**What Covid?**

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Bucharest, Romania: Interestingly, the last trip I made in late February 2020 was to Bucharest just before Covid-19 shut everything down. Now, some sixteen months later, the first trip I made post-pandemic was to Bucharest. And here, as in much of America, there are few signs of Covid. For the time being, cases and deaths are relatively few and declining.

Curiously, almost immediately after President Joe Biden’s visit to Europe, the State Department elevated the Covid threat level from two to three, the second-highest, in all but two European countries – Finland and Belgium that are Level Four, meaning don’t go. Level Three is ‘reconsider travel’. On the advice of my physician, I made an inquiry as to the conditions in Bucharest with senior Romanian doctors.

The Romanian physicians were offended. Romania in fact had just eased restrictions that returned the country to certain pre-pandemic normalcy although serious concern was given to the Fall and the spread of the Delta variant. And while in Romania, the Minister of Defense who is a friend of long-standing told me that Britain’s senior general, Sir Nick Carter, Chief of Defense, had just tested positive for Covid. I had missed this news.

What made the news more striking, was the while Sir Nick was asymptomatic, he was in proximity to the Minister of Defense and the four-star heads of the other services. These officers took to self-isolation as precautions. While each can work remotely, the implications given these disruptions were not amusing. And, at about the same time, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced the intent to relax some of the restrictive regulations towards the end of July.

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What happened in the UK led me to wonder about what other unforeseen and disruptive consequences from Covid and other factors could arise. In my latest book to be released in December, the short title The Fifth Horseman and the New MAD in which MAD stood not for the Cold War Mutual Assured Destruction but for Massive Attacks of Disruption, the basic argument was that as societies became more advanced, ironically, vulnerabilities and fragilities grew geometrically. Covid, climate change that produced extraordinary weather conditions, cyber hacks such as those affecting Colonial pipelines, US government networks in SolarWinds, the January 6th Capitol Hill riots, and the grounding of a massive ship blocking the Suez Canal were unmistakable symptoms of the new MAD.

Suppose one aim of a disruptive group was to incapacitate or neuter the leadership of an organization, whether government or a corporation for either political or monetary gain not by actual Covid infections but through cyber, social media, “deep fakes” and disinformation attacking credibility, trust, confidence, and legitimacy of the targets. A similar tactic can apply to using Ransomware that threatens to tarnish individuals, organizations, or the efficacy of vaccines, medications, stocks, and currencies unless blackmail is paid. The potential for damage is the stuff of Hollywood thrillers.

Similarly, what might be the political impact of the Delta variant should a new wave of infections occurs? One possibility is the creation of pandemic peaks and valleys reflecting the nation’s political divisions and polarization. Blue coastal states where vaccination rates are relatively high and tend to be more affluent could be less affected. Red states where vaccination rates are low could become Covid hot spots.

A further critical question is how the under 12 cohorts, not allowed to be vaccinated, would be affected. If the Covid variant were to take hold among this group, presumably both Red and Blue states would be affected. Depending upon the severity, would states be forced to shut down schools and reimpose social restrictions? And how would the public react believing the worst of the pandemic was over and the wearing of masks and social distancing became mandatory both indoors and out?

Under any of these circumstances, how would the administration anticipate and respond to these outbreaks as well as expecting intense allegations of mishandling and incompetence by Congressional Republicans? And, as Covid divided the nation politically over masks and vaccinations, would these divisions become even wider and nastier? The answer here is unlikely to be reassuring.

Given these scenarios, what planning or thinking is being done to anticipate different sets of contingencies whether manmade disruptions imposed through these other means or responses to a further Covid wave? The United States and most countries do not have good track records in this regard. That unhappy history must not be repeated.

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