

Novel Coronavirus (nCoV-2019): Is it a Bioweapon?

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Abstract

The Coronavirus outbreak of January 7, 2020 at Wuhan, Hubei infected more than 45,000 people in 27 countries, killed about 1000. It has become widely controversial. There are arguments both in favor and against it being a bioweapon attack. The superpowers are blaming each other for its spread. Americans are pointing out at Chinese facilities involved in similar research, whereas, Chinese are suspecting American military laboratories around the world. The Israelis are blaming Chinese and Russians are blaming Americans but the discovery of evidence of the Biohazard containers buried at American Consulate Wuhan, has changed the scenario altogether and has to be proved otherwise.

Keywords: Coronavirus (nCoV-2019); Bioweapon; WMD; Wuhan

Commentary

The Coronavirus outbreak originated on January 7, 2020, in the Chinese City of Wuhan, in the province of Hubei. The common symptoms of the virus are cold with fever, cough and difficulty in breathing. This new emerging virus novel Coronavirus (nCoV-2019) is a new strain but similar to earlier viruses such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

If you look at Wuhan, it is a port city, which is a hub of transportation and education and also a tourist attraction. The shutdown of this city has badly affected the Chinese economy as the Chinese employs from other countries were there to celebrate the lunar New Year. They cannot leave and are absent from their jobs as no country is ready to accept them back, the schools in Hubei province are closed upto March 1, 2020. The supply chain is also badly affected, resulting in the reduction of productivity. The tourism has also badly suffered.

The sources of pathogen remain unclear; it is expected to spread from a seafood and animal market. However, an earlier source than the market cannot be ruled out and has to be found. Conspiracy theory of the biological terrorism was creeping up in my mind as in the world over, since, the discovery and spread of virus has occurred but there was no evidence to support. It is also severely condemned by the international community in the light of Biological Weapon Convention (BWC). The BWC came into force in 1975 and was signed by China in 1985, which bans development, production and stockpiling of entire of Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD). It was also emphasized in the 8th review conference held on 2019. However, the threat of BWC always remain there as they can really effect a large population very easily at a very low cast, similar to the spread of nCoV-2019 in Wuhan. It has severely affected public health and morale and public stability. People are also not well equipped with effective measures to combat the virus as in the case of Coronavirus. It can be considered as one of the emerging infectious diseases.

The Coronavirus has infected about 45,000 people in 27 countries till February 11, 2020 and has killed about 1000 people, whereas; more than 50 million remain under locked down conditions. World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Coronavirus as a public health emergency at the international level and to be dealt under the coordinated efforts internationally under the guidance of UN Health Authority. On February 9, 2020 WHO has dispatched its advance team led by Dr. Bruce Aylward expert in public health emergencies [1]. Some Chinese sources initially claimed that virus is the result of some US germs warfare conspiracy and believed that it is created by the US. The Chinese also blamed that it was Americans who created a fear and height about the widespread of Coronavirus, whereas, it is well under the control of the Chinese authorities and China already allocated \$10.26 billion to the fight this terrible situation and provided subsidies to medical supplies companies [2].

On the other hand, Americans are blaming China by saying that even after signing the BWC in 1984, there are reports that China is maintaining an offensive Biological Weapon Program. It was easy to pin suspicion on the Wuhan Institute of Virology, a few miles away from the ground zero and to a second facility known as Wuhan Institute of Biological Products. It is the one of the eight research facilities under the BWC surveillance.

The Israeli authorities are suspecting that nCoV-2019 may be originated from a laboratory in Wuhan. They give an example of a radio report on Wuhan Institute of Virology working with the deadly viruses. An Israeli scientist Danny Shoham, a microbiologist and a senior analyst of Israeli Military Intelligence for Biological and Chemical warfare, also said that the Institute is linked to Beijing's Covert Biological Weapon Program [3]. An American scientist Vipin Narang, a MIT security specialist is of a view that there is no evidence that Coronavirus is a bioweapon and any claim that it is willfully spread, is misinformation and is incredibly irresponsible. He also has doubts that it is an escaped bioweapon as it does not fulfill the requirement of a bioweapon to be highly lethal and not highly communicable [3].

The Russian scientists believe that the Americans have created the Coronavirus episode in Wuhan to disturb China and to make money [4] and also to destroy Chinese economy. Chinese economy has

already started showing affects and it is declared that there will be an inflation of more than 8.5% this year as compared to 3% declared earlier.

The Russian media suggests that the novel disease name as 2019-nCoV, could be an American made Bioweapon which is designed to sabotage Chinese economic activities [4]. The media also refer it to the recent tensions between America and China, a struggle between superpowers, ranging from trade supremacy, dispute on South China Sea and 5G internet. The Russians believe that this has pushed Americans to take a drastic action against China to achieve its goals [4].

The Russian news agency RIA Novosti in an article by Nikulin, a former member of UN Commission on Biological and Chemical Weapons claims that he was contacted by Chinese colleagues who believe that the Coronavirus is manmade. He reported that the spread is sabotage and also speculated that this dangerous cargo from an American laboratory might have been carried out by US diplomatic staff to Wuhan [5]. It is also supported by a foreign policy expert Lenoid Savin working at Shadowy Strategic Culture Foundation. He speculated that the creation of Coronavirus bioweapon has been financed by Bill and Malinda Gates Foundation. Nikulin goes further that Coronavirus is made by American corporations working on emerging diseases and to make money while finding a cure. He also states that America is the only country that has more than 400 military biological laboratories around the world including China to support these kinds of projects [5].

This conspiracy theory was supported on a patent filled by Pirtbright Institute, England. These allegations were denied by Matthew Frieman a Coronavirus researcher at the University of Maryland. He said that sequencing was done at the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) during the SARS outbreak and they were the ones who filled the patent.

Vladimir Zhirinovskiy leader of Liberal Democratic Party told Moscow radio that Americans are surely behind this outbreak. He said that research on this virus has given a chance to Americans military to weaponize the virus.

On the other hand, the Chinese believed from the beginning that it is created by the Americans as the virus is genetically shaped in the US

laboratories. Now the spokeswoman Hua Chunying of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China has released a statement on January 30, 2020, that they found eight containers with Biohazard labels [6] (Xinhua News also published their photos) wrapped in two layers of tarpaulin buried at a depth of one and half meters in the backyard of American Consulate in Wuhan. This was founded by Chinese intelligence after Americans evacuated the consulate. MoFA China has officially demanded from the US to explain why Biohazard Containers are found buried in the US Consulate at Wuhan. Since, China has not received any answers from the Americans after so many days; therefore, they called for an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council [6].

We can say that however; non-state actors are not only the potential users of the biological weapons, new technologies and changing political contexts also, make bioweapons attractive to state sponsored attacks.

In the end I would like to suggest some essential steps necessary for the national as well international security. The countries have to be more vigilant to any biological warfare in view of the new emerging technologies which are revolutionizing access to deadly germs and toxins. Secondly, we should develop and improve the ability to prevent and cope up with emerging virus warfare. Thirdly, an International and National Biological Defense Security System should be established by creating public awareness.

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