

BETWEEN THE LINES

June 15, 2021

Covid, Trump, Horses, and Trucks...

Introduction

At BIA we are (usually) all business: every day we apply our Tactical Behavior Assessment[®] (TBA[™]) methodology to examine the verbal components of corporate communications, assessing their transparency and completeness to help our clients see what others are missing. But we also watch the news through that same behavioral lens; our *Between the Lines* (BTL) reports cover mainstream topics that are generating a lot of media and public attention. We use our unique methodology to cut through the noise and reveal the truth behind the headlines. In this edition of *Between the Lines*, we take a step back to review a few of our most recent conclusions that demonstrate the effectiveness of BIA's methodology.

BTL Report: [Is the COVID-19 Origin Story Fiction or Nonfiction?](#) Published May 29, 2020

Back in May 2020, we analyzed Chinese officials' responses to questions about the origins of the novel coronavirus, specifically regarding whether the virus could have escaped from a lab at the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

- **Geng Shuang, China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Said:** *"The Chinese side has repeatedly stressed that the issue of the origin of the novel coronavirus is a serious question of science that should be studied by scientists and medical experts."*
- **BIA Said:** "The most conspicuous deceptive behavior on display across all of these statements by Chinese officials is their repeated failure to specifically deny that the virus may have originally escaped or 'leaked' from a lab in Wuhan. The officials instead recite standard rhetoric designed to discredit or invalidate any statements, allegations or even inquiries about the virus's origin from anyone other than 'scientists and medical experts.'"
- **BIA Concluded:** "Even in the context of carefully crafted policy rhetoric, we find a clear pattern of deceptive behavior indicating that China is not being completely truthful in its answers, particularly with respect to the origins of the virus."
- **Recent News (May 23, 2021):** "Three researchers from China's Wuhan Institute of Virology became sick enough in November 2019 that they sought hospital care, according to a previously undisclosed U.S. intelligence report that could add weight to growing calls for a fuller probe of whether the Covid-19 virus may have escaped from the laboratory."
- **Recent News (June 7, 2021):** "A report on the origins of Covid-19 by a U.S. government national laboratory concluded that the hypothesis claiming the virus leaked from a Chinese lab in Wuhan is plausible and deserves further investigation, according to people familiar with the classified document."
- Sources: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/intelligence-on-sick-staff-at-wuhan-lab-fuels-debate-on-covid-19-origin-11621796228>
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-report-concluded-covid-19-may-have-leaked-from-wuhan-lab-11623106982>

BTL Report: Dr. Conley's Unintentional Disclosures Revealed with Tactical Behavior Assessment™
Published October 6, 2020

When then-President Donald Trump was diagnosed with Covid-19 in October 2020, the world held its breath and turned to the experts for answers. However, the press conferences held by President Trump's medical team, led by Dr. Sean Conley, were opaque and confusing, giving the American public and the world very little real information during a critical time. We analyzed these press conferences, uncovering behavioral nuances that others may have missed.

- **Dr. Conley Said:** When asked if the president's oxygen saturation level was ever below 90%, Dr. Conley fails to answer the question. Instead, he says that *"we don't have any recordings here on that."* This statement leaves open the possibility that Mr. Trump's oxygen saturation levels did drop below 90%, just not *"here"* or just that low of levels were not *"recorded."* Dr. Conley is immediately asked to confirm whether at Walter Reed Medical Center or at the White House the president's oxygen saturation levels fell below 90%. In this case he says *"No, it was below 94%, it wasn't down to the low 80's or anything like that."*
- **BIA Said:**
"When talking about President Trump's oxygen saturation levels, Dr. Conley exhibits BIA Indicators that we commonly see in responses from corporate executives on earnings calls that can lead investors to inaccurate conclusions."

"Similar to how executives will sometimes sidestep problematic topics on earnings calls, Dr. Conley consistently avoids providing any insight into whether Mr. Trump has had any issues with his lungs or suffered any lung damage."
- **BIA Concluded:** "President Trump's oxygen saturation levels were likely between 85% and 89% at some point before October 4, and test results on President Trump's lungs likely show significant problems."
- **Recent News (Feb 11, 2021):**
"The people familiar with Mr. Trump's health said he was found [during his October hospitalization] to have lung infiltrates, which occur when the lungs are inflamed and contain substances such as fluid or bacteria. Their presence, especially when a patient is exhibiting other symptoms, can be a sign of an acute case of the disease."

"Mr. Trump's blood oxygen level alone was cause for extreme concern, dipping into the 80s, according to the people familiar with his evaluation. The disease is considered severe when the blood oxygen level falls to the low 90s."
- Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/11/us/politics/trump-coronavirus.html>

BTL Report: CEO Departures & Showjumper Shocks – It's Been a Tough Year (pt 1.)
Published October 2, 2020

In June 2020, the news broke that a whistleblower had accused star showjumper Andy Kocher of using electric spurs in many competitions, using a hidden device to shock his horses. We analyzed Mr. Kocher's responses when confronted with the allegations and the pictures to back them up, and questions about the formal investigation of animal abuse by the Federation Equestre Internationale (FEI). Despite apparently being caught red-handed, Mr. Kocher's responses to the allegations reflect attempts to persuade the public that he did nothing wrong.

Andy Kocher Said: *"I love my horses and I take great care of them. I refuse to speak to anyone who claims otherwise. My horses represent my whole life. Do you know where I come from?"*

- **BIA Said:** "By shutting down the line of questioning, Mr. Kocher reveals that he is psychologically unable to refute the allegations. Anything short of an immediate and flat-out denial is a significant behavioral indication that Mr. Kocher is culpable."
- **BIA Concluded:** "Altogether, the BIA Indicators in Mr. Kocher's responses to the allegations against him of animal abuse indicate that he used electric spurs during competition."

- **Recent News (April 22, 2021):** As a result of the FEI investigation, Andy Kocher was suspended for 10 years and disqualified from 8 events between 2018-2019 “for using electric spurs on horses.”
- Source: <https://inside.fei.org/media-updates/fei-tribunal-imposes-10-year-suspension-us-jumping-athlete>

BTL Report: CEO Departures & Showjumper Shocks – It’s Been a Tough Year (pt. 2)
Published October 2, 2020

In September 2020, Nikola founder and Executive Chairman Trevor Milton stepped down following allegations in a short-seller report that he and the Company had misled investors about the Nikola One truck never achieving self-propulsion.

Trevor Milton Said: *“This isn’t just a pusher like a lot of vehicles that they unveil [that] are just vehicles that don’t actually function. This is a fully functional vehicle which is really incredible. You can go through. We can change out whatever they want, all the temperatures. I mean this is a fully functioning vehicle; it’s not just a pusher. That’s what they call [it] in the automotive world; they just push and it doesn’t move.” – 2016 Interview*

Trevor Milton Said: *“Nikola never stated its truck was driving under its own propulsion in the video, although the truck was designed to do just that (as described in previous point). The truck was showcased and filmed by a third party for a commercial. Nikola described this third-party video on the Company’s social media as ‘In Motion.’ It was never described as ‘under its own propulsion’ or ‘powertrain driven.’ Nikola investors who invested during this period, in which the Company was privately held, knew the technical capability of the Nikola One at the time of their investment. This three-year-old video of a Nikola prototype is irrelevant except for the fact that the short seller is trying to use it for its main thesis. The fact is, Nikola has real working hydrogen fuel-cell powered semi-trucks. Any reports intended to suggest that Nikola’s trucks do not drive are erroneous, and recent videos of Nikola vehicles driving can be found here.” – 2020 Press Release*

- **BIA Said:** “Rather than insisting that the Nikola One was fully functional, the statement ‘Nikola never stated its truck was driving under its own propulsion in the video’ narrowly focuses on what was said to be shown ‘in the video.’ Furthermore, the repeated emphasis that the video was made by a ‘third party’ reflects additional effort to absolve the Company of accountability for what was portrayed in the video. More significantly, the statement makes a strong defense of the Company’s communication with investors at the time, insisting that investors who invested at the time ‘knew the technical capability of the Nikola One,’ and dismisses the significance of the video by reminding investors that the ‘three-year-old’ video of a ‘prototype’ is ‘irrelevant.’”
- **BIA Concluded:** “The Nikola One’s technical capabilities were not as successful as the Company portrayed at the time, and there is merit to the allegations that the Nikola One had not achieved self-propulsion.”
- **Recent News (Feb 25, 2021):** In their February 25, 2021 10-K, Nikola listed nine instances in which Trevor Milton misled investors: “The statements listed above were inaccurate in whole or in part, when made.” This list includes:
 - o “in December 2016, Milton stated that the Nikola One was a fully functioning vehicle;
 - o that an October 2017 video released by the Company gave the impression the Nikola One was driven”
- Source: <https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1731289/000173128921000010/supplemental12.htm>

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