



THE WORLD AFTER COVID-19 COOPERATION OR COMPETITION?

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reevaluate ourselves both materially and spiritually, rethink our individual and collective way of life and produce radical changes in international organizations. Marton Ugrosdy from the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade in Hungary argues that COVID-19 will lead to two short-term outcomes: the UN system will be more irrelevant and the usefulness of large multilateral organizations will be undermined. Yiwei Wang from Renmin University in China calls for going beyond ideological constraints and promotes innovation to open the global scientific system to tackle such global crises as COVID-19. According to Joshua Webb and Ronja Scheler of the Körber Foundation in Germany, the pandemic has underlined major cracks in Berlin's three pillars of foreign policy: European integration, transatlantic cooperation and an export-driven economy model. Last but not least, Mahjoob Zweiri from the Gulf Studies Center defines the COVID-19 pandemic as a shifting-of-sands event rather than a major earthquake, noting that major changes do not occur because of one event.

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GLOBAL GOVERNANCE IN THE POST-COVID-19 ERA

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Keywords Global Governance, Multilateralism, Geopolitics, Biological Threats

The world order that has ruled the globe since the end of the Second World War has been under severe stress for some years now. The growing challenges to the supremacy of the United States as the sole super-power, the rise of China on the world stage and the emergence of multiple power centers have irreversibly impacted geo-politics worldwide. Coupled with that, the rise of narrow nationalism, laced with xenophobia, anti-immigrant sentiment and Islamophobia have catalyzed strategic shifts in the global governance system. The principles of inter-state conduct enshrined in the UN Charter—most notably respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity,

non-interference and non-intervention have been trampled upon with impunity, all the while leading to a disarray in the world order. With Donald Trump assuming presidency of the United States, the unilateralism epitomized by the 'America First' approach has further undermined the spirit of globalism and multilateralism. Protectionist trends have come to impede free international trade, while economic coercion rather than cooperation has become the norm for inter-state conduct.

It is in these changing times that the challenge of COVID-19 has emerged; within months, it has brought further unprecedented strain to global governance. It is not unprecedented in the sense of pandemics, but rather in terms of the enormous speed with which it has engulfed countries far and wide. The reality is that humanity has already suffered many such pandemics, and in each case, it went on to recover and surge ahead with even more robust economic growth and development. However, today, as a consequence of the globalized world in which we live, no society is beyond the reach of the virus. The coronavirus pandemic poses a ubiquitous challenge because of its cross-domain impact on every facet of human activity, from politics to economy to sociology.

The question arises, whether we are able to calculate the scale of the damage that this virus could cause before it recedes. Analysts of the world are struggling to find an answer to this question. However, there is consensus that a multi-directional challenge of such enormity will require a multi-dimensional global response. To better understand the direction toward which the world will likely move in the post COVID-19 era, we would first need to accurately assess the trends in every major domain that has been impacted by this deadly virus.

The most glaring victim of the COVID-19 pandemic, second only to the tremendous and tragic loss of human lives, is the global economy. Fate would have it that global economy

was already ailing when the virus hit, and the pandemic has made matters worse. According to the IMF, it is projected that global growth in 2020 will fall to -3 percent.¹ The Asian Development Bank estimates that the global economy could suffer up to USD 8.8 trillion in losses as a result of the pandemic.² Unemployment rates are soaring in nearly every country, bringing anxiety, uncertainty and suffering. The rising levels of poverty and malnutrition in the developing world are wiping out decades of work that had been done painstakingly to bring poverty levels down. The World Bank estimates that nearly 23 million people are at risk of being pushed into poverty, mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.³ With a lull in manufacturing, global demand for oil has plummeted, pushing the world economy even further toward a massive global recession. The figures emerging out of the U.S., the largest world economy, are particularly worrying. A recession looms over Europe, Japan and other leading economies as well. Some economists are predicting a depression of a scale even bigger than the world witnessed in the late 1920s.

Geo-politics too is scaling new heights of complexity and uncertainty. With the U.S. and China on the cusp of a Cold War, new alignments are shaping up around the world. In Asia, for instance, the U.S. has deepened its strategic partnership with India as a counter-weight to China, and is teaming up with other allies in the region to contain China's rise. The advent of COVID-19 and the blame game that ensued between the U.S. and China has intensified their major power competition, moving them further away from the globalism that is needed more than ever to fight this menace.

Multilateralism, which was already under challenge from unilateralism, is losing relevance. The United Nations, the World Health Organization and scores of other international organizations are struggling to stay relevant to this fast-changing world. Regionalism, conversely, is gaining traction.

China, which had emerged as the icon for globalism thanks to its Belt and Road Initiative, may focus even more on its contiguous regions. Another mega project, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, is a case in point; this venture links up Pakistan's shores on the Indian Ocean with the Eurasian landmass through Central Asia and Russia. Such connectivity would continue to drive regional cooperation.

While it is never easy to predict the future, there are self-evident trends that are likely to shape global governance in the post-COVID-19 era. First is the singular importance that technology has assumed in all that we do. Knowledge economies, with innovation through research and development as their central pillar, will determine the status of each state in the comity of nations. As every country is likely to become even more dependent on the use of technology, those that form a well-developed technological base will have an edge. Since every country would be on its own, a competition to acquire cutting-edge technologies would set in. It would be in every country's interest to develop a technological base that is self-sufficient and self-reliant.

Countries with a strong agricultural base, both in agricultural produce and agri-based industry, would be better positioned to survive the anticipated long periods of low economic growth and drop in international trade during the times of recession. Already, developing countries might be inclined to revive economic concepts such as import substitution, which had long been abandoned in favor of free international trade.

Biological threats have come into renewed focus. With conventional wars already replaced by hybrid fifth-generation wars, biological warfare could emerge as an important tool in the armory of those engaged in conflict. The nature of conflict too is changing, with intra-state chaos becoming far

more lethal than inter-state confrontations. The Arab Spring of 2011, which soon turned into Arab Autumn and later Arab Winter, showed that hybrid warfare and implosion from within societies has left conventional warfare far behind in the annals of history. Will deadly viruses like COVID-19 and its mutations become another weapon in the hybrid warfare of the future? One sincerely hopes not, as that would be a lose-lose option for not only the aggressor and the victim but the world as a whole.

Perhaps it would be prudent for the world to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC); 183 state parties to it have already committed to not develop, stockpile or acquire biological agents or toxins other than for peaceful purposes, or use such agents or toxins for hostile purposes or in armed conflict.⁴ Furthermore, there are fears that terrorists and non-state actors could get hold of viruses and deadly biological agents to carry out bioterrorism or biological warfare. The world must come together to ensure a renewed commitment by all states to not indulge in biological warfare, and to prevent non-state actors from gaining access to deadly biological agents from labs. Sustained support for conventions like the BWC could help control the emergence of biological threats and accidental or intentional, illicit spread of such biological threats in future.

With the world heading toward a period of phenomenal uncertainty, economic recession and possibly even depression, the need for the world to come together is ever more urgent today. The leaders of major powers have a special responsibility; within that context, the United States, being the pre-eminent power, must not shy away from its global responsibilities. The people of the United States must reject isolationism because the world would be better off with a U.S. that is engaged constructively in making the world a better place to live. China too must maintain the zeal for globalism that it has already amply displayed. Other major powers must resist

the temptation to pursue narrow nationalism based on faith or ethnicity. All the nations of the world have an enormous task to do together—first to fight the menace of COVID-19, a common enemy, and then, to stitch together a global system that is based on the cooperative spirit that we witnessed after the end of the Second World War.

Endnotes

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COVID-19 AND EUROPE: LOOKING FOR A GEOPOLITICAL MEGAPHONE

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The COVID-19 crisis is now entering its third phase. The first was the medical emergency phase, with Europe and other world powers dealing with an invisible but powerful threat affecting the population with no distinctions and unfortunately no rules. Then came the economic crisis phase, with worldwide governments dealing with an unprecedented situation whose long-term effects are gradually showing their features and for which a recovery plan is still quite blurry. The third phase is that of political crisis, with worldwide leaders trying to set a new strategy for their countries to survive this process politically, namely, to find a new role and *raison d'état*