The Post-COVID-19 Pandemic World Order: Imposing New Realities

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Abstract

Treating global pandemics must be seen as a form of investment for the future of public health rather than a temporary, political response to national or international crises. Meeting this challenge need not necessarily lead to a degradation of norms and values in the pursuit of politics and global great power rivalries. It is urgent to search for a paradigm shift away from a nationalist-populist solution and toward global cooperation and coordination. A reliance on empirical science, combined with value-loaded and evidence-based approaches, is essential to controlling the spread of this infectious disease and being better prepared to cope with its possible next waves. Trump's magical hopes, dreams, and thinking are unlikely to restore normalcy to the lives of multiple millions of people—both in the Unites States and around the world. At a time when we all face a world turned upside down, the need for a tenable vision and strong leadership has never been more urgent and apparent. Trump has failed to offer a comprehensive plan and national strategy for dealing with the COVID-19 virus. Hope alone is not a strategy nor can it provide the optimal level of solidarity needed for coping with the myriad challenges involved in effectively containing and eliminating COVID-19. This

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pandemic has imposed new realities on the global community that can only be effectively dealt with by an unmitigated global coordination and cooperation.

Keywords

Post-COVID-19, Pandemic, World Order, New Realities

Introduction

We are at the beginning of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the worst is yet to come. Governments around the world are still in 'reaction mode' and politicians are making decisions as they go. Experts are rushing to express different views and contemplate the ramifications of the spread of this infectious disease. Meanwhile, the world faces the lethal cost of containing and eventually controlling this virus in terms of economic decay and a public health crisis of a magnitude unforeseen in the past. Simultaneously, tensions have flared between the United States and China. President Donald J. Trump has announced that the United States would be exiting the Open Skies Treaty—the 1992 agreement designed to reduce the risk of military miscalculations that could lead to war by simply allowing member countries to conduct reconnaissance flights over other countries to collect data on their military forces and activities.[1]

More specifically, however, poverty-stricken countries and those still engulfed in a civil war, including refugees, migrant workers, and asylum seekers, will wind up being ignored or forgotten in the scrum. Most predictions point to the epic event of our time surpassing the great depression of the 1930s, with deadly consequences, including the rise of extremism, mass suffering, socioeconomic inequality, economic collapse, and possibly social unrest or insurrection. It is not clear when the world will exit from various strategic national lockdowns and "stay at home" strategies. If there is an agreement among experts, it is that going back to 'normal' is impossible in the short term, as parts of the world await a long recovery.

This paper's central argument is that the COVIT-19 pandemic is likely to impose new realities on the whole of humanity, influencing life circumstances and thinking across the globe. To that end, the paper seeks to unpack the dynamics of change with a pace unprecedented in contemporary global affairs. Its core argument is that. Two questions arise: (1) Will this global pandemic drive potential structural transformation? And (2) what would the world be like in the post-coronavirus pandemic era? I argue that both the dynamics and intensity of change in the world affairs are likely to be permanent—not temporary—and that governance, leadership, the texture of global politics will be manifested in the shift in the era of COVID-19 pandemic. After explaining competing perspectives on the post-coronavirus era, the essay turns to the need for global cooperation and why populist mode of operation in stemming the tidal rise of the coronavirus pandemic may prove futile. In the ensuring section, I examine the reasons behind the erosion of trust and confidence in the Trump administration.

Competing Perspectives

Populist politicians exploit this pandemic as yet another opportunity to blame China, the World Health Organization, refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers for the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. At the same time, an emerging trend—if not a broad consensus—holds that the actual new world order, which is premised on global integration and transnational governance, is in fact disintegrating. Instead of generating some sort of globalist consolidation, Ross Douthat writes, "the rule of the coronavirus is unraveling internationalism everywhere you look."[2] The virus has tightened border controls, hindered migration, and transferred power from the international to national and the national to the local level. Most glaringly, it has galvanized a great power rivalry between the United States and China, with the possibility of a trans-Pacific Cold War of sorts looming on the horizon.[3]

Echoing a similar sentiment, Stephen M. Walt argues, populist leaders throughout the world will likely push for closing borders and adopting anti-globalization measures in the name of nationalism and economic protectionism.[4] Walt warns that the globe should: "… get ready for the new normal: Political opportunism and fear of a new pandemic will lead many governments to leave some of their newly acquired powers in place."[5]

Given this caveat, the pandemic will strengthen the state and bolster nationalism. Different governments will adopt emergency measures to curb the crisis and many will be reluctant to give up these newfound powers when the crisis is over. The coronavirus pandemic, Walt insists elsewhere, will also expedite the "shift in power and influence from west to east."[6] The result will be a world that is bereft of social justice, shared prosperity, environmental sustainability, and basic freedoms. Consequently, US competence will be rightfully disputed by eastern powers, and its global influence will almost certainly lead to a sharp decline.

More specifically, economic experts call our attention to protectionism and populism. One manifestation of populism, they assert, is likely to be resurgent protectionism in the form of anti-globalization. This would mean the imposition of subsidies or tariffs on overseas imports, including pharmaceuticals, medical devices, food stocks, information technology (IT), essential manufacturing, defense contractors, financial services, energy suppliers, and security services.[7] Governments will restrict international technology transfers, to their pronounced peril. Similarly, many countries will continue to monitor their citizens via mobile devices to help manage the risk of COVID-19, or other infectious diseases, which further obscures the line between the private and public control of data. The debate over the security ramifications of using foreign telecom equipment suppliers are thus likely to grow.[8]

From a somewhat different perspective, however, Richard N. Haass, the author of *The World: A Brief History* (2020), argues that we cannot separate

local from global or think locally in a globalized world. The Coronavirus or the Covid-19 pandemic, which has originated in the Chinese city of Wuhan, has now spread to all corners of the world. The 2008-2009 global financial crisis hit the world with successive waves of austerity, and very few countries proved immune from its effects and aftermath. In 2016, hackers in Russia, traveled virtually in cyberspace to manipulate America's elections. In recent years, severe hurricanes and large fires caused by climate change have ravaged parts of the earth; and now the globe enters the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is likely to fundamentally alter the world. In the future, we should anticipate even more serious global uncertainty.[9]

Haass has also reminded us that the post-coronavirus world will not be dramatically different from the one that came before it. "COVID-19," Haass continues, "will not so much change the basic direction of world history as accelerate it."[10] The world that emerges from this crisis, Haass insists, will be familiar: "Waning American leadership, faltering global cooperation, great power discord"—features that have come to accurately describe declining US leadership role in the world.[11] Well before this virus overwhelmed the globe, Haass asserts, there had already been a drastic drop in the appeal of the US model. The pandemic is certain to heighten friction between the United States and China, while also reinforcing the democratic recession that has characterized the world since the 9/11 attacks on the United States. Now more than ever, the possibility of a new Cold War between the United States China looms large. There will be greater support for a larger government role in society, particularly in the form of curbing the movement of populations or providing economic aid. Under such circumstances, civil liberties and political freedoms will be significantly restricted.

Still others argue that abandoning democratic norms will come with a hefty price, underscoring the need to assess the performance of authoritarian regimes in terms of alleviating poverty, protecting rights, and tackling socioeconomic and racial disparities. The need for global coordination becomes so urgent that

it would require cooperation at all levels—international, national, and local. Each country has much to learn from the experiences of the rest. An ardent defender of liberal internationalism, G. John Ikenberry posits that in the future, while we may see the increasing great power rivalry in a divided and violent world, nation-states are likely to cooperate to achieve security and prosperity for all. It is plausible that in the long term, Ikenberry writes, "democracies will come out of their shells to find a new type of pragmatic internationalism."[12] While most liberal democrats acknowledge that this global pandemic could widen the divisions between countries and possibly fuel anti-migrant sentiments, there is a good chance it will buttress international cooperation, support for the international organization such as UN, and a willingness to seek negotiations rather than military and economic clash.

Meanwhile, in the absence of global leadership and cooperation, the traumatic effects of coronavirus will leave unresolved the possibility of the return of the liberal order narrative, making a critical assessment of the pandemic's disruptive consequences all the more urgent. US Senator Bernie Sanders, along with several others in the Democratic Party, have asked the Trump administration to lift sanctions on Iran in light of the fact that the country is facing a humanitarian disaster in its campaign against coronavirus. There is evidence that the sanctions have reduced Iran's capacity to curb its outbreak. Absent global cooperation and sustainable/coordinated efforts, the future waves of this virus will be even more threatening.[13]

The Necessity of Global Cooperation

As noted above, scientists have consistently argued that the COVID-19 pandemic threat will persevere for many years to come. The global economy is headed for a recession and possibly a depression such as the one that transpired in the 1930s. These experts associated with the World Economic Forum have indicated that: "Not only will this translate into rising

unemployment and food insecurity, but it could quickly escalate into political unrest, violence, and conflict."[14]

Increasingly, the risks of violence will heighten in the most vulnerable countries and cities. Violence against women and human rights abuses will most likely spike. Governments—blaming outsiders—will be further undermined if the issue of national security and human security are mishandled. Without the collective willingness to work together to tackle shared challenges, the difficulties of mitigating the impact of the coronavirus will mount. While many expressions of solidarity are openly uttered, people are more likely to support populist-nationalist responses in times of crisis; with less competent leaders at the helm, millions of people are likely to die unnecessarily.[15]

Nowhere is the necessity of global cooperation more urgent than in the case of refugees who are cohabitating and concentrated in densely populated contexts which renders them impotent to maintain physical and social distancing. With approximately 70 million refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and asylum seekers scattered around the world, the global community can ill-afford to gloss over or embrace ignorance around their plight. The international humanitarian system faces an unprecedented number of challenges, perhaps the most daunting of which is how to address the plight of refugees and how to assist those fleeing persecution, natural disasters, and armed conflicts amidst this pandemic.

The coronavirus pandemic has aggravated the plight of people fleeing civil war, violence, terrorism, and persecution. As governments restrict the movement of people inside and outside of their countries, in the name of safeguarding their populations and economies, basic rights of refugees are likely to be weakened at best and violated at worst. "The core principles of refugee protection are being put to the [SIC] test—but people who are forced to flee conflict and persecution should not be denied safety and protection on the pretext, or even as a side effect, of responding to the virus," noted Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.[16] It is fundamentally

misguided to assume that shielding public health and protecting refugees are mutually exclusive. "Long-recognized refugee laws," Grandi goes on to argue, "can be respected even as governments adopt stringent measures to protect public health, including at borders."[17]

It is also worth noting that the climate change impacts in the context of refugee crisis and forced migration, which have long been ignored, now raise several questions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic: whose responsibility—states, humanitarians, or international organizations—is it to tackle the climate-related spread of the coronavirus? Some studies have placed the onus on states, arguing that among the key remedies available to policymakers are improvements in water-use efficiency and productivity in agriculture, better management and monitoring of groundwater resources, and multilateral agreements on managing and sharing the rivers that cross political borders.

The UN and Red Cross agencies face an equally huge humanitarian crisis under present circumstances. The UNHCR, acting on the basis of current refugee law, appears helpless in the wake of these new crises. While the UNHCR promises to do its part to help those affected by natural disasters, such as droughts and floods, it is not within its legal mandate to do so. Thus, the responses of relief agencies, NGOs, and donors, as well as other forms of foreign aid, could prove to be vitally significant.

Arguably, climatic stresses, when combined with rapid urbanization and population growth, could become a source of climate-induced displacement, with politically destabilizing and disruptive consequences. Policies aimed at improving the adaptive capacities of states to deal with climate change may mitigate the likelihood of civil unrest and forced migration in the future. The implications of the Syrian refugee crisis and forced displacement are numerous, posing numerous challenges to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Similarly, in Syria's war-torn Idlib province, only one small health facility is equipped to receive suspected coronavirus cases. In two sprawling camps in

Kenya, Somalis have survived several decades of drought, starvation, and war, and fear more uncertainty to come. The World Health Organization has sent 5,900 testing kits to Idlib, in northern Syria, where they have been rigorously allocated. As of mid-April 2020, WHO authorities have completed nearly 200 tests, with no positive cases detected.[18]

The nightmare scenario of a coronavirus outbreak in densely populated refugee camps of the 25-mile Gaza Strip has invigorated international efforts to help Palestinians cope with this global pandemic. Living under land, sea and air blockades enforced by Israel and Egypt, who view Hamas leaders as terrorists—nearly 2 million Gazans are retreating into home isolation like the rest of the world in the hope they can manage the menace despite their woefully inadequate medical facilities.[19]

Amid the spread of the COVID-19, Gaza's rulers have put a halt on the demonstrations, while seeking international assistance. WHO has sent thousands of face masks and testing kits to Gaza. Qatar has sent $150 million in financial aid while broader international relief efforts have been coordinated by the Palestinian Authority, which assists in administering Gaza even as its competitor, the Hamas practically controls the territory since the 2007 Hamas coup. Medical expertise from Israel has also reached Gaza in an attempt to advise the Palestinians on matters relating strictly to public health and epidemiology.[20]

In Jordan, according to the UN refugee agency, the two largest camps for Syrian refugees have been sealed since March 2020. In Zaatari, host to 80,000 refugees, the Jordanian government conducted 150 random tests, all of which came back negative. Residents of Azraq, home to about 40,000 refugees, will be the next site of testing. All these camps suffer from fragile health care systems.[21]

Some experts have warned that the COVID-19 has yet to penetrate the refugee camps the way it has hit many parts of the world. Chris Boian, a senior communications officer with the U.N. Refugee Agency, the UNHCR,

asserts that, on balance, there have been "relatively low numbers of suspected or confirmed cases among refugees."[22] Boian notes, however, that a vast majority of refugees live in low- or middle-income countries with poor health conditions. It bears remembering, Boian posits, that the majority of the world's refugees live in urban settings—not in camps. They are indeed "an integral part of the communities that they live in, which illustrates why it is so important to make sure that they have access to health facilities and services and information."[23]

Stuck in Bangladesh since 2017, the Rohingya, a majority-Muslim ethnic group from majority-Buddhist Myanmar, who fled that country when the Myanmar army began a systematic genocidal campaign against them, now face the added pressure of the spread of coronavirus in their camps. The UN and the rest of the international community holds that the Rohingya ought to be allowed to go home to Myanmar voluntarily, in complete safety and with dignity. That possibility, however, appears remote at least in the near future.[24] Bangladesh imposed a lockdown on March 24, 2020, after the first case of COVID-19 pandemic was reported in one of the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. These camps together house more than 1 million Rohingya Muslims.[25]

A Return to Human Security

As governments take necessary measures to protect civilian populations from COVID-19, states and armed forces have come to focus on human security to minimize civilian harm, while placing the larger civilian agenda at front and center of their priorities.[26] All over the world, military forces have been engaged in the domestic 'fight' against COVID-19, seeking their assistance in providing medical support as well as implementing mitigation measures. As COVID-19 spreads across countries engulfed in civil wars, it rapidly becomes a global health security crisis, thus demanding a robust approach to human security aimed at protecting civilian populations that are

faced with multiple threats.[27]

The military's efforts to support public safety and health while also maintaining law and order should not cause more harm than good to the affected communities. Security forces are highly unlikely to successfully curb the virus and/or slow its spread if protecting civilian population is not their first priority. Thus, they must engage civil society in order to further mitigate harm to civilians arising from new ways of thinking about and tackling new problems.[28]

It is important, however, to note that an over-reliance on the securitization framework and the imposition of public health work on military actors can lead to the predominance of threat where the use of basic medical treatment is far more necessary. The securitization of the Ebola outbreak in 2014, for example, led to a public panic over the importation of returning American scientists for treatment in the United States.[29]

While, we should value the contributive and comprehensive efforts of the military in resolving potential outbreaks, as was achieved in the case of Ebola, one must also pay close attention to the tendency to interpret threat and place blame around emergent strains and imperiled populations. Security in this sense must be a guidepost but not a crutch as the societies around the globe need empathy and treatment—not suspicion and mistrust. Collective action deliberately directed toward setting a public health agenda must be the most prudent course of action in the age of the COVID-19 outbreak. The Human Security framework offers just such an approach as it elevates concerns without prescribing forceful methods to mitigate human misery.[30]

The Eroding Trust in Washington

On the heels of weathering the impeachment process, the presidency of Donald J. Trump has faced a colossal challenge in his battle against the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This challenge, which has magnified the

problem of inequality in the United States, may yet prove detrimental to his presidency. Jacob Hacker, a political scientist at Yale University, argues that inequality lies at the very heart of Americans' lack of faith in Washington and that the coronavirus pandemic has exposed and exacerbated existing class inequality in the United States: "Rising inequality is a huge shock to our society and political system. Our democracy is not working as it should."[31] Trust in government, Hacker continues, is one metric of a country's democratic health and democracies that lack such reservoir of confidence tend to be less stable.[32]

As quarantine fatigue sets in and people rush to shopping malls, restaurants, parks, and recreation centers, public confidence and trust in the federal government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic remains at or near historically *low* levels. This is true across generational lines—from the WWII generation and baby boomers through millennials and Gen Y. The United States faces endless threats, battles, and defiance. With only 5 percent of the world's population, it has one-third of the confirmed cases of coronavirus and the largest number of deaths in the world; and compounding the healthcare crisis approximately 40 million Americans have filed for unemployment since the mid-March 2020, making American jobless numbers worst since the Great Depression.

The Trump administration's failure to adopt a national health-care program, on top of its efforts to dismantle Obamacare, has left millions of the poor and middle-class without coverage. National policies on gun control and education have fallen by the wayside, as many observers, including George Packer and Michael Jansen, have called the U.S. federal system a failed state.[33]

Fear of this deadly and highly contagious virus looms large among the vast majority of the population, even as many states are preparing to perilously end lockdowns. This lingering fear and its concomitant lack of trust in the federal government's commitment to public health are likely to deal a big blow to Trump's re-election prospects. The failure in this regard is multi-pronged. It is

not simply a healthcare crisis, which would be daunting enough, it is also a messaging and public health crisis. The Trump administration has proven itself incapable of maintaining a single prevention and containment method and has alternatively embraced hocking phony cures and predicting the miraculous evaporation of the pandemic. Overall, distrust of the Trump administration lies at the heart of the national conversation.

There are multiple reasons why public trust in the Trump administration is significantly diminishing. First is the mishandling of the coronavirus crisis: The sluggish and ineffective response has run counter to the scientific consensus, from Trump's suggestion of injecting disinfectant to fight against the coronavirus to blaming the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for the mismanagement of the present crisis, and finally to self-prescribing the unproven "miracle drug" hydroxychloroquine, its many known side-effects and unknown complications notwithstanding.

Secondly, the institutionalization of the corruption within the Trump administration far exceeds anything in US history. During the months of April and May 2020, Trump fired or replaced four inspectors general, part of a broad effort to subsume government accountability as well as his absolute disdain for oversight activities. The damage to American democratic institutions has never been so thorough and severe. Since taking office, Trump has protected himself from outside criticism by fostering nepotism and cronyism. Surrounded by scandal and impeachment traumas, Trump's brief history in the White House has been mired in corruption scandals, ineptitude, divisiveness, and mismanagement of epic proportions.

Thirdly, Trump has ceaselessly harkened back to his old notions of building walls and imposing travel bans, while scapegoating China and the WHO, all in a disastrous pursuit of his populist policies while cases and deaths continue to rise. Once a staunch apologist for China in the hope of salvaging bilateral trade ties between the two countries, Trump has now turned against China and the WHO, the threatening to permanently freeze the U.S. contributions to the

WHO, and even to withdraw U.S. membership. If this was not enough to confuse the public, in yet another ploy to conceal his mishandling of the current crisis—a move that will lead to U.S. self-isolation, ironically putting China in a much better position to influence that organization's policies. All this flies in the face of a widespread global consensus that if COVID-19 has taught us one lesson, it is that once the virus is anywhere it is everywhere so that one nation's public health and safety cannot be separated from those of others.

Finally, Trump's obsession with the economy and the stock market to the detriment of climate change has exacerbated the deleterious effects of this omission not only on environmental sustainability but also, more subtly, on *human* sustainability. Earth scientists keep reminding us that humans have altered the environment at a much quicker pace than at any other time in history, a fact that has contributed to the evolution, the mutation, and the spread of all sorts of viruses. Human encroachment into animal habitats—consider, for example, how deforestation and forest degradation have contributed to global warming—has created further contact between humans and animals, rendering disease transmission more likely than ever before.[34]

In these uncertain times, when scientists encourage us to look for ways of thinking and living that are dramatically different from the past, the Trump administration advocates a return to business as usual. This attitude strikes most public health officials as disingenuous and unwise, as they warn against both reopening society and economy before safety benchmarks are met, and underestimating the toxic presence of this pathogen extraordinaire. Most people are as concerned and apprehensive about the future as they are eager to restore some degree of normalcy to their lives. At the same time, they have little or no confidence in the Trump administration's ability to handle this crisis. For all these reasons, U.S. citizens' trust in the ability of the Trump administration to competently navigate this moment of great confusion and peril has been irreparably broken and damaged beyond repair. The United States, along with the rest of the democratic world, is crying out for new leadership in

Washington.

Conclusion

The interplay between public health and politics—local as well as global—persists as public health officials feel less and less immune from political interference. While a complete separation of politics from public health may not be realistic in the near future, the fact remains that the most effective response against the pandemic demands giving scientists and public safety experts as unbiased a platform as possible.[35] There can be no doubt that the coronavirus pandemic has compelled a potential structural transformation in the public's understanding of their role and patterns of daily life.

Contrary to the populist view, the COVID-19 outbreak has restored the trust in institutions by bringing the role of the state as an objective arbiter of information and a benevolent provider of the public good back to preeminence.[36] The need for global coordination, governance, and the maintenance of a multilateral coalition in tackling problems such as pandemics, arms control, and climate change has never been more apparent and urgent. Public health specialists constantly remind us that multiple nations and multiple regions need to work together to help in the development of multiple vaccines for controlling the spread of the coronavirus.

In 1966, the mission of fighting against smallpox, which was responsible for two million deaths, and as many as 15 million infections annually, appeared impossible. Yet at the height of the Cold War, as Sean B. Carroll poignantly noted, the United States and the Soviet Union worked together to successfully eradicate smallpox.[37] Humanity cannot sustain itself, Carroll rightly argued in 2016, in a world devoid of any regard for the climate change. "The ecological challenges we now face," Carroll wrote, "are matters of public health and welfare, just as smallpox was. Our mission, whether we want to accept it or not, is to summon the collective will to halt our self-destruction."[38]

Treating such global pandemics must be seen as a form of investment for the future of public health rather than a temporary, political response to a national crisis. Meeting this challenge need not necessarily lead us to disregard norms and values in favor of a pursuit of politics and a global competition among great power rivals. It is urgent to search for a paradigm shift away from nationalist-populist's solution and toward global cooperation and coordination. In these troubled times, a reliance on a blend of science, premised on evidence-based approaches, and political cooperation is essential for stemming the spread of this infectious disease and being better prepared to cope with its possible and increasingly likely next waves.

Trump's magical hopes, dreams, and thinking are unlikely to help reopen the US and global economy safely. At a time when the United States and the rest of the world are facing a moment truly comparable to the Great Depression, one needs the same vision and clarity to overcome this challenge. Trump has failed to offer such a plan and national strategy.[39] Hope and miraculous delusions are not a strategy, nor can they provide the optimal level of solidarity needed for coping with and eradicating COVID-19. This pandemic has imposed new realities on the international community that can only be effectively dealt with by an unmitigated embrace of global coordination and cooperation. Thus, China bashing, xenophobia, and the scapegoating the World Health Organization will do no good to the global community's welfare and well-being and may even lead to further escalations of viral spread and human misery.

NOTES

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