Biological agents can be disseminated as aerosols, within food or water, by a zoonotic vector (such as rodent, insect) or by injection.

A. Whether ‘COVID-19’ is a ‘Biological Weapon’? In order to find feasible answers to this question, researcher has focussed on different scholarly perspectives:

As per Wood (2020), *“One of Ukraine’s top scientists has poured scorn on the idea that COVID-19 could be an artificially constructed virus or a biological weapon.....In May 2020, a report from the University of Oxford in the UK suggested that more than a quarter of people in the UK believed the COVID-19 pandemic started in a Chinese laboratory, whether that be as a bioweapon or as a result of testing. But the vast majority of scientists and experts CGTN Europe has spoken to say that, given the information they know, it could not have started from inside a lab, with the most likely cause animal interaction” [Emphasis added]*

According to Carbanaro (2020), *“researchers, doctors, politicians and intelligence services around the world are convinced that COVID-19 evolved naturally. They have studied its makeup, its behaviour and other context to make their conclusions. In contrast, CGTN has been unable to find a single credible figure from the scientific community who believes COVID-19 was artificially created. One of the most persistent has been the suggestion that COVID-19 is a man-made bioweapon. Sometimes these claims have been able to flourish because the virus is so new that scientists simply do not have hard enough evidence and corroborated research to dismiss them”.* As per Aslam (2020), *“a publication in Nature containing the most applauded scientific research to date, which absolutely confirms the natural origin of COVID-19, ruled out any of the conspiracy hypotheses in early April: that it was created as a*

biological weapon to reduce the world's population, or that it was an experiment developed in Wuhan to reduce China's elderly population, or even the theory of a fatal error, according to which someone would have dropped a test tube in the city which has been ground zero for the pandemic. Much less the hypothesis spread in China that U.S. soldiers brought the virus to the outbreak region during a military sports tournament last fall"

As per the views of Guillouet- Lamy (2020), *"Covid-19 like Ebola, are not airborne viruses, which means that to be used as a Biological Weapon, it would rely on the transmission from person-to-person, and not on a delivery via an aerosol for instance, which is known to be the most efficient way to spread a biological agent. Additionally, Covid-19 and Ebola are very unstable viruses and would be extremely difficult and dangerous to weaponize since no vaccines are yet available, and since it would require a BSL4 Lab to manipulate these viruses...these laboratories are in limited numbers. Now yes, one could argue that the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China, originally a BSL3 Lab, was recently completed by a BSL4 facility in 2015, and therefore could have been able to manipulate this virus, and it did after the discovery of the new coronavirus. But the probability that this virus could have been created by biologists in the BSL4 Lab in Wuhan is very low, since SARS-CoV-2 does not look like any viruses already known by the scientific community, which could have served as a base to create this new virus.....For COVID-19, the origin of the virus is still unknown. A study published in February 2020 by the Wuhan Institute of Virology identifies the bat coronavirus RaTG13 as the closest parent of SARS-CoV-2, sharing 96,2% of their overall genome sequence identity. A second study from the Hong Kong University and Guangdong-Hongkong Joint Laboratory of Emerging Infectious Diseases shows that a group of beta-coronaviruses found in the pangolin species are even closer, with 97,4% similarities with the SARS-CoV-2 amino acid sequence. However, despite their apparent close parental ties, in genetic these differences are too big to assume that SARS-CoV-2 could have been elaborated in a lab, by human hand" [Emphasis added]*

Therefore, in a nutshell, analyzing aforesaid opinions, it is potential to mention that there is no confirmed evidence on the origin of COVID-19, except the fact that it was initially identified in Wuhan, China. Moreover, these scholarly

perspectives are more biased to the argument that COVID-19 could not have been laboratory constructed.

'Covid-19': A Modern Strategy in World Power Game?

In the viewpoint of international geopolitics, U.S. is considered as the sole superpower whereas China is considered as the 'rising' power in world power game. It is obvious that the ongoing COVID-19 crisis have pressed the international community to reflect about current and future biological threats as means of a *soft power* in world power rivalry.

While dealing with COVID-19 allegations in world power game, one must not forget that the debates and rising concerns emerged about the possibility that the SARS-CoV-2 was developed as a biological weapon by the Chinese. According to Guillouet-Lamy (2020), *"If questions still remain regarding the emergence of the virus, no valid proof can support the theory that the SARS-CoV-2 was weaponized and intentionally released by the Chinese"* As the ongoing pandemic, Christensen (2020) pointed out that the brief calls for a ceasefire between Beijing and Washington on criticism of the two countries' initial responses to the SARS-CoV-2 virus, accompanied by a commitment to an eventual international investigation of what went wrong in all countries during the early phases of the pandemic.

It is apparent that a considerable number of countries have cast doubt on China's action in relation to COVID-19 that has caused the most serious global health and economic crisis in the last century. Therefore, at the moment, the credibility of the eastern power is already in question, especially with the political virus rooted in the obsession with the great power game. It is further established by the fact that U.S. Government has labelled China and Russia as the biggest challenges to U.S. national security in its latest National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy.

As per Aslam (2020), *"not long ago, the American media revealed that senior US officials had handed down documents to a number of federal agencies requesting all federal employees to speak consistently about the pandemic and blame China for everything. After the WHO and the scientific circle named the novel coronavirus*

COVID-19, some American politicians deliberately ignored the new nomenclature and insisted on calling it the “Chinese virus”.

However, with all these, as per Wood (2020) reported Sergiy Komisarenko, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine told CGTN Europe: *“So my own opinion, at this very moment, is that this is not an artificially constructed virus. By the way, when some of the fake news, or some experts even, are saying that, ‘look, China has a very sophisticated, very updated virology institute, which has a collection of coronaviruses.’ Yes, it does ... Why? Because the first really dangerous outbreak of a coronavirus was in China in 2002. And there was an international idea to make the research institute in China, which will be looking for coronaviruses and for the possible further outbreaks of coronavirus infection. this institute, and it was collaborating and cooperating with scientists from different countries, just recently with France. They were cooperating with United States scientists, with Australian scientists and with others. Can you imagine it making biological weapons in cooperation with scientists from different countries? No, not at all,”* This provides a plausible explanation on bioweapon accusations against China.

‘Covid-19’ Impact on China and U.S.

As the first country to be experienced the COVID-19 pandemic, China is several weeks ahead of other countries on the “curve” of the virus progression and also in the measures taken to overcome the crisis. With this, the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak has shifted to the U.S. while China projects the image of a country that has successfully combated the virus and is ready to help the world. For example, China has sent doctors and medical supplies to countries around the world even as the European Union and the U.S. are trying to consolidate their own domestic responses to the global outbreak. This paved way to decide that the Trump administration has been facing a lot of criticism for its inefficient handling of the pandemic. It is the majority scholarly opinion that it would be illogical to claim that the Chinese leadership intentionally released the COVID-19 virus into the global community due to the fact that the damage caused to economies on which Chinese companies rely on for their profits and for many their existence is immense, and will have an effect on growth prospects in China for years. In addition, within a few feeks of

identifying COVID-19, medical masks rapidly became the most essential commodity in the world which paved way to “mask diplomacy”. As per Bradsher K. and Alderman L. (2020), *“China made half the world’s masks before the coronavirus emerged there, and it has expanded production nearly 12-fold since then. But it has claimed mask factory output for itself. Purchases and donations also brought China a big chunk of the world’s supply from elsewhere”.* Therefore, another may also argue though the world is badly affected due to COVID-19 due to travel restrictions and global economic failures, yet China is keep rising due to masks and other medical products.

Concluding Remarks

In initial responses to COVID-19, both Chinese President Xi Jinping and U.S. President Donald Trump started off with denial and misinformation. Simply, after imposing lockdowns, the world’s two largest economies engaged in propaganda battles. China has blamed the U.S. military for the presence of the virus in Wuhan, and Trump has spoken about the “Chinese virus.” According to WHO director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus stated, *“We’re not just fighting an epidemic; we’re fighting an infodemic and fake news spreads faster and more easily than this virus and is just as dangerous. We do not know where or when the next global pandemic will occur, but we do know that it will take a terrible toll, both on human life and on the global economy”.*

With all these, it is evident that COVID-19, whether it is a bioweapon invented by China as a modern strategy in world power game is yet a mystry unsolved. However, aftermath of careful analysing of research findings it can be summarized as, there is no confirmed evidence on the origin of COVID-19, except the fact that it was initially identified in Wuhan, China. Moreover, research findings seem more supportive to the argument that COVID-19 could not have been laboratory constructed. However, the argument that it may be a laboratory constructed virus by China and it maybe accidently disclosed to the world during experiments cannot be disregarded too. Considering the results of COVID-19, it is possible to mention that COVID-19 cannot be called as a ‘Biological Weapon’ invented by China to use against U.S., because COVID-19, as a whole, it has

negatively affected to China than to U.S. Thus, it is even impossible to give concluding remarks with that regard, because one may also argue, China invented COVID-19 as a bioweapon and though its negative impact seemed bounced back to China, truly, U.S. has been already justified as a *Failed State* in the world community in combating COVID-19, whereas China has anyway won the current world power game using a soft power. If the latter is the reality, it further acknowledges the myth that future world power rivalry will not be based on conventional wars (hard power) but will decide by means of soft power.

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