

**MAKING SENSE OF
POST COVID-19 POLITICS**

Edited by

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*To the victims of the COVID-19 pandemic
and
to the memory of those who have lost their lives ...*

Contents

<i>Note on Contributors</i>	6
<i>List of Acronyms</i>	12
<i>Preface</i>	15
<i>Introduction</i>	16

Chapters

1. Pandemic and Change in International Politics: A Historicist Analysis <i>Nausheen Wasi</i>	21
2. Pandemic and the Geopolitical Dilemma: Battle of the Elephants <i>Rabia Akhtar</i>	29
3. Rising Competition between US and China: A Modern-Day Tragedy <i>Huma Baqai and Sabiha Mehreen</i>	40
4. Conceptualizing Controlled Globalization in Post-Pandemic Politics <i>Shahid Hameed</i>	55

Contents

5. Clash of Two Ideologies: Market Economy versus Social Democracy 64
Kaiser Bengali
6. Human Rights Concerns in Post-Pandemic Context: Risks & Responses 74
Isbrat Afshan Abbasi
7. One Humanity – Alternative Instruments for Response Mechanism 84
Saira Bano Orakzai
8. Pakistan’s Foreign Policy Options in the Post-Pandemic World 97
Bettina Robotka
9. Comparative Pandemic Responses in Kashmir 106
Sardar Masood Khan
10. Post-Pandemic Politics of the 18th Amendment 113
Farhan Hanif Siddiqui
11. FinTech: A Window of Opportunity for Pakistan 123
Ikeram Sehgal

Index

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List of Acronyms

Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK)
Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)
Benazir Income Support Program (BISP)
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)
Blue Dot Network (BDN)
Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)
China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)
Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)
Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)
Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)
European Union (EU)
Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)
Financial Technology (FINTECH)
Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN)
Global War on Terror (GWO'T)
Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
Human Rights Watch (HRW)
Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IOJK)
Indo-Pacific Strategy Report (IPSR)
International Labour Organization (ILO)
International Monetary Fund (IMF)
Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)

List of Acronyms

Know Your Customer (KYC)
Line of Control (LoC)
Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)
National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC)
National Coordination Committee (NCC)
National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA)
National Defense Strategy (NDS)
National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)
National Finance Commission (NFC)
National Institute of Health (NIH)
National Poverty Graduation Initiative (NPGI)
National Security Strategy (NSS)
North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
Nuclear Posture Review (NPR)
One Belt One Road (OBOR)
Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz Group (PML-N)
Pakistan People's Party (PPP)
Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI)
Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure (PSCQI)
Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)
Responsibility to Protect (R2P)
Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)
Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)
South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)
Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)
State Coordination Committee (SCC)
Terms of References (TORs)
United Nations (UN)
United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
United Nations Fund for Population (UNFP)
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
United Nations Human Development Program (UNDP)

Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV)

World Bank (WB)

World Economic Forum (WEF)

World Trade Organization (WTO)

Preface

Dear Friends,

A Karachi-based prominent think tank, Karachi Council on Foreign Relations (KCFR), deliberates mainly in the fields of foreign relations, economic affairs and law. Several former ambassadors, generals, admirals, senior bureaucrats as well as elite captains of industries and businesses are our members. KCFR holds seminars and conferences and interacts regularly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, institutions like ISSI, Ambassadors/High Commissioners, Consuls General, etc, accredited to Pakistan as well as other foreign dignitaries during their visits to Karachi. KCFR has signed MOUs with a number of foreign institutes and think tanks of the USA, China, India, Nepal, etc, which are working on similar national and international objectives. KCFR also publishes books from its forum. This book, *Making Sense of the Post COVID-19 Politics* too is a venture on these lines.

With its self-explanatory title, this book is much needed in these precarious times. It examines the impact of COVID-19 on geo-politics and geo-economics. It's a predictive analysis of the post-pandemic world edited by two International Relations experts, Dr Huma Baqai and Dr Nausheen Wasi. The manuscript is an academic effort to which several scholars from across the country have contributed. The pandemic has changed the world beyond recognition; we should prepare to face the freshly emerging challenges.

KCFR takes great pleasure in presenting this intellectual and knowledgeable pursuit to you. We not only look forward to your comments in this regard but also invite you to become members of KCFR.

Ikram Sehgal

Chairman

Karachi Council on Foreign Relations

Introduction

The New Year's Eve of 2020 saw China proudly leading the celebrations with a pioneering drone display over the Huangpu River. Who could then envision that an epic episode was brewing in one of its largest cities, Wuhan. It was the outbreak of an unidentified virus, transmissible human-to-human and deadly in nature. In just under a month, the virus triggered a series of measures from entry port screenings and quarantines to lockdowns.

China and the world had been on this road before. It had also happened in recent past. A virus had emerged in China in 2002 which spread to 29 countries, infected 8,098 people and caused nearly 774 deaths. However, it was still business as usual; it created no major impact on the economy, socio-cultural life, or politics of the affected states. This time, however, it has not proved to be business as usual. The virus, labeled as COVID-19, has spread across borders at tremendous speed to affect almost the entire world. It was qualified by WHO as a pandemic in March 2020.

This has resulted in almost the entire world coming to a halt and has created an unprecedented economic meltdown. Country after country, thousands of businesses have shut and millions of jobs have been lost. A 'new normal' has evolved. However, governments — nationally and globally — have been found wanting in their responses in terms of handling the medical emergency as well as the economic fallout.

The uncoordinated responses have exposed the fragility of state structures and the sheer inability to address the needs of the people. It has bared the fissures within and between national and global power formations. Multilateralism has collapsed. The pandemic has called many established practices into question. In fact, there are more questions than answers. The national and international media as well as the social media have jumped onto the bandwagon of ‘analysis’ and ‘predictions’ adding to the confusion and creating more uncertainties.

The COVID-19 pandemic will go away. However, the world will have changed and will not be able to revert to old practices; the challenges it has thrown up are here to stay. National and world politics struggle for power and that is not likely to change; however, the framing of agendas and priorities may change. States that adapt to the changes are likely to survive the crisis. In the superpower league, states that respond effectively are likely to find the upper seat on the global decision-making table.

There has emerged an opportunity to rethink the global order and find mechanisms to reshape a better world. Many scholars seem to agree on three powerful shifts:

- From state to human security
- From greed-driven capitalism to conscience-laced capitalism
- From US-Euro-centric global politics to an Asia-centric order.

The COVID-19 moment demands mature responses. This is not a time to succumb to paralysis. This book is a productive outcome of the lockdown circumstance seeking to assess the situation, explore responses and come up with predictive analyses. We have striven to bring together some of the best minds in Pakistan to contribute to this effort. The objective is to initiate scholarly debates on different aspects of COVID-19 led changes. The book dwells on potential security threats, challenges to the existing ideological politico-economic divide, issues of human security, response mechanisms, issues of Kashmir, and centre-province relations vis-à-vis the 18th Amendment.

Nausheen Wasi conceptualizes post COVID-19 changes in

international politics and argues that the post-pandemic political discourse is likely to remain the same with the introduction of new jargons and some peripheral changes.

Rabia Akhtar looks at the post COVID-19 geopolitical dilemma between the US and China and writes that the pandemic-induced scenario suits China's ways of conducting diplomacy and engendering goodwill which is generating insecurity for the US.

Huma Baqai and Sabiha Mehreen explore the course of US-China relations during the COVID-19 pandemic with China emerging as the survivor turned saviour for the world and challenging US superpower status.

Shahid Hameed discusses the emergence of globalization as a new tool to regulate international politics and postulates the emerging role of 'controlled globalization' in post COVID-19 digital world politics.

Kaiser Bengali analyses the sharpening of the ideological political economy divide between the market and the state in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and argues that the balance has tilted in favour of the latter.

Isbrat Afshan Abbasi focuses on human security concerns and discusses possible risks being posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the responses to these challenges within the framework of International Human Rights Law.

Saira Bano Orakzai examines the international response to COVID-19 and suggests alternative mechanisms for tackling the pandemic in low-income countries arguing that lowering risks in low-income countries can facilitate developed countries in controlling pandemic risks.

Bettina Robotaka explores Pakistan's foreign policy options in the wake of the pandemic and argues that the rise of China to the major power status and re-emergence of Russia in international politics have presented Pakistan with an opportunity to balance its relations with the western world.

Sardar Masood Khan explains how the disaster management structure developed in the wake of the 2005 earthquake helped shape an effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic in AJK and compares this with the catastrophic situation in Indian-occupied Kashmir.

Farhan Hanif Siddiqui traces the debate on the 18th Amendment emanating from handling of the COVID-19 crisis by the federal and Sindh governments respectively and contextualizes the contentions within the ambit of civil-military relations.

Ikram Sehgal presents FinTech as a way forward for not only the problems that have surfaced due to COVID-19 but also an option that may provide solutions to the structural financial problems Pakistan has always struggled with.

On to the acknowledgements.

First and foremost, our gratitude goes to our contributors for agreeing to write for us and keeping up with our tough timelines, to Mr Ikram Sehgal, Chairman, Karachi Council on Foreign Relations, and Ms Ameena Saiyid, CEO Lightstone Publishers, who can't be thanked enough for their timely support to ensure that this book sees the light of the day. And, last but not the least, to the silent worker, Sabiha Mehreen, without whose diligence this project could not have been possible.

Huma Baqai and Nausheen Wasi
Editors

1

Pandemic and Change in International Politics: A Historicist Analysis

NAUSHEEN WASI

Change is a constant feature of international politics. Many changes in social, economic and political life which are attributed to a turning point in history are evolutionary and reactive in nature. The subtle interplay of many variables, which include science, politics, economics, philosophy and theology influences the process of change. Political scientists define this in terms of cause and effect relationship. The significance of this interaction is ignored until some major event takes over the world by surprise. The COVID-19 moment presents a similar reference point. It is a health crisis but has impacted all aspects of governance, challenged the manner states govern their societies and interact at global level, and reintroduced the debate between a realist and idealist approach to politics as to what is the better way of governance. Many drastic changes in international politics are expected in the wake of the pandemic having potential to shift the state focus in favour of the latter. The evolutionary and interrelated nature of change, however, makes the historicist mode of analysis, perhaps, the right prism through which the post COVID-19 politics can be conceptualized.

The post World War-II period was marked by global competition between capitalism and communism. This resulted in divisive Cold War politics. The principal actors were the United States and the Soviet Union. This period also witnessed the end of colonization.

Many states gained independence. However, Cold War politics did not allow the newly-independent states to enjoy this freedom and translate it into independence of conduct. The dynamics of the Cold War impacted the internal politics of every single country around the globe. Any advancement of US interests, no matter how far-flung an area, was seen as a setback for Soviet interests and vice versa. The arms race, proxy wars and politics of alliances kept the world in a state of perpetual threat of nuclear holocaust. Many of the critical issues the world encounters today are rooted in that era.

The end of the Cold War symbolized a victory of liberal democracy and capitalism. It was expected to bring novel changes in international politics. These expectations emanated from the language used by the victorious power of the Cold War. In his speech, *Toward a New World Order*, delivered on 11 September 1990, US President George H. W. Bush described his objectives for post-Cold War global governance in cooperation with post-Soviet states:

Until now, the world we've known has been a world divided—a world of barbed wire and concrete block, conflict and cold war. Now, we can see a new world coming into view. A world in which there is the very real prospect of a new world order. In the words of Winston Churchill, a 'world order' in which 'the principles of justice and fair play ... protect the weak against the strong ...' A world where the United Nations, freed from Cold War stalemate, is poised to fulfill the historic vision of its founders. A world in which freedom and respect for human rights find a home among all nations.¹

¹ During a joint session of the US Congress, President Bush proclaimed a New World Order on 11 September 1990. See his speech: <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4528359/user-clip-george-bush-defines-world-order>, accessed on 28 April 2020. The term 'new world order' has been used to refer to any new period of history evidencing a dramatic change in world politics and the power distribution. It is primarily associated with the ideological notion of world governance in the sense of new collective efforts to identify, understand, or address worldwide problems that go beyond the capacity of individual states to solve. The phrase 'new world order' or similar language was used in the period toward the end of the First World War

Realism came to be tempered with idealism and engendered widespread euphoria. The concept of comprehensive security, which includes the human, economic and environmental dimensions of safety and well-being, gained prominence. The era witnessed the rise of multilateralism and globalization. Western Europe came together to form the 12-nation European Union with a single currency and emerged as a strong integrated economic power. It inspired the formation of regional cooperation organizations and strengthened the existing ones in all regions of the world and promised peace and development. The 123-member World Trade Organization (WTO) came into being to regulate world trade. The United Nations Millennium Declaration, signed by 191 states in September 2000, set global development goals that committed world leaders to combat poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women.² Globalization also accorded China the opportunity to emerge as the centre of global industrial growth and a global power in world trade. The era also saw the creeping advance of the neo-liberal ideology which professed the supremacy of the market at the expense of the state.

Eleven years after the US President's 1990 proclamation of a New World Order, the world witnessed another turning point in international politics on exactly the same date: the attack on the World Trade Center twin towers in New York. The attack was significant for many reasons. Above all it seared the American psyche. As Barbara Keys explains, 'A country whose continental states had not seen a major attack in nearly 200 years was stunned to find that its

in relation to Woodrow Wilson's vision for international peace; Wilson called for a League of Nations to prevent aggression and conflict. The phrase was used at the end of World War II when describing the plans for the United Nations and the Bretton Woods system to promote world peace and development. Similarly, COVID-19 is expected to bring novel changes in international politics. It is notable, however, that none of the periods hopes for the 'new world order' have materialized.

² https://www.who.int/topics/millennium_development_goals/about/en/, accessed on 28 April 2020.

financial and military centers had been hit by a small terrorist group based thousands of miles away.³ More low-cost high-impact attacks suddenly seemed not just probable but inevitable.

The 9/11 attacks, as the event has come to be called, triggered a sequence of reactions and unintended consequences that continue to reverberate today. They include the unending War on Terror, erosion of democracy, intensification of antagonism towards Muslims in the West and the decline of US power alongside rising international disorder. Simmering conflicts in the Middle East, ethnic conflicts, economic crisis, environment degradation, bilateral rivalries, Brexit, growth of ISIS and Taliban's control of most of Afghanistan was not the 'New World Order' President Bush had promised the world. Hopes for peace, justice, freedom, equality, health and environmental conservation faded; nationalism and populism grew.

Nineteen years after 9/11, the world is mired with the COVID-19 pandemic and the second time in a span of two decades that contemporary world politics is faced with the unprecedented and unexpected.

The 9/11 and COVID-19 are both unprecedented because of the action-reaction responses adopted in sharp contrast to traditional international relations norms. Some momentous features of contemporary politics explain why. One, competition over resources, influence and supremacy has remained the most powerful feature of the post-Cold War as well as the post 9/11 periods; two, post-Cold War, neoliberal forces have weakened the states and compromised their capacity to make timely interventions; and three, globalization and digital revolution have introduced extraordinary modes of global interaction and connectivity. As such, it is not surprising that any sudden interruption, namely lockdowns, will cause unprecedented outcomes.

The politics of radicalization and subsequent conflicts following

³ Barbara Keys, World politics explainer: The twin-tower bombings (9/11), <https://theconversation.com/world-politics-explainer-the-twin-tower-bombings-9-11-101443>, accessed on 30 April 2020.

9/11 were to be expected. In the 1970s, some policy makers in the US, involved in strategic planning were against cultivating religious extremists against the Soviets and warned that it might lead to radicalization.⁴ Then, however, defeating communism was an all-consuming priority and this view was disregarded. Radicalization was, thus, a predictable result.

Likewise, the COVID-19 pandemic can be said to be predictable.⁵ Since the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2002, numerous research articles and policy papers were issuing dire warnings that a global pandemic involving a new respiratory disease was inevitable. BBC reported in 2018 that ‘experts believed there could be millions of undiscovered viruses in the world and a flu pandemic was only a matter of time.’⁶ In 2019, the US Department of Health and Human Services also carried out a pandemic exercise named ‘Crimson Contagion’, which imagined a flu pandemic starting in China and spreading around the world. The simulation predicted that 586,000 people would die in the US alone.⁷

However, as in the case of the fight against communism, mounting evidence of the dire impacts of climate change, environmental degradations and pandemics were ignored. Rather, considerations of

⁴ Robert Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007).

⁵ The virus had been identified even earlier before the outbreak of SARS. Scientists first identified a human coronavirus which caused COVID-19 in 1965. Seven coronaviruses can infect humans. The one that causes SARS emerged in southern China in 2002. A small outbreak in 2004 involved only four more cases. Belonging to the same virus family, a virus caused Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) started in Saudi Arabia in 2012. Almost all of the nearly 2,500 reported cases have been in people who live in or travel to the Middle East. This coronavirus is less contagious than its SARS cousin but more deadly, killing 858 people.

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200325-covid-19-the-history-of-pandemics>

⁷ Carol Marin & Don Moseley, ‘Crimson Contagion 2019’ Simulation Warned of Pandemic Implications in US, <https://www.nbchicago.com/news/local/crimson-contagion-2019-simulation-warned-of-pandemic-implications-in-us/2243832/>, accessed on 30 April 2020.

strategic and military security and the neo-liberal fixation with profit maximization overwhelmed and sidelined the agenda that highlighted the interrelated nature of human security. COVID-19 is the inevitable result.

The SARS outbreak that quickly spread to 29 countries has shown how, in a closely interconnected and interdependent world, a new and poorly understood infectious disease can play havoc. Lockdowns and quarantines were imposed to control the disease spread then too and it too impacted public health, economic growth, trade, tourism, business and industrial performance, and caused political and social instability. Initially recognized as a global threat, SARS was successfully contained in less than four months largely because of the remarkable level of international collaboration and cooperation. The international response to SARS was coordinated by the World Health Organization with the assistance of the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) and its constituent partners comprising 115 national health services, academic and technical institutions and individuals.⁸

Based on the previous experiences, the response to COVID-19 should have been more prompt, appropriate and coordinated. This was not the case, however. The rise of post-9/11 populism has been mentioned earlier. Generally, populist leaders tend to have a personalized approach to addressing crises, disregarding institutional mechanisms and the complexities of the world politics and finding solutions in scapegoating. The approach tends to compromise the ability to understand and address the genesis of crises. US President Donald Trump's ascendancy to power, his sidelining of the SOPs to handle pandemics, his proffering of untested solutions, and his constant insistence that COVID-19 is a 'Chinese virus' made in Wuhan laboratories, for which China should be held accountable, and his arbitrary exit from WHO is but one prime indication how damaging populism can be for the world.

Security of states is intrinsically linked with many pressing

⁸ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK92476/>, accessed on 30 April 2020.

problems not excluding that of the earth and its inhabitants and, thus, requires a humanistic approach to politics. However, despite repeated calls from experts, social leaders and advocacy groups to address the issues of environment degradation, global warming, population growth, rampant urbanization and social inequalities, they have not become operational priority areas of states which continue to define security in the traditional fashion. There is no sign to suggest that states have begun to consider prioritizing these issues in their agendas. Past experience and historical patterns caution against hope for any radical change in world politics in the post COVID-19 pandemic phase.

The story of change in international politics is either a struggle for power or for a desire to bring about justice and equality in the world. In the past three centuries, these two features have institutionalized into a broad conflict between capitalism and socialism, each with a different set of politico-economic connotations. The victory of the US capitalist bloc over the Soviet communist bloc did not bring an end to the historical struggle over the global distribution of wealth in the post-Cold War period. In fact, inequality within and between states increased. It was a bargain that worked out relatively well for some states and for some classes within those states but did not yield fruit for most post-colonial nations and post-Soviet states. Intoxicated with its victory in the Cold War, the United States and its capitalist allies overlooked the complexities of the post-Cold War world. As a consequence, they too have suffered. There has been a retreat from multilateralism and globalization the hollowness of neo-liberalism has been exposed and social democratic politics appears to be resurging.

The two parallel doctrinal debates have raged and evolved since feudal times and the interplay of different variables is making them intense. The popular cliché in the late 19th and 20th centuries — ‘the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles’ is relevant now too and continues to inspire the desire for equality. On the other hand, the forces of status quo remain strong. This clash of ideas is rooted in the historical development of states and societies

and is likely to remain intact in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Albeit, new jargons a la the 'New World Order', with some peripheral changes, will certainly acquire prominence.

2

Pandemic and the Geopolitical Dilemma: Battle of the Elephants

RABIA AKHTAR

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken the world by storm. Deaths, lockdowns and economic stagnation have beset countries regardless of their positions on the power ladder. Countries across the globe are faced with a health-care crisis of great magnitude tackling which would be marred by an economic slump. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), global output is likely to shrink by 3.0 percent in 2020.⁹ As countries grapple with the pandemic, trying to limit the damage that it leaves behind in the post-pandemic world, analysts and thinkers are already looking for clues about how the post-pandemic world order would look like. Questions abound as to how geopolitical rivalries will play out. What will the future of conflict be? How will states view their threat spectrums going forward? More importantly, many are concerned about the future of Sino-US competition.¹⁰ The importance of these questions and the Sino-US rivalry notwithstanding, other factors need to be looked at in order to better appreciate the impact of the pandemic on geopolitics. What

⁹ International Monetary Fund ‘G-20 Surveillance Note: G-20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors’ Meetings April 15, 2020 Virtual Meeting,’ <https://www.imf.org/external/np/g20/pdf/2020/041520.pdf>, accessed on 29 April 2020.

¹⁰ Joseph Nye Jr., ‘Why the Coronavirus is Making U.S.-China Relations Worse,’ *The National Interest*, April 3, 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-coronavirus-making-us-china-relations-worse-139457>, accessed on 29 April 2020.

transpires in the post-pandemic geopolitics will be greatly determined by how China and the US handle the crisis and see the world after coming out of the pandemic.

The behaviour of the US and China will shape the contours of regional and global geopolitics. The course that this great power duel takes will depend upon a number of factors. Two among them deserve deeper understanding and analyses. One, how will both countries construe non-kinetic security threats and put them alongside the kinetic ones in their security mosaics. Two, how will both countries handle their allies and partners during and after the pandemic. The security element will assess how likely conflicts could be in the post-pandemic world and relations with allies will be instrumental in ascertaining on whose side the balance of influence will hang. From what is apparent so far, it could be reasonably argued that the two countries will look at crises like COVID-19 through the lens of security and think of them as a blow to their power mixes. The responses, thus, will lead to competition and conflict rather than competition and cooperation. As far as relations with allies are concerned, China and the US will tread different routes. While China would find this pandemic as a fillip to its efforts towards economic integration, the US will likely opt for a muscular recourse. All this does not augur well for the post-pandemic world. The pendulum will likely swing more towards conflict.

The Geopolitics of COVID-19: Jostling for Ascendancy

The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly dealt a severe blow to the fast-paced world that we knew of but it has not reduced acrimonies and conflagrations across the world. Also, it has done little to change the tone, tenor and actions of competitors. For instance, the US-Iran rivalry continues to fester despite the fact that Iran is one of the worst-hit countries by COVID-19. The US slapped yet another wave of sanctions on Iran making it doubly difficult for the latter to fight

COVID-19.¹¹ Iran, for its part, has not mellowed its rhetoric against the US. While vociferously refusing US' help in fighting the pandemic, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, termed the Coronavirus a US conspiracy.¹² Similarly, the Afghan peace process is a victim of delays and in-fighting with no real push being seen from the US to help navigate the process towards peace in Afghanistan. Highlighting the urgency of the situation and unnecessary delays from all stakeholders in the peace process, Sultan Barakat and Barnett Rubin wrote: 'During the Vietnam War, Washington and Hanoi haggled for four years over the shape of the table but the pandemic and US aid cuts mean that Afghanistan might not even have four months'.¹³ Also, while the pandemic can only be dealt with by putting in concerted efforts from all quarters, the US and China have been found wanting in that regard and are involved in recrimination. This is something that is likely to impede the fight against the menace of COVID-19.

That ideological rivalries are simmering with states trading blames with each other during the height of the pandemic is reason enough to assert that the humanitarian disaster being wrought by the pandemic is not likely to change how states operate in the international system. The proclivity to outdo competitors in a bid to maximize power and security will dictate geopolitics just like it did in the pre-pandemic world. The states' focus on and prioritization of power over morality were befittingly summed up by Morgenthau. He asserted, 'Political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the

¹¹ 'As COVID-19 Rages, U.S. Slaps New Sanctions on Iranian Individuals,' *Al-Jazeera*, March 26, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/ajimpact/COVID-19-rages-slaps-sanctions-iranian-individuals-200326145240630.html>, accessed on 29 April 2020.

¹² 'Iran Leader Refuses U.S. Help; Cites Coronavirus Conspiracy Theory,' *Al-Jazeera*, 23 March 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/iran-leader-refuses-cites-coronavirus-conspiracy-theory-200322145122752.html>, accessed on 29 April 2020.

¹³ Sultan Barakat and Barnett Rubin, 'Start the Negotiations, End the Afghan War Now,' *War on the Rocks*, March 31, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/03/start-the-negotiations-end-the-afghan-war-now/>, accessed on 29 April 2020.

moral laws that govern the universe. As it distinguishes between truth and opinion, so it distinguishes between truth and idolatry. All nations are tempted — and few have been able to resist the power for long — to clothe their own aspirations and action in the moral purposes of the universe.¹⁴

In an environment where COVID-19 is fast-turning into a geopolitical point of friction and, if anything, exacerbating mistrust, it is important to contend the much-needed cooperation to counter the pandemic will be outweighed by the strong tendencies of states to go one up over their rivals going forward. However, the war of words between the US and China has another dangerous angle attached to it that goes beyond mere competition. The militarization of narratives from both sides against each other could have implications for future threat matrices of Washington and Beijing.

In order to have a sense of how both countries' security orientations will be like in the post-pandemic world, it is important to assess how Washington and Beijing are looking at COVID-19 and its effects on the security of both nations. US President Donald Trump and other top officials of his administration have repeatedly asserted that the Coronavirus originated in a laboratory in Wuhan, China. President Trump has repeatedly accused China of deliberately causing the spread of Coronavirus. Both President Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo have doubled down on their claims that the virus has its genesis in Wuhan. According to Secretary Pompeo, the US has 'enormous evidence' that the virus came from the Wuhan lab.¹⁵ While Beijing and even the US intelligence agencies have debunked claims that the virus was man-made or genetically modified, President Trump has stood firm in his belief that the deadly virus incubated

¹⁴ Hans J. Morgenthau and Kenneth Thompson, *Politics Among Nations 6th edition* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), p.12.

¹⁵ 'Mike Pompeo: 'Enormous Evidence Coronavirus Came from Chinese Lab,' *The Guardian*, May 3, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/03/mike-pompeo-donald-trump-Coronavirus-chinese-laboratory>, accessed on 8 May 2020.

in a laboratory in Wuhan.¹⁶ Here, what is more instructive is not the tirade but how the US wants to deal with a country that it feels is responsible for so many deaths in the US homeland. While terming the Coronavirus an invisible enemy, President Trump said that the virus' attack is bigger and deadlier than the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor or the 9/11 bombings. Though President Trump desisted from calling the Coronavirus as China's act of war, his insinuations to that effect are noteworthy.¹⁷

That the US has termed COVID-19 as an event of greater magnitude than those that led to some of the most aggressive military responses in US history is likely to have important implications for its defense strategy. It is clear that US considers COVID-19 as one of the very many non-kinetic threats that it faces. Thus, it is likely that voices will increase against China's role in pushing this crisis right in the US homeland. The fight against COVID-19 could then be linked with the fight against the Chinese. In a recent article, Richard N. Haass warned Washington against making confrontation with China as a core pillar of its foreign policy. He further argued that neither is this the Cold War era nor is China like the Soviet Union.¹⁸

A spike in tensions between the two countries is easy to predict. In terms of a security and threat perception, COVID-19 has just added a new dimension to how the US perceives China. Three US documents outline how the US sees China as a threat and, based on them, one can make sense of the effects of COVID-19 on the future of US security strategy. The 2017 US National Security Strategy (NSS) described China as a strategic competitor and revisionist power seeking 'to erode

¹⁶ 'Coronavirus: Trump Stands by China Lab Origin Theory for Virus,' BBC News, May 1, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52496098>, accessed on 8 May 2020.

¹⁷ 'Trump Says Coronavirus Worse Attack than Pearl Harbor,' BBC News, May 7, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52568405>, accessed on 8 May 2020.

¹⁸ Richard N. Haass, 'Don't Start a New Cold War With China,' *The Wall Street Journal*, May 7, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/dont-start-a-new-cold-war-with-china-11588860761?redirect=amp#click=https://t.co/KUofi6Yx9K>, accessed on 8 May 2020.

American security and prosperity’ and ‘shape a world antithetical to US values and interests.’¹⁹ The NSS made a hawkish turn on China as it called for countering China across domains and battlefields. In the document’s section that deals with pandemics and bio-threats, the Trump administration noted that ‘emerging outbreaks of viruses such as Ebola and SARS, as well as the deliberate 2001 anthrax attacks in the United States, demonstrated the impact of biological threats on national security by taking lives, generating economic losses and contributing to a loss of confidence in government institutions’. The NSS prescribed, as a policy action, the need for meeting and containing biothreats at their source. While the document called for cooperation with other countries in that regard, it is reasonable to argue that, if the US deems China as the source, confrontation instead of cooperation is in the offing.

The 2018 US National Defense Strategy went a step further by placing strategic competition from China and Russia as the central challenge to US security and prosperity. The NDS noted that ‘China is leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce neighboring countries to reorder the Indo-Pacific region to their advantage.’²⁰ At a time when criticism of China’s behaviour towards its neighbours during the pandemic is mounting, the US is likely to look at this set of heavy-handed approaches as part of efforts to ‘reorder’ the Indo-Pacific region.²¹ If anything, this could mean an intensification of rivalry between Beijing and Washington during and after the pandemic.

¹⁹ The White House, ‘The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,’ December 18, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>, accessed on 8 May 2020.

²⁰ The Department of Defense, ‘Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States,’ January 21, 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>, accessed on 8 May 2020.

²¹ The Department of Defense, ‘Nuclear Posture Review 2018,’ February 2, 2018, <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872886/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINAL-REPORT.PDF>, accessed on 8 May 2020.

If the US is convinced that the Coronavirus is a China-created biological means of warfare against it, then there would be plenty to worry about. The 2018 US Nuclear Posture Review is provocative and dangerous in the sense that it allows a US nuclear deterrent to deter non-nuclear strategic attacks. The NPR noted that, ‘the United States will maintain the range of flexible nuclear capabilities needed to ensure that nuclear or non-nuclear aggression against the United States, allies, and partners will fail to achieve its objectives and carry with it the credible risk of intolerable consequences for potential adversaries now and in the future’. Like the other two US policy documents, the NPR is important to analyze in the current context. While this crisis and the responses to it are in the embryonic stages, Washington’s preparations of a response mechanism to China could pretty much be seen through the lenses of deterrence and compulsion. Predictably, the US nuclear-use threshold will come down adding yet another incendiary element in the US-Sino conflagration.

On the other hand, China has not linked COVID-19 with security. However, its narrative could become brazen as it tries to repudiate US castigations and accusations. The environment of hostility at a time of the pandemic is likely to protrude into the post-pandemic world. China, for its part, is believed to be the one exploiting the pandemic situation. Some analysts contend that China is expanding its military production facilities and pressing territorial claims.²²

The fog of information, coupled with uncertainty about the future of the pandemic, makes holistic appraisals and prognosis difficult. That said, the geopolitics surrounding the pandemic has brought to light some of the likely trends and pathways in the US-Sino showdown. With the chorus of censure from the US on China in full swing, one cannot emphasize the repercussions on the conflict-propensity between the two countries.

²² Harsh V. Pant and Kartik Bommakanti, ‘COVID-19: The Chinese Military is Busy Exploiting the Pandemic,’ Observer Research Foundation, April 14, 2020, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/COVID-19-the-chinese-militarys-busy-exploiting-the-pandemic-64569/>, accessed on 8 May 2020.

The Balance of Influence

One of the biggest concerns that Washington has regarding Beijing is the latter's use of predatory economics to coerce neighbours in a bid to re-order the Indo-Pacific region. According to the US, China's sledgehammers against a rules-based order are to be dealt with by knitting a web of alliances and partnerships.²³ The Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, released last year, lays out in detail how the US will challenge China in the Indo-Pacific. Upfront in the report, the Indo-Pacific was labelled as a priority theatre for the US Department of Defense (DoD), something that is quite instructive and pivotal to our understanding of how things could transpire going forward. The report accentuated that bolstering partnerships will be one of the lines of effort to take on Beijing in the Indo-Pacific. According to the report, the US will expand its 'interoperability with allies and partners' to ensure that its 'respective defense enterprises can work together effectively during day-to-day competition, crisis, and conflict.' Furthermore, 'through focused security cooperation, information-sharing agreements, and regular exercises,' the US is 'connecting intent, resources, and outcomes and building closer relationships' with other militaries and economies. This increase in inter-operability ensures that US 'military hardware and software are able to integrate more easily' with those of its allies 'offering financing and sales of cutting-edge US defense equipment to security partners and opening up the aperture of US professional military education to more Indo-Pacific military officers.'²⁴

It is pertinent, therefore, to ask at this time when the US is seeing its arch-rival, China, as an alleged instigator of COVID-19, how would

²³ United States Congress, 'Asia Reassurance Initiative Act,' December 31, 2018, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/2736/text>, accessed on 8 May 2020.

²⁴ The Department of Defense, 'Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships and Promoting a Networked Region', June 1, 2019, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>, accessed on 8 May 2020.

its engagements with allies and partners shape up? Will using allies as bulwarks against China give the US the influence it wants over them?

Militarized and securitized partnerships to counter the Chinese juggernaut are sharply in contrast to China's approach towards its allies and partnerships. The difference in handling allies is all the more important at a time when countries require support to grapple with a lethal pandemic. At a time when the US is already finding it hard to convince allies to gleefully jump on the anti-China bandwagon, China will get more room to maneuver into open and new spaces. US allies are not fully joining the fray of America's confrontation with China because of the mixed messaging of the Trump administration that oscillates between pulling back international investments and competing with China through allies. According to Uri Friedman, the allies are circumspect because they are 'less inclined to side with the US now that they've witnessed how major foreign-policy initiatives are no longer likely to carry over from one administration to the next.'²⁵

In a new report on the US policy towards China, the authors urge the US to keep in mind that, while allies detest a world controlled by an authoritarian China, they fully acknowledge Beijing as a colossal 'economic opportunity and geographical reality'.²⁶

This is something that Beijing can pounce on in these testing times. In the wake of China's activeness and alacrity in lending a hand of support to other countries dealing with the pandemic, a callous and

²⁵ Uri Friedman 'America is Alone in Its Cold War with China', *The Atlantic*, February 17, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/02/us-china-allies-competition/606637/>, accessed on 8 May 2020.

²⁶ Ely Ratner et. al., 'Rising to the China Challenge: Renewing American Competitiveness in the Indo-Pacific', Center for a New American Security, January 28, 2020. https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/rising-to-the-chinachallenge?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=NDAA%20Report%20Release%20Rising%20to%20the%20China%20Challenge&utm_content=NDAA%20Report%20Release%20Rising%20to%20the%20China%20Challenge+CID_9a828840b6f83474a5ae314d2f923f94&utm_source=Campaign%20Monitor&utm_term=Rising%20to%20the%20China%20Challenge%20Renewing%20American%20Competitiveness%20in%20the%20Indo-Pacific, accessed on 8 May 2020.

insular response from the US will be the last thing it needs.

Having quickly overcome the Coronavirus, China started providing succor to other nations. This is just the kind of soft power China needs in the battle of influences that lies at the heart of the US-Sino rivalry. While nations across the power spectrum are at pains to deal with the pandemic, China has stood tall in not only extricating itself from it but also by helping corona-stricken countries. By volunteering to weather the storm in Italy and other countries in Europe, China has kick-started the process of turning the narrative in its favour in this long-drawn war of narratives and perceptions.²⁷

Retaining allies during crises can never be overstated. One of the fulcrums of China's highly-touted Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been rebuked by the US time and again. However, the Coronavirus has done little to dent Pak-Sino relations or their joint resolve to complete the project. Pakistan has shown immense support to China while the latter has been quick to provide its South Asian partner with the assistance it needed.²⁸

How both Washington and Beijing treat other countries during the pandemic will greatly permeate into the state of the balance of influence after the pandemic fades away. If China can come across as a helpful partner rather than a behemoth superpower, it is likely to sit pretty on the pendulum. Insularity and muscular strategies will not help the US effectively win this non-kinetic battle against China.

To surmise, we can argue that which we know in this uncertain and muddled period; future geopolitics will be marked by an exacerbation of the great power competition between the US and China. While the pandemic-induced scenario suits China's ways of conducting

²⁷ 'Is China Winning the Coronavirus Response Narrative in the EU', The Atlantic Council, March 25, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/is-china-winning-the-Coronavirus-response-narrative-in-the-eu/>, accessed on 8 May 2020.

²⁸ 'CPEC to Proceed at full Speed Despite Pandemic: FM Qureshi,' *The Nation*, March 20, 2020, <https://nation.com.pk/20-Mar-2020/cpec-to-proceed-at-full-speed-despite-pandemic-fm-qureshi>, accessed on 8 May 2020.

diplomacy and engendering goodwill, it creates security concerns for the US. All this does not help us sketch an optimistic picture of a post-pandemic world. Conflicts will likely fester with new frontages, weapons and strategies added to the mix.

3

Rising Competition between the US and China: A Modern-Day Tragedy

HUMA BAQAI AND SABIHA MEHREEN

History is witness to the world's changing polarity and the rise and fall of many empires within the span of a few centuries or decades. Even the United States' hegemony is 75 years old. The end of bipolarity and the disintegration of the Soviet Union is another story. In the present scenario, the rising competition between the US and China is the most obvious geostrategic implication of COVID-19.

It sometimes takes a solo event to decide one's exit from grandeur. The 1956 Suez Canal crisis marked the end of the United Kingdom's reign as a global power, post WW-II.²⁹ The COVID-19 could mark a 'COVID Moment' for the United States if it does not rise to meet global expectations. The novel Coronavirus pandemic could lead to Beijing supplanting the US as a global leader. According to Professor Stephen M. Walt of Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center, 'the relatively slow and haphazard response to COVID-19 in Europe and America will accelerate the shift in power and influence from the West to East.'³⁰

²⁹ J. Marcus, 'US-China Contagion: The Battle behind the Scenes,' BBC News, 24 Mar. 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-52008453>, accessed on 26 Mar 2020.

³⁰ World Economic Forum, 'How China's COVID-19 Recovery Could Bolster Its Global Influence,' 24 Mar. 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/how-china-s-covid-19-recovery-could-bolster-its-global-influence>, accessed on 2 May 2020.

Global order tends to change gradually at first, and then all at once. The gradual dislodging of the US by China had already started with China's revival plan of its ancient Silk Route and global connectivity; the pandemic seems to have given it an impetus. It is emerging as a stress test for globalization and the existing norms of global conduct. Pandemics should ideally result in global cooperation. However, the virus that gripped Wuhan and spread globally may exacerbate pre-existing tensions between the two protagonists of the world.

Interestingly, China seems to have seized the moment. Even though it was the first victim, it has survived the crisis, giving the world the confidence to trust it to do the right thing. Even the World Health Organization (WHO) was echoing the 'Chinese line' on the fight against the virus which annoyed the US no end.

The feud between China and the US over WHO has spread to the UN Security Council (UNSC). A diplomat rightly commented that, instead of focusing on the real issue, the discussion in the UNSC on a humanitarian pause in various conflict zones to allow officials to focus on the pandemic, was transformed into a US-China tussle. It seems that the competition between China and the US will only intensify, as the international community is comparing the responses by the two world powers.

China may be winning the battle with its rational response to the global pandemic. It is fast emerging as a part of the solution, rather than the problem, as it is 'not just fighting for itself, but also for the world'.³¹ China has had notable success in reshaping its image as a 'saviour' with its effective global outreach to contain the disease. The United States, on the other hand, has not only failed to respond to the world health crisis; but also President Trump and other US officials have been involved in a blame game with allegations on China for a delayed alert to the pandemic.

The Economic Front

The global pandemic is having a disastrous impact on the world

³¹ Statement by Zhang Jun, China's permanent representative to the United Nations.

economy; companies, regardless of nationality, are facing downfall. The UN has estimated that global economic losses could reach up to US\$2 trillion.³² Developing countries tend to be more vulnerable and China may be the only country in a position to help.

The global economy is expected to contract by 3 percent by the end of 2020 as the great lockdown curbs productivity.³³ For the first time since the Great Depression, advanced economies, emerging markets and developing economies all are in recession.³⁴ China's GDP shrank by 6.8 percent during the January-March period,³⁵ the country's first decline since 1976. However, despite contraction in the Chinese economy, the IMF projections of its economic growth are positive; it is to grow by 1.2 percent in 2020 and 9.2 percent in 2021,³⁶ ahead of all major economies. On the other hand, the US, regardless of pumping massive amounts of money into stabilizing the economy, will suffer a 5.9 percent shrinkage in 2020 and grow by 4.7 in 2021, as per IMF projections.³⁷

However, China also has to make a comeback. This will further fuel the existing tensions between the two countries. To accelerate

³² World Economic Forum, 'COVID-19 crash: How China's Economy may Offer a Glimpse of the Future,' 31 Mar 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/covid19-economy-china-health-coronavirus-economics-global/>, accessed on 28 April 2020.

³³ Rappoport and Smialek, 'IMF Predicts Worst Downturn since the Great Depression.' *The New York Times*, 14 April 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/14/us/politics/coronavirus-economy-recession-depression.html>, accessed on 19 April 2020.

³⁴ The Great Lockdown: Worst Economic Downturn since the Great Depression. IMF Blog, 14 Apr 2020, <https://blogs.imf.org/2020/04/14/the-great-lockdown-worst-economic-downturn-since-the-great-depression/>, accessed on 19 April 2020.

³⁵ K. Bradsher, 'China's Economy Shrinks, Ending a Nearly Half-Century of Growth'. *The New York Times*, 16 Apr 2022: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/16/business/china-coronavirus-economy.html>, accessed on 20 April 2020.

³⁶ IMF, 'Global Economy in 2020 on Track for Sharpest Downturn since 1930s', 14 April 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-imf-worldbank-outlook/global-economy-in-2020-on-track-for-sharpestdownturn-since-1930s-imf-idUSKCN21W1MA>, accessed on 20 April 2020.

³⁷ Ibid.

its comeback, China will go back on its commitments to the US to rectify specific practices endemic to China's economic model that systematically tilt the playing field in favour of Chinese companies domestically and globally.³⁸ The commitment of internal economic liberalization and reforms will also receive a setback. In fact, President Xi will resort to strengthening the one-party rule because, despite the rapid growth in its economy and acceptance of a role for competition and markets, the Chinese Communist Party remains firmly in control of China's economy.³⁹ This is surely not the time to revisit the Chinese economic model or political structure. The shrinkage of the economy is the only challenge the Chinese government is facing at the moment. However, the fact that China will manage a positive growth rate in 2020 is a testament to its strength.

The United States, on the other hand, is not only confronting a major economic crisis as a result of the COVID-19 health emergency, but is also facing a political challenge with the forthcoming 2020 elections and lumbering in its response to the crisis domestically. The Trump administration, instead of working on deliverables and response mechanisms, has themed the elections on blaming China.

Is the United States Failing as a Superpower?

The United States has failed both domestically and globally. It has fast emerged as the epicenter of the pandemic as things have got considerably worse in the countries' mega cities. The death toll in the US has surpassed all other countries.

The US lacks the production and procurement capacity to meet many of its own demands let alone provide aid in crisis zones elsewhere. The US Strategic National Stockpile which keeps critical medical supplies is believed to have only one percent of the masks and respirators and perhaps ten percent of the ventilators needed to deal

³⁸ Meltzer, J. and Shenai, N., 'The US-China Economic Relationship: A Comprehensive Approach,' https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/us_china_economic_relationship.pdf.

³⁹ Ibid.

with the pandemic.⁴⁰ The rest will have to be made up with imports from China or by rapidly increased domestic manufacturing. Chinese local governments and companies have donated 9.6 million masks, 500,000 test kits, 305,000 pairs of gloves, and 133,500 pairs of goggles to 55 cities in 30 US states.⁴¹

According to the former CIA Director, John Brennan, ‘Trump’s message has been that America is going to look out for its own interests, not for the interest of others’.⁴² Brett McGurk, who was formerly the Trump administration’s top civilian official in the fight against the Islamic State, says that ‘Diplomacy and global leadership are long standing attributes of American power. Trump risks squandering both’.⁴³

The US is in the news for all the wrong reasons, the latest being the Trump Administration slashing the US contribution to the WHO whereas China gave a US\$50 million gift to WHO in this time of crisis. Speaking at the World Health Assembly on 18 May 2020, President Xi has promised a US\$2 billion investment over two years to help fight the Coronavirus pandemic.⁴⁴

The US has lost opportunity after opportunity to appear as a

⁴⁰ Campbell and Doshi, ‘The Coronavirus Could Reshape Global Order,’ 18 Mar 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-03-18/coronavirus-could-reshape-global-order>, accessed on 22 Mar 2020.

⁴¹ China says it backs WHO in tracing COVID-19, denounces U.S. ‘lies’, 7 May 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-china/china-says-it-backs-who-in-tracing-covid-19-denounces-u-s-lies-idUSKBN22J10G>, accessed 8 May 2020.

⁴² *NBC News*, ‘As U.S. Struggles to Stem Coronavirus, China Asserts itself as Global Leader’, 26 Mar 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/u-s-struggles-stem-coronavirus-china-asserts-itself-global-leader-n1169491>, accessed on 2 April 2020.

⁴³ B. McGurk, ‘America Should Build an International Coalition Now’, *The Atlantic*, 29 Mar 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/america-should-build-international-coalition-now/608983/> accessed on 2 April 2020.

⁴⁴ Aljazeera, ‘WHO Chief Vows Independent Review of Global Pandemic Response’, 18 May 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/chief-vows-independent-review-global-pandemic-response-200518150848008.html>, accessed on 19 May 2020.

state in control of the situation or, for that matter, giving the world a sense of direction. It has said almost nothing about international cooperation to fight the spread. In fact, it is seeking aid and assistance and is playing the blame game. To add insult to injury, the world witnessed American governors having squabbles with President Trump over the management of the crisis. Jude Blanchette, who holds the Freedom Chair in China Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said, 'we are bungling this in a fairly open and transparent manner'⁴⁵ and, more importantly, Beijing's push for global leadership is able to get so much tail wind by virtue of the relative absence of any US leadership.

Micah Zenko, a writer at the Foreign Policy, calls it 'willful negligence' of the Trump Administration as the intelligence community warned White House at the year's start, about the threat. However, the senior officials were influenced by Donald Trump's flawed response to the threat. Trump's first tweet about Coronavirus stated, 'We have it totally under control. It's one person coming in from China, and we have it under control'. Later, he reportedly called the virus a 'Chinese virus' which created ill-will between the two states.

The West has demonstrated neither responsibility nor leadership in the face of major events, recently.⁴⁶ The US has always questioned the political systems and governance mechanisms of the countries which did not comply with its wish list. The examples include withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran, invasions of Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, the Syrian refugee crisis, the Yemen war and the global financial crisis.

The COVID-19 could have been a golden opportunity for the West particularly the United States, to show the failings of the

⁴⁵ Huma Baqai, 'The Geostrategic Implications of COVID-19', 27 Apr 2020, <https://www.geo.tv/latest/285178-the-geostrategic-implications-of-covid-19>, accessed on 28 Apr 2020.

⁴⁶ X. Tao, 'How the West Failed the Rest in the COVID-19 Pandemic', 14 April 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/how-the-west-failed-the-rest-in-the-covid-19-pandemic/>, accessed on 16 April 2020.

Communist Party system in China especially because China was on the defensive on how the pandemic started and initially blundered in its handling of the spread.

However, the criticism of China by the US seems to be a self-serving exercise under President Trump. While talking to Reuters, he said, 'China will do anything they can, to have me lose this race.' Analysts are of the view that the US President is trying to blame China for his own incapability of responding to the pandemic. Barbara Plett Usher, BBC State Department Correspondent, reports in her article on 'Trumplomacy: What's behind the new US strategy on China?' that, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has declared multiple times that the Chinese Communist Party can't be trusted. He focuses attention on Beijing's inability to contain the virus shortly after it emerged and questions the security of its laboratories,⁴⁷ all charges that China vigorously denies.

WHO, in fact, supports the Chinese stance.⁴⁸ Perhaps, for the first time, China is beating the US at its own game by mounting a very aggressive counter propaganda campaign to US allegations nicknamed 'wolf-warrior diplomacy'. This is a new approach popular inside China and reinforces a presumed transition of Chinese diplomacy from conservative, passive and low-key to assertive, proactive and high-profile.⁴⁹ China, at the same time, is using the soft power of assistance in times of crisis to win over vulnerable states, also called Mask Diplomacy.

The United States inherited the legitimacy of global leadership which flows from its domestic governance, the provision of global

⁴⁷ B.P. Ushe, 'What's behind Trump's New Strategy on China?' BBC News, 1 May 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52506073>, accessed on 3 May 2020.

⁴⁸ Aljazeera, 'WHO Says Coronavirus 'natural in origin': Live updates.' 1 May 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/trump-suggests-coronavirus-linked-wuhan-lab-live-updates-200430231206079.html>, accessed on 1 May 2020.

⁴⁹ 'Interpreting China's 'Wolf-Warrior Diplomacy'', 15 May 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/interpreting-chinas-wolf-warrior-diplomacy/>, accessed on 17 May 2020.

public goods and ability and willingness to master and coordinate a global response in times of crisis. The status of the US as a global leader over the past seven decades has been built largely on wealth and power. However, it is now failing the test on all the three fronts of wealth, power and legitimacy in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is failing its own people and it is failing the world.

China's Role as a Saviour

China is gradually but surely emerging as the country that has not only survived COVID-19 but also may be a global saviour. It is several weeks ahead of many other countries on the curve of the virus progress. Karl Taro Greenfeld, the author of *China Syndrome* writes that there are four stages of epidemic grief: denial, panic, fear and, if all goes well, rational response.⁵⁰ According to this design, China has gone through the first three phases and has arrived at a rational response to the pandemic. Most parts of the world are in the phase of fear which will dissipate eventually and be replaced by a more realistic approach of taking on a rational response.

Despite the doubts cast over China's role in the spread of the virus, the fact remains that countries that ignored Chinese counsel to deploy Beijing's playbook for fighting the outbreak, especially its strict lockdown, have suffered immeasurably. The Chinese are in so many words saying to the world that the homework the Chinese people wrote with their blood and sweat is right in front of your very eyes and you can copy it.

China is working towards filling the vacuum of medical supplies; its global outreach and efforts to serve humanity are commendable. China, by April 2020, has helped no fewer than 100 countries fighting the Coronavirus and provided assistance to four international organizations.⁵¹ The crisis has exposed the global dependence on Chinese medical

⁵⁰ 'The Pattern That Epidemics Always Follow', *The Atlantic*, 6 Mar 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/four-things-you-need-know-about-virus/607495/>, accessed on 11 Mar 2020.

⁵¹ 'West's Pandemic Falsehoods Debunked', *Global Times*, 16 Apr 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1185819.shtml>, accessed on 29 Apr 2020.

supplies. Three hundred of the world's top five hundred companies have facilities in the high-tech manufacturing hub of Wuhan where the outbreak began. Almost three quarters of all anti-coagulant drugs imported by Italy come from China; half of all the antibiotics imported by Germany, Italy and France also come from China. The global supply chain needs to be valued.⁵² Decoupling⁵³ is emerging as a theme. However, reshaping the global supply chain takes a lot of time. China will remain a vital manufacturing hub for decades to come and not just for medical supplies. China seems to be in a better position to both restore and consolidate them. 'Rethinking China' is going to be more positive than negative.

The US and the UK may blame and bad-mouth China but the fact remains that the rest of the world is looking towards China for help. China appears to be leading; its private and public sectors are filling the gaps. The Chinese government and Jack Ma, a Chinese billionaire and co-founder of the Alibaba group, have sent doctors and medical supplies to France, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Iran and Iraq, the Philippines, Cambodia, Pakistan, India, the United States and several other countries. It was China that stepped up first to help Italy and dispatched masks, ventilators, and 300 intensive care doctors to support overwhelmed hospitals in the country. It also stands in the forefront to help Africa with massive donations to fight the Coronavirus pandemic. The Jack Ma Foundation has also sent 20,000 testing kits, 100,000 masks, and 1,000 protective suits and face shields to all countries of Africa.⁵⁴ The projection of state power beyond its borders was the domain of the US and the West. The role is being

⁵² 'Coronavirus will Change the Way the World does Business for Good,' *Financial Times*, 2 Apr 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/cc2ff3f4-6dc1-11ea-89df-41bea055720b>, accessed on 25 Apr 2020.

⁵³ Collin's Dictionary defines Decoupling as 'the separation of previously linked systems so that they may operate independently.'

⁵⁴ 'From Cover-up to Global Donor: China's Soft Power Play', *Financial Times*, 24 Mar 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/efdec278-6d01-11ea-9bca-bf503995cd6f>, accessed on 15 Apr 2020.

taken over by China.

The saviour narrative is endorsed by the fact that Chinese researchers and medical practitioners are emerging as leaders in the global scientific world by publishing in open-access sites evidence on case management, genomics and various areas of public health and epidemiology which have been of vital use globally.

At the opening of the 73rd session of the World Health Assembly on 18 May 2020, President Xi said that China supported a ‘comprehensive evaluation’ of the global response to the Coronavirus pandemic. Any vaccines, developed for COVID-19, will be China’s contribution to global health and will be made a public good. China will ensure accessibility and affordability of these vaccines to the developing world. Moreover, Xi also stated that he will ‘work with the United Nations to set up a global humanitarian response depot and hub in China’.⁵⁵

China is doing well on the research front also. Xinhua News Agency, which is China’s official state-run press agency, claims that Chinese researchers are racing against time. Their early work of isolating the novel Coronavirus and sequencing its whole genome has enabled scientists and health authorities worldwide to carry out follow-up research. The press agency also reports that Chinese researchers had published 54 research papers in international journals, and a platform for COVID-19 research sharing went online on Chinese Medical Journal Network with more than 700 research papers recording 2.3 million views.⁵⁶ China had not only controlled the spread of the Coronavirus disease from its land but has also taken over scientifically by the end of March 2020.

⁵⁵ ‘COVID-19 vaccine will be made a global public good - Xi Jinping,’ 18 May 2020, <https://www.srilankamirror.com/news/news-in-brief/18210-covid-19-vaccine-will-be-made-a-global-public-good-xi-jinping?from=groupmessage&isappinstall=0>, accessed on 19 May 2020.

⁵⁶ ‘China Focus: Scientific Research Plays a Pivotal Role in China’s COVID-19 Fight,’ Xinhua Media Agency, 30 Mar 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-03/30/c_138931909.htm, accessed on 27 Apr 2020.

China has made policies to vet the research before it gets published to eliminate false facts to spread. Reportedly, two Chinese universities have posted notices online, stating that research on the virus' origins needs to be approved by the university's academic committee and the Ministry of Science and Technology or the Ministry of Education before being submitted for publication.⁵⁷ Alice Hughes, a biologist at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, says this measure will stop the dissemination of potentially inaccurate and sensationalist research.⁵⁸

The world is now witness to China's ability to handle the crises at home without being in a rush to open to prevent economic slowdown and hunger. China imposed the largest and the most stringent quarantine in history. Factories were shut down, public transport stopped and people were asked to stay indoors. China invested in building hospitals and quarantine zones provided with trained medical staff. With these steps forcefully enforced, China was able to flatten the curve and avoid millions of new cases and deaths.⁵⁹ The opening up with Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) being put in place also has global following. The social media is viral with SOPs China has introduced to gradually open up.

Moreover, with the Belt and Road framework in mind, China is strengthening its commitment to reshaping the face of globalization where the systems of healthcare, communication, transportation and production and distribution of consumer goods may be transformed completely. Most recently, in mid-March 2020, President Xi mentioned to Giuseppe Conte, Italy's prime minister, that Beijing is willing to

⁵⁷ A. Silver, and D. Cyranoski, 'China is Tightening its Grip on Coronavirus Research' *Nature*, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-01108-y>, accessed on 27 Apr 2020.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ 'Managing People and the Coronavirus', *Daily Times*, 24 Apr. 2020, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/601283/managing-people-and-the-coronavirus/>, accessed on 28 Apr 2020.

contribute to a ‘Health Silk Road’ (Jiankang Sichou Zhilu).⁶⁰ The Health Silk Road includes mutual medical aid between China and Italy to ‘battle the COVID-19 together’, as well as any activity that might support China’s vision of ‘a new approach for perfecting global public health governance.’⁶¹

Jiankang Sichou Zhilu already existed since at least 2017 as President Xi first used the term during a visit to Geneva in January 2017 where he signed a memorandum of understanding with WHO committing to the construction of a ‘Health Silk Road’ that would aim to improve public health in countries along China’s Belt and Road.⁶² The pandemic may become a milestone to speed up the launch. Prior to this, a similar short-term plan was mentioned in 2015 in the Three-Year Plan for the Implementation of the ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ Health Exchange and Cooperation (2015–2017)⁶³ which is criticized by many in the West for doing too little as compared to what was claimed. It is still too early to gauge China’s performance in the context of improving global health. However, there is hope that it may be revolutionary.

Western Criticism and Alternative

The US holds China responsible for the spread of Coronavirus, an idea roundly dismissed by experts, US allies and Beijing. However, Europe along with the US, has been very skeptical of BRI alleging it

⁶⁰ ‘From Cover-up to Global Donor: China’s Soft Power Play’, *Financial Times*, 24 Mar 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/efdec278-6d01-11ea-9bca-bf503995cd6f>, accessed on 15 Apr 2020.

⁶¹ ‘China Proposes Health Silk Road’, *The Maritime Executive*, 28 Mar. 2020, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/china-proposes-health-silk-road>, accessed on 29 Mar 2020.

⁶² ‘Mapping China’s Health Silk Road,’ <https://www.cfr.org/blog/mapping-chinas-health-silk-road>, accessed on 12 April 2020.

⁶³ National Health and Family Planning Commission of the PRC, ‘Major Health and Exchange and Cooperation on the Belt and Road Initiative’, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/m/chinahealth/2015-12/18/content_22774412.htm, accessed on 28 April 2020.

as a ‘branding strategy’ for China’s foreign policy. Both are of the view that it may have a hidden agenda of geostrategic imprint behind the idea of connectivity, politics of investments and loans, infrastructure and social projects.⁶⁴ The US has gone to the extent of calling it ‘debt diplomacy’. Europe has engaged with China more than the US but also calls upon it to exercise more transparency and introduce rule-based connectivity.

Frans-Paul van der Putten of the Netherland’s Clingendael Institute identifies three potential long-term impacts of COVID-19 on the BRI which may also have an impact on the emerging global power equation:

1. A greater role for state-supported Chinese companies in global sea and air transport while some of their more market vulnerable foreign competitors may go bankrupt or downsize.
2. Increased pressure on China’s relations with developing countries that built infrastructure with Chinese money and struggle to repay their debts.
3. An additional motive for China to take more of a leadership role in multilateral platforms such as the G20, the World Bank and the IMF.⁶⁵

Wade Shepard, a commentator on the Silk Road, criticizes Chinese supplies in Forbes stating ‘the providing of medical equipment in a time of crisis to a BRI partner via rail shows that China is carrying forward the foundational pillars of BRI of supporting person-to-person connections between China and the rest of the world.’⁶⁶ The Health Silk Road has also come under criticism by the Brussels bureaucracy about it being not

⁶⁴ <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/some-say-chinas-belt-and-road-helped-create-this-pandemic-can-it-prevent-the-next-one/>, accessed on 14 April 2020.

⁶⁵ W. Shepard, ‘China’s ‘Health Silk Road’ Gets a Boost from COVID-19,’ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/wadeshepard/2020/03/27/chinas-health-silk-road-gets-a-boost-from-covid-19/#120572e56043>, accessed on 28 Apr 2020.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

geared towards saving lives but essentially to ‘destabilize’ the EU and improving Xi Jinping’s domestic image.⁶⁷

One hundred and twenty-six countries and twenty-nine international organizations have signed cooperation agreements with China on jointly building the Belt and Road Initiative.⁶⁸ This has, however, also generated skepticism, counter-strategies and alternatives; none of them have really taken off. It includes the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (US, Japan, Australia and India), and more recent ones are the Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure (EU and Japan) and the ‘Blue Dot Network’ (US, Japan and Australia).⁹

It goes without saying that Blue Dot Network (BDN) and Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure (PSCQI) are the Western strategic responses to the BRI in the infrastructural area in Indo-Pacific and beyond. PSCQI is identical in scope to BRI and both are in competition with BRI.

There is no comparison between BRI, BDN, and PSCQI. The countries involved are in no position to commit to the kind of financial assistance China has already made on connectivity and infrastructure projects around the world. BRI has a vision and the plans are very clear. On the other hand, BDN and PSCQI, launched by countries skeptical of China’s rising geostrategic footprint, appear to be self-serving and lack vision. It may actually demotivate and even repel foreign investors and project leaders from taking an interest in these networks.

Conclusion

The post WW-II global order led by the West dominated the world for more than seventy years by successfully battling the tide of communism and the military might of Soviet Union. However, the post COVID-19 world seems to be different where hard power,

⁶⁷ P. Escobar, ‘China rolls out the Health Silk Road’, *Asia Times*, 2 Apr. 2020, <https://asiatimes.com/2020/04/china-rolls-out-the-health-silk-road/>, accessed on 27 Apr 2020.

⁶⁸ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-09/14/c_138391095.htm, accessed on 7 May 2020.

ideological and religious divides and the capitalist-exclusive economic models may become irrelevant. The world may be looking at decisive and strategic leadership that takes more pride in investing in human well-being and sustainable growth.

Perhaps, if China had focused on the health component of the BRI much earlier, not only would the world have been in a better position to handle the COVID-19 pandemic but also China would have avoided any accusation that it is politicizing health. In fact, China would have created a health network that could even surpass the WHO when it comes to efficiency.⁶⁹

China is now seen as a country that is taking extraordinary efforts to save lives abroad and is willing to share its capabilities, knowledge and, most importantly, its finances. China seems to have seized the moment whereas traditional global leadership is struggling or is in a state of disarray.

The United States' global position will come under global search lights once the health crisis is over. President Xi, China's most influential leader since Mao, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, had made it his priority to expand the country's economic and military might around the world. The COVID-19 may have provided him the opportunity to accelerate the pace of his ambition.

Health-care and climate will become more important than power and arms in the post COVID-19 world. Both the US and China do not fit the bill. However, China for now is better poised. It has to do a lot more to let the world trust it enough to become a global leader. The West that ruled the world first through their military might and later through international monetary institutions also had the soft power reach of the rule of law, democracy, morality, human rights and multilateralism; it is now failing on all of these fronts. The million-dollar question is, will the West recover, revamp and continue or will China emerge as an alternative?

⁶⁹ See <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/some-say-chinas-belt-and-road-helped-create-this-pandemic-can-it-prevent-the-next-one>, accessed on 14 Apr 2020.

Conceptualizing Controlled Globalization in Post Pandemic Politics

SHAHID HAMEED

The new century dawned with the shocking 9/11 incident resulting in the ‘globalization of terrorism’. The United States launched a Global War on Terror (GWO’T) that shaped the international relations discourse for the next decade. The second decade of the 21st century has been dominated by another global threat perception known as ‘climate change’. With the failure of the United Nations (UN) to address this problem effectively, leading states have retained this responsibility and, by 2010, it became a ‘joint venture of both the G-8 and G-20’.⁷⁰ In 2012, Strategic Monitor confirmed that the cooperative systemic architecture is less likely to continue in the coming decade and a ‘greater role of the state’ has been rapidly emerging.⁷¹ The United States space agency, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), announced that 2015 has been the warmest year in history.⁷² Nevertheless, in the next few years, the global warming and climate change has reduced the hype of GWO’T. As the second decade came to an end, another threat has put the world in shocking conditions. This time China has warned the rest of the

⁷⁰ Ella Kokotsis, *The Gx Contribution to Global Climate Governance*, *Studia Diplomatica*, Egmont Institute, Vol. 68, No. 3, *The Future of the Gx System and Global Governance* (2017), pp. 79-96.

⁷¹ Van Schaik, Louise. “An Uncertain World”, *Clingendael 2013 Strategic Monitor*, see www.jstor.org/stable/resrep_05391.17, accessed on 18 April 2020.

⁷² Kokotsis, op.cit.

world that there is an emergency threat to human life around the globe as the COVID-19 outbreak may create an existential problem for the future of humankind.

The proliferation of infectious diseases and zoonotic viruses have been generally considered the product of globalization.⁷³ The growing economic activities, migrations, international travel, refugee movements and increasing interdependence have increased the probability of the spread of viral diseases. However, the history of pandemic outbreaks is not as new as the phenomena of globalization and anti-globalization. In the recent history of pandemic outbreaks, the deadly 1918-19 Spanish Influenza has been the most visible and caused the death of nearly 20-50 million people around the world with high mortality rate in young people.⁷⁴ HIV/AIDS, Ebola, Swine Flu (H1N1), H5N1, H7N9 Avian Influenza, infectious Congo disease, SARS and Bird Flu have resulted in thousands of deaths around the world.⁷⁵ But the global pandemic outbreak has never reached the same spread and level as has happened during the COVID-19 episode.⁷⁶ Whatever may be the clinical dimensions of COVID-19, the political outcomes of this outbreak denote that the globalization of world politics⁷⁷ has changed into ‘the world’s politics of globalization’.

⁷³ Alvin Y. So and Ngai Pun, “Introduction: Globalization and Anti-Globalization Of SARS in Chinese Societies”, *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2004), p.1.

⁷⁴ Gottfredsson, Magnús, et al., “Lessons from the Past: Familial Aggregation Analysis of Fatal Pandemic Influenza (Spanish Flu) in Iceland in 1918.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 105, No. 4 (2008) 1303-308. www.jstor.org/stable/25451270, accessed on 16 April 2020.

⁷⁵ There has been a series of global pandemics during the 20th century. Similar to COVID-19, Influenza pandemics of 1957-58, 1968-69 have Asian origin.

⁷⁶ Though some infectious diseases do not become a pandemic and a few can be mild and develop resistance gradually, a new type may any time become lethal as the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in thousands of deaths within weeks.

⁷⁷ See Steve Smith, Patricia Owens and John Baylis, *The Globalization of World Politics, An Introduction to International Relations*, 6th Edition (Oxford University Press 2014).

Controlled Globalization, Pandemics and Politics

Globalization as compression of space and time has grown to a certain level where the concepts of Industry 4.0 have been emerging as an instrument to reach the ultimate human destiny. What we know today as ‘globalized world’ is rapidly transforming to a new digitalized human world. Imaginations are going to become truth as the bio-tech world, fifth generation wireless technologies, robotics and artificial intelligence have been ready to slump existing structures. Of course, the emerging fourth industrial revolution and cognitive functioning of machines might de(stabilize) all aspects of life. Resultantly, parameters for the state’s power and security will not remain as traditional as they are in today’s globalization. In a digitalized political world, oceans and space might be the zones of conflict and nuclear weapons might become less pertinent to deterrence concepts. States will be left with no option but to compromise a valuable portion of security because, under known versions of globalization, ‘the market becomes hegemonic subjugating both the state and society under its control’.⁷⁸

The ontological positioning and epistemological differences have shaped multifaceted discourses of globalization.⁷⁹ Despite dissimilarities in opinion and heterogeneous characteristics ‘a neutral frame describes globalization as a natural, evolutionary and largely inevitable development’.⁸⁰ These attributes define a continuity in ontological secrets and epistemological innovations. No matter how and what the meanings of ‘globalization’ are for someone, it covers a cross-border, transnational and world-wide array of interactions. No matter which countries are more globalized and which are not — the spread of disease and ideas is inevitable.⁸¹ But globalization is not an

⁷⁸ So and Pun, “Introduction: Globalization and Anti-Globalization of SARS in Chinese Societies.”

⁷⁹ Peer C. Fiss and Paul M. Hirsch. “The Discourse of Globalization: Framing and Sense-making of an Emerging Concept.” *American Sociological Review* 70, No. 1 (2005), pp. 29-52. www.jstor.org/stable/4145349, accessed on 9 April 2020.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 35.

⁸¹ “Globalization’s Last Hurrah?” *Foreign Policy*, No. 128 (2002), pp. 38-51.

independent force that has the ability to drive multifaceted aspects of the world as has inextricable linkage with states having power to regulate it. Though some states enjoy comparatively greater indicators of globalization, they do not have the ability to control its inward or outward flow. For example, Ireland and Denmark have a greater globalization index as compared to France and Germany⁸² but none of them can match the US, Russia, or China in controlling inward and outward globalization.

By and by, that is not all about the ‘next age of globalization’ as it transcends the neo-liberal economic philosophy and realist theory of international relations simultaneously. The consequences for individuals and states are much more devastating with the emergence of new actors, particularly viral diseases that are affecting the world’s social, economic and political landscape. These infectious diseases may cause unbearable losses for human existence. In fact, the idea is not essentially to defend an ‘anti-globalist’ approach or criticize the contemporary flow of globalization but to identify a pattern in states’ behaviour in order to understand the global responses to any devastating pandemic or biological outbreak. Therefore, it has a totally different conception as compared to anti-globalization⁸³ as well as assumptions of economic interdependence and sustainable development.⁸⁴ A ‘controlled globalization’ thus denotes a unique positioning of development and progress different from the globalists and anti-globalists debate. The phenomena refers to discovering a ‘dominant source of global power execution’ whether individuals, state, non-state actors within an anarchic international structure. It also incorporates linkages between these

⁸² Erik Lundsgaarde, “Introduction: Contextualising Globalization Scepticism, Report: Explaining Globalization Scepticism,” Danish Institute for International Studies (2018), p.11.

⁸³ Manfred B. Steger and Erin K. Wilson, “Anti-Globalization or Alter-Globalization? Mapping the Political Ideology of the Global Justice Movement”, *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 56, No. 3 (September 2012), pp. 439-454.

⁸⁴ Berke, Philip, and Maria Manta, Planning for Sustainable Development: Measuring Progress in Plans. www.jstor.org/stable/resrep18489.4, accessed on 6 April 2020.

regulatory authorities of future globalization. No doubt, globalization has been influenced by all these factors but it is the international structure that works as the primary regulatory authority and, within those structures, the dominant portion (depending upon the nature of the world system) leads the future direction for globalization. Thus, a controlled globalization is actually the power to define future expanding mechanisms for the world and whoever controls that power will decide the future of the world.

There is no such ‘coherent theoretical foundation for globalization in international relations discipline’.⁸⁵ At the same time, international relations are intricately connected with states. The transformations in the world’s political, economic and social structures as demonstrated by globalization merely shape epistemological patterns of agency in terms of responses. Thus, the state’s role as an important actor cannot be neglected even in a world with other powerful non-state actors. The focus here is not to exclusively develop a new theory of international relations, but limit it to emerging world politics with reference to new contours of globalization, particularly the COVID-19 shock and the collective failure of individuals, states, and the system to defeat an invisible enemy.

In December 2019, the emergence of COVID-19 with a considerable mortality rate globally put the whole world into a shock. By mid-April 2020, more than a million people had been infected with over a hundred thousand deaths around the world reflecting the lethality of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been actually the most influential shock in the post-9/11 era that has not only covered a dominant portion of global flow of news but also drew lines for future policy narratives of states and other international institutions. The World Health Organization announced a global health emergency on 30 January 2020. On the other hand, a new wave of global powers

⁸⁵ Kacowicz, M. Arie, and Mor Mitrani, “Why Don’t We Have Coherent Theories of International Relations About Globalization?” *Global Governance* 22, No. 2 (2016), pp. 189-208. www.jstor.org/stable/44861073, accessed on 11 April 2020.

political contestation escalated. In fact, the globalization of COVID-19 accelerated the world politics of globalization. On 8 April 2020, WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, requested all states to ‘quarantine politicising COVID-19’ and not to ‘politicize this virus’.⁸⁶

In a short period of time, the United States has become the worst sufferer of COVID-19. The strongest military power has been facing a grim challenge.⁸⁷ Despite having a global pandemic surveillance mechanism, biosecurity labs, political and financial investments in multilateral institutions,⁸⁸ the US vaccine production has been limited as it imports nearly 70 percent of its required vaccines.⁸⁹ Resultantly, a rapid response to COVID-19 was not possible and the US has failed to cope with the spread of the disease. On the other hand, China has immediately announced a victory against the pandemic and Russia has shown an ambiguous global response. At the same time, the European continent has experienced devastating outcomes of the pandemic spread. On the political landscape, a non-preferential outlook in US foreign policy behaviour towards Europe propelled by Trump’s ‘America first doctrine’⁹⁰ has emerged as a new point of reference in world politics. US has put on hold the funding to the World Health Organization (WHO) and officially criticized the role of this UN specialized agency during the COVID-19 episode.⁹¹

⁸⁶ “Please quarantine Politicising COVID-19”, World Health Organization, 8 April 2020; <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>, accessed on 11 April 2020.

⁸⁷ Sarah Kliff et al., There Aren’t Enough Ventilators to Cope with the Coronavirus, *The New York Times*, 18 March 2020; <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/18/business/coronavirus-ventilator-shortage.html> accessed on 12 April 2020.

⁸⁸ Matthew M. Kavanagh et al., Ending Pandemics: U.S. Foreign Policy to Mitigate Today’s Major Killers, Tomorrow’s Outbreaks, and The Health Impacts of Climate Change, *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (Fall 2019/Winter 2020), pp. 49-68.

⁸⁹ John M. Barry, “The Next Pandemic?”, *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Duke University Press Summer 2010), p. 12.

⁹⁰ President Donald J. Trump is Demanding Accountability from the World Health Organization, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-demanding-accountability-world-health-organization/>, accessed on 15 April 2020.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

In contemporary world politics, the liberal institutional approach has also influenced international relations discourse as international organizations were given space to perform their role as independent actors. The liberal institutionalism ultimately developed a new thinking to identify a common global agenda that has shaped the homogeneity of the political world based on common threat perceptions i.e., environment, pandemics, natural disasters, etc. In fact, the fabrication of ideas has been linked with perceived threats to the political universe we inhabit.⁹² However, the modern state system based on power contestation cannot be undermined as it has emerged as the greatest political fact in the last five centuries.⁹³

The fresh wave of global power contestation during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak has proven this unique character of the state and system. The role of collective global efforts against pandemics or any other non-traditional security threat has been dramatically shrinking since the COVID-19 episode. International structure has been going back to Cold War politics with new characteristics. In fact, Russia has been replaced by China and the new century has given birth to a rough bipolarity. But this time, globalization will play a definite and decisive role and the winner will be the one who has the ability to ‘control the flow of globalization’ not limited to hard power capabilities but a wide range of ‘affecting, influencing, and controlling the will and perception’⁹⁴ of others. World orders have dynamic characteristics but they never exist in a static position nor does a particular order remain forever.⁹⁵ The great powers’ responses in the aftermath of COVID-19 established the reality of power politics surpassing the agenda of global

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2018).

⁹⁴ Bergin Anthony, and Karl Claxton. “Shock Without Awe: Military Lessons of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands.” *PRISM* 5, No. 3 (2015), p. 81. www.jstor.org/stable/26470418, accessed on 16 April 2020.

⁹⁵ Anne-Marie Slaughter, “The Return of Anarchy?” *Journal of International Affairs* (2017), pp.11-16.

governance. The role of international institutions including the United Nations (UN) has a challenging future that may wane its credibility to perform defined functions effectively.⁹⁶ Subsequently, a new phase with a nationalistic approach in foreign policy behaviours of states will frame the grounds for the upcoming ‘controlled globalization’.

Despite having limited aspirations of global cooperation to cope with COVID-19, US, China and Russian responses have demonstrated a contesting behaviour in contemporary world politics. Donald Trump named COVID-19 as ‘Chinese virus’ whereas Mike Pompeo used the term of ‘Wuhan Virus’. China’s initial stance was also based on reciprocity questioning US capacity to control disease. Russia, on the other hand, has framed a new strategy to quarantine the flow of information. Meanwhile, Russian adoption of Chinese diplomatic philosophy by sending aid of medical equipment has fostered debates on Russian political maneuverings. The oil war is an additional factor that has proved Russian’s key role in victimizing the US through challenging OPEC. The pandemic has also given an opportunity to states to define new routes for political engagements. There have been few most visible outcomes of the COVID-19 outbreak that might strengthen ‘controlled globalization’ in the aftermath of this global shock. First, the neo-liberal approach to regulating economic or political settlements has been facing a rapid downfall as pandemic fear increased and the role of international organizations has reduced though not vanished at all. Second, a de-facto bipolar world order is being shaped that may increase economic, political and strategic tensions. This systemic evolution has been shaping new principles of foreign policy behaviour and arrangements of actors within anarchic world structures. Third, the US has realized that the new competition is not simply a hard power projection but an attempt to control the maximum portion of globalization. This realization has definitely

⁹⁶ Ibid.

promoted concepts like ‘sharp power’⁹⁷ and ‘shock power’⁹⁸ as tools for ‘controlled globalization’.

Conclusion

Eventually, the COVID-19 has been rapidly shaping the forthcoming agenda for world politics. Followed by the global economic and financial crisis, the pandemic shock was perfectly timed as the global oil war has abruptly changed the economic indicators of great powers. Non-polarity is transforming into a rough bi-polar order and ‘controlled globalization’ has emerged as the new strategy of world politics in the 21st century. Global institutions have a limited scope to perform independent roles in building peace or provide assistance to control crises like economic recessions, wars, and pandemics. Pandemics and their implications are not new but the post-COVID-19 world has an alarming disposition as the homogeneity character in foreign policy behaviour of states has been reducing particularly in terms of the global securitization of such issues. Thus, states having the capability to practise sharp power and build a ‘shock’ for others with the ability to absorb the impact of a given shock at the same time will control the dominant portion of future globalization. It does not necessarily mean that China has achieved that maximum level but, actually, a new arrangement of power distribution has been evolving that has increased China’s ‘potential power’ for controlling globalization.

⁹⁷ Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig, “The Meaning of Sharp Power: How Authoritarian States Project Influence”, *Foreign Affairs*, No.16 (2017), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2017-11-16/meaning-sharp-power>; also see Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig, *Sharp Power Rising Authoritarian Influence*. The International Forum for Democratic Studies, National Endowment for Democracy, 2017 <https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Sharp-Power-Rising-Authoritarian-Influence-Full-Report.pdf> accessed on 10 April 2020.

⁹⁸ Shock power denotes ability of a state to produce an outward shock to destabilize or harm adversary.

Clash of Two Ideologies: Market Economy Versus Social Democracy

KAISER BENGALI

The Corona crisis has sharpened the ideological political economy divide between right-wing, pro-market, neo-liberal capitalists and left-wing, pro-people social democrats and socialists. The schism has polarized power structures and political forces within each country. It is playing out across the world: in the United States and Brazil in the West as well as in Pakistan and India in our own region. The virus is new and has no known drug or vaccine to deal with it. Given that its transmission is on account of human-to-human interaction, a curfew-like shutdown of all social and economic movements has appeared to be the only viable short-run solution. The situation has presented a stark choice for leaders of every country: save lives or save businesses. There is no middle ground.

The response of the political leadership has been diametrically opposite to each other. On the right, leaders have scrambled to protect business interests. Those on the left have prioritized saving lives. The implicit right-wing argument is that the casualties that the virus will cause will be relatively less damaging than the costs to the economy on account of a shutdown. The implicit left-wing argument is that lives are important for their own sake and cannot be measured in economic cost-benefit terms. Governments on the right and left are alarmed over collapsing revenues.

On the right, President Jair Bolsanaro of Brazil has refused to

even acknowledge the existence of the viral threat. US President Trump first dismissed it as a hoax and then opposed any kind of lockdown dithering every step of the way on measures forced upon him by the fast-deteriorating situation. In India, the Modi government initially dismissed the danger, insisting that cases were localized and no local transmission was occurring. In Pakistan, Prime Minister Imran Khan empathically opposed lockdowns and delivered three televised speeches emphasizing his opposition to it. All of the above represent pro-business forces.⁹⁹

On the left, Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo seized the initiative and ordered a lockdown in the United States' state of New York. He has become the leading voice for measures to arrest the spread of the virus. In Pakistan, the Pakistan People's Party-ruled government of Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah unilaterally ordered lockdown in the Sindh province. He has come to be seen as providing responsible leadership to the entire country. Both represent social democratic shades of the political spectrum in the two countries.

The US and Pakistan cases are very similar in terms of the trajectory of response to the crisis. In both countries, the national leadership opposed lockdowns while state or provincial level leaderships actually went ahead and imposed restrictions on movement. In the US, the New York state measures were quickly followed up by other states including many of those run by Republican governors. In Pakistan, the steps taken by Sindh were immediately adopted by other provinces, including those under Prime Minister Imran Khan's party, the PTI.

In the US, President Trump is under pressure from Wall Street and constantly and almost every other day announces dates for reopening of the economy — much like the Pakistani driver who has stopped at

⁹⁹ Classifying Imran Khan as right wing or pro-market may be a misnomer. He is essentially apolitical and without any particular shade of ideological leaning. His locally recruited team suffers from the same affliction. It is thus likely that the oxygen for his pro-market orientation in his positions and pronouncements emanates from the Washington institution team controlling his economic governance structures. That may also explain the remarkable symmetry between Donald Trump's and Imran Khan's stances.

a street light showing red and is inching forward by the second waiting to shoot forward as the lights turn green. In Pakistan, Prime Minister Imran Khan is also under pressure from the business community and continuously harangues on the need to revive economic activity. Ironically, President Trump and Prime Minister Imran Khan are both repeatedly and publicly contradicted by their own advisors and ministers.

The Angst over Unemployment and the Plight of the Poor

The business community in all countries are concerned about their bottom line – profits and many businesses are worried about survival and the loss of their investments. These apprehensions are valid in themselves. However, they are not being expressed in these terms. Rather, the frontal argument that has been adopted as a cover for their business interests is that of anxieties over unemployment and the plight of the poor! Even the Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, in an interview on a Pakistani television channel, deflected every question on the economy by pointing out the need to protect employment!

The unease over the poor is not altruistic. Unemployment has been the bane of the poor all along but was never a cause for sleepless nights for the rich. Now, too, it is not that the rich have suddenly developed empathy for the poor. The real underlying reason is fear. Social media comments among upper class chat platforms are rife with apprehensions that the unemployed labour out on the streets with their eyes pleading for help can also engender anger and turn violent.

The problem is essentially organic. The market responds to purchasing power not to need. In a society or economy where wealth and income are distributed highly unequally, the market will produce what the rich require and ignore what the poor need. If the economy possesses purchasing power for ice-cream and not for shoes, the market will produce ice-cream for the rich and ignore the barefoot children. If cardiac problems dominate the ailments of the rich and diarrhea and malaria those of the poor, the market will produce profit-

earning, state-of-the-art curative facilities but ignore zero-revenue preventive health care.

The privatization of education has had more far-reaching strategic impacts for society. First class universities offering degrees in business and finance have been established. They charge exorbitant tuition which are affordable for the rich as the ensuing qualifications command lucrative returns. Essential disciplines from the point of view of advancement of knowledge per se — philosophy, mathematics, etc., do not command high returns and are ignored by the market-oriented private universities as well as by the policy-degraded state universities. However, philosophy and mathematics are the mother of all science which is the mother of all technology. The result is that under-developed countries no longer produce mathematicians or scientists or technologists. They merely produce salesmen and sales girls for marketing the products made in advanced countries — a la economic imperialism.

Worse still, capitalism does not consider labour as human; they are production units: inputs to generate profits. This was laid out in plain words by a very influential US economist.¹⁰⁰ He calculated the per-worker value of life based on individual productivity. He then concluded that, given the higher labour productivity in developed countries and lower productivity in under-developed countries, several lives lost in the latter can be considered equal to fewer lives lost in the former. Today, the same line of thought informs the elite demand for the opening up of the economy.

The fact is that some inequality, some unemployment and some poverty has always been accepted by capitalist ideologues as the necessary price for development. Post-war economists in the West — brilliant minds indeed — actually formulated fancy mathematical models with fancier statistical verification techniques to show how inequality could produce a class of entrepreneurs as leaders and propel under-developed countries into prosperity for all. They produced lucid

¹⁰⁰ Internal Memo known as the ‘Summers Memo,’ 12 December 1991.

terminologies, trickle down, to adorn their arguments, the innocent term ‘collateral damage’ with regard to present day warfare. These academic frontline storm troopers of capitalism also had their students peppered in highly responsible positions in under-developed countries propounding the new canons. The trickle-down theory,¹⁰¹ however, ran into a major snag: it did not happen that way. The rich continued to become richer and the poor continued to become poorer.

The social democratic left, marginalized over the last four decades, is showing signs of life. Old ideas about universal social security, basic income for all, free education and health care, unemployment insurance, etc. are re-emerging with renewed vigour. In the West, mainstream opinion is beginning to treat what was considered impractical political platforms of electorally-discarded Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders¹⁰² with grudging respect. In Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto are no longer being scorned in whispered discussions among the elite.

The social democrats are also aware of the importance of keeping the economy rolling. After all, the economy means jobs and that is the ultimate bottom line for them. However, they have seen the economy structured in a manner where the bulk of the benefits in growth in national income accrue to the upper classes while the middle class and the poor are left with a pittance. The Pakistan data shows that, of every one hundred rupees growth in national income, the top ten percent accrue thirty-four rupees and the bottom ten percent are left with a mere three rupees.¹⁰³ The latter then cannot be expected to be enamoured with the idea of protecting economic growth.

¹⁰¹ The trickle-down theory states that, when wealth is concentrated in a few hands, they either invest in new ventures or spend on consumption which creates jobs and incomes for workers, i.e., the benefits of trickle-down to those at the lower end of the income ladder.

¹⁰² Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the British Labour Party and Bernie Sanders of the US Democratic Party propounded the primacy of the social agenda in national policy. Both lost their bids to lead their respective parties and countries.

¹⁰³ Social Policy Development Centre, “Combating Poverty: Is Growth Sufficient?”, Social Development in Pakistan, *Annual Review 2004*, p. 69.

The Rise and Fall of Neo-Liberalism

The neo-liberal bandwagon has soared high for four decades and ruthlessly trampled all competing ideas and ideologies. Its market supremacists have run down the value and even the utility of the State. Its intellectuals have declared the end of history. Its warriors have arm-twisted every economy of the world to bend them to the service of the capitalist class globally and locally. Those that refused to bend had devastating wars imposed on them. The result has been glaring inequality in the rich and the poor countries alike — and stark misery in the latter. Two universes emerged: one of the rich and the other of the poor.

The Pakistan example defines the situation. The rich and the poor are segregated spatially. The former live in palatial houses, two rooms to a person; the poor live in tiny flats or slums, six to a room. The rich use several gallons of water a day to keep their lawns green; the poor fetch water in buckets that is supposed to last them the whole day. On average, the rich have two private vehicles per house; the poor commute in or hang on top of crowded buses. Under the circumstances, women have no mobility. The rich send their children to schools where the per-pupil tuition fee is three times the monthly salary of the chowkidar (gate-keeper) of the school — and whose own children will never be admitted to the school. And so on.

Brazenly, the rich have been living off the poor. The opulent lifestyle of the rich is supported by a regressive fiscal regime. A study of the income group-wise burden of all taxes combined shows that the richest ten percent of the population pay twelve percent of their income in taxes while the poorest ten percent pay sixteen percent.¹⁰⁴ Public expenditure is also skewed in favour of the rich. Millions are spent on improving traffic flow on city roads to facilitate motorists but there is zero expenditure on public transport. Sectorally, millions are spent on defence, a non-productive outlay, while essential economic infrastructure is starved of funds and has eroded to critical levels.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 86.

Pakistan also has its share of neo-liberal protagonists. One prime minister, appointed by the military dictatorship, touted that the age of stellar growth had arrived. And he had data twisted and tortured to produce the results that he desired. He cited figures on the rising growth of demand for luxury imported consumer durables: air-conditioners, refrigerators, deep-freezers, television sets, microwave-ovens, etc. He claimed prosperity citing long queues of customers waiting for a table outside five-star restaurants. Of course, he also conveniently overlooked the resultant increase in electricity consumption that caused outages and cost domestic industry and jobs heavily. He also overlooked long post-midnight queues of the poor outside restaurants waiting for leftover food.

The glorification of selected and manipulated data was also eulogized by international agencies, development banks, rating agencies, etc. They are complicit in the charade. However, for all the arrogant bombast that the neo-liberal protagonists have displayed all along, the ideology of materialism has had feet of clay. An ideology that derided the State has always turned to the State, a-la socialism, for help whenever hit with an existential crisis. This is true of every country in the world including the United States and Europe and Pakistan. From Los Angeles and New York to London and Brussels, when corporations and banks were facing collapse, it is the State that was looked upon for bailouts — and it did so. In Pakistan, private sector players of the market economy routinely appeal to the State for incentive packages to help them survive — and it obliges. In the present mother of all crises, the market has just disappeared leaving the State to carry the entire burden of rescue.

The Second Reckoning

The Coronavirus crisis is posing an existential threat to the market economy edifice. And this is the second time in a hundred years that it is facing such a situation. Then, most of Europe was a highly unequal society and poverty was pervasive. Decent housing, adequate and potable water, clean neighbourhoods, education and health facilities

were luxuries that only the rich could afford. Common diseases that take countless lives in under-developed countries today were then common there too. The poor did not even have in-house toilets!

Three earth-shaking events, almost simultaneously, changed it all: the First World War (1914–18), the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917, and the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1918–19. The first caused immense human and material destruction and the third was responsible for massive mortalities. The ensuing destruction of capital and shortage of labour tilted the balance of bargaining power away from the capitalist class. However, the tipping point proved to be the Red Revolution in Russia and the failure of the Anglo-French inspired White [counter] Revolution in 1919.

The already weakened capitalists of western Europe became aware that the socialist wave would sweep their world too and underground communist groups were active throughout Europe. They saw the imperative of undertaking drastic remedial measures that conceded the rights of the working class and improved their welfare. It is not a coincidence that the International Labour Organization (ILO) was formed in 1920. Other measures followed: from public housing to state-supported education and health care to unemployment insurance to child support allowances. The welfare state and the high levels of human development indicators that Europe enjoys today is not a bequest of the market but a gift from the rise of socialism in their eastern neighbourhood a hundred years ago.

It is also meaningful that the rise of the Thatcherite-Raeganite politics in the 1980s and the beginning of the destruction of elements of the welfare state coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the abatement of the challenge of the working class to capitalist hegemony. The proponents of market economy stormed into the corridors of power. Trade unions were undermined and state support for housing, education and health was scaled back. In fact, the State was itself scaled back. Even warfare was privatized to contractors.

The corona invasion has exposed the abject hollowness of the

neo-liberal market economy paradigm. The United States, the bastion of the neo-liberal market economy, is the richest and most powerful country in the world. Wealth is seen to be oozing from every corner; power is stomped all across the globe yet the country has found itself woefully deficient in catering to one of the most important needs of its people, health-care.

Even something as elementary as face masks are not available. Death is stalking the land in tens of thousands and the wealthiest and most powerful nation on earth is impotent! This is not surprising. After all, the market was supposed to provide for sports cars, luxury yachts and private jets; it was not obliged to cater to health-care. Today, all America is looking up to the State for rescue and relief. The moral legitimacy of the neo-liberal market economy political order has been shattered.

In Pakistan, too, the State's abject deficiencies have appeared in all its ignominy. There are between three to six million people who are not on any official record anywhere; it is as if they do not exist. Employers do not have their employees and workers on record. Thus, the mechanism for disbursing assistance to those who need it the most does not exist. And despite trillions of rupees of taxpayer money spent over nearly three-quarters of a century, public health-care facilities have been exposed to be dysfunctional and, outside the big cities, effectively non-existent.

The corona crisis promises to change it all again. This is the second time in a hundred years that the capitalist class and states are being cornered into making strategic concessions to the forces representing the working class. Inevitably, the State will have to return to the driver's seat and the agenda of the working class will have to move up the national priority scale. National security will need to be redefined in terms of human security. Privileged sectors of the economy will have to concede space. Budgets will need to be reconfigured to attend to the basic needs of the people.

It is likely that much of the homage to the unemployed and

poor and the spirit behind efforts to provide relief will evaporate once the crisis is over. Pakistan has a history of erasing the worst of the events from its collective memory. The 1971 military defeat and dismemberment of the country is a prime example. However, the poor and the unorganized working class as well as the non-propertied middle class have now become aware of the extreme vulnerability that they have been living under. Post-Corona crisis, the State will not be able to restore the status quo and withdraw to the margins. The market is a spent force; donor support will dry up. Either the State rises to the occasion or it will suffer an implosion.

6

Human Rights Concerns in the Post-Pandemic Context: Risks & Responses

ISHRAT AFSHAN ABBASI

Addressing COVID-19 in the context of Human Rights, the Secretary General of United Nations António Guterres pointed out that ‘COVID-19 has already upended life in some of the world’s wealthiest countries and poorer countries are in an even more vulnerable situation. In that situation, failing to help vulnerable countries to fight Coronavirus now could place millions at risk’.¹⁰⁵ He provided authoritative guidance to governments advising that (certain) rights of people should be restricted as this was a public health emergency. Such restrictions increased concerns about human rights across the world. Since then, there has been an on-going debate to decide whether restrictions over certain basic rights of people during the pandemic is a human rights-based approach or not? If it is rights-based, then what are the legitimate foundations of this approach? Also, how do these authentic approaches respond to the concerns of people?

The existing scholarly literature concerning the social consequences of epidemics lacks in-depth research over these debatable questions. To respond to the concerns of people, it is important to address these gaps. This research gap gives a reason

¹⁰⁵ UN News, ‘UN Launches Major Humanitarian Appeal to keep COVID-19 from ‘circling back around the globe.’ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1060222>, accessed on 20 April 2020.

to understand logically the link between epidemic and human rights with regard to the outbreak of the Coronavirus Infectious Disease (COVID). Currently, international human rights organizations such as the World Health Organization and Human Rights Watch are engaged in convincing people and helping them to understand how and why certain restrictions on their rights during epidemics are legitimate to counter the Coronavirus pandemic tactically. Simultaneously, they guide governments by helping them mitigate risks to human beings and compensate their losses during and in the post-COVID era. These efforts on an organizational level give a rationale for the scientific and scholarly research on this discourse. This study is an addition to this effort to investigate the 'rights-resisting challenges' during the outbreak of a pandemic and explore the 'rights-based responses' to pandemics with reference to International Human Rights Law.

Rights-Resisting Risks in the COVID-19 Pandemic

The World Health Organization reports that the only way to stop the spread of any pandemic disease is to take precautionary measures such as imposing restrictions on human movement, maintaining social distancing, and managing the symptoms.¹⁰⁶ During epidemics, the most difficult decision to be taken by governments is to lockdown affected cities and keep symptomatic people in isolation or quarantine. Why is it considered the hardest decision and risky for human rights? This question can be addressed through multiple answers. In basic terms, lockdown and quarantines impose a ban on social movement and force social distancing. In most of the cases, the lockdowns and quarantines are of indeterminate lengths. They do not ensure the protection of those under quarantine and there is no consideration for the financial situation of low-income and daily-wage workers under lockdown. Since such lockdowns and quarantines are challenging to execute and enforce equivalently, they are often assumed subjective or

¹⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch, 'Human Rights Dimensions of COVID-19 Response.' <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/19/human-rights-dimensions-COVID-19-response>, accessed on 10 April 2020.

prejudiced in application. An example of this is the digital surveillance system operated by governments to monitor and control the pandemic which is assumed to be an abuse of human rights by many people. The public in some countries have reported that their governments are expanding the range and nature of their surveillance capabilities on public health grounds and these surveillance operations have restricted their rights in an unjustified manner. It is observed that, in some countries, governments are operating this system in collaboration with the private sector to collect and examine data about peoples' activities in an attempt to know how and where the virus is spreading and evaluate the efficacy of current medical treatment.¹⁰⁷

Combating the threat of any contagious disease requires apt health facilities including clean water, hygiene, sanitation, and fitting waste management and health-care systems. Most third world countries in Asia and Africa lack an essential hygiene protocol, are deficient in quarantine centres, there is a lack of health specialists and required medical equipment such as respiratory masks, disinfectants and standard emergency health kits. The politically and economically fragile countries of the Middle East are running out of the required basic medical items such as masks, gloves, doctors' uniforms and medical kits which are both essential and urgent materials to deal with this life-threatening viral disease. In Egypt, in several places, doctors, nurses and other medical staff are not informed about their shifting to quarantine centres. This is a direct violation of their rights of service. In Lebanon, due to the economic crisis, probably all transactions from the US have been frozen since February; these transactions include imported medical items. The public is looking to the government to form or give a strategy to resolve the economic crisis which is delaying access to medicines and the required equipment.¹⁰⁸ Likewise, the

¹⁰⁷ World Health Organization, 'Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Report – 99' https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200428-sitrep-99-COVID-19.pdf?sfvrsn=119fc381_2. accessed on 29 April 2020.

¹⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch, 'Human Rights Dimensions of COVID-19 Response.'

People of the Islamic Republic of Iran are facing severe adversities owing to extensive sanctions levied by the US Government. The country's competence to counter the Coronavirus is largely obstructed by US economic sanctions. Although essential medicines are exempt from the list of sanctioned items, they are still very difficult to acquire due to several procedures of economic sanctions.¹⁰⁹

We are all vulnerable to COVID-19 but displaced people, refugees and the stateless who are living in camps and refugees centres are more exposed to this virus. A large number of refugees live in overcrowded camps, temporary living quarters or reception centres where they are deprived of proper health-care services, potable water and hygiene.¹¹⁰ Similarly, people in custody and detention are at the highest risks during an outbreak of a deadly disease because most of the host countries' prisons and detention centres lack adequate health-care facilities. Even economically developed countries are careless in the matter of providing appropriate medical care to detainees or prisoners. Human Rights Watch reports sub-standard health-care in the US immigration detention centres which causes deaths of immigrants in the custody of US Immigration and Custom Enforcement.¹¹¹

COVID-19 has distorted economic and labour markets impacting both supply and demand. The disruptions to production and supply are being spread across the world. All sorts of businesses are encountering

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/19/human-rights-dimensions-COVID-19-response>, accessed on 29 March 2020.

¹⁰⁹ BBC, 'Coronavirus: Iran and the US Trade Blame over Sanctions.' <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-52218656>, accessed on 22 March 2020.

¹¹⁰ UNHCR, 'The Rights and Health of Refugees, Migrants and Stateless must be protected in COVID-19 Response: A joint statement by UNHCR, IOM, OHCHR and WHO.' <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/3/5e836f164/rights-health-refugees-migrants-stateless-must-protected-COVID-19-response.html>, accessed on 12 April 2020.

¹¹¹ Human Rights Watch. 'Systemic Indifference: Dangerous & Substandard Medical Care in US Immigration Detention'. <https://observatoriocollef.org/?articulos=systemic-indifference-dangerous-substandard-medical-care-in-us-immigration-detention>, accessed on 20 April 2020.

challenges particularly industries of tourism and hospitality, aviation, trade and commerce which are tackling a decline in revenue. It is difficult for infant and average entrepreneurs to maintain business operations. As a result of travel bans, lockdown measures, and border closures, workers cannot reach their workplaces or do their jobs. This has had a terrible effect on incomes, especially for informal, casual employees and migrant workers.¹¹²

During the time of epidemics, primary to higher level educational institutions provide basic teaching and understanding of the endemic. They provide emotional support to students and their parents. They give a sense of normalcy and stability by creating a routine which helps people cope with the challenging situation. Educational institutions also play an objective role and mobilize information for common people in order to keep them updated on safeguarding techniques to fight the viral attacks. However, during COVID-19, the situation has changed. Coronavirus has set back educational institutions in general. Almost all the countries of the world have temporarily closed all schools, colleges and universities. Suspension of academic activities has disrupted the routine-level learning and academic activities of students thus slowing down their progress. In many countries, institutions are instructed to teach students through online distance-learning but not all countries or families have appropriate Information Technology systems and, therefore, many students are deprived because of the lack of access to the internet.

The history of infectious diseases shows that people with infectious diseases face stigma and discrimination. The Coronavirus outbreak has also witnessed examples of racial discrimination, xenophobia and gender discrimination. The Media have reported terrifying instances of hate speech in the US, Italy, Spain and other countries where people have linked Asians to COVID-19. The US President, Donald Trump, fueled anti-Chinese sentiment by denoting the Coronavirus as the

¹¹² ILO, 'COVID-19 and the World of Work: Impact and Policy Responses.' https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_738753.pdf, accessed on 25 April 2020.

‘Chinese Virus’.¹¹³ In the same way, some religious leaders associate the virus with the liberty of women. For example, in Pakistan, a renowned cleric claims that the Coronavirus is a ‘wrath of God’. He blames liberal women who are, in his opinion, ‘immodest women’ and are the main cause of this wrath-virus.¹¹⁴ Such types of hate speech hurt the sentiments of women and offended liberal and educated women throughout the country.

Rights-Respecting Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESCO) and the United Nations Commission on Human Rights declared Siracusa Principles in 1984. These principles assert the authoritative response of governments concerning freedom of movement and states of emergency or national level for public health. It clarifies that these measures must be mandatory, legal and impartial. The state of emergency needs to keep a tight rein on the time duration; it should be objective-oriented and any curbing of rights must not have a disproportionate influence on an exclusive population or disempower and marginalize groups. These restraints need to be respectful to human dignity and subject to review.¹¹⁵ The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights requires mandatory isolation or quarantine of symptomatic people to counter an epidemic. International Law authorizes countries to implement travel bans and limit freedoms of movement in order to stop or contain the transmission of infectious diseases. It includes a ban on foreign visitors and migrants provided the restrictions are based on scientific and legal grounds.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Zimmer, Ben. ‘Why Trump Intentionally Misnames the Coronavirus.’ *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2020/03/why-trump-intentionally-misnames-coronavirus/607900/>, accessed on 20 April 2020.

¹¹⁴ Ali, Kalbe. ‘Cleric under Fire for Linking Women to COVID-19.’ *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1552313/cleric-under-fire-for-linking-women-to-covid-19>, accessed on 20 March 2020.

¹¹⁵ UNCHR, ‘The Siracusa Principles on the Limitation and Derogation Provisions in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.’ <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4672bc122.html>, accessed on 20 April 2020.

¹¹⁶ OHCHR, ‘International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.’ <https://www.>

United Nations Human Rights Council, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International experts have supported the rights of common people at every stage during the Coronavirus infection. The experts of the UN Human Rights Council declared on 16 March 2020 that emergency declarations and health protection activities based on the COVID outbreak must not be misused to victimize particular individuals or groups under the guise of digital surveillance or health protection. Researcher and advocate of Digital Rights Research at the Human Rights Watch, Deborah Brown said in her statement ‘Any surveillance measures must have a legal basis, be narrowly tailored to meet a legitimate public health goal, and contain safeguards against abuse’.¹¹⁷

International Law protects people’s rights to information during epidemic diseases. This right was severely violated in China where the government initially withheld information about novel Coronavirus cases from the public which caused the severity of infection and outbreak not only in China but also across the world. The UN Committee on Economics, Social and Cultural Rights deems it obligatory to give common people all basic knowledge and access to information regarding critical health issues including the necessary information about taking precautions and preventing illness and explaining to them why their behaviours are controlled. Like all other pandemic diseases, people have a right to information and the right of speech about COVID-19 in accordance with International Human Rights standards. The information provided on the outbreak and related matters must be accurate and up-to-date.¹¹⁸

Protecting prisoners and detainees is crucial during the epidemic.

ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx, accessed on 20 April 2020.

¹¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, ‘Government Should Respect Rights in COVID-19 Surveillance.’ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/02/governments-should-respect-rights-COVID-19-surveillance>, accessed on 20 April 2020.

¹¹⁸ Amnesty International. ‘COVID-19: How Human Rights Can Help Protect Us.’ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/02/governments-should-respect-rights-COVID-19-surveillance>, accessed on 21 April 2020.

The best way to protect prisoners and detainees, who are at higher risk of viral attack, is to reduce the population in prisons and immigration detention centres. Governments should take appropriate steps; for instance, low-risk prisoners and immigrant detainees, pre-trial hostages, old prisoners, detainees scheduled to be released in the near future and prisoners suffering from fatal illnesses must be released through a legal procedure. It is the responsibility of governments to advise the jail authorities and detention centres to make available all relevant health and treatment facilities to prisoners. Under the supervision of the government, the jail authorities must provide the same standard of health care as that provided to the non-incarcerated population. The supervising authorities should make efforts to mitigate the risks of infection in jails and detention centres in an appropriate way to protect the health and lives of not only prisoners but also staff and visitors.¹¹⁹

Accessing treatment for the virus is a basic right for everyone. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, in her statement, forced governments to ensure a serious public health crisis did not also become a human rights crisis. Governments need to have a workable strategy to guarantee that the public has inexpensive and reachable medication and treatment opportunities include documented as well as undocumented migrants and refugees. Governments should also confirm that financial impediments do not constrain people from gaining access to the necessary health care for COVID-19.¹²⁰ Health workers (doctors, nurses and medical staff) and the administrative staff at hospitals are always at the frontline of the

¹¹⁹ World Health Organization, 'Preventing COVID-19 Outbreak in Prisons: A Challenging but Essential Task for Authorities.' <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/pages/news/news/2020/03/preventing-COVID-19-outbreak-in-prisons-a-challenging-but-essential-task-for-authorities>, accessed on 20 April 2020.

¹²⁰ OHCHR, 'COVID is 'a Colossal Test of Leadership' Requiring Coordinated Action, High Commissioner Tells Human Rights Council.' <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/pages/news/news/2020/03/preventing-COVID-19-outbreak-in-prisons-a-challenging-but-essential-task-for-authorities>, accessed on 19 April 2020.

pandemic. They continue to deliver services despite all possible risks to them and their families. It is the prior responsibility of governments to protect them by providing excellent personal protective equipment and psycho-social assistance.

The education sector has a strong effect on COVID-19. To reduce the chances of academic loss and recover lost time, almost all countries will have to apply a mitigation strategy. The immediate strategy is to apply online virtual learning systems. Subsequently, with the reopening of classes, the educational institutions 'administration, teachers and teachers' unions should devise a strategy to recover the time lost due to students being unable to physically attend centres of learning. Thus, they should compensate for the lost days by adding working hours and adjusting the academic calendar and examination schedules.

COVID-19 caused the deterioration of the overall scenario of the economy and employment prospects in qualitative and quantitative terms. Immediate and coordinated plans are essential at the national and global levels. The International Labour Organization-Report (2020) suggests three strategies to ameliorate the malicious influences on the economy and labour market; it includes care workers at their workstations, motivating the economy and labour demand and supporting the jobs and incomes of employers. On a national level, countries have introduced business and labour policies to control major losses. These policies encourage teleworking, flexible working hours and arrangements, paid sick leave, social assistance benefits and cash transfers to enhance income security.¹²¹ While these measures and emergency responses will, no doubt, help ameliorate the pandemic, more scientific research is required to contain the virus and more social and psychological efforts need to be made to bring society back to normalcy.

COVID-19 has been a setback to the Sustainable Development

¹²¹ ILO, 'COVID-19 and the world of work.' <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/lang--en/index.htm>.

Goals (SDGs) where, prior to this crisis, the world was struggling to achieve the positive results of the SDGs. The achievement of SDGs is possible with the protection and promotion of Human Rights and, therefore, in the post COVID-19 order, governments will have to take solid initiatives in view of certain human rights. These include: public and private investment in sustainable development projects such as reinforcing social protection systems, investing more in crisis prevention plans, risk reduction management and abolishing trade barriers and restrictions.

Conclusion

In the context of the severity and scale of the COVID-19 or any kind of pandemic, certain human rights restrictions are thoroughly justified by International Human Rights Law as long as human dignity is upheld, nondiscriminatory attitudes are maintained, a proper strategy is set to achieve the objective within a certain time period and alternative measures are adopted to protect human rights. The COVID-19 crisis is a test of nations' responsiveness and, therefore, all nations should ensure this crisis unites rather than divides nations on territorial, national, racial and gender lines. Governments around the world must have zero-tolerance towards discriminatory attitudes in all manifestations. Governments must be transparent in their actions to compensate for losses rationally. Governments need to remember that they are responsive and accountable to people for all their actions.

One Humanity–Alternative Instruments for Response Mechanism

SAIRA BANO ORAKZAI

Pandemics valorises a nation’s resolve for the well-being of humans. Such ‘moments’ are not new to human societies. The Plague in the 14th century and Spanish Flu in 1918–19 claimed millions of lives and changed the course of history. The response mechanisms to occurrence of such an event are different in history. It not only includes the policy of tackling it but also human behaviour, social conditions, vaccine stages and development time, and post-pandemic healing process for both governments and societies. Since the end of Second World War, two events became consequential and a challenge for the policy makers due to sudden occurrence. First, the events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent terrorism threat, which took almost 19 years to counter. Second, is the outbreak of novel Coronavirus or COVID-19 on 14 January 2020 in the Wuhan province of China, when the first case was officially reported, consequently spreading worldwide due to an integrated world.

World Health Organisation declared this outbreak a ‘pandemic’ on 11 March 2020 calling for an aggressive and urgent action,¹²² with no possible vaccine for the next 10 to 12 months and economically

¹⁵⁶ ‘WHO Director General’s Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19’, March 11, 2020.

<https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>

destructive consequences since the Great Depression of 1930s. At the launch of a global collaboration to accelerate development, production and equitable access to new COVID-19, World Health Organisation (WHO) Director General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus referred to this situation as a ‘coming together to work in new ways to identify challenges and solutions together’.¹²³

The spread of novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) since its initial appearance in the Wuhan province, China in January 2020 has challenged the epistemic standing of models, idealization and response mechanism of all countries alike, from developed to fragile/poor countries. This chapter uses two key approaches for suggesting response mechanism. German Chancellor Angela Merkel remarked that we have ‘to live with the virus for a long time’¹²⁴ as it is just the beginning of the pandemic not the final phase, both economic and societal changes have to be made keeping in view of the nature of pandemic. Thus, any alternative instrument must take this into view while suggesting short, medium and long term suggestions for designing policy objectives. For the short-term alternative instruments, Robert Stavins suggests the cost-effectiveness analysis approach for addressing this social problem instead of cost-benefit approach.¹²⁵ Cost-effectiveness is an approach to analyse the cost and effectiveness of a policy or course of action instead of monetary value attached to the cost-benefit approach. The cost-effectiveness analysis approach rests on the premise that taking some policy objectives like maximum mortality numbers, a specified case of transmission rate or target mortality risk reduction can be used

¹²³ Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director General, 00:02:44, ‘COVID-19 ACT Accelerator Launch’, April 24, 2020. https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/transcripts/transcript-who-actlaunch-24apr2020.pdf?sfvrsn=45977318_2

¹²⁴ Holly Ellyatt, ‘Merkel says things will remain hard for a very long time as pandemic is still at the beginning,’ CNBC- Europe Politics, April 23, 2020. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/04/23/merkel-says-things-will-remain-hard-for-a-very-long-time-as-pandemic-is-still-at-the-beginning.html>

¹²⁵ Robert N. Stavins, ‘Cost-Effectiveness Analysis and Finding the Best Policies to Fight COVID-19,’ April 3, 2020. <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/cost-effectiveness-analysis-and-finding-best-policies-fight-covid-19>

to compare the cost of alternative instruments along with the given instruments of social distancing to suppress the curve, targeted approach to reduce transmission like mass testing, pool testing, contact tracing, better facilities for patients or in need of treatment and basic income for poor communities. Instead of using quantifying nature of the cost-benefit approach of mortality risk reduction, cost-effectiveness can prove to be more helpful as a qualitative and quantitative approach, both in short and longer run for saving human life along with the provision of economic benefits to the people.¹²⁶

At the time of writing this paper, COVID-19 had affected 215 countries, total number of reported cases: 9,755,196, deaths: 492,685 and recovered cases: 5,280,663.¹²⁷ The fast spread of COVID-19 in different parts of the world owes to globalisation, but also emphasizes the importance of national governments for an effective and fast track response mechanism by policy makers. The nature of the virus looks different in different countries, not only because of mutation and different strains that goes to biology, but also because of 'ideology' and the way each country adopting policies to deal with it.¹²⁸ Nicholas Burns remarked that facing this pandemic, 'the most important thing is a common message of steadiness, of reassurance around the world that we're going to pull together [as] one or not just compete with each other. That is sorely lacking today'.¹²⁹

COVID-19 has also challenged the traditional concepts of national security, use of strategic language or military jargons to respond to the crisis. Amartya Sen calls tackling a pandemic not as fighting a war, but which needs participatory governance and alert public discussion. Informed public discussion is key to good governance during pandemics

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ 'Worldometer', <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries>

¹²⁸ Annalisa Nash Fernandez, 'Coronavirus Knows no Borders? Here Are a Few of Them', April 2, 2020. <https://thegeopolitics.com/coronavirus-knows-no-borders-here-are-a-few-of-them/>

¹²⁹ Nicholas, Burns, 'COVID-19 Impact Could Be As 'Serious As a World War'', Former Ambassador Says, March 16, 2020. <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/covid-19-impact-could-be-serious-world-war-former-amb-says>

instead of taking punitive measures against the media or threatening dissenting voices.¹³⁰ It is critical to hear the problems of the medical community, low income/poor class, and other segments of the society to find a response mechanism taking into account the local conditions.

Sudden eruption of a pandemic is difficult to tackle, however, looming behind such a crisis is the need to significantly re-order the diverse ways in which our social, political and economic systems are interlinked, and the way they can disturb social equilibrium prevalent in our security driven world. It requires a holistic thinking beyond territories and border, and away from the imagined security threats towards real threat to human well-being due to frequent outbreaks/pandemics, food scarcity, climate change, inequality, wars and conflicts and poverty within societies.

According to Scott Barrett:

[T]he international global effort to contain COVID-19 will be a persistent challenge, ...and will result in fundamental changes in society..... the pandemic is affecting people from all levels of income and wealth, and that it's in everyone's best interest that we control it...It's hard to know exactly what those changes will be, but there will be changes in terms of how we understand our relationship with each other, to technology, to science, to government, to international institutions. I think all of this is in play right now.¹³¹

Multilateral Diplomacy and Coordination

COVID-19 has also challenged multilateral diplomacy and

¹³⁰ Amartya Sen, 'Overcoming a Pandemic may Look Like Fighting a War, but the Real Need is Far From that', Indian Express, April 8, 2020. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/coronavirus-india-lockdown-amartya-sen-economy-migrants>

¹³¹ Douh Gavel, 'Columbia University Professor Scott Barrett Compares Global Responses to COVID-19 and Climate Change in Special Edition of 'Environmental Insights', March 27, 2020. <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/columbia-university-professor-scott-barrett-compares-global-responses-covid-19>

coordination especially by the World Health Organization to suggest steps for coordinated efforts. United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres's call for a 'global ceasefire'¹³² opened the doors for prospects of peace in war-torn regions of the world, however he also warned that the pandemic crisis can turn into a human rights crisis due to authoritarian regimes, state control and abuse of rights. South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) also witnessed an unprecedented virtual summit and joint fund to tackle the crisis in the region. Economic diplomacy initiatives by International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and G-20 group of countries took emergency financial initiatives of giving loans to developing, poor-low income countries, and also providing debt relief to 77 poor/low income countries.

WHO has devised various approaches for dealing with the pandemic. So far, the world has witnessed the states' response and available instruments as lockdowns, mass testing, pool testing, social and physical distancing, personal hygiene and provision of food for the unemployed due to the effects of lockdown. However, the question of its relevancy to societies like South Asia or Global South is questionable as it exposed the states' lack of structural facilities for health, support to low income daily wagers, problems in education sectors, failure of social distancing due to religious, cultural and structural issues of housing, and inability to respond to this pandemic in an orderly fashion by medical community and states' policy makers. Right now, we are witnessing a battlefield between medical practitioners, politicians and media. It is medical practitioners who are supposed to lead with ways of dealing with it, providing data, and projections; policy makers have to design policies accordingly, and media to disseminate news without create panic or selectivity.

Statecraft and Well-being: Thoughtful Leadership

COVID-19 has challenged the statecraft of every state. The

¹³² Antonio Guterres, 'Statement by the U.N. Secretary General', 23 March 2020. <https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/fury-virus-illustrates-folly-war>

requirement of a thoughtful leadership versus strategic thinking has changed the order of priorities. Jeffrey Frankel calls such sudden occurrence of events as ‘black swans’, as ‘they are known unknowns, not unknown knowns’.¹³³ This happens usually because states are usually analysing a narrow data sets not taking a wider look at the changing events and discount what is happening in other countries, and often leads to ‘plague of unpreparedness’,¹³⁴ evident in most of the countries hit by the COVID-19.

Mitigating a crisis like COVID-19 requires a fast-track response, which not only requires creativity, solidary, leadership but also digital approach for documenting the data, as the key to this pandemic is to have technological infrastructure in place. In short term, digital teams have to work under the crisis circumstances to provide maximum services like data about COVID-19 cases on daily basis, projections, models for finding solutions but in the mid-term and long term, governments have to work more on the digital solutions as most of the work in the society has to be performed digitally due to the nature of the spread of disease.¹³⁵ It requires improving institutional capacity both at the national and international level, and is important to nurture a global community response, nevertheless, national social realities must be taken into consideration and respected while designing response strategies.

The Chinese way of dealing with the virus with complete lockdown of a province, and USA and European’s late lockdown policies resulted in different outcomes. Similarly, in the South Asian context, Pakistan’s initial strict lockdown produced better result, while easing lockdown and making it a ‘smart lockdown’¹³⁶ is increasing the

¹³³ Jeffrey Frankel, ‘Black Swans Like COVID-19 are Predictable’, March 30, 2020. <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/black-swans-covid-19-are-predictable>

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ David Evans, ‘How Digital Service Teams are Responding to Covid-10’, apolitical, 31 March 2020. https://apolitical.co/en/solution_article/how-digital-service-teams-are-responding-to-covid-19

¹³⁶ Rashid Mahmood Langrial, ‘Signal Driven Covid-19 Management Strategy for Pakistan’, <https://pide.org.pk/pdf/Smart-Approaches-COVID-19.pdf>

number of cases and death. India is strict to ease lockdown, resulting in numerous economic problems due to rampant poverty and migrant issues. The pandemic is hitting South Asia though still unlike Europe and USA. Pakistan, also faced this sudden shock of unpreparedness due to lack of any pandemic in its history of existence. Pakistan's first reported case was on 26 February 2020, and till date has 195,745 reported cases, total deaths 4000, total recovered 84,168, active cases 107,615, with mortality rate of 2%, total tests conducted 1,193,017 which is 820 test/1 millions of populations.¹³⁷ Pakistan has projected 300,000 cases by end of June and mid-July. Pakistan is faced with a critical lack of health infrastructures and inability of policy makers to have a 'pandemic warning system' in place to include the 'risk of pandemics' in its calculations. Pakistan has a National Disaster Management Authority (NADMA), National Command Operation Centre (NCOC) and National Security Council to deal with this 'pandemic'. Facing acute economic problems, Pakistan has been added to UN Coronavirus Fund List, received US\$1.386 billion disbursement from IMF, US\$50 million from the Asian Development Bank as a part of US\$1.7 billion through its Asia Pacific Disaster Response Fund, and UN fund will cover US\$6.7 billion by the end of December. Pakistan has also received debt relief as a part of G-20 debt relief deal.¹³⁸

Designing an Effective Policy Response to this Pandemic is a Challenge and an Opportunity

The World Economic Forum suggested various exit strategies before a vaccine is developed in the world. Mass testing or pool testing with international cooperation in production and distribution; Disease surveillance with manual or app contact-tracing, followed by an effective vaccine that is distributed globally. WEF called for effective containing of virus in developing, low-income/poor countries as

¹³⁷ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries>

¹³⁸ 'IMF Executive Board Approves a US\$ 1.386 Billion Disbursement to Pakistan to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic', 16, April 2020. <https://www.imf.org/en/NEWS/Articles/2020/04/16/pr20167-pakistan-imf-executiv-board-approves-disbursement-to-address-covid-19>

wealthy nations were able to contain smallpox in 1940s, however, it was globally eradicated in 1978. Thus, it suggested to contain the virus in poor and populous countries on an urgency basis to protect everyone so that virus is contained well before a vaccine is developed.¹³⁹ After China, the governments of New Zealand, Germany, Hong Kong and other developed countries effectively contained the virus, thus easing lockdown and opening up economies, though a second wave of virus has surged in June 2020. It will take time for the economic system of the world to function normally due to the lack of pandemic management in developing, poor and low income countries.

For South Asian countries like Pakistan the ‘the trade-off between saving lives and saving livelihoods is excruciating’.¹⁴⁰ For countries like Pakistan, cost effectiveness analysis approach should be the basis of policy for not only reducing mortality rate, which is now 2.3%, but also preserving livelihood of the people.

Managing Lockdowns: Smart Lockdown or Smart Containment

Lockdown is an opportunity to ‘win time’ for improving health-care facilities, designing policies and objectives, examining economic issues and its long-term impact. It is not a way of ending the pandemic but minimising the risk. The ‘lockdowns’ and ‘self-isolation’ exposes the fact that instruments that could be used by the developed world due to availability of resources, cannot be practiced in developing and low income countries or having diverse cultural setting. Following WHO guidelines, countries of South Asia including Pakistan adopted these measures but failed to implement them due to overall structure of the society that works on a different set-up compared to the developed countries. Similarly, flattening the curve of pandemic is one of the goals, however, this term is applicable over countries having relatively effective medical infrastructure. For a country like Pakistan,

¹³⁹ ‘There’s only one Option for a Global Coronavirus Exit Strategy’. April 11, 2020. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/there-s-only-one-option-for-a-global-coronavirus-exit-strategy/>

¹⁴⁰ ‘The next calamity- Leaders’, *The Economist*, March 26, 2020.

where medical system is not properly in place for the urban areas, the question of flattening the curve is even questionable. The lack of medical equipment, protective gears for the medical staff and no physical or social distancing is increasing the corona positive cases every day.

For short term measures, an urgent coordinated and coherent policy response is a task for countries like Pakistan where social norms, religious rituals and economic problems making strict lockdowns nearly impossible. There are suggestions of ‘Smart Lockdown’ and ‘Smart Containment’,¹⁴¹ though good as ideas based on cost-benefit analysis, when put in practice need detailed mapping of areas and confining of a community where mobility is key to social and economic survival, success becomes nearly impossible. But then what is the way out? How to make social distancing and lockdowns possible in a society where religious leaders have greater say in opening mosques during the holy month of Ramadan (fasting) than the appeal of doctors to stay at home? It eventually led to the partial collapse of the country’s health system as hospital do not have the capacity to accommodate patients if increased beyond certain number. The solution lies in effectively managing and monitoring lockdown either strict or eased.

Smart Quarantine and Hospitalization

There are many suggestions to make lockdown successful, however, few mentioned the need and importance of good quarantine facilities and hospitalization. Mostly, patients with mild symptoms are reluctant to go to hospitals or in quarantine/isolation facilities due to poor conditions of facilities. Even developed countries asked citizens to quarantine/isolate themselves in case of mild symptoms leading to infecting entire families and neighbourhoods. China established temporary hospitals and quarantine facilities to limit the spread.

¹⁴¹ Tahir Andrabi, Ali Cheema, Jishnu Das, Adnan Q Khan, Dr Asim I Khwaja, Aryn A. Malik, Anum Malkani, Saad B. Omer, and Maroof A. Syed, ‘Smart Containment with Active Learning: A Proposal for a Data-Responsive and Graded Response to COVID-19’, April 16, 2020. <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/centers/cid/publications/smart-containment-with-active-learning>

Pakistan, till May 2020, had around 18,000 reported cases and nearly 13,000 active cases. If the government had managed properly through good quarantine/isolation facilities and separate hospitalization, it was possible to limit the spread in wider sphere of society. This needed active response and budget appropriation to tackle the problem efficiently.

Building Solidary: Citizen-State Trust

One of the key challenges of this pandemic is building solidarity, not only across international/ national communities but also thinly veiled ethnic, racist and social inequality issues. Pakistan is unable to build the Citizen-State relations irrespective of political affiliations, ethnic, sectarian and religious discords. The initial failure of the government to deal with the 7,000 pilgrims arriving from Iran at the Taftan border of Pakistan-Iran, and later the inability to stop the annual Tablighi Jamaat congregation, and prayers during Ramadan created a blame game issue over the spread of this disease. Moreover, the urgent step taken by the provincial government of Sindh (belonging to the opposition Pakistan People's Party) created a rift between the Centre and the Province over the lockdown issue, and of taking political credit of dealing with the problem. Similarly, India is also facing a Hindu rage against Muslims, thus, worsening the crisis.

Preventive Measures in the Absence of a Systematic Response

In this utter state of confusion, like all developing and poor states, Pakistan failed to develop instruments that suits its own community. Pakistan has been dealing with the existential threat to its territory and state since its inception, however, is ill prepared to deal with the existential threat to humans living within the state. It's a reminder for the low-income countries to be more attentive of their own realities rather than being a part of power politics of major states. In this case, cost-effectiveness in health care and social services plays an important role instead of a cost-benefit driven policies. Ending divisive politics and social/religious conditions that renders society to be divided,

the need to accept the decisions of the government is critical. The government should present a detailed policy for provision of basic income to people unable to earn livelihood and present a sustainable economic solution for at least two years by reducing the budget for wars, counter-terrorism, and unnecessary expenses.

Budgeting the Response

This pandemic provides an opportunity to re-prioritise our threat perception and re-order our political objectives at the state level and economic development, taking into account the vast number of daily wagers, poor and low income working class. States that are coming out of this pandemic and successfully easing lockdown with less pressure on economies are coming out as stronger nations as compared to developing states like Pakistan with its huge spending on defence. Thus, it is facing economic and social issues along with the current increase in pandemic, with no end to its miseries in the coming months.

Pakistan has started the Ehsaas Emergency Cash Program (first Phase) to provide basic funds to 12 million families. Till now it has covered 6.6 million, a very small number of households. Moreover, it is manual not digital, leading to more exposure to the virus. Thus, a digitalized/mobile payment technology, with less possibility of spread of virus and more easy access to public, is the need of the time.¹⁴²

Decisions and Risks

Taking risks is risky, but taking no decisions of re-prioritising about the nature of risks and threats we face in the next decade, is riskier. What are the major risks emanating from this pandemic in Pakistan and other developing/low income countries? Emergence of class inequality, making the poor more vulnerable to disease by opening up businesses as governments are unable to deal with the

¹⁴² Tariq Malik and Alan Gelb, 'IS COVID-19 Pakistan's Black Swan Event for Digital Payments', Center for Global Development, May 1, 2020, <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/covid-19-pakistans-black-swan-event-digital-payments?fbclid=IwAR1RCcuSR4uR1DRa1S3f87Ij2oHwvg0gIsgDgNoIjQrf4WrJcLhsCJlDrco#.XqxqR-L08nU.twitter>

economic crisis. Massive unemployment is foreseen in the coming days, a state of fear of spread of the disease, thus, making businesses less profitable, ill-prepared education system, divisive religious and political narratives are adding to the burden. Political divisions need to be reduced to design a policy which is acceptable to all instead of making Coronavirus an electoral issue. In particular, it is important to frame these challenges of human health and survival not as imagined threats but as real priorities.

Re-prioritizing Human Life

A new economic thinking based on cost-effectiveness to deal with this pandemic is of critical importance instead of focussing on cost-benefit that emphasise economics and monetary benefits over human lives. Re-emphasizing old models of economic activity are therefore important to be replaced by a sustainable and human well-being based economic activity. Budgets must be based on human welfare not on political and ideological concerns. Social solidarity is vital to be the basis of resilient institutions in the wake of exacerbating social inequality, re-prioritising role of people in the community is essential. This pandemic has shown that essential service workers, low income daily wagers, janitors, cleaners, paramedics, medical staff, and other workers who are the lowest on the wage ladder are the cornerstone of the community, and should be given higher wages as long as this pandemic lasts and with proper medical cover.

Conclusion

This pandemic re-discovered the inner-working and relationship of science with the humans, it has also revealed the emotional forces that unleashed issues of inequality, divisive nature of the political system, need for peace and harmony, decisive and coordinated leadership and, most of all, the need for ‘one humanity’ to tackle this crisis of unprecedented level. Such ‘moments’ in history are not only conducive for challenging the pre-pandemic approaches and policy

instruments, but also the use of vocabulary to address the particular situation. Pakistan and the world community are trapped in a vertigo, 'a unique condition in which one feel trapped within a dizzying state of adversarial relationship'¹⁴³ which is having a disorienting effect on national and world politics. It is critical to revitalise democratic institutions, giving a sense of direction for a sustainable economy keeping cost-effectiveness analysis as a policy in decision making. This will transform the economy in a positive direction increasing the capacity of the health system, a sustainable economy for the next few years by re-prioritising sectors and services, and decreasing inequality. Maintaining peace in the society is vital during and after pandemics. Development, health, education and social justice policies if not pursued with a proper approach will create a law and order situation, thus, leading to an unending conflict in the society.

¹⁴³ Daniel Shapiro, *Negotiating the Non-negotiable: How to Resolve your Most Emotionally Charged Conflicts* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), p. 36.

Pakistan's Foreign Policy Options in the Post-Pandemic World

BETTINA ROBOTKA

Pakistan has just begun to deliberate upon the geo political and geo strategic dimension of the changes that have occurred in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. The world after COVID-19 will not be the same; however, the major changes that had been visible before the epidemic had hit will survive or even get more pronounced. One such tendency from the pre-Corona time is the changing global power equation meaning the end of the unipolar world with the US as the main power towards a multipolar world with China (and Russia) in the lead. China was the country where the new virus hit first and many observers were convinced in those early days that this pandemic would put an end to the rise of China. Now, within a short time, this prediction has been proven wrong and we can see China's economy starting its recovery before anyone else's.

Another prediction that is not going to come true is that the pandemic would herald the end of globalization. An end of globalization would even have been impossible because globalization is the process that has connected people and countries, economies and cultures not only locally and regionally but globally since ancient times. The exchange of people, goods, ideas and culture has been taking place since the beginning of history. Adventurers and traders roaming the world have been there for thousands of years; we have found evidence of contacts with Mesopotamia and Egypt among the

artefacts found in the ruins of Mohenjodaro. Made famous by the adventures of Marco Polo, the Silk Road running through Eurasia and connecting Italy and China including all the territories in-between is another example. But those were occasional connections only; they took a long time and were irregular and far-between. Then came the building of large empires like the Chinese and Roman Empires, the Khalifates, the one of Chengiz Khan, and finally the colonial empires of the British, French and Dutch. The building of empires saw a shift from being a land power only to being a superpower by itself or both. With the industrial revolution, globalization gathered momentum and the digital age has added even more speed to the process. The latest example of 21st century globalization is the Chinese initiative of One-Belt-One-Road (OBOR) that re-focusses the process to the Eurasian mainland, the Middle East and its Pakistan-specific part of CPEC. OBOR is now mainly called 'Belt Road Initiative' (BRI).

Reconstructing Eurasia Physically and Intellectually

With the start of the BRI project by China in 2013, global developmental initiative is shifting from the oceanic waterways to the Eurasian mainland. Since the 19th century, when Western Europe was dominating all development via their sea power, the impression was created that Europe and Asia are two separate continents and the Ural mountain chain was rather randomly selected to draw a line between the two. Today we have to recognize that Europe and Asia are geographically one and the difference between people, economies and cultures east of Ural Mountains and to the west of it is not more than between Eastern and Western European people and cultures. Covering the vast lands between Europe and Asia by means of road and rail connections, the enormous distances have not only been reduced in time compared to sea terminal but it has also become substantially less, both in terms of time and expense.

The current refugee crisis and the ongoing economic crises within the EU show that the 'Enlightenment values' of Western Europe like materialism, individualism, secularism and democracy are not shared by

a majority in Eastern Europe because the process of 'Enlightenment' or 'Modernity' did not or only partially reach out to those territories and countries. This has become very much evident when the imagined European unity of values and purpose vanished during the recent crises within the European Community. Thus, Eastern Europeans, while sharing some values and experiences with Western Europe, also share some values with the East such as a stronger community feeling, less individualism and less secularization. This is especially glaring in the case of Russia, the largest country in the world that, for a long time in history, has included large Asian territories and people. That is why the idea about the 'Geographical Pivot of History'¹⁴⁴ of the British geographer, Mackinder, declared that the future of human development lies in the Eurasian continent, the largest land mass globally, and that it will turn out eventually as the new pivot of history, economy and progress with the advent of multiple land routes. This idea is now, a hundred years later, coming to fruition and no virus will stop this process.

Globalization versus Nation State

Another aspect of globalization that has to be taken into account by Pakistan and other nation states is the fact that it undermines nationalism and nation states based on a national ideology, fixed territory and boundaries and sovereignty — the idea that a state can take independent and single-handed decisions about how to run the country and that all decision-making power lies in the hands of the national parliaments only. Globalization translates into a framework of interdependence between states where decision-making is adjusted and affected by the decisions of neighbours, regional and global stakeholders. To give up a certain part of independent decision-making is quite a painful process as even the 'advanced' countries in the European Union (EU) cannot easily find a common platform since its creation. 'Brexit' is a great example of this where,

¹⁴⁴ H.J. Mackinder, 'The Geographical Pivot of History', *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 4 April 1904, pp. 421-37.

by means of a referendum, the British as a people have opted for independence from the consensus thinking within the EU. Globally, economic protectionism led by the US Trump administration as a counter-reaction to growing interdependence is showing up and has strengthened during the corona crisis rather than diminished so that the danger of trade wars is further polarizing the existing world order.

This process is also quite painful ideologically when the nationalist slogan ‘right or wrong — my country’ has to be replaced by the feeling of being a global citizen belonging to the world at large. In practice that means that an increasing amount of decision-making power has to be consensually delegated to regional and global institutions and we have seen that this again is a very tricky process. We have seen its failures in many cases; a glaring example in the global arena is the UN, a regional example is SAARC. One major reason for the failure is the fact that both are based not on the equality of the member states but on the insistence that there are some countries that are more equal than others. In the case of the UN, it is the veto power of some countries and, in the case of SAARC, it is India’s insistence on ‘might is right’. This model has to be replaced which means that the globalization process has to be balanced so as to benefit all and to give an equal say to all members of a supra-national organization.

SCO – A New Type of Supra-National Organization

Showing the characteristic of the coming of a ‘new world order’ is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SCO is a Eurasian political, economic and security organisation, the creation of which was announced on 15 June 2001 in Shanghai, China, by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan; the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Charter was signed in June 2002 and entered into force on 19 September 2003. According to this charter, the organization functions as a forum to strengthen confidence and neighbourly relations among member countries and promote cooperation in politics, trade, economy and

culture, to education, energy and transportation.¹⁴⁵ In fact, the SCO is increasingly being looked at by the states of Europe and Asia as the alternative to other hegemonistic organizations such as NATO.

The SCO today has eight member states including Pakistan and India since 2017, four observer states, Afghanistan, Iran, Mongolia and Belarus and six dialogue partners, Turkey, Sri Lanka Nepal, Cambodia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. It is one of the major Eurasian organizations¹⁴⁶ which represents 44% of the world's population and two-thirds of the territory of the Eurasian continent after the inclusion of India and Pakistan. It includes four nuclear powers with two permanent seats on the UN Security Council. While the agenda of the SCO is still evolving, this organization represents an important new development as it stipulates a fresh way of interstate relations. Taking into consideration the diversity of its members, the SCO claims to represent a new model of inclusive regional cooperation capable of encompassing all its members. This does not discount the existing tensions and clashes of interests between the member states. The distinction is the anticipated equality of rights of all the member states and the lack of one overarching strong power while handling differences and problems and the insistence that all problems have to be solved politically and without the help of pre-emptive strikes, regime change and other violent tools.

Top leaders of the SCO member countries said that political and diplomatic means are the 'only choice' to settle regional conflicts.¹⁴⁷ SCO has become increasingly important because of its security redressal focus.

¹⁴⁵ https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi_e_pub_shanghai_cooperation.pdf

¹⁴⁶ Others are the Eurasian Economic Community founded in 2000 by Russia and Eurasian Customs Union

¹⁴⁷ http://www.scochn2018.cn/English/2017-06/09/c_137027198.htm

Globalization and Pakistan

Pakistan is amongst the countries that have been struggling with the impact of globalization. The economic downfall of the COVID-19 crisis has reinforced the problem. The foreign policy of Pakistan is also impacted. Historically, Pakistan's foreign policy was short on choice and it was compelled to find strong support in the western world for its security. Thus, the evolving global Cold War scenario found Pakistan aligned with the US. The Pakistan Army relied fully on American weaponry and training to counter the Indian threat.

Even before the pandemic, Pakistan's relationship has become more distant from the west mainly due to its realization that its engagement after 9/11 in Afghanistan has done more harm than good to the country. Parallel to this, China has risen to become the second-largest global economy and Russia re-emerged and started asserting itself in the international arena. Pakistan's foreign policy now has more options than the past. The growing cooperation with China and Russia will certainly be an important feature of Pakistan's foreign policy.

One central idea from which Pakistani foreign policy would profit is the Eurasian concept. In the broad sense, the Eurasian Idea and even the Eurasian concept do not strictly correspond to the geographical boundaries of the Eurasian continent. The Eurasian Idea is a global-scale strategy that acknowledges the objectivity of globalization and the termination of nation-states but, at the same time, offers a different scenario of globalization which entails no unipolar world or united global government. Instead, it offers several global zones (poles). The Eurasian Idea is an alternative or multipolar version of globalization but accepts globalization as the currently major fundamental world process that is deciding the main vector of modern history.

Eurasianism rejects the centre-outskirt model of the world. Instead, it suggests that the planet consists of a constellation of autonomous living spaces partially open to each other. These areas are not nation-states but a coalition of states, reorganized into continental federations or 'democratic empires' with a large degree of inner self-

government. Each of these areas is multipolar, including a complicated system of ethnic, cultural, religious and administrative factors. In this global sense, Eurasianism is open to everyone regardless of one's place of birth, residence, nationality and citizenship. Eurasianism provides an opportunity to choose a future different from the cliché of Atlantism and one value system for all mankind. In its most basic sense, Eurasianism in the 21st century is defined as the adherence to alter-globalization, synonymous with a multi-polar world.¹⁴⁸

Pakistan's participation in CPEC, a composite element of the BRI has been a bold foreign policy move that will come to its help in the post-corona time. This project will open up the land-locked but resource-rich Central Asian and Inner Asian countries and territories. Pakistan's suitable geographic situation and its close political and economic relationship with China make it a logical partner in this enterprise. But, in order to partake in the economic development and improvement of living conditions for a majority of Pakistanis, there is a need to better prepare our population for the challenges that are connected to such an immense project.

The relative isolation of many regions of Pakistan that will be opened up rapidly when the economic corridor starts functioning will bring big changes within a short period of time to the doorsteps of the population that until now is under-privileged. If no immediate action is taken, there could be a negative backlash against 'foreigners' and 'change' if, because of missing local qualification, large amounts of foreign workforce is brought in and migration within Pakistan is gravitating towards the regions where jobs are available.

Therefore, situated at the crossroads of the Asian mainland, Pakistan has to consider itself as a bridge between the different regions and powers. In this position, it has a special responsibility to keep the region stable and our foreign policy commitment to mirror this. That is why Pakistan, in future, needs to work even harder to improve relations with our immediate and mediate neighbours. With regard to

¹⁴⁸ <https://www.counter-currents.com/2013/11/the-urasian-idea/>

Afghanistan, there seems to be some progress visible. Pakistan is on the right side of things actively facilitating the peace process.

The India-Pakistan relationship remains a challenge. China expects the SCO to play a key role in resolving the India-Pakistan conundrum. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said in an interview with CGTN, ‘We know there are existing and historical unresolved conflicts between Pakistan and India...I think, after they joined the SCO, maybe we can provide a better platform and opportunities for the building of relations between them.’¹⁴⁹ COVID-19 hasn’t changed much in this regard and we realize that there is still a long way to go.

Another major neighbour is Iran. Unfortunately, its relations with Pakistan haven’t been as good as they should have been. An obstacle in the relations is Pakistan’s close relations with Saudi Arabia and the US that have singled out Iran as their enemy. The Pakistani membership in the Saudi-led military coalition against counter-terrorism that has excluded Iran and, therefore seems to have an anti-Shi’ite touch, is not helpful as well. The fact that former Pakistani COAS, General Raheel Sharif, has been selected to lead this coalition could arouse more Iranian suspicion but, if handled wisely, could be an asset as well. Nevertheless, the climate of Iran-Pakistan relations has noticeably improved in the recent years. The two countries have been quite successful in harmonising their differences over Afghanistan where they have no more to enter into contestation given Iran’s reconciliation with the Taliban and the two countries’ common threat perceptions over the rise of the Islamic State in the ‘AfPak’ region.¹⁵⁰

One major consequence from what has been said so far is that this specific location of Pakistan and the volatility in the region forbids our joining any bloc or having relationships with one country to the exclusion of another. Pakistan has its work cut out to keep a fine balance between our next-door neighbour Iran and an old friend Saudi

¹⁴⁹ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/sco-can-bridge-india-pakistan-distance-china/articleshow/64549191.cms>

¹⁵⁰ <http://www.atimes.com/iran-seeks-strategic-depth-pakistan-ties/>

Arabia or between an old ally US and our new relation with Russia. But this should not be an impossible task.

The political pivot for Pakistan is clearly shifting from overseas' relations to regional alliances. The main thrust of its foreign policy will not change post COVID-19. Our strong relationship with China and commitment to CPEC will stay in place and strengthen. The same should be true for relations with Russia. Both relationships will take time for adjusting our perceptions so that historical and cultural prejudices can be overcome. The solidarity between our countries during the pandemic will certainly help in this process.

Comparative Pandemic Responses in Kashmir

MASOOD KHAN

No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;— John Donne

The worldwide figures of the Coronavirus' depredations are staggering. This is a global pandemic but, so far, its death toll is much lower than last century's Spanish Flu which infected at least 500 million, a third of the world population at that time, and left 50 million people dead all around the world.

It does not seem that the world was better prepared to deal with a virulent virus like COVID-19 this time around either. What is most surprising is that the developed countries, with the best health systems in place, have been affected most. The developing nations, with fragile systems to deal with communicable diseases, have had a low level of infections and fatalities so far. The World Health Organization warns that this may well be illusory because the poor countries may face a bigger tide of the pandemic later if they do not take the necessary precautions and that the virus may boomerang in the developed world as well. The virus has not passed its peak.

As of now, Pakistan's confirmed cases are more than 247,803; 5,157 deaths; and 153,134 recovered. Tragic deaths, and yet the incidence is much lower than that of the UK where 233,000 are infected and more than 32,000 have died. But this is no reason to lower our guard.

Azad Kashmir

In Azad Kashmir, the situation has been quite manageable. The total confirmed cases are 1,511 and the death toll has been fairly low.

The pandemic revived bitter memories of the 2005 earthquake when Azad Kashmir and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa lost more than 73,000 lives. So, the area was, in a sense, in a state of preparedness for disaster management. Therefore, the AJK Government took a swift decision to declare a health emergency, enforce a lockdown and prepare the entire state for a coordinated response.

Because of the early threat perception, an elaborate system was put in place. AJK was connected directly with the Government of Pakistan's National Coordination Committee (NCC) and the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) and a State Coordination Committee (SCC) was established in Muzaffarabad. Rapid Response Teams were set up in all 10 districts. Four committees were given the responsibility for awareness-raising, physical verification, social protection and the provision of food to the poor. The Ulema were taken on board and a media campaign was mobilised. In the beginning, people became really conscious and scared of the lethality of the virus. Most of them cooperated voluntarily and observed the protocols of cleanliness, isolation and social distancing.

But the role of the armed forces, police, administration officials, and even volunteers was critical in making the lockdown a success. We pay tribute to the doctors, nurses, and paramedics who literally fought on the frontlines to save lives. Donors, philanthropists and businessmen stepped forward to help the needy.

The AJK Government rapidly raised Corona-related infrastructure to fight the pandemic. Sixty quarantine centres were set up and three Virology Departments were started for PCR testing in Muzaffarabad, Mirpur and Rawalakot. An officers' club in Muzaffarabad was converted into an isolation hospital and now such hospitals are being planned for all district headquarters.

Because of these measures, deaths were averted, nobody went

hungry, there was no social unrest, and the ulema became part of decision-making and consensus building.

We are grateful to the timely and substantial support given to us by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), the National Institute of Health (NIH) and the Ehsaas Programme for helping out Azad Kashmir. We also used our own resources to give assistance to the indigent.

Of course the lockdown has created problems. Businesses were shuttered for months, livelihoods were lost, educational institutions were closed and government work suffered. The cumulative economic loss is being assessed. A major intervention by the government is needed to turn things around.

COVID-19 also ushered in the digital era. Government officials and social entrepreneurs transacted business through Zoom webinars and video-conferences. Pollution decreased, skies and stars became visible, and one witnessed instances of strong social bonding despite social distancing.

Another impact of the virus has been the proliferation of rumours and advertisement of magic potions. It took a while to convince people that they have to follow the advice of doctors and the government, not Voodoo recipes.

The Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir

The story of the Occupied Jammu & Kashmir has been tragic and catastrophic. One does not really know where to begin. Since 5 August 2019, the occupied territory was already under brutal, punitive lockdown which could be rightly called a siege by the 900,000 occupation forces. There was a communication blockade, thousands of boys and children had been abducted and incarcerated in concentration camps, and the entire political leadership was under illegal detention. People were caged in their own houses, hospitals had become graveyards, and pharmacies were empty. Seething with anger, the disenfranchised people contested the illicit writ of the occupiers through civil disobedience. The occupied territory had become a colony under alien domination. The clamour

and protest of the international media, parliaments and the global civil society who questioned the Bharatiya Janata Party's genocidal policies made no impact on the governments of the most powerful nations who chose to seal their lips in the face of the most flagrant violations of international law in recent history.

Despite these formidable barriers, robust efforts were made by Pakistan and Azad Kashmir as well as our diaspora community. That did shake up the world but then the momentum started petering out because of other developments.

It was against this backdrop that the COVID-19 lockdown was introduced in Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IOJK). Instead of atoning for its horrendous sins, the BJP-RSS regime saw this as an opportunity to accelerate its oppression of Kashmiris and consolidate its occupation of the territory. It did not give Kashmiri COVID patients the treatment and care they needed. Perceived as enemies, supplies of ventilators, PPEs, masks, sanitisers, and medical equipment were diverted to the Hindu population in Jammu. Kashmiris fear that, because of this lack of attention, they would die like cattle.

The entire Kashmir region as well as three districts in Jammu, with Muslim majority, have been declared as red zones, or hotspots, in order to maintain surveillance on Kashmiri Muslims though restrictions on the Internet connectivity.

The BJP-RSS regime has spurned appeals from the six international human rights organizations, the UN Secretary General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights to release political detainees from cramped prison facilities in IOJK and India.

Under the cover of COVID-19, the fascist regime in Delhi is killing Kashmiri youth in cordon and search operations which are in fact staged encounters. According to their own figures, they have killed 60 'militants' in recent months but these figures are not reliable. The casualties are much higher. The occupation authorities do not release the bodies of the dead boys to the families out of fear that there would be a large attendance of mourners and pro-freedom demonstrators at

their funerals.

The deadliest strike of the regime against the people of Jammu and Kashmir, however, under the dark shroud of the Coronavirus, was the introduction of the New Domicile Rules designed to launch land-grab, deprive Kashmiris of their jobs, businesses and their ownership of the state. These rules are comparable to the Nuremberg Laws that were promulgated by the Nazi Party last century to rob Jews of their German nationhood and to prepare the ground for their genocide. Kashmiris are being reduced to a minority in their own homeland. This move is designed to orchestrate an influx of Hindus from India to change the demographic composition of the state and transform it into a Hindu Rashtra. These steps taken by India are war crimes and ethnic cleansing. Some Western newspapers have once again started highlighting the crackdowns in Kashmir but their governments are, as usual, silent.

In order to hide its crimes against humanity in IOJK and its loathsome anti-Muslimism in India, the BJP-RSS regime is violating ceasefire along the Line of Control with a vengeance, targeting civilians in Azad Kashmir. So far, Indian troops have violated the LOC more than 1,600 times since January this year. The recent official readouts and leaks suggest that India may well be planning another false-flag operation against Azad Kashmir and Pakistan. They signal that Delhi would implement a 'counter-infiltration' plan against some fictitious 'launching pads' in AJK. This is their favourite fib and a Machiavellian device to operationalise their acts of aggression against Pakistan.

It is therefore important to keep the Kashmir issue alive in global conversations. Because of the COVID-19 limitations, the video-conferencing and communications to the global forums and decision-makers are the best means to sustain advocacy of Kashmir. Through the Zoom App, I have been reaching out to the Western and Middle Eastern interlocutors. Social media, too, is a great means to influence public opinion but it has become so garbled that it hardly makes any impact on decisions impinging on peace, security and human rights. It

is fueling prejudices instead of crystallizing and mainstreaming values which should underpin our world order.

The Regional and Global Fault Lines

The globe will have a different face after COVID-19. On the positive side, it would have a digital and cyber-spatial face that could help us reduce inequalities within and among nations. The understanding about climate change could expand. The health systems would be streamlined and the capacity to fight viruses would be enhanced.

On the flip side, I fear that the ethnic, nationalist, religious and civilizational fault lines may resurface making the world more volatile and turbulent. The US and China should avoid a collision. A fight between them — military or economic — will plunge the world into disarray.

The United Nations has been marginalized. It has been reduced to a bystander in regard to the most momentous issues of peace and security. Instead of taking decisions, it has assumed a didactic, moralizing persona. If it can't be bolstered, it should be reformed to reflect the pluralist fabric of international politics.

The struggle for Kashmir will become harder. The BJP and its affiliates would not let go this historic opportunity for Hindu ascendancy. To achieve this goal, they have chosen the paths of violence, fascism and exclusion. At some point their inhuman agenda would collapse but by then they would have left behind a trail of death and destruction. It is international community's collective responsibility to stop Hindutva's rising tide of hatred and megalomania.

The struggle of the Kashmiris will continue. All their options have been exhausted by India. There's no way they will ever be able to live peaceably with their killers and tormentors. Diplomacy is still an option but the BJP-RSS's hauteur and hubris would not let them have any political discourse with the Kashmiris, Pakistan, their own Muslims population, or the marginalized citizens of India. Today their target is Pakistan but soon they are going to confront the entire Muslim world and Christendom. They already have an ongoing animosity with

China.

It is incumbent on Pakistan and the people of Jammu and Kashmir to find new strengths in all fields so that they can fulfil their aspirations for the realization of the right to self-determination of the Kashmiri people. Our struggle continues.

Post-Pandemic Politics of the 18th Amendment

FARHAN HANIF SIDDIQUI

The Coronavirus pandemic has states and governments all across the developed and developing world at a stretch. The conventional dichotomy of developed states at the higher end of socio-economic stability and service delivery compared to the developing states' inability to cope with socio-economic necessities holds little in the wake of the pandemic. In the developed world, the shortages of life-saving ventilators and hospital staff combined with millions of unemployed individuals and devastated businesses has once again enlivened the security debate.¹⁵¹ What good is state security if care and support cannot be provided to its own citizens? This grave situation is particularly troublesome if seen in the context of rising social democratic movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America preceding the onset of the pandemic with outraged protesters in Hong Kong, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, Algeria and Chile demanding greater freedoms and socio-economic equality.¹⁵² Though the movements subsided temporarily owing to COVID-19, they retained the potential

¹⁵¹ Christopher A. Preble, "Coronavirus will force us to rethink the national security debate," National Interest, 12 April 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/coronavirus-will-force-us-rethink-national-security-debate-143227>, accessed on 10 May 2020.

¹⁵² Roland Hughes, "The year in protests: From Chile to Lebanon, what happened next?", BBC News, 22 December 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-50822363>, accessed on 19 May 2020.

to manifest themselves as fissures between state and civil society. This intensifies states' inability to attend to human security and socio-economic welfare.¹⁵³

Both the United States and Japan announced huge relief packages to mitigate the socio-economic crisis prompting Prime Minister Imran Khan to reiterate the stark inability of the Pakistani state to provide essential basic needs if the pandemic were to continue over a longer period of time. Making calls for debt relief for the developing world, the Prime Minister said, 'Developing countries like Pakistan cannot afford to announce huge economic packages to mitigate the impact of the crisis. Countries like the United States and Japan have announced economic packages worth trillions of dollars whereas Pakistan could only announce a package of US\$8 billion.'¹⁵⁴

In addition to the failing provision of socio-economic needs, political practices and the elites' speeches and acts also indicate a state of bewilderment and confusion. Caught between a strict lockdown entailing economic losses but the protection of human lives and a softer version ensuring continuity of business yet with the risk of increased deaths, the response to the crisis has been marred by confusion and delays in the implementation of a viable strategy. As the pandemic hit Pakistan, Prime Minister Imran Khan compared the Coronavirus to little more than a flu affecting only the old or immunocompromised individuals¹⁵⁵ but also warned that the disease would not spare anyone.¹⁵⁶ This confusion festered into a political crisis as the Sindh provincial government embarked on a stricter lockdown owing to perceived rising cases — the first case in the country was detected in

¹⁵³ Yascha Mounk, "The End of History Revisited," *Journal of Democracy* 31, No. 1 (2020), pp. 32–3.

¹⁵⁴ Sanaullah Khan, "PM Imran Urges World Bodies to Grant Debt Relief to Developing Countries," *Dawn*, 12 April 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1548643>, accessed on 10 May 2020.

¹⁵⁵ "Not to Panic, Says PM Imran," *The Nation*, 17 March 2020, <https://nation.com.pk/17-Mar-2020/not-to-panic-says-pm-imran>, accessed on 10 May 2020.

¹⁵⁶ "Pakistanis Immune to Coronavirus? PM Imran Advises Citizens not to be 'foolish'," *Dawn*, 4 April 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1546415>

a student at the University of Karachi in February¹⁵⁷ — and the advice of health professionals. This put the federal and Sindh governments at odds with each other bringing rather absurdly the entire gamut of the 18th amendment into contestation. Again, Prime Minister Imran Khan bred confusion stating that, after the 18th Amendment, health was a provincial subject but, on the other hand, ridiculed the Sindh government for spreading panic and giving into fear.¹⁵⁸

As the Sindh government tightened much-needed lockdown measures, the fact that the 18th Amendment has come under stress necessitates the larger debate on why the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) expresses reservation over the Amendment.¹⁵⁹ This oddity is remarkable given the fact that, had it not been for the 18th Amendment, the PTI's governance model in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) would have been impossible to contrive. This governance model and the perceived service delivery in health, police, education and the environment was one of the prime factors in catapulting the party to power in the centre in 2018.

PTI and the 18th Amendment: Why the Reservation?

The paradox is entirely this: why is a party which was a prime beneficiary of provincial autonomy under the 18th Amendment also opposed to it? I propose a critique with the purpose of outlining the inherent meanings and contradictions that form part of the PTI's discourse on provincial autonomy and federalism. The discursive analysis is animated with the empirical reality of the party's absenteeism from the political elite consensus that produced both the Charter

¹⁵⁷ Imtiaz Ali, "Pakistan Confirms First Two Cases of Coronavirus, Govt says 'no need to panic,'" *Dawn*, 26 February 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1536792>

¹⁵⁸ "Imran Hits out at Sindh CM for 'creating panic,'" *Daily Times*, 19 April 2020, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/598105/imran-hits-out-at-sindh-cm-for-creating-panic/>, accessed on 11 May 2020.

¹⁵⁹ Azeem Samar and Imtiaz Ahmad, "18th Amendment Turned Centre into a Pauper," *The News International*, 31 March 2019, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/451183-18th-amendment-turned-centre-into-a-pauper>, accessed on 11 May 2020.

of Democracy¹⁶⁰ and the 18th Amendment advocating democracy, federalism and provincial autonomy. This absenteeism, combined with PTT's self-characterised political positioning as a party of deliverance from the socio-economic ills and corruption of their arch political rivals PML-N and PPP, makes it less amenable to political compromise and more critical of the 18th Amendment. In order to make sense of PTT's stance, it is instructive to deep dive into the electoral manifesto of the party for both the 2013 and 2018 elections. The manifesto as a primary source document reveals that, while the PTI was appreciative of provincial autonomy and federalism in 2013, its reservations of the Amendment became more acute going into the 2018 general elections.

The language of the 2013 election manifesto which the PTI titled as an 'Agenda for Resurgence' is explicit in its support to 'federalism and functional autonomy of the provinces, based on the spirit and fundamental principles of parliamentary democracy as envisaged in the 1973 Constitution.'¹⁶¹ In fact, in the section titled, 'Institutional Reforms, Strengthening the Federation' is a key sub-section where the text advocates that, 'true devolution of power can only start with giving due autonomy to the provinces' and is appreciative of the 7th NFC Awards' appropriation of four different heads for finance allocation terming unfair the previous formula fixed only on the population variable.¹⁶² The sub-section calls for the following reforms including the reduction of federal share in the net proceeds of divisible pool taxes as well as the strengthening of provincial finance commissions 'for fiscal discipline, resource mobilisation, and resource distribution within each province.'¹⁶³ On local government, the 2013 manifesto takes note of imputing too much power in the hands of the Nazim with the local government system in shambles. This politization of

¹⁶⁰ "Text of the Charter of Democracy," *Dawn*, 16 May 2006, <https://www.dawn.com/news/192460/text-of-the-charter-of-democracy>, accessed on 11 May 2020.

¹⁶¹ "PTI Manifesto 2013," <http://www.cpd-pakistan.org/party-manifestos>, accessed on 12 May 2020.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

the local government system works against the spirit of power-sharing which the manifesto advocates will be addressed by making local government institutions accountable to the provincial assemblies and the Nazim directly elected by the people in the town.¹⁶⁴

In what can be termed as a fairly positive assessment of provincial autonomy and the 7th NFC Award in 2013, the PTI's 2018 manifesto, in contrast, reads as a muted and circumspect take on provincial autonomy. In fact, 'provincial autonomy', 'federalism' and the '18th Amendment' do not find mention in the 2018 manifesto, a stark omission for a party which stands as an important beneficiary. The emphasis is on a 'Naya Pakistan' which is explained in the following terms:

The Movement for Justice/Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf, was envisaged as a movement to fight for a just and equitable society based on the system that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) laid down in the Madina Charter which was the foundation of the model Islamic state, an egalitarian society based on the rule of law and economic justice – the first welfare state in the history of mankind. Unfortunately, as the Muslim philosopher, Ibn-e-Khaldun, predicted: when the Muslims' commitment to justice declined so did their civilisation.¹⁶⁵

The manifesto's primary affliction is centred on Pakistan's crisis of governance for which the following measures are identified: instituting accountability irrespective of political affiliation, empowering people through local government, depoliticizing and strengthening the police and reforming the criminal justice system and civil service.¹⁶⁶ Local government figures more prominently than provincial autonomy, a governance mechanism that is in consonance with a monistic

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ "PTI Manifesto 2018: The Road to Naya Pakistan," <https://pmo.gov.pk/documents/manifesto-pti.pdf>, accessed on 12 May 2020.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

conception of sovereignty.¹⁶⁷ The manifesto states, ‘we will transform Pakistan by devolving power and decision-making to the people through an empowered local government.’ This empowered local government entails a city government model ‘where the directly elected Mayor will be responsible to deliver on all interrelated urban city matters.’¹⁶⁸ Chapter 3, titled, Strengthening the Federation side steps provincial autonomy by laying emphasis on creating a new province in South Punjab, championing reconciliation in Balochistan, integrating FATA with KP, transforming Karachi and attending to Gilgit-Baltistan.

What does a comparative analysis of the 2013 and 2018 election manifestos divulge? First, from a party which showed a relative appreciation of provincial autonomy and federalism, the PTI today displays an uneasy acceptance, if not a complete rejection of the 18th Amendment. A palpable reason has to do with the party’s self-positioning as a third alternative to the two mainstream political parties with the latter obliterating the socio-political and economic dynamics of the Pakistani state and society. In invoking this populist narrative which thrives on creating and identifying enemies, a relative assent to the 18th Amendment is tantamount to making a deal with the devil. Second, a starker analysis has to do with federalism-skeptics that equate the 18th Amendment and federalism as laying the basis of a weakened Pakistani state and society. In short, if education, health and other ministries are devolved to the provinces, what then remains of the Pakistani national narrative? In 2018, a symbolic assessment of the dangers of provincial autonomy were at play with press reports of a Bajwa Doctrine. The new Chief of Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, allegedly equated the 18th Amendment with Shaikh Mujeeb-ur-Rahman’s Six Points reiterating that the Amendment has turned Pakistan into a confederation.¹⁶⁹ The fear of a relative weakening of

¹⁶⁷ John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary, “Territorial Approaches to Ethnic Conflict Settlement,” in Karl Cordell and Stefan Wolff (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 250.

¹⁶⁸ ‘PTI Manifesto 2018’.

¹⁶⁹ M. Ziauddin, “Analysing the ‘Bajwa Doctrine’”, *Daily Times*, 22 March 2018, <https://>

the centre was also echoed resolutely by Prime Minister Imran Khan who blamed the 18th Amendment for bankrupting the federation.¹⁷⁰ With this the case, the PTI is now firmly ensconced in the federalism-skeptic side of the debate pitting it against the federalism-optimists, PPP and PML-N.¹⁷¹

COVID-19 and the 18th Amendment: Why Debate it Now?

As fissures between the federal and Sindh provincial government mounted more so because of the greater appreciation of the latter in the popular press and social media as opposed to the federal government's confused Corona-speak, the 18th Amendment has once again come up under scrutiny. The fissure relates to the federal government's invocation that the Amendment needs review,¹⁷² that too much financial power rests with the provinces and that one, the Sindh government has misappropriated financial resources to its political advantage and popular support.¹⁷³ In short, the 18th Amendment has engendered corruption and inefficient governance while making provinces independent of the centre. Is this contention true?

First, the debate over the ills of the 18th Amendment resonates primarily with respect to the Sindh government, not the other three provinces. For logic's sake then, provincial autonomy works well in KP, Punjab and Balochistan — the last province was visited by Prime Minister Imran Khan and its measures relative to the Coronavirus lauded¹⁷⁴ — but not in Sindh. If this is true, then the problem is not

[dailytimes.com.pk/217943/analysing-the-bajwa-doctrine/](https://www.dailytimes.com.pk/217943/analysing-the-bajwa-doctrine/), accessed on 12 May 2020.

¹⁷⁰ Azeem Samar and Imtiaz Ahmad, op. cit.

¹⁷¹ The 2018 electoral manifestos of both the PML-N and PPP are celebratory of the 18th Amendment, federalism and provincial autonomy.

¹⁷² "Spotlight on 18th Amendment as Pakistan Fights COVID-19," *Pakistan Today*, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2020/04/27/spotlight-18th-amendment-pakistan-fights-covid-19/>, accessed on 12 May 2020.

¹⁷³ Imtiaz Mugheri, "PTI's White Paper on Sindh Govt.'s Performance Reveals Financial Irregularities of Billions," *Dawn*, 29 May 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1485310>, accessed on 12 May 2020.

¹⁷⁴ "PM Imran Tells Nation to Prepare for a Coronavirus Epidemic, Rules out

exactly the 18th Amendment as much as it is the unrelenting Sindh government dominated by the PPP. Shibli Faraz, the Information Minister, in a recent interview, castigated the 18th Amendment for imputing too much power to the provinces while irresponsibly blaming the PPP and PML-N for engineering it in order to cater to their provincial power. He said, ‘it seems that the Amendment was put through so that these two parties could control their respective provinces without federal interference.’¹⁷⁵ This framing of the debate is reflective of a populist narrative that spreads hate against others without attention to evidence and arguments based on rationality.

Second, the PTI’s tirade against the 18th Amendment is a classic diversionary tactic to stave off criticisms of its own government. Since 2018, when the party came to power, the economy has nosedived into a recession, federal income tax collections have declined,¹⁷⁶ unemployment has increased — with Hafeez Pasha claiming a figure of 1 million unemployed in 2019¹⁷⁷ — and corruption scandals centred on wheat and sugar subsidies for influential politicians in the government.¹⁷⁸ In short, before the pandemic hit the country, Pakistan’s economy was reeling from a crisis of governance and indecisions on the part of the PTI government. With this, the ruling party’s opening up the 18th Amendment front allows it to leverage itself as a party fighting

Lockdown,” *Dawn*, 17 March 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1541689>, accessed on 12 May 2020.

¹⁷⁵ “Has to be Assessed Whether 18th Amendment has Benefited Provinces or Political Personalities, Shibli Faraz,” *Dawn News*, May 13, 2020, https://twitter.com/Dawn_News/status/126060968482377280, accessed on 13 May 2020.

¹⁷⁶ Shahbaz Rana, “FBR Sustains Rs. 385b Tax Shortfall in Jul-Jan FY20,” *The Express Tribune*, 1 February 2020, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2148186/2-fbr-sustains-rs385b-tax-shortfall-jul-jan-fy20/>, accessed on 13 May 2020.

¹⁷⁷ “2.2 Million Pakistanis Could Lose Jobs in Two Years, says Hafeez Pasha,” *24 Digital*, 7 February 2020, <https://www.24newshd.tv/07-Feb-2020/2-2-million-pakistanis-could-lose-jobs-in-two-years-says-former-finance-minister>, accessed on 13 May 2020.

¹⁷⁸ Tariq Butt, “Supplementary Report on Sugar Scandal,” *The News International*, 6 April 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/640279-supplementary-report-on-sugar-scandal>, accessed on 13 May 2020.

for the average Pakistani against corrupt and self-serving opposition politicians. However, the correlation between the 18th Amendment and corrupt provincial governments — read only Sindh government — is less easily taken. In fact, a counterfactual analysis reveals that the 18th Amendment has catered to a healthy and well-functioning health sector, an upward trend from the 2000s.¹⁷⁹

Third, the PTI's take against the 18th Amendment also feeds into the civil-military equation which is a necessary facet of political parties' survival in government. The military took the lead in calling for a lockdown to the embarrassment of the Prime Minister who earlier was dismissive of it.¹⁸⁰ Criticizing the 18th Amendment provides the government a leverage with the military, especially the latter's reservations over the financial distribution formula which places a majority of finances with the provinces. As evidence, the TORs of the 10th National Finance Commission Award prioritises security as a vital concern pushing the provinces to contribute to it.¹⁸¹ This is a tough ask from the PML-N and PPP who have consistently rallied against any debilitating changes in the financial distribution formula as well as the 18th Amendment.

Conclusion

Political opposition between federal and provincial strategies of dealing with the coronavirus is not merely a Pakistan-specific problem but was also on display in the United States between President Trump and New York Governor, Andrew Cuomo. However, in Pakistan, questioning the edifice of federalism and provincial autonomy implies politics in times where the federal government tries hard to sustain

¹⁷⁹ Pervez Tahir, "Healthier under 7th NFC, 18th Amendment," *The Express Tribune*, May 8, 2020, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2216429/6-healthier-7th-nfc-18th-amendment/>, accessed on 13 May 2020.

¹⁸⁰ Fahd Husain, "Locking Horns over Lockdown," *Dawn*, March 25, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1543529>, accessed on 13 May 2020.

¹⁸¹ Shahbaz Rana, "10th NFC Agenda Tilts in Favour of Centre," *The Express Tribune*, May 13, 2020, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2220315/2-10th-nfc-agenda-tilts-favour-centre/>, accessed on 13 May 2020.

an economy reeling from its own decisions and indecisiveness over the last year and a half. The PTI's disdain of the 18th Amendment has, over time, appropriated an incessant feature of its politics but will the Amendment's review provide a way out of Pakistan's myriad social and economic failings? If political, social and economic policies before the Coronavirus pandemic hit the country are anything to go by, the PTI government has much to balance out with its rhetoric of a Naya Pakistan in statements and speeches with real-time efficiency and service delivery on the ground.

FinTech: A Window of Opportunity for Pakistan

IKRAM SEHGAL

An apocalyptic medical emergency hit Pakistan's rather weak health-care system and had all indications of creating panic in the face of impending havoc. Given the inherited weak structure, this may have national security implications. The dilemma of the looming gaps in the healthcare and public cleanliness system cannot be bridged in a short time. The process of paying for health-care is costly, complicated, stressful and time consuming. It prohibits access to care. COVID-19 medical emergency has only made it worse in countries like Pakistan. It is actually a double-edged sword.

Without playing down the danger to the lives of our citizens, one must put the medical crisis into context of all the hazards daily threatening millions of lives in Pakistan. Among them are a failing economy and spreading poverty and complex issues with law and order problems. One can have a full lockdown or curfew in big cities; this may lessen massive infections but it will halt the economy if the supply lines are interrupted not only for agriculture but also industries.

This is what perhaps Prime Minister Imran Khan had in mind when addressing the situation in the country. Faced with such a crisis in the country's history for the first time, there was no precedent to follow and a ready-made recipe to employ. Even in the West, with its developed health-care systems, medical research and experience with previous epidemics are in a state of learning. They make frequent adjustments to respond to the situation. The most challenging aspect

of the pandemic for Pakistan is that the economic outfall of the lockdown is more dangerous than the medical one. By ordering partial or full lockdowns, we are strangling our fragile economy.

The shortage of foreignexchange reserves on the shoulders of plunging demand and global supply-chain contagion could send Pakistan's economy to the morgue. The IMF reaction of putting aside long-held principles and promising help is an excellent sign. The government has lifted the ban on goods transport movement and decided to allow the opening of food-related industries to ensure adequate supply of essential items during the nationwide lockdown. The wheel of the core Pakistani industries like construction, textiles and leather need to keep moving. Employees need jobs and the country needs revenue. People are getting infected by the virus, more are recovering than dying but many will suffer because of the economic crunch, hunger and other diseases when they have no money to buy medicines and no transport to reach help.

The unemployment rate in Pakistan may have surged by several millions. A rough estimate based on Pakistan Bureau of Statistics data suggests that approximately 4.2 million salaried-class workers could have ended up jobless by the end of this period; informal estimates hint at 8-10%.

The daily wagers and their families are hit the hardest by the loss of their income. The World Bank has praised the government's EHSAAAS welfare programme and its effectiveness in providing aid under the critical threat environment formed by the sharp spike in COVID-19 infections. The World Bank has urged making this method central to the national strategy to help people affected by the crisis with statistics citing 24% of the 210 million population reported as being below the poverty line. EHSAAAS represents a broad poverty alleviation programme with a variety of individual modules numbering around 115 including initiatives such as the National Poverty Graduation Initiative (NPGI) which aims at enabling sustainable livelihoods for people below the poverty line with key elements including skills/

vocational training, interest-free loans, and asset transfer based on the core policy principle of ‘redistribution’ used in most welfare states.

This programme’s core function involving the disbursement of loans will be key for FinTech¹⁸² development. Initially the government’s response scaled up their flagship welfare programme, EHSAAS Kafalat including a further 7.5m additional vulnerable families and increasing their budgetary needs by 85% for cash transfers. In addition to this was expanding the reach of the Benazir Income Support Programme by 4.5m women. Applicants to state-backed welfare systems are automatically screened through the National ID database which covers any KYC¹⁸³ concerns. The usage of biometric identification methods are considered to be state-of-the-art by commentators.

One of the consequences of the current pandemic is the need to lessen physical contact. Mobile phone devices could become the primary tool for payments while avoiding the necessary trip to the bank. A society with such a young population and increasingly tech-savvy generations ensures a unique role for mobile payment services. Such services called ‘FinTech’, short for financial technology, refers to technology-led innovation in financial services which aims to exploit the gaps in coverage and affordability of the services offered by the mainstream financial sector. This will pave the way for such development of e-commerce and new media of payment. According to recent statistics, over 80% of the Pakistani people own a mobile phone and the figure is only likely to rise. Incidentally, the new electronic payment scheme does not need a smart-phone; it can function on any feature phone as it does not need internet.¹⁸⁴

The expected benefit of a cashless society and digital payments

¹⁸² FinTech is a portmanteau of the terms ‘finance’ and ‘technology’ and refers to any business that uses technology to enhance or automate financial services and processes. FinTech is a broad and rapidly growing industry serving both consumers and businesses.

¹⁸³ KYC check is the mandatory process of identifying and verifying the identity of the client when opening an account and, periodically, over time. In other words, banks must make sure that their clients are genuinely who they claim to be.

¹⁸⁴ <https://www.pta.gov.pk/en/telecom-indicators>

is that it will lead to less crime as theft or illegal transactions that typically take place with cash, leave no record. Digital records of every payment make it much harder to hide income and evade taxes. Money laundering will be limited as well. Current payment systems settle payments within 24 hours after a transaction is made although the host receives the payment instantly. When introduced, real-time payment systems will complete this process in seconds which will lead to a manifold rise in the volume of small transactions. This technology currently exists in only 10 to 12 countries of the world; more time is required for its introduction in Pakistan. From a context of financial inclusion and FinTech development, we see that the ability of governments to make a lasting difference is miniscule in relation to the ability of commercial entities. A government with no experience, and in the context of a global crisis, had to hurriedly scramble through the process of (a) stakeholder engagement, (b) conducting customer due diligence to identify legible segments, and (c) initiating digital settlement to provide the necessary financial services, all of which are basically the core functions of virtual banking entities across the world.

Every month, 80,000 interest-free loans are disbursed through more than 1,000 loan distribution centres set up in around 100 districts. The current system does not allow a recipient to receive the Rs 12,000 in funds except after their confirmed verification through NADRA even though there may be other technological solutions available for identity verification. Although the usage of biometric verification is a state-of-the-art process, there were risks of using biometric identification methods due to infection via multiple usage of thumbprint-based scanning devices. However, the theft of funds by the people operating the actual centres was not anticipated.

The question of the method of disbursing funds is a pressing concern amidst the chaos caused by COVID 19 with far reaching implications for two of the government's central programmes, EHSAAS and the 'Digital Pakistan' programme neither of which pays any significant attention to FinTech. The current mechanisms for cash

disbursement, which is now to be a permanent fixture in welfare policy, are being operated in less than optimum conditions. The objectives of EHSAAS were tied-in closely to the UN SDGs and the World Bank's 'Financial Inclusion' agenda. The urgency to deliver initiatives under this context has been accelerated by the pandemic. Now, however, the issues related to mismanagement and risk to human life have shed light on a neglected avenue of development, the rapid promotion of disruptive digital financial services.

People are only supposed to visit the centres after receiving a confirmed text message from the 8171 line; however, many are swarming at the centres without following this rule. The same is the situation at hospitals where many are flocking for testing without a valid recommendation by a doctor. The risks associated with a large crowd of people gathering at cash distribution centres are apparent with all using the same thumb recognition devices.

The police is helpless in the face of largely hostile crowds that neither understand nor want to observe the SOPs recommended for their safety. The usual crowd management techniques failed miserably. The exploitation of the generally poor management of the Kafaalat programme has opened the door to the agent cartels, the middle men we all wanted to get rid of following the launch of PSO-PSPs a few years back. A consequence of allowing the corruption of agent cartels to continue unchecked over this period of time has allowed exploitation of the worst-affected population segments.

Cash disbursements are only a temporary solution to assist the most underprivileged. They need to be allowed to conduct their trade online and rapid innovation and provision of e-commerce solutions should be a priority for the team under the 'Digital Pakistan' initiative for long-term sustainability. Unable to follow the latter course, the masses of daily-wage workers are compelled to seek welfare under conditions which will spread infection and then accelerate the cycle of economic decline for those most ill-affected.

A major issue as a result of this pandemic is the impending financial

crunch. Already under heavy financial burden, there is a need in Pakistan to keep the burden of the state as small as possible, which means that the interest rates have to be brought down further to close to zero as it has been done internationally. The so-called 'hot money', having mostly gone, what is remaining is most possibly going to stay.

Garnering good profits prior to 2020, the banks should share the financial burden of the country. In any case, almost 70% of these profits came from T-Bills, the interest is paid by the public exchequer. Pakistan's stock market does not have any relevance to the market situation and to commodity prices. It is at best a gambling den that does not need the State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) support. This situation requires the financial burden being shouldered by those who can afford it. It is the solidarity with the weak in such times that makes a nation. Even Pakistanis abroad can help. Keeping in view the devaluation of the rupee against the dollar, one would urge overseas Pakistanis to deposit funds into the account that has been set up by the SBP to help lift the pressure off the rupee.

This pandemic is a huge challenge. Pakistani leadership should not blindly follow others who are also only trying to make sense of the situation. We need to stay flexible and consider all options and get our priorities right. The most important point of convergence should be that the epidemic; the subsequent economic hardship can be defeated by the united effort of the entire nation. While the role of the leadership in these crucial times is certainly important, a rational, honest and compassionate social support that mobilizes the nation, especially the young people, is the only viable response.

The marriage between the youth and FinTech solutions can be a doable way forward for not only the problems that have surfaced due to COVID-19 but they may also carry the answer to the structural financial problems Pakistan has always struggled with.

Index

10th NFC Commission Award 121
7th NFC Award 116, 117
18th Amendment 113, 115–22

A

Afghan Peace Process 31
Afghanistan 24, 31, 45, 101–2, 104
aid and assistance 44
arms race 22
artificial intelligence 57
Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) 107–10

B

Bajwa Doctrine 118
Beijing 32, 35–8, 40, 45–7, 50–1
Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) 38
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) 109–11
Biological warfare 35
bio-tech 57
bipolar 62
Bird Flu 56
Blue Dot Network (BDN) 53
Bolshevik Revolution 71
branding strategy 51

C

Capitalism 17, 21–2, 27, 67–8
Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) 44
Charter of Democracy 116
China 23, 25–6, 29, 30–54, 56, 58,
60–3, 80, 84–5, 91, 93, 97–8, 100,
102–5, 111–12
China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
(CPEC) 38, 98, 103, 105
China Syndrome 47
Chinese Virus 26, 45, 62, 79
civil-military relations 19
climate change 25, 55, 87, 111
Cold War 21–2, 24–5, 27, 33, 37, 61,
102
collateral damage 68
conflict zones 401
confrontation 33–4, 37
connectivity 41, 51–3, 109
controlled globalization 58–9, 62–3
cooperation 22–3, 26, 30, 32, 34, 36,
44, 51, 53, 62, 91, 101–2, 129
Coronavirus 25, 42–4, 46, 50, 60, 79,
83, 86–8, 90–1, 113, 122
COVID-19 21, 23–30, 32–3, 35, 40,
51, 45, 47, 49, 52–4, 56, 59–63, 74,
77–8, 80, 82–4,

86–9, 97, 100, 104, 106, 108–10, 123–4,
129
COVID moment 40
Crimson Contagion 25
crisis 21, 24, 29, 30, 33, 35–6, 41

D

Debt diplomacy 52
dependence 47, 100
Digital Pakistan Initiative 128
disaster management 90, 107–8
diplomacy 18, 38–9, 44, 46, 88, 111
digital world 18, 57
democracy 22, 24, 54, 98, 116

E

Ebola 34, 56
economic liberalization 43
economy 16, 18, 41–3, 64, 66–73, 82,
96–7, 99, 101–2, 120–4
Ehsaas Emergency Cash Programme
94
EHSAAAS Programme 108, 124, 127
EHSAS Kafalat 125
environment degradation 24, 27
epidemic 47, 74–5, 78–81, 97, 124, 128
Eurasian concept 102
European Union (EU) 52–3, 98–100

F

Federalism 115–19, 122
Financial Technology (FINTECH) 125
foreign policy 19, 33, 45, 51, 60, 62–3,
102–3, 105

G

Geopolitics 29, 30–1, 35, 38
global leadership 44–6, 54
global order 17, 40, 53
Global South 88
global warming 27, 55
globalization 18, 23–4, 27, 41, 50,
56–63, 97–8
governance 21–2, 45–6, 51, 62, 87, 115,
117–19, 121
Great depression 42, 85

H

Health Silk Road 50–2
healthcare 29, 50, 54, 67–8, 71–2, 76–7,
81, 91, 94, 123
hegemony 40, 71
human rights 18, 22, 54, 74–7, 79,
80–1, 83, 88, 109, 111
Human Rights Watch (HRW) 75, 77,
80
human security 17–18, 26, 73, 114

I

India 48, 53, 64–5, 90, 93, 100–1, 104,
109–12
Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir
(IOJK) 109–10
Indo-Pacific region 34, 36, 53
infectious diseases 26, 56, 58, 75, 78, 80
information technology 78
infrastructure 52–3, 70, 89–90, 92, 107
interdependence 56, 58, 99–100
International Human Rights Law 18,
75, 80, 83

International Labour Organization

(ILO) 71

International Monetary Fund (IMF) 29,

42, 52, 88, 90, 124

Investments 37, 52, 60, 66

Iran 30–1, 45, 48, 77, 93, 101, 104–5

Italy 38, 48, 50–1, 79, 98

L

legitimacy 46–7, 72

lockdowns 16, 24, 26, 29, 65, 75, 88,

91, 124

M

market economy 70–2

mask diplomacy 46

medical supplies 43, 47–8

migration 56, 103

militarization 32

multilateral diplomacy 88

multilateralism 17, 23, 27, 54

N

national security 34, 72, 86, 123

National Security Agency (NSS) 33–4

neo-liberal approach 26, 58, 62

neo-liberalism 69

New Normal 16

New World Order 22–4, 28, 100

nuclear weapons 57

Nuremberg Laws 110

O

One-Belt-One-Road 98

P

Pakistan 38, 48, 64, 65–6, 68–9, 70, 72–

3, 79, 90–9, 101–7, 109–12, 114–15,

117–19, 121–4, 126–9

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz Group

(PML-N) 116, 119–21

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) 116,

119–21

Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) 65,

115–22

pandemic 15–19, 21, 23–32, 34–5, 37–

41, 43–49, 51–63, 71, 74–6, 79–80,

82–97, 102, 105–7, 113–14, 120, 122,

124–5, 127–8

Pompeo, Mike 32, 46, 62

President Xi 43, 44, 49–1, 54

Proliferation 56, 108

Provincial autonomy 115–19, 122

Q

quarantine zones 50

quarantines 16, 26, 75

R

racial discrimination 78

radicalization 25

Red Revolution 71

refugees 77, 81

relief packages 114

Right resisting risks 75

robotics 57

rule-based order 36

Russia 34, 58, 60–2, 71, 97, 99–102,

105

S

security 17–18, 23, 26–7, 30–6, 39, 46, 57, 61, 68, 72–3, 82, 86–7, 100–2, 111, 113–14, 121–3

Security Council (SC) 41, 90, 101

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) 25–6, 34, 56

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) 100–1, 104

Silk Route 41

smart lockdown 90–2

social democracy 64

social distancing 75, 86, 88, 92, 107–8

socialism 27, 70–1

SOPs 26, 50, 127

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) 88, 100

Spanish Flu 56, 71, 84, 106

State Coordination Committee (SCC) 107

status quo 28, 73

super power 17–18, 38, 43, 98

sustainable development 58, 83

Swine Flu 56

T

technologies 57

territorial claims 35

terrorism 55, 84

Thatcherite-Reaganite politics 71

TORs 121

transactions 76, 126

trickle-down theory 68

Trump, Donald 26, 32, 45, 62, 65, 79

Trumpplomacy 46

U

Unipolar 97, 102

United Kingdom (UK) 40, 48, 106

United Nations (UN) 22, 41–2, 55, 61–2, 74, 79–81, 88, 90, 100, 109, 111, 127

United States (US) 18, 21–5, 27, 29–31, 33–46, 48, 51–6, 58, 60, 62, 64–5, 70, 72, 76–7, 79, 90, 97, 100, 102, 104–5, 111, 114, 122

urbanization 27

V

ventilators 43, 48, 109, 113

Vietnam War 31

virus 16, 25–6, 32–4, 41, 45–7, 50, 56, 60, 62, 64–5, 76–7, 79, 81, 83, 85–6, 89, 91, 94, 97, 99, 106–08, 111, 124

W

War on Terror 24, 55

Washington 31–3, 35–6, 38

White Revolution 71

wolf-warrior diplomacy 46

World Bank (WB) 52, 88, 124, 127

World Health Assembly 44, 49

World Health Organization (WHO) 16, 26, 41, 44, 46, 51, 54, 60–1, 84–5, 88, 92

Wuhan 16, 26, 32, 41, 48, 62, 84–5

Index

X

Xenophobia 78

Z

zoonotic viruses 56