

Is China the boogeyman ?

害怕中国？

COVID Cover Up: Criticism or Secrets

In a country like China, silencing voices and punishing critics is common, not necessarily because people are whistleblowers revealing misdeeds. This doesn't excuse China's behavior, but implies maybe there's less behind the cover up. If evidence of more serious allegations arises, that would make it more serious.

Early on in the outbreak, China interrogated, intimidated, and silenced a group of doctors who discussed the COVID-19 virus online. China is also heavily censoring discussion or commentary relative to virus. Recently, a long-time critic of the Communist Party and Chinese President Xi was given a long prison sentence for little more than expressing his opinion, most recently relative to China's handling of COVID-19.



No defense for silencing critics. Only perspective.

There is no defense for this behavior, except perspective. Real democracy is rare, enjoyed by only 15% of the people in the world. All poor countries have weakness in the rule of law. Stifling dissent, intimidating opponents, imprisoning rivals, and other such anti-democratic behavior is common among less developed countries. China is far from alone.

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Plus, believe it or not, forty years ago, in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, China was much worse. The reform that began in 1980 has made the Chinese people freer than they have ever been, more empowered, in more control of their lives, making decisions about home, education, career, employer, spending, saving, investment, retirement, and most other aspects their economic lives, that they could never make before. In China, economic freedom is developing before political freedom, as it has in all successful developing countries.

Silencing voices raises suspicions

From the outside, particularly the perspective of a democracy like the US, when people are being silenced, the logical conclusion is that there is a cover up underway. While that is quite possible in China, we have to distinguish between stifling criticism and covering up secrets. In the US, where criticism is common and allowed, silencing would normally be associated with an attempt to stop a whistleblower from revealing wrongdoing. In China, not just wrongdoing, but criticism in general is not allowed. So just because someone is silenced does not necessarily mean they were going to reveal nefarious actions. They might simply be pointing out mistakes, errors in judgment, or any other type of government decision or action that would normally be criticized in a place like the US.

The target might be criticism and not secret misdeeds

For example, the dissident who was recently jailed was formerly the head of a large, state-owned real estate company. He had no inside knowledge relative to China's COVID efforts. He simply criticized the government's handling of the outbreak. In the US, that criticism is allowed. In China, you end up with a long prison sentence. It isn't fair. It isn't right. But it doesn't mean the government is covering up deliberate wrongdoing relative to COVID-19.

China seems to have misled on transmissibility

There have been allegations of misdeeds and wrongdoing as well. The most credible is that China had strong indications the virus was transmittable human to human weeks before publicly admitting it. At best this was gross negligence at worst it was a deliberate lie.

The delay in reporting transmissibility was not necessarily high impact

China deserves criticism for this, but the impact of this delay should be put in perspective. This was very early in the outbreak. Just knowing that something is contagious does not indicate how contagious or fatal it might be, which is why, when the admission was made, the world did not go into global lockdown immediately. The information came out months before the outbreak gained momentum in the US. Frankly, the outbreak spreading to Europe first was a more immediate sign of a threat to the US than this piece of information, yet it still took a while for the US reaction to gain momentum. While this lack of transparency rightly damages China's credibility and trustworthiness, it doesn't necessarily mean China deliberately took actions which significantly impacted the spread of the disease.

Some allegations seem farfetched

There have been other allegations as well. It has been suggested China developed the virus as a bioweapon. There is no evidence to indicate this is true or that China even has that capability. It has also been alleged that China accidentally released the virus from a lab that studies diseases. There is no hard evidence to suggest this happened. If it is true it would point to incompetence by China, not malfeasance.

Understating deaths would be a big lie

Lastly, it has been alleged that China dramatically understated the number of deaths in China from COVID-19. This would be much bigger lie, and since it would have likely started early in the outbreak in China, it could have had a much larger impact on the global reaction. In other words, lying about deaths is a much bigger deal than lying about transmission.

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So far there is not enough hard evidence relative to this allegation.

President Trump did not mention it in his speech. If more comes to light on this, then we might in fact have reason to believe a serious cover up is underway in China.

Maybe not a cover up. Maybe just suppressing dissent as usual.

However, just because China is stifling discussion and intimidating critics doesn't mean they are covering up misdeeds. Unfortunately, such behavior by the government in China is commonplace, as it is in much of the world.

For more on China's role in COVID-19, click [here](#).