

COVID and the Empire

by Bill Herbst

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The SARS CoV-2 outbreak, more commonly referred to as the COVID global pandemic, has brought new and potent revelations concerning the extent to which the people who wanted an American Empire have successfully engineered our society's transformation from one superficially resembling a democracy to a flat-out plutocracy. (For clarity, *SARS CoV-2* is the name of the virus, while *COVID* is the disease among humans that results from infection by the virus. *Democracy* is "a system of government by the whole population or all eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives," while *plutocracy* is "a country or society governed by the wealthy.")

We now have ample evidence to conclude that the "lab leak" hypothesis — denied and derided by a majority of institutional authorities and the mainstream media during the first year of the pandemic — is, if not quite "proven" to be correct, at least very likely.

In other words, we can reasonably conclude that the SARS CoV-2 virus did not originate zoonotically, which means that it didn't arise naturally. Instead, it was created by human beings who were producing potentially lethal viruses (called "gain of function" research), presumably in an effort — however questionable morally and ethically — to anticipate and prepare for the possibility of various disease pandemics that might adversely affect humanity. The SARS CoV-2 virus then "escaped" from the confines of a laboratory in Wuhan, China, into the outer environment, after which it spread like wildfire through the local human population and then around the world.

Various analogies apply effectively to the effects of the COVID pandemic on our understanding of the Empire. Both historic and fictional "fables" apply, among them "*Crossing the Rubicon*," "*The Elephant and the Blind Men*," and "*The Emperor's New Clothes*." All these cautionary tales describe what we've been increasingly able to see over the past two years, namely, that "something is rotten in Denmark" (yet another allusion, but apt).

My working definition of modern fascism comes from Sheldon Wolin, the late American political theorist who coined the term "Inverted Totalitarianism." Fascism is the unholy marriage between state and corporate power — the government in bed with big business, to which I would add government almost

exclusively serving the interests of Big Money. That's what we have in this country, and it is the essence of the American Empire.

The existence of a "Deep State" has been a longstanding conspiracy theory that was routinely denied by institutions and mostly ignored by the American public. For a long time, anyone who embraced the notion of the Deep State was considered an outlier or a radical and branded a kook. But no more. The COVID pandemic has ripped off the mask that hides our plutocracy, unveiling the Deep State for anyone who cares to see. The fascism of the American Empire is now more naked and increasingly obvious.

Throughout our 250-year history as a nation, Americans have struggled with numerous paradoxes. The one that's relevant to this essay is about our relationship to hierarchical authority — the "pecking order" of our top-down social structure. On the one hand, Americans are pro-authority, routinely compliant, and even submissive to authority as a basic fact of daily life. Most of us obey traffic laws and pay our taxes. We vote Democrat or Republican. On the other hand, Americans have an iconoclastic streak that is defiant to authority and obsessed with the idea of personal freedom as inviolate.

That position has always been more popular on the right side of the political and cultural spectrum than the left: "Don't Tread on Me" is an example, as is Ronald Reagan's oft-quoted dictum about the most hated nine-word phrase in the English language (*"I'm from the government, and I'm here to help."*). I always felt that Reagan's assertion was ridiculously one-sided and neither accurate nor trustworthy, but many millions of Americans felt otherwise and agreed that government was invariably a bad and invasive force in their lives.

COVID is dismantling and destroying that simplistic right-left contrast. No longer are Libertarians (who, in my opinion, have something of a stick up their asses about "freedom") the only people concerned about fascism and totalitarian rule. The complete bungling of the COVID pandemic by the powers that be, from the very beginning and continuing to this day, has outraged people at every point across the political spectrum. The personal and collective grief of a million (and perhaps more) premature deaths among Americans — deaths that might have been prevented with a modicum of institutional sanity about how to deal with the pandemic — has laid bare at least two uncomfortable qualities of the elites who create and administer policy: 1. They lie routinely, and 2. They don't care about the rest of us. They care about themselves and maintaining their positions of power and privilege.

The campaign of fear waged over the past two years has provoked markedly divergent reactions from different people. A fair percentage of Americans have become more compliant than ever. They parrot the party line and all the mainstream media talking points, accepting the ridiculous strategy of Big Pharma's vaccine-only solution to the pandemic. They believe the lie that the

COVID vaccines are safe. They minimize the power of natural immunity and deny the existence of cheap and relatively effective palliative medicines that could significantly limit hospitalizations and deaths. Many of them support vaccine mandates and passports: No job, no job. They tend to label anyone who doesn't agree as misinformed or selfish. Even those who respectfully disagree are tarred with the epithet of "Anti-Vaxxers," which carries the dismissive implication of a kind of lunacy that's somehow beneath contempt.

A smaller segment of the public dissents by engaging in active or passive civil disobedience, refusing inoculation with the recently-developed mRNA vaccines. Some of these people were already strongly inclined toward resistance to and mistrust of authority, while others are new converts.

The largest segment of the population (my guess would be about half the country) doesn't know with any certainty what to think. These Americans want to trust our institutions and would prefer to dutifully comply, both for their own safety and the greater good, but some of them harbor at least private doubts about the path that they've been told to walk. During 2020, the first year of the pandemic, I was among this group. I got the jab — two doses of the Pfizer vaccine. Now I am an outright dissenter and will not get a booster or any further vaccine inoculations.

No, I am not an anti-Vaxxer in general. It is these specific vaccines — the mRNA vaccines using the spike proteins — that concern me. When I read over and over the claim that "*the vaccines have been proven safe and effective*" (offered as indisputable fact), I get angry, because I know that's NOT what the evidence says. Beyond the vexing questions of what's true and what's not, I worry about the forces in business and government that lobby for the vaccines as our sole and exclusive medical strategy. The cynical levels of greed and megalomania at work here have become standard for too many of those who run the Empire, but that is still profoundly disappointing.

One result of what's happened with the pandemic is that we have become a nation and culture even more fractured than we were before the pandemic hit. Another result is that the American Empire is looking more fragile and shopworn than ever. The Empire was in trouble before the pandemic. Now it's much worse.

Despite the almost unimaginable power at its disposal, the Empire is now scrambling to maintain itself, in part by empty reassurances to the public, and in part by doubling down on damn near everything. This seems to be the historical pattern of failing empires. Empires are rarely beneficent and typically lean toward the authoritarian (in deed if not always in word). As empires decline, the skills and savvy they developed during their rise to power are replaced by desperation, bad decisions, and unsound risks. Basically, they lose their minds, becoming more extreme rather than less in their attempts to control and dominate, which accelerates their break-up and ultimate downfall.

All of this makes for very strange bedfellows. There was a time not too long ago in America when identifying one's "tribe" was fairly straightforward, almost sensible (even if not always accurate). For instance, if you were Pro-choice (or Pro-life) on the abortion issue, you could be fairly certain that others on your "team" were like-minded on a whole slew of other cultural issues and concerns. That consistency is no longer the case. Some people who were formerly allies may now feel more like enemies, and vice versa. It's quite disorienting.

Historically, the Empire has employed an effective strategy of encouraging ordinary Americans to fight amongst ourselves as a way of keeping us distracted from the disturbing truth that our democracy has been long dead. That strategy has been very successful in keeping "the people" from challenging the powers-that-be. Any rising up of the population as a whole still appears very unlikely at this point, but the realignments underway among the public because of the pandemic should give the elites reason to worry. The bloom is off the rose, so to speak, and it's not coming back. Not for this Empire, anyway.

As is the case with so much of what I write, I don't pretend to know how all this will play out, and my concerns about mass suffering remain serious. Anyone who reads my commentaries knows that I am pessimistic about our collective future. What I see coming, though, is that the success of "business-as-usual" is no longer guaranteed. If another major disaster erupts (such as a system-wide financial meltdown, which is symbolically indicated by America's Pluto Return, an astrological event already underway that achieves critical mass this year and continues through 2023 and into 2024), then all bets may be off.

Over the past two decades, I've been sorely impressed by the ability of the elites who wield power in this country to continue their Three-Card Monte con-game. From one crisis to the next, they've not just maintained but even extended their domination. I put nothing past them and have no doubt that they still regard themselves as "Masters of the Universe."

Nevertheless, it's beginning to appear to me that their perch atop the world is not nearly as secure as it once was. If that's true, it may bode well or ill for the rest of us. One way or another, though, I think we're going to find out.