

Impacts of Corona-Crisis on Global Politics

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ABSTRACT

International epidemics are centuries-old phenomenon that have often changed the course of global order. This COVID-19 pandemic has certainly created mayhem everywhere. It has affected international relations and global politics in a big way. It is also causing diplomatic tensions all around the World. Diplomatic relations are getting badly affected due to tension around trade and transport of medicines, diagnostic test and hospital equipment for COVID-19. There is a constant blame game is going on between America and China. Leaders of some countries have accused other countries for not containing the disease effectively and resulting in the uncontrolled spread of virus. On the one hand, developing nations in Latin America and Africa are not getting enough material for testing the Corona virus rapidly. On the other hand, other countries in Europe and United States are outspending the resources. More than anything else, the current time is a kind of litmus test of legitimacy for every Government and the global order. The second World war resulted into a bipolar world and now the current situation may lead the world towards a similar zone which will be led by America and China. The current viral outbreak may disturb the global harmony and multilateralism can be badly affected. The era of de-globalization is already presumed by some global scholars. So, in these circumstances, we need to see that apart from the physical infection how much the virus can infect the global order. Some scholars are claiming that authoritarian government is dealing with the pandemic in much better manner. It may go against the popular democratic narrative, which is being considered as best form of government in modern state. India is also fighting the battle and some scholars see it as an opportunity for India to play a bigger role in global affairs and it can take the advantage of growing cynicism towards China in near future. This paper enquires about all above issues.

1. Introduction

The entire world is going through a very tough time due to the viral outbreak. Whenever we hear the name of Corona virus today, the first thing that emerges in our minds is 'Quarantine' or 'Isolation'. Interestingly, this isolation has not happened at the level of the individual or society but also at the level of the boundaries of different nations. In the event of this global disaster, on the one hand, while efforts are being made to fight on war footing, on the other hand, a round of acquisition about the origin of this virus has started between first world countries. Recently, a spokesman for the ministry of foreign affairs of the Chinese government officially claimed that the corona virus has not originated in China but in the United Statesⁱ, whereas American President Donald Trump was already calling the Coronavirus as Wuhan virus or Chinese flu.ⁱⁱ It is right time to think that what kind of impact it could leave on our geo-political system. Is it going to be a new era of a new kind of cold war or is it going to develop a new kind of unipolar political order at the start of 21st century? It is also a challenging time for the democracy and multilateralism and we need to know to what extent the crisis is going to affect them.

2. Objectives

1. To analyse the impact of corona crisis on geo-political order and government
2. To observe changing pattern of diplomatic relations

3. To find out the possible upcoming challenges for global order
4. To understand the possible outcomes for democratic order and multilateralism

3. Historical Background of Epidemics

History is evident that every global crisis made some kind of impacts on the international systems, its structures, norms and institutions. The earliest recorded epidemic occurred during the Peloponnesian war.ⁱⁱⁱ The Spartans crossed the Athenian walls when they crossed Libya, Ethiopia and Egypt. During this time two-thirds of the people died in Athens. The Justinian plague (with a recurrence from 541–542 AD, 750) was an epidemic that plagued the Byzantine (Eastern Roman) Empire, and especially its capital, Constantinople, as well as the Sasanian Empire and port cities around the entire Mediterranean Sea Was.^{iv} Some historians believe that the plague of Justinian was one of the deadliest epidemics in history, resulting in an estimated 25–100 million deaths during two centuries of recurrence, equivalent to half the population of Europe at the time. Then comes the Black Death. It was a devastating global epidemic of the bubonic plague that plagued Europe and Asia in the mid-13s. The plague arrived in Europe in October 1347, when 12 ships from the Black Sea docked at the port of Sicily, Messina. Over the next five years, the Black Death caused more than 20 million deaths in Europe - about a third of the continent's population^v. In the words of Stanford

historian Walter, she held, the epidemic is one of the "four horsemen" of inequality, the other three being wars, revolutions and state failures. The Black Death led to an improvement in wages for surfers and agricultural laborers. Land became more abundant relative to labor (after the death of millions of toiling people). In some parts of Europe, wages tripled as labor demand rose. Perhaps the most important influence of the Black Death was the weakening of the Catholic Church.

Then the world saw deadliest Spanish flu, also known as the 1918 flu pandemic, was an unusually deadly influenza pandemic. Lasted from January 1918 to December 1920, it infected 500 million people, which at the time was a quarter of the world's population. Death tolls range anywhere from 17 million to 50 million, one of the deadliest epidemics in human history^{vi}. Spanish flu during the last phase of World War I, a major impact of the outbreak was on the outcome of the war. To maintain morale, World War I censor minimized early reports of illness and mortality in Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and the United States. Newspapers were free to report the effects of the epidemic in neutral Spain, such as King Alfonso XIII's critical illness, and these stories made a false impression of Spain as particularly hard-hit. This gave rise to the name Spanish Flu. Although the flu occurred from both sides, the Germans and Austrians were so badly affected that the outbreak affected them

And now the COVID-19, which is the latest development is causing havoc all around the world. It has already killed more than 8 lacs people all over the world till August 2020 and the counting is still on^{vii}. The Western world is at the centre of pandemic and speculation about the changing world order is trending everywhere. The western world is at the centre of this epidemic. This marked a question on the relevance of international organizations such as the World Health Organization. This may be the reason for the withdrawal of the principles of globalization. It can also produce major power changes in world politics. It is causing a negative economic impact all over the world.

4. America vs China: A Blame Game -

Currently, Wuhan city of Hubei province of China was seen as the hub of the corona virus, but claims by the spokesman of China's foreign ministry about the origin of the corona virus in the United States gave rise to new debate in the world political system. The US has also officially referred to it as the Wuhan virus in its press releases^{viii}. US also alleges that despite knowing about the virus, China kept it hidden for a long time. This charge of us has been supported by the experts from all parts of the world. Recently, Missouri has become the first US state to sue China, alleging Beijing for spreading the virus and arrested whistle blowers and denied the contagious nature of the virus. China's negligence can be gauged from the fact that even after the knowledge of the virus infection, China has organized 'Potluck Dinner' in Wuhan. About two-thirds of the 40,000 people involved in the ceremony were found to be infected with the virus^{ix}. However, China claims that Patient Zero (the first carrier of any infectious disease) was a US Army soldier who was part of the US contingent that arrived in Wuhan to participate in military games held in China. According to a Chinese spokesperson, in November 2019, some soldiers of the US Army were admitted to the hospital due to a disease like pneumonia, where they died some days later^x. China

alleges that the US Department of Health did not properly investigate the incident and spread the disease to other US soldiers. It is noteworthy that China has banned reporting on journalists of some major US newspapers within the country. This was done because the said newspapers were suspected of writing accusatory things towards China in the news related to Corona. In response, Chinese news agencies operating in the US were banned by the US administration.

So, great blame game is going on between the two biggest powers. We can see the roots of this conflict in already running trade war between the two countries. It is also a battle for dominance. The world is again looking like a divided place.

5. Implications Ahead

The confrontation between the two global superpowers like the US and China in the shadow of the Corona-crisis is expected to have a serious impact on global politics. Its first direct impact will be on the recently concluded trade agreement between the US and China. Also, due to the careless attitude of China in this development, China will be viewed with suspicion around the world. Although now China is doing everything to improve its image and doing all kind of health diplomacy, still, Xenophobic sentiments are floating in the air against China. Even in India, persons from North East are feeling the heat. Jwala Gutta case is a classic example of that.^{xi} A new age racism may take place as the demand for sanitary and Phyto- Sanitary measures from developing countries may be seen in stringent manner. Certainly, it has potential to create a new kind of divided all across the globe.

However, the clash between the two countries over the Corona virus could play a decisive role in the US presidential election in November 2020. The disaster has brought Iran and the US, who are fierce opponents of each other, closer, which seems to eliminate the potential threat of Third World War for the time being. A crisis of political representation can also be seen within a short time in Italy, which failed to cope with this global disaster. It is estimated that, it may take several decades for Italy to regain its lost credibility as Italy has been a historical and tourist destination. After the separation from the European Union, this crisis will create immense pressure financially and politically on the new government formed in Britain. China's manufacturing sector may have to struggle for decades to restore its dominance, putting a stop to its neo-imperialist policies. Although China has not lost hope yet and preparing to launch a new Health silk road and wants to revive its Belt and Road Projects^{xii}. Nevertheless, setting up new centers of global manufacturing will require considerable time and money as other countries of the world lack the same infrastructure and cheap labor as China. Other prominent leaders of the continent of Europe, including the Chancellor of Germany, believe that the effects of the coronavirus can create conditions throughout the continent, such as the economic crisis that arose after the First World War. The balance of power may also shift into different directions as Russia is also coming into the front as Putin is also showing some aspiration to get the lost crown.

6. Impressions on Internal Political System All Across the Globe

Apart from the international order, this pandemic also having some huge impact on internal political system especially

the democratic system. It is not only destroying public health and the global economy everywhere but also disrupting democracy in a way. It leads towards the centralization of power and likely to transform other pillars of democratic governance such as electoral processes, civilian control of military, civic mobilization and potentially the merits of democracy. A great debate is taking place between authoritarianism and democracy. This pandemic can also have adverse impact on basic government functions, centre- state relations, socio- political solidity and may increase corruption many folds.

Certainly, the COVID-19 opened the door for expanding executive powers around the globe. Over the past month, for obvious reasons, most countries have restricted public gatherings and citizens' freedom of movement, and more than fifty countries have declared states of emergency. Definitely it is going to make impact on democratic system. In the days to come, many illiberal leaders may take advantage of the crisis to further weaken checks and balances and erode mechanisms of accountability, thereby entrenching their positions of power. For example, In the Philippines, the parliament passed legislation granting President Rodrigo Duterte nearly limitless emergency powers^{xiii}. In Hungary, a new law allows Prime Minister Viktor Orban to rule by decree indefinitely, without any parliamentary oversight^{xiv}. Similarly, in Cambodia, a new draft law on national emergency would give the government unlimited access to martial power while drastically curtailing citizens' political rights^{xv}.

Not only that, it can also abridge citizens fundamental rights. Chinese government is a classic example, who has censored information about its response and detained journalist to report on the outbreak. In the countries like Thailand and Egypt, citizens and journalists who criticize the government's handling of the crisis are facing lawsuits and government intimidation. A Guardian reporter was forced to leave Egypt^{xvi}, when he raised questions on official number of corona virus cases.

The next thing is about expanding state surveillance. The crisis is also accelerating governments' use of new surveillance technologies. In the countries like Israel and South Korea, governments are using smartphone location data to track down citizen, who may have been exposed to the virus. Hong Kong and Singapore are also bringing such measures in their country. Even 'Aarogya Setu' app developed by the Indian government is also under the scanner with the question of privacy.^{xvii} While enhanced surveillance is not per se antidemocratic, the risks for political abuse of these new measures are significant, particularly if they are authorized and implemented without transparency or oversight. It is very convenient for the governments to benefiting all the protests. Governments may use the current need to restrict public gatherings as an excuse to crack down on the wave of anti-government protests that have churned global politics over the past several years. In Algeria, last year, some protests forced government for political reform, but now all such protests have been banned.

The pandemic threatens to topple electoral processes around the world. The US has already delayed many state-levels presidential primary votes, and candidates have curtailed rallies and campaigns. European countries including Italian Republic, North Macedonia, Serbia, Spain, and also the United

Kingdom have delayed national or native elections. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has also done the same. Within the coming months, elections are scheduled in Burundi, the Dominican Republic, Republic of Cote d'Ivoire, Malawi, Mongolia etc. Some of those elections might also be delayed. In India, Maharashtra case imposed a new constitutional question.

Now debate of authoritarianism versus democracy is going on and some scholars are claiming that the authoritarian way is much more efficient to deal with the virus. Both China and United States are fighting for control over global perceptions. Though, it is too early to say which type of political system will prove more effective at managing the crisis but some authoritarian regimes have done well like Singapore and Vietnam while others like Iran have done poorly. Democratic countries like India, South Korea and Taiwan have performed very well while others like Italy and United States have failed to do so.

The virus may reshape relations between non-state actors and governments with important implications for government legitimacy and claim to sovereignty. More than anything else, this is a test of legitimacy for every government, do not necessarily for the political system as such^{xviii}. There are many countries who enjoy low level citizen trust, cooperating with non-state actors became a necessity there. The Taliban in Afghanistan are already committing themselves to cooperating with health officials from international organizations like the World Health Organization that typically collaborate with sovereign governments^{xix}. The Taliban have launched a coronavirus awareness campaign in areas of the country under their sway; whereas the Kurdish-led region of northeast Syria, which maintains autonomy from the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, has initiated curfews, coordinated aid delivery, and stood up isolation wards to combat the virus^{xx}. Arab governments are mobilizing official Islamic institutions and authorities to help them manage the crisis. This may have long term consequences. Non state actors in his role in implementing crisis responses may also strengthen their legitimacy and authority in the eyes of local community, thereby establishing their political influence.

7. Findings

- Pandemics have often changed the world and reshaped human society
- UN, WHO have failed to measure up to the grave challenges posed by the pandemic
- America vs China may grow in the days to come
- U.S.'s capacity to play a crucial role is certain to diminish
- New age Racism is a possibility
- Excessive centralisation of power is possible
- Democratic means are highly impacted
- Role of Non-State Actors may increase

8. Conclusions

So, at the time when the global trade is expected to shrink by 13% to 32 % margin^{xxi}, blaming cannot be the answer. At present the whole world is going through a severe crisis. This is not the time to accuse each other but to show solidarity and fight this invisible enemy. The global superpowers should make every effort towards the best possible prevention of this

epidemic with making optimal use of their resources. They should learn from country like India and provide support to their neighboring countries and the regional organizations. All the countries of the world will also have to work toward the construction of various centers of manufacturing sector and supply chain. As far as the COVID-19 is concerned, country

like Taiwan has shown the way to the world. It is time for a new Atlantic Charter, where Environment, Healthcare, Technology, and democratic liberalism can be its foundation. No government should use this crisis for the sake of their own benefit. It is the time for the whole world to get united and emerge victorious in the great battle for humanity.

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