

# **Biological Weapons the Focus of China's Military Research in the Last 20 Years**

Monika Chansoria March 25, 2020 5:47 am



Independent Chinese media outlet <u>Caixin Global</u> revealed that Chinese laboratories had in fact identified a mystery virus — later identified as COVID-19 — to be a highly infectious new pathogen by late December 2019. But they were ordered to stop further testing, destroy samples, and suppress the news to the fullest extent possible.

The regional health official in Wuhan City, the epicenter of the pandemic, demanded the destruction of the lab samples, which established the cause of an unexplained viral pneumonia

since January 1, 2020. China didn't acknowledge that there was human-to-human transmission until more than three weeks later.

*Caixin Global* provides the clearest evidence yet of the scale of this fatal cover-up in the very crucial early weeks, when the opportunity was lost to control the outbreak — a contagion that spread throughout the world thereafter, and has caused a global shutdown, literally.

## Warfare Beyond Rules

It is only apposite to go back and trace the many notable military research writings that have advocated for more than two decades that China should prepare itself to wage warfare beyond rules put in place by the Western powers.

In 1996, two Chinese military officers (colonels in the People's Liberation Air Force (PLAAF), Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, took part in military exercises conducted by China for the purpose of coercing the island nation of Taiwan. This was the period when Taipei was getting ready for its presidential elections. Soon enough, East Asia witnessed the return of great power rivalry to the region when the United States dispatched two aircraft carrier groups to the area.

This became the backdrop in which these two colonels met in a small town in southeastern China's Fujian province and began their research. The end product was a co-authored book, *Chao Xian Zhan: Dui Quanqiu Hua Shidai Zhanzheng yu Zhanfa de Xiangding* (*Warfare Beyond Rules: Judgment of War and Methods of War in the Era of Globalization*), published by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Art Press.

The central premise of *Warfare Beyond Rules* is that China should be prepared to conduct "warfare beyond all boundaries and limitations to defend itself."

In the book, Qiao and Wang argue that the existing rules of war, international laws, and agreements were developed by the Western powers, and that the United States leads the race in new-age military technologies and weapon platforms. Writing more than two decades ago, Qiao and Wang stated that, because of higher costs, cutting-edge weapons' platforms could trigger a national economic collapse.

# A Revolution in Warfare By All Means

The book — termed *Unrestricted Warfare* in the English translated version — went on to state that geographical security is an outdated concept. Threats to national security may not come from cross-border invasion, but from non-military actions. Qiao and Wang articulated that definitions of security must include geographical, political, economic, resource, religious, cultural, data, environmental, and near-earth space security.

While commenting on the bans on chemical, biological weapons, and landmines, the authors argued that for a country to accept rules which regulate war depends on whether the laws and

rules are favorable to its own national interests. They contended that powerful nations use the rules to control others, for instance "by banning chemical and biological weapons."

The essence drawn out from these arguments is that China should freely decide and opt for the means of warfighting by disregarding agreements and codes of conduct developed over the past decades by the West. Basically, in theory, the book *Warfare Beyond Rules* highlights thinking out of the box.

Most significantly, with an aim to target the adversary's vulnerable targets in unexpected ways, *Warfare Beyond Rules* underlined the concepts of "asymmetric warfare." This included guerrilla war, terrorist actions, and cyber-attacks against data networks.

Qiao and Wang called for a "revolution in war," which combines conventional with non-war actions, and military with non-military actions. In an alarming opinion, they stated that war may include a blend of stealth planes and cruise missiles, along with biochemical, financial, and terrorist attacks.

#### War for Biological Dominance

More than a decade later, a 2010 publication titled <u>War for Biological Dominance</u> (制生权战争) emphasized the impact of biology on future warfare.

The book, published by Xinhua Publishing House in October 2010, was authored by Guo Jiwei ( 郭继卫), a professor and chief physician at the Third Military Medical University, Army University. The book highlighted the decline of traditional military thinking and focused upon emerging trends in military thinking, the invisible battlefield, and unexpected changes.

Subsequently, in 2015, then-president of the Academy of Military Medical Sciences He Fuchu ( 贺福初) argued in an essay that biotechnology would assume the shape of a new strategic commanding height in national defense. These will range from biomaterials to "brain control" weapons.

He Fuchu went on to become the vice president of the PLA's Academy of Military Sciences (中 国人民解放军军事科学研究院 Zhōngguó Rénmín Jiěfàngjūn Jūnshì Kēxué Yánjiūyuàn) — the highest-level research institute of the PLA, headquartered in Beijing.

Chinese writings over the past two decades have amplified that cross integration of biotechnology, engineering, and information technology will become the new strategic doctrine for future military revolutions, as cited in the October 2015 edition of the *Liberation Army Daily*. These writings consistently put forth that weaponization of living organisms shall become a reality in the future, with non-traditional combat styles taking center stage.

## **Biology Among the 7 New Domains of Warfare**

Foremost among the new-age defense high frontiers will be the biological frontier. Biodiversity and technology innovation will redefine biological military revolution. Since 2016, China's Central Military Commission has been funding projects on military brain science, advanced biomimetic systems (that mimic biological systems), biological and biomimetic materials, and new-age biotechnology.

Further and more significantly, biology has been demarcated as "one of the seven new domains of warfare" in a 2017 book titled *New Highland of War* (National Defense University Press) authored by Zhang Shibo (张仕波). Zhang is a retired general and former president of China's National Defense University. In the book, Zhang argues that modern biotechnological development is gradually showing strong signs characteristic of an offensive capability, including the possibility of employing "specific ethnic genetic attacks" (特定种族基因攻击).

More recently, the 2017 edition of *Science of Military Strategy* (战略学)— an authoritative textbook published by the PLA's National Defense University— has introduced a new section on "biology as a domain of military struggle." This section discusses new potential kinds of biological warfare, including "specific ethnic genetic attacks."

Contemporary advances in biotechnology and genetic engineering hold worrying implications for military affairs. The Chinese military's interest in these gets reflected through its strategic writings and research, which consistently have argued that advances in biology are contributing to changing the form or character (形态) of conflict.

# China's 13th Five-Year Plan

China's national strategy of military-civil fusion (军民融合) has highlighted biology as a priority. As a result, as per the September 2017 <u>Thirteenth Five-Year Special Plan for Military-</u> <u>Civilian Integration Development</u>, the Party Central Committee, the State Council, and the Central Military Commission have put in motion the full implementation of the development strategy of military-civilian integration in the field of science and technology. This was done in accordance with the 13th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China.

Among the key tasks of this 2017 plan are the implementation of key technology-militarycivilian integration projects.

In accordance with the requirements of the key national research and development (R&D) plan for the design of the entire chain and implementation of integrated organizations, a number of deployments have been made. These include the fields of biology, among others, with dual-use features to accelerate the formation of new productivity and combat effectiveness in scientific and technological achievements. The plan also aims to strengthen the capability of military and civilian science and technology collaborative innovation and coordinate the layout of basic research and cutting-edge technology research. Accordingly, a special fund for basic research military-civilian integration has been set up to focus on supporting basic national defense research projects and promote the transformation of the results of basic civil research into military applications — more specifically, in the fields of biological crossover and disruptive technologies.

Study of the Chinese military's interest in biology as an emerging domain of warfare becomes increasingly relevant in the current COVID-19 context, particularly when viewed against the two-decade-old backdrop of emphasis on biological frontiers of warfare put forth by Chinese military thinkers.

It is well-established that Chinese military strategists have been arguing about potential "genetic weapons" and the possibility of a "bloodless victory." The task becomes all the more challenging, owing to the lack of transparency and uncertainty of ethics in China's research activities.

Thus, the research writings cited above defend China's move, if it were to come to that, of not hesitating to use as many means of warfare as possible. Clearly, those include weapons that are "not permitted by international law and the rules of war," such as chemical and biological weapons.

The dangerous recommendations of most of these writings raise alarm bells about China's future commitment on banning chemical and biological weapons.

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