

OPINION

Joe Biden's Covid 'Science'



MAIN STREET
By William McGurn

You wouldn't know it from Joe Biden's statement, but his order to the U.S. intelligence community to "redouble" efforts to find out whether Covid-19 originated in a Chinese lab is quite the comedown.

Nowhere mentioned is that the State Department already had such an investigation going when Mr. Biden entered office, but his team killed it. They killed it for the same reason they've made so many other bad decisions: If Donald Trump was for it, they are against it, and if Mr. Trump was against it, they are for it.

How far this is from the piety Mr. Biden offered up when he announced his science team in January. "I have always said that the Biden-Harris administration, we're . . . going to lead with science and truth."

Mr. Biden has made many such statements ("we are letting science speak again"), but they have little to do with science. They are meant as continued digs at Mr. Trump. All are offered with a confidence, apparently fully justified, that a largely pliant press will run with them, no hard questions asked, unless you count asking the president about the flavor of his ice cream.

Another way to put it is that the Biden administration

cannot take a scientific approach to Covid-19 because it is too invested in politically convenient Covid-19 narratives. So we have sad spectacles such as White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki repeatedly refusing to give her boss's predecessor even an ounce of credit for Operation Warp Speed, which spurred the development of Covid-19 vaccines in record time.

President Biden followed the same script in his March 11 address to the nation, ding-ding Mr. Trump for causing more Covid-19 deaths without once mentioning the vaccines. Likewise the \$1.9 trillion in relief was justified as necessary to jump-start a post-Covid economy when the evidence points to an economy already beginning to recover nicely on its own.

Now we have the embarrassing about-face on China. For more than a year the dominant narrative, again in the name of "science," has dismissed as a conspiracy theory any claim Covid-19 might have originated in the Wuhan Institute of Virology. The Journal reported last week that three of the Chinese lab's workers were hospitalized in November 2019—before China's first officially reported case—with symptoms that might be Covid-19. This is now leading some to concede there might be something to the lab story after all.

But as an editorial on these pages noted, "the suspicious facts have been apparent from the start." Begin with this:

Only a few miles from the Huanan seafood market, said to be Ground Zero for the Covid-19 pandemic, China operates a virology lab that conducts research on bats and coronaviruses and has ties to the military. On a phone call, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo says "all intelligence I have seen points to the lab."

His desire to do the opposite of Trump on everything is one cause of his mistakes.

Surely the most reasonable approach would be to investigate the lab until it can be safely ruled out. But China has refused to cooperate, denying investigators proper access and information. By now Beijing likely has destroyed any incriminating evidence it can. At the same time, when Australia called for a full and honest reckoning at the World Health Organization, China responded with economic warfare, targeting Australian imports. Its Foreign Ministry has now responded to the renewed U.S. investigation by reviving a pet conspiracy theory of its own: that Covid-19 originated at a lab at Maryland's Fort Detrick.

Why has Team Biden been so slow to call China on its bad behavior? Again the answer has nothing to do with science.

For one thing, the administration is heavily invested in another narrative—namely, that the wave of nasty beatings of Asian-Americans in recent months is all because Mr. Trump called Covid-19 the "Wuhan Flu" or "Kung Flu." Ms. Psaki put the Biden imprimatur on this view when she said from the White House podium that Mr. Trump's rhetoric is behind the "elevated threats" to Asian-Americans.

Worse, taking the Wuhan lab theory seriously would mean admitting the possibility that Mr. Trump might have been right, at least on this one thing, after all. With even the Delphic adviser Dr. Anthony Fauci now saying he cannot be 100% certain the virus came about naturally, the old line becomes harder to square with the accumulating evidence. Meanwhile, the intelligence investigation Mr. Biden has relaunched will only set up further clashes and contradictions with China, given that Beijing will continue to refuse cooperation, as well as with the discredited WHO, which the Biden administration has rejoined because . . . well . . . Mr. Trump took us out of it.

In 2020, the politics of Covid-19 helped propel Candidate Biden from the safe space of his Wilmington, Del., basement into the Oval Office. But for President Biden in 2021, the cure may yet turn out worse than the disease.

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BOOKSHELF | By Adrian Woolfson

Our Fallible Bodies

Evolution Gone Wrong

By Alex Bezerides
(Hanover Square, 364 pages, \$28.99)

In Voltaire's "Candide," the protagonist's servant asks his master to explain the meaning of optimism. To which his master replies: "It is the mania for insisting that all is well when all is by no means well." There is perhaps no more perfect description of the human condition, as all is manifestly not well. How could it be? From the moment of our inception, a silent biological clock begins the countdown to the end of our existence. Our genome contrives to mutate itself into a smorgasbord of potential pathologies, each capable of corrupting and unraveling us. We respond with attempts to medicate and therapize ourselves, to correct the built-in flaws and shining imperfections that make us so irresistibly human.

In Alex Bezerides's entertaining "Evolution Gone Wrong: The Curious Reasons Why Our Bodies Work (or Don't)," the author's quest is to determine the origins of the "aches and pains of the masses and why they happen"—not the mechanical causes of our maladies but the evolutionary ones. The explanation, Mr. Bezerides concludes, may be found in

our anatomical shortcomings—"trade-offs" made during our continuing evolutionary history. The result is that even healthy bodies operate at the edge of acceptable performance, while also being prone to fail in predictable ways.

The catalog of human fallibilities that Mr. Bezerides assembles begins with an account of our suboptimal dentition. For many individuals, the textbook display of 32 neatly arrayed teeth, systematically configured to produce a perfect

Hollywood smile, is at best hopeful and more frequently fictional. Reality more typically involves a procession of braces, extractions and eccentric protrusions. So why don't our teeth fit into our mouths?

The answer, according to Mr. Bezerides, is that four million years ago our ancestors transitioned from a fruit-and-leaves-based diet to one of grasses and sedges. Their molars ballooned out to gargantuan proportions, which was not at first problematic, since their substantive jaws readily accommodated the newly enlarged teeth. But as humans controlled fire, learned to cook, became cooperative, and developed hunting techniques and an accompanying armamentarium of cutting implements, the requirement for robust dentition diminished. We were nevertheless stuck with the legacy of "a mouth full of large teeth." Jaw and tooth size subsequently began to decrease, yet the distinct genetic programs controlling each led to a disconnect between their relative rates of reduction. While the human jaw enthusiastically embraced its "great shrink," tooth-size reduction struggled to keep up. Hence the modern tooth-jaw mismatch.

Our imperfectly functioning eyes suffer similarly from constraints imposed by our distant evolutionary history. More than half of European adults have visual defects, while a quarter of U.S. children require visual correction. The problem, according to Mr. Bezerides, is that the eyes of our vertebrate ancestors evolved to function underwater. When vertebrates first moved onto land 375 million years ago, their eyes had already existed for more than 100 million years. The reconfiguration of such established biological hardware was not trivial, leaving us with short-sightedness and a range of oddities, including the need to blink up to 14,000 times a day while deploying a Coke can full of lubricating tears.

A series of evolutionary 'trade offs' means that even healthy bodies operate at the edge of acceptable performance, predictably prone to fail.

Our evolutionary history may also have impacted our ability to perceive color. The nocturnal nature of the species predating the evolution of mammals may have led to a reduction in the number of photoreceptor types enabling human color perception. While many fish, reptiles and birds perceive color using four types of photoreceptors, we make do with three. As a result, the humble gecko perceives the world in up to a magnificent 100 million shades of technicolor, while we are limited to no more than one million.

Other aspects of visual performance also appear to have been affected by our evolutionary history. Unlike the eyes of the honeybee, the human eye filters out ultraviolet light—most likely to prevent DNA damage—making the bees' nectar-guides invisible to us. Intriguingly, Mr. Bezerides speculates that the late works of Claude Monet may have been influenced by the artist's likely newfound ability to perceive ultraviolet light following cataract surgery at the age of 82.

The author also addresses the inconveniences of our anatomy. One requires no better evidence of our design's lack of metaphysical oversight than the absurd configuration of our esophagus and trachea—so near each other as to invite trouble. A benign creator would surely have designed a respiratory system in a way that did not leave us in perpetual fear of choking. But once again this apparently bizarre arrangement results both from our evolutionary origins—the lungs began as an offshoot of the digestive system—and from the requirement for a descended larynx. This "clunky anatomical fault" may give us a fright every time a "hot dog takes a wrong turn at the intersection," as Mr. Bezerides writes, but it also facilitated the origin of human speech.

Other maladies may be traced back to the origin of bipedalism. We weren't designed to be erect, and becoming so has caused no end of problems for us, from back pain and torn menisci to sprained ankles. An ostrich has eight bones in its foot, whereas we have 26. A rational designer would never have included such gratuitous largesse. We are constrained and confined by our "evolutionary baggage."

Although Mr. Bezerides, a professor of biology at Lewis-Clark State College in Idaho, overlooks alternative non-adaptive explanations for the various fallibilities of the human body, he has provided us with a timely reminder that we, as a species, may be outgrowing our evolutionary history and the biology we are constructed from. The emerging technology of genome writing may offer an opportunity to take human design back to first principles. But, as Voltaire wrote, the ills of the world are but shadows in beautiful paintings. "The shadows bring out the colors," he said, echoing Leibniz. It is to some extent our imperfections that make us human.

Mr. Woolfson is the author of "Life Without Genes."

A Golden Age for Genocide



GLOBAL VIEW
By Walter Russell Mead

It's been a big week for genocide apologies. On Friday, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas asked Namibia and the descendants of its Herero and Nama peoples to forgive Germany for actions that "from today's perspective" were a "genocide." After bloodily crushing a revolt against colonial rule, in the 1900s German authorities confined Herero and Nama in concentration camps, where a majority of inmates are believed to have died of starvation and illness. In many cases, the tribal land Germany confiscated—the taking of which triggered the rebellion—is still held by settlers' descendants today. Berlin's apology came with a pledge of €1.1 billion (around \$1.3 billion) for development and reconstruction projects over the next 30 years as recompense.

Meanwhile in Rwanda Thursday, French President Emmanuel Macron acknowledged France's "terrible responsibility" in the 1994 genocide, but without offering a formal apology or financial compensation. French forces played no direct role in the attacks that killed hundreds of thousands of Rwandans, but as Mr. Macron acknowledged, they supported the "genocidal regime" that carried out the murders. A

French inquiry acknowledged in March what had been well-known to observers for decades: "French officials armed, advised, trained, equipped, and protected" the Rwandan government that prepared and carried out one of the most horrific actions by any non-Communist government since World War II.

The apologizers, as usual, seem less enthusiastic at their tasks than the genocidaires were in theirs. A representative of the Herero people denounced the German apology and compensation offer as "a total insult to our intelligence" and vowed to "fight to hell and back" against closing the books on the German colonial atrocities. The leading Rwandan genocide survivor group expressed disappointment that Macron didn't offer "a clear apology."

The problem for apologetic states in part is a legal one. Germans don't want to set a precedent in Namibia that would strengthen the case of, for example, Greeks who demand close to €300 billion as compensation for Nazi crimes in World War II. Similar concerns have dogged Japan's efforts to resolve the issue of crimes against Koreans during the era of colonial rule, which ended in 1945. Apologies carefully vetted by lawyers rarely sound truly heartfelt.

But if genocide apologizers are having an active year, genocidaires are even busier. Walking through my neighborhood in Washington earlier this spring I saw a crowd

of people shouting "Stop the Genocide!" and it took me a few minutes to figure which contemporary atrocity they had in mind.

Was the protest about Chinese actions in Xinjiang? About the continuing plight of the Rohingya, whose circumstances have worsened following the coup in Myanmar? Were the protesters worried that vengeful Azerbaijanis, at the time advancing victoriously across land Armenians seized in 1994, would massacre any Armenians left behind in the retreat?

It isn't awareness the West lacks but a clear strategy to reverse the rising, bloody tide.

It turned out to be none of the above. The protesters were ethnic Tigrayans getting early reports from friends and relatives in Ethiopia about mass murder and ethnic cleansing against civilians as Ethiopian and Eritrean forces moved into the restive province.

This is not what the post-Cold War world was supposed to look like. In the 1990s many believed the fall of the Soviet empire, a global surge of democracy and the West's military and economic preponderance had led humanity into a "posthistorical" liberal world order. During the 1991 Gulf War, when George H.W. Bush and his team organized

a global coalition with United Nations backing that reversed Saddam Hussein's conquest of Kuwait, humanity briefly glimpsed the shape of a better world.

A generation later, that world is distant. New genocides and bloody campaigns that bear genocidal hallmarks are taking lives faster than halfhearted apologies can be made for the old ones. The "international community" hasn't been this morally weak or politically divided since the depths of the Cold War.

The Biden administration, commendably, wants to heave the arc of world history in a more hopeful direction, but it will be difficult. Americans in both parties are disturbed and disheartened by the meager accomplishments of Washington's past 30 years of world-order-building policy. And there isn't much demand for "responsibility to protect" interventions like President Obama's ill-fated Libya campaign.

Human-rights campaigners often think the problem is a lack of "awareness." This is surely wrong. When powerful governments worry over past sins and the bloody evidence of modern atrocities is plastered all over the web, we live in a golden age of genocide awareness. But sadly it is also a golden age for genocide.

What's really missing is strategy: a serious plan to restore the moral and political foundations of our fraying world order. The world needs less moral grandstanding and more hard thought.

NYPD Can't Fight Crime on Its Own

By Ray McGuire

Nearly 30 people were shot in New York City on a single weekend in May. Citywide, shootings are up approximately 80% since the beginning of the year, and murders have increased more than 20%.

It is naive to think we can make the city safer by removing resources from the New York Police City Department. But it's also true we can't continue the current approach to fighting crime. Increasing police presence in high-crime areas is a critical component of responding to the violence affecting our city, but it is not a complete solution. We must confront this crime wave with specialized policing while also addressing the underlying social inequalities.

Some of my opponents in the race for mayor suggest a return to blunt-force tactics, such as stop-and-frisk, that

perpetuated racial discrimination and stereotypes. In 2011, the peak of stop-and-frisk, police made 685,724 stops. Of those stopped, 87% were black or Latino, and 88% were innocent, according to an analysis of NYPD data from the New York Civil Liberties Union. The police are supposed to protect communities, not profile them.

Officers need support from social workers, counselors, teachers and the community.

Instead, the NYPD's acute intelligence and investigative capabilities, which have resulted in record gun arrests—a 64% increase in February compared with the same time last year—should continue in communities facing runaway gun violence. We must also disrupt the influx of illegal guns and em-

bed specially trained officers in the highest-crime areas to take on criminal networks.

Officers need better de-escalation training. Yet even the best-trained police officer shouldn't be expected to handle situations that are really mental-health or substance-abuse crises. When someone calls 911 for those cases, the responding personnel should be equipped to deal with the situation effectively and non-violently.

The NYPD's emergency response teams, therefore, have to include social-service workers like therapists and addiction counselors, depending on the issue. This expansion should be paired with increased funding for violence-prevention programs to divert young people from criminal activity. Additionally, we should expand the use of New York state's Kendra's Law, which allows courts to mandate outpatient mental-health treatment for afflicted people.

Also, when defendants have a prior conviction for a violent crime or possession of an illegal firearm, or are actively facing felony charges, and are arrested with a loaded gun, they should be jailed until trial without exception.

Ultimately, we need to invest in our communities to prevent youth from becoming involved in criminal activity in the first place. That means high-quality schools and community centers in every neighborhood, as well as after-school programs and a paid summer internship for every high-schooler who wants one.

I'm confident we can curb the rise in violence and pull our city together. The next mayor must give priority to public safety and make our system the most effective and fair it's ever been.

Mr. McGuire is a Democratic candidate for New York mayor.