



# The Impact of Covid-19 on the Geopolitics of the World: A Realist Paradigm

**Sara Sheikh**, Researcher/Analyst, Islamabad, Pakistan

**Dr Azhar Ahmad**, Senior Associate Professor, Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, Bahria University Islamabad, Pakistan.

**Asim Muneeb Khan**, Senior Lecturer, Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, Bahria University Islamabad, Pakistan.

**Dr. Zaheer Abbas**, Department of Sociology, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan

**Beenish Ambereen**, PhD Scholar, Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, University of Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

---

**Abstract-** The world politics has been dominated by the US-led West since the Second World War and particularly after the demise of the Soviet Union at the end of a protracted Cold War. However, the balance of power seems to be shifting from the West to the East led by rising China. This geopolitical shift has been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Pandemics have been known to affect great powers and global politics in the past. The ‘Black death’, the ‘Plague of Athens’ and ‘Antonine plague’ are some of the examples from history, which resulted in the decline of great empires. Although Corona virus reportedly originated in Wuhan and later spread to the entire world, China was able to mobilize its resources in time and managed to control the disease in a very short time. On the other hand, the West and particularly the US was slow in taking appropriate measures resulting in death and misery to the people. US like many other countries, is still struggling with the pandemic that has caused a severe blow to not only its economy but also its standing as a world leader. While China has emerged as a more suitable candidate for the world’s leadership and steadily on the path of economic and technological primacy. The paper studies in detail how the virus has affected the global politics, particularly comparing the performance of the two rivals during the pandemic.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, geopolitics, China-US rivalry, democracy, economy.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Pandemics and epidemics have been constant companions of humanity, they often change the societies in strange and unexpected ways. Massive casualties and economic decline have become the reason for the downfall of many powerful nations and empires. In such situations, authorities are questioned e.g. when the Black Death struck in Europe many lost their faith in the government because they had failed to protect them. Similarly, today democracies, non-democracies and international organizations are being questioned for not responding efficiently to the pandemic. The plague of Athens contributed in the defeat of Athens and ended democracy. Bubonic plague swept away a third of Europe’s population which led to enormous political and economic impact. Antonine plague caused major damage to Roman Empire, they suffered immense loss of troops and damage to Roman maritime trade. Also their military and economic might got severely devastated and they were not able to gain back the strength they previously had. Plague of Justinian weakened the Byzantine Empire when it was at the peak of prosperity. This is how plagues have changed human history in strange ways. History does repeat itself, especially if the lessons are not learnt or implemented. Exactly how the previous pandemics have done to some powerful empires and nations, this time Covid-19 seems to be doing the same to the United States of America.

The Novel Corona Virus started from Wuhan in China, which is a city of around eleven million people. On December 1, 2019 the first patient was reported to be suffering with this virus and the first death occurred on January 11, 2020. The more the world was interconnected more was it easier for the virus to spread. The World Health organization declared the disease as a pandemic and the entire world was in the grip of an unprecedented emergency. G-7 emergency meeting of governors and central bank finance ministers took

place in which they decided to monitor the situation. Soon after the meeting the United States government referred this virus as 'Chinese Virus'. They believe that this virus is spreading throughout the world due to China. Whereas, China believes that this was brought to China by US army at Wuhan. There are different conspiracy theories about the virus but at this time of emergency, besides the blame game these leaders were required to play global leadership role. But due to the negligence, the confirmed cases of COVID-19 have reached 90,054,813, including 1,945,610 deaths worldwide, updated by WHO on 13 January, 2021.<sup>1</sup> Covid-19 is big crisis in the terms of health, economy and a lot more. From third world to first world countries, from weak to strong this virus has become a threat for all. Since this virus spreads from person to person so there was a need to shut down work places, airlines, educational institutions, traveling, industries, markets, export import and a lot more, which has led to severe consequences for all.

### **Impact of Covid-19 on the US Leadership and its Global role**

In the United States, the first case of Covid-19 was reported in January, 2020. By the end of the year 2020, the confirmed cases of COVID-19 in US had reached more than eleven million, including 250,000 deaths, highest number of infections and deaths worldwide.<sup>2</sup> Covid-19 has accelerated some ongoing processes including de-globalization and great power competition. China has been efficient enough to deal with the virus and recover economic growth. Meanwhile, the US economy has suffered and is still not able to handle the situation. This has accelerated the competition between the two states because China has now become a serious threat to the United States. In the situation of crisis, there are few important factors required. Firstly, there should be a compassionate and competent leadership. Secondly, trust and solidarity are important. President Donald Trump continuously blamed China for the spread of the virus, but failed to control the pandemic within his country. Despite timely warning, the Trump administration was late in taking any measures to prevent the spread of the disease. Being the leader of an advanced country, his utmost goal should have been the health and well-being of his citizens but his focus remained on economic growth albeit at the cost of human lives. But he does not admit that he has mishandled the pandemic.

### **Thucydides Trap**

Greek historian Thucydides, in his book *History of the Peloponnesian War* claimed that when changes in balance of power occur then the one in power aims to defend its position while the challenger aspires for more influence and acknowledgement at global level. 'Thucydides trap' is a term given by a political scientist, Graham Allison which means that an emerging power is always perceived as a threat by an existing great power. The example of Thucydides trap can be seen in current US China relations, where the US believes that China's rising capabilities can be a challenge to US primacy. Covid-19 crisis has made US weaker in terms of their global standing so China is confident enough to take the position by increasing its influence. China has focused on spreading influence primarily through economic cooperation; it is deepening its footprints in Asia and beyond. Whereas US is still plunged in the pandemic so bad that they are not yet capable enough to tackle China's rise or regain their own development and influence around the world. In a nuclear world there would be no win-win situation, so neither of these would want a full scale war but a Cold War and trade war are likely.

### **Flaws in Leadership:**

Immense military, great economy, cultural and technological strength, these factors are not enough to determine a nation as a superpower but in fact, the most important factor is leadership, because if a leader handles all these elements of national power sensibly then he can lead his nation towards progress. In 2005, President George Bush went through a book on *The Great Influenza*, also known as Spanish flu, which had killed millions of people. He was shocked to know how destructive a pandemic could be, thereby, he decided to formulate some strategies and policies on what should US do if a pandemic ever hits the country. He involved scientists, doctors and policy makers to sit together and plan the pandemic response policies. So his administration came up with a 'Plague Book' and were ready with strategies to deal with such situations.

---

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization, Accessed May 26, 2020.

<https://covid19.who.int/?gclid=CjwKCAjw> .

<sup>2</sup> BBC news, November 18, 2020. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.bbc.com/news/>.

Which included urgent funding to develop vaccine, rapid supply of ventilators and masks wherever required. "A pandemic is a lot like a forest fire," Bush said at the time. "If caught early it might be extinguished with limited damage. If allowed to smolder, undetected, it can grow to an inferno that can spread quickly beyond our ability to control it". President Obama also developed a plague strategy during his governance, which also included information about the novel coronavirus. Although no one knew when a pandemic can hit but both the previous governments were ready for a situation like that. The Trump administration ignored the issue and when in January, 2020 the World Health Organization declared it as a pandemic situation, even then the Trump administration dismissed the threat and were sure that their experts and money would help them to deal with it. Due to the mishandling, now people of the United States are facing some serious threats like unemployment and hunger leading to the downfall of economy.

### **Failure of Democracy**

It is not necessary that only a spectacular event like declaration of martial law could lead to the democratic failure. In the United States, the failure of democracy looks normal. When a democratically elected government start attacking the institutions which make democracy work, it is called democratic backsliding. Getting frustrated from media and courts highlighted Trump's deep distrust of Americas democratic institutions. He called journalists 'the enemy of people', criticized judges and called the federal judge as 'so-called judge'. Not only that he blamed the agencies for conspiring against him in a 'witch hunt' but also questioned the legitimacy of elections. So, there are series of events that can cause sudden and great damage to their system. Recent example of assault on democracy was when the Trump supporters stormed at the Capitol Hill building because of election results. One woman was shot and later she died. There were clashes between police and protestors when they attacked the senate chambers to stop congress from certifying Joe Biden's victory, completely disregarding democracy. Some protestors also turned their anger towards media. In the name of protest, insurrection occurred and that was the day when democracy in USA was completely shattered. As a result of his baseless voter fraud conspiracy theories, Trump is the first US president to be impeached twice. US has been central to the Liberal World Order, the goal of which is to promote democracy. But US has unfortunately stepped back from everything it has stood for.

The collapse of Soviet Union led to the increase in the number of democracies around the world, same is the situation now as well. US is not able to maintain the democratic standards, so the other parts of the world are also following the same trend. European Union gave a seven-year budget of trillion euros, including Covid relief budget, for this budget they have set rule of law to be obeyed as a condition. All leaders have accepted, but both Poland and Hungary argue that it is a political instrument, and claim it could be used to force policies onto the two countries.<sup>4</sup> They call it enslavement and the limitation of national sovereignty so both have used veto against EU. This sudden action pushed the EU (trying to grapple with Brexit) to a political crisis as they were not able to maintain democratic standards.

India claims to be one of the biggest democracy of the world but the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is not able to maintain democratic standards. Important pillars of democracy include legislature, executive, judiciary and media. The Indian government has completely disregarded the essence of the parliament which is debate, moreover it also neglects the parliamentary values like neither the timings for bill passing is followed nor are the bills referred by the standing committees. For example; Bharatiya Janata Party has passed bill in which illegal immigrants from three countries Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh will be given Indian citizenship after six years of services. It included Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians, Jains and Parsis, whereas Muslim immigrants are not eligible for the citizenship. They have just taken this step to sideline the Muslims. Despite opposition, the government did not give any consideration to the standing committee and the protestors. This violates the Constitution's Article 14, the fundamental right of equality to all persons. The basic structure of the constitution cannot be reshaped by any parliament.<sup>5</sup> This is how government has completely

---

<sup>3</sup>ABC news, April 5, 2020. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/abcnews.go.com/>.

<sup>4</sup>EszterZalan, "Poland and Hungary say rule of law link needs treaty change", euobserver. November 27, 2020. <https://euobserver.com/political/150206>.

<sup>5</sup> "Citizenship Amendment Act", The Economic Times. December 31, 2019. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/>.

overshadowed its democratic claims. While in executive branch, decision making is done by only few, by neglecting the voice of public.

### **Shifts in International Order**

International order should be more adaptive to the changing dynamics and existing challenges, it should create a balance between developed and underdeveloped states. The International system is based on how great powers behave and interact, their positive or negative behavior brings shifts in the international order. Under Trump administration, US cut down WHO funds which is a crime against humanity, US has been a quitter of international agreements and institutions, did not remain a part of Paris Agreement on Climate change also withdrew from one of the most important trade agreement Trans Pacific Partnership, which included forty percent of world's trade and was a great opportunity for US exports to flourish. In fact, US under President Trump has withdrawn from its global standing leaving a void for China to fill the geopolitical, economic and technological gap left by the United States. Although the new president Joe Biden has reversed some of these decisions of Trump, the damage already done to the US prestige and leadership status would be hard to recover. During the Cold War period 1945-1990, US focused on the policy of containment, to contain the spread of communism. They believed that if the communism is not contained, then it can spread rapidly like domino effect from one state to other parts of the world. Earlier, US was strong enough to pursue good strategies during Cold War, but the difference now is that now US has lost its global image and is not efficient enough to contain China's rise. Covid-19 has plunged US economy, role and influence which would not be easy to bring back to normal, thus further growth and development wouldn't be easy. Increasing levels of unemployment, poverty, racial inequality, dissatisfaction with the government, will remain as the aftershocks of the virus. After the Corona crisis, the poor performance of the international institutions can render them irrelevant. In this situation, where International cooperation and effective leadership were required, US has not played an effective global role, which makes it incompetent and incapable to continue their global standing.

### **Food Insecurity**

Demand for food banks is growing more and more as the pandemic is continuing with its second wave. This is a great hunger crisis for the United States, around fifty million people are facing food Insecurity. US has been increasing its defense budget each year, having a lot of aircrafts and missiles won't help them to feed their citizens. While China must be happy with this because they have plenty of money to spend on feeding their people and continues to raise its population out of poverty. Trump administration by the end of his term ended the Covid-19 relief funds, US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin asked the Federal Reserve to return \$455 billion in unused coronavirus relief funds.<sup>6</sup> This was a very shocking news for all the Americans as they are still struggling hard to deal with the pandemic. Trump left the office leaving millions of people hungry, he has actually reversed his promise of making America great again.

### **Racial Inequality**

Covid-19 is also responsible for creating inequality, the black society is more likely to get unemployed earlier as compared to the white. The blow has fallen hardest on women of color. Since February, the number of Hispanic women in the U.S. labor force has fallen nearly 7 percent, the number of Black women declined 5.6%, and the number of white women by nearly 3%. That compares to a drop of just 1.7% for white men and less than 1% for Hispanic men. The drop for Black men was more than 4%.<sup>7</sup> Recessions often fall the hardest on ethnic minorities, they are always the last choice to be hired and the first choice to be fired. White people live in far better places as compared to the black, they have access to greenery and fresh air but black live in congested areas whereas they cannot easily maintain social distance to stay safe from the pandemic. Also not all students have the internet facilities, which makes it difficult for them to carry on their studies. Existing

---

<sup>6</sup> Jeffery Martin, "Treasury asks Federal Reserve to return unused Covid emergency funds", Newsweek. November 19, 2020. <https://www.newsweek.com/treasury-asks-federal>.

<sup>7</sup> Howard Schneider, "Women of Color are worst affected by the U. S Covid-19 labor shock", World Economic Forum. October 7, 2020. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/united-states-female-employment-covid19/>.



over 25% of their value in the first wave<sup>12</sup> Technological industries and theme parks in America generate huge revenues but Covid-19 has slowed down technological growth and theme parks are not generating much due to social distancing measures. These are the highly productive industries in the United States, decline of these industries has led to an overall economic decline. The upcoming years will be focused more on how to get out of this huge damage rather than further development and progress. As recovery takes place, huge gaps between the performances of countries are opening up, which could further recast the world's economic order. By the end of next year, according to forecasts by the Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD), America's economy will be the same size as it was in 2019 but China's will be 10% larger.<sup>13</sup>

### **China maneuvers for Global Leadership**

In the recent years, there have been rising tensions between the United States and China. The outbreak of Covid-19 Pandemic has highlighted the flaws in the international system and governance. While China's effective response to the pandemic has polished its leadership for global governance. China's assistance in terms of loans and development has enhanced its soft power and countries find it desirable to cooperate with them. China provided two batches of \$50 million in cash assistance to the World Health Organization (WHO), and by the end of May, sent 29 medical expert teams to 27 countries and offered anti-epidemic assistance to 150 countries and four international organizations.<sup>14</sup> With China's growing influence, international institutions and international structure is also bending towards China's preferred decisions. China is also using infrastructure development to extend its global influence. Regime preservation in all circumstances and to build grand Euroasia is their utmost goal.

### **China's space missions**

China's Chang'e plan for space exploration was initiated in 2004. The developments in this field have been quite fast and they have gained a lot of achievements this decade. After the success of China's Chang'e 4 which touched the lunar surface in 2019, China gained more confidence for its next plans to moon. So, they successfully launched their most advanced Chang'e 5 mission in November, 2020. Chang'e 5 aircraft was sent to the moon and their flag was planted there at the start of December, 2020. China aims to establish a manned space station by 2022 and a space-based solar power station by 2050 to meet its burgeoning economic and energy needs, develop space science and technology, explore outer space, and land on Mars<sup>15</sup> Followed by United States and Soviet Union, China is the third country to land on lunar surface leading the race in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Leaving their flag on the lunar surface was a symbolic display of their capabilities to compete with the US. Chang'e 5 has collected lunar materials, through which they will be able to understand the volcanic activities on moon and those rocks will help them to implement their next plans to moon and Mars. After the success of Chang'e 5, work continues on Chang'e 6 which will gather samples from moon's south pole. The further advanced Chang'e 7 and Chang'e 8 will also land near south pole for the analysis of the region, so that they can establish International Lunar Research Station there. This mission was not just about the exploration of lunar surface but they're focused to develop Chinese Space Power. China's single party government handles the space program more efficiently as compared to the US, where uncertainty is created due to the changes in administration and public mood. In today's world where space is becoming extremely significant for the future developments, the country with better long term vision is likely to win power and influence. The competition of space exploration has started another competition between US and China. They fear that China's continuous presence at moon will make them occupy moon. Currently, China is more ambitious towards space missions while US is still facing the disruptions caused by Covid-19. So, China's quick space plans pose a geopolitical as well as psychological threat to US.

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Luca, "The Pandemic has caused the world's economy to diverge", The Economist, October 8, 2020. <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2020/10/08>.

<sup>14</sup> ZongShukang, "China's role in Global fight against Covid-19", CGTN. November 19, 2020. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/news.cgtn.com/>.

<sup>15</sup> Namrata Goswami, "China in space: Ambitions and possible conflict", JSTOR. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/26333878?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/26333878?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents).

## **Dominance in the Fifth-Generation Network**

The most influential weapon in today's world is technology. The fifth-generation wireless network can definitely define the geopolitics of the world. Under Xi Jinping's governance, China has focused to prioritize its own industries and is gaining a lot from the export of chips and mobile phones. Globally, China has become the champion of 5G technology and Huawei is the best seller mobile phone of the year 2020. It is because of their protectionist policies due to which they sell their own phones in their domestic markets, so they gain profits from both domestic and international markets. 5G is the wireless network which connects everyone with everything like devices and machines. It is like a connective tissue, connecting everything with internet including agricultural equipment, medical devices and self-driving cars. Today's world is becoming highly dependent on technological advancement, so China's edge in 5G is a serious threat for US. Even if US campaigns against Huawei, a successful domestic 5G build-out would still amount to China's most ambitious industrial policy.<sup>16</sup>

The one who dominates 5G is most likely to dominate the Global politics as they will control economy on big scale. 5G can easily fulfill the current and upcoming demands and it can bring drastic changes to improve the performance of robotics, artificial intelligence, smart technologies and other relevant technologies. Where US is still suffering with coronavirus, China has edge on the further developments of 5G technologies. Winning 5G race from China is not going to be easy because Chinese companies are stepping ahead for 6G. Until US companies will reach 5G, till then Chinese companies would be leading far ahead in this technology. 5G can be used in so many fields that the country which is dominant in this sector will surely have dominance in other future technologies including weapon control systems and sensors. The world is rapidly growing towards digitalization; after Covid-19 this growth has intensified even more. China is setting smart industries, smart health care and smart education with 5G appliances. Covid-19 has increased the demand for digital technology and China is rapidly developing 5G phones and telecom networks. Hence, China will be able to fulfill the increasing demands for technology. Better equipment with lower costs is what makes the world go for their technology.

## **First official e-currency**

Swift is one of the world's largest institution for transferring money, this institution is required to play a neutral role for everyone but since most of its transactions are through New York and in dollars, the US has more influence than any other nation. So the companies in China have developed such kind of apps for transactions so that the use of credit cards and bank accounts etc. can be minimized. By using the digital wallets, it would be easier to pay for things without money. Around 49 trillion dollar payments were made last year through these apps introduced by China. After the corona virus, people are more inclined towards online shopping, so during these days the apps offered by China seem to be more effective than those given by the US. Also their apps are expanding across the globe, around 56 countries accepted Alipay app. Now there is a good chance that the digital yuan will enter circulation in 2021. It won't be in the form of apps but it would be equivalent to an account at the central bank with same solidity as hard cash.<sup>17</sup>

## **Galwan Valley Incident**

Line of Actual Control is the disputed territory between China and India. It includes Aksai Chin controlled by China and Ladakh controlled by India. The soldiers from both sides came face to face many times. They also fought a war in 1962, in which India has suffered defeat. US uses India in the region in order to contain China. As Covid-19 has intensified the conflict between US and China, meanwhile India decided to take advantage of the situation and was trying to make maximum gains. They built a road near LAC in Ladakh which made China suspicious because a road can help them to move their people and material easily in case of any conflict. Bridges, roads and other transportation networks can strengthen sovereignty and strategic positions. China objected on the construction but however, they still continued which resulted in a clash between the

---

<sup>16</sup> Anjani Trivedi, "Beijing may score its biggest 5G win at home", Bloomberg Opinion. August, 2020. <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-08-09/china-may-score-its-biggest-5g-win-at-home>.

<sup>17</sup> Simon Rabinovitch, "China prepares to launch the world's first official e-currency", THE ECONOMIST, November 17, 2020. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.economist.com/the-world-ahead/2020/11/17/china-prepares-to-launch-the-worlds-first-official-e-currency>.

two on June, 15. Troops from both sides confronted each other and used rocks and wooden pieces, resulting in casualties. Through this clash, China has given a message that they are powerful enough to tackle India from gaining more territory on LAC and they have emerged as an active global leader while India's strategic partner US still faces the drastic impact of the Corona virus.

### **China's rising influence in Southeast Asia and South China Sea**

The South China Sea holds a lot of significance both economically and geo strategically. Presence of immense energy resources is the reason why major powers find their interest in the region. It is the main source of aquatic animals, it feeds the thickly populated Southeast Asian region and many people depend on it as source of food and living. It contains big amount of oil and gas under its sea bed, the Spratly islands of South China Sea are estimated to contain a billion tons of oil and gas. It is the most important trading route, about 22-33% of global trade is carried by this sea<sup>18</sup> China's claims in South China Sea are on the basis of nine-dash line. China has been creating artificial islands to consolidate its claims. China uses 'The Cabbage strategy', under this strategy, a contested area is surrounded by multiple security layers to deny access to rival nation and is claimed subsequently<sup>19</sup> Which means they keep their presence active around the conflicted region with the help of naval ships and aircraft. China has taken advantage of Covid-19 in the region to pursue its interests in the sea without any hindrance. Because other nations are distracted due to Covid-19, China's actions have been more effective in the region.

This crisis has made some Southeast Asian countries to align with China and to follow its practices. By assisting them and sharing best practices, China has enhanced diplomatic ties with these countries and they are stepping forward to accept Chinese soft power as well. China has become the leading trade partner in the region. By providing aids and foreign investments it has successfully convinced ASEAN that China is a valuable partner. Moreover, China is busy enhancing its economic role in the region. It has built many dams near Mekong River and is planning to build more as well. It is building hydro plants and assists these countries in agriculture sector, free trade and infrastructure. Thus, major part of the productivity in the region goes to China.

### **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership**

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is the largest trade agreement which is signed between fifteen countries on November 15, 2020. Ten of its members are Southeast Asian nations while other five include China, Japan, Australia, South Korea and New Zealand. It is the biggest trade agreement which will cover 30% of world's GDP. This agreement includes e-commerce, telecommunications, intellectual property and financial and professional services. It aims to lower tariffs, boost investment and allow free movement of goods in the region. Removal of trade barriers, will lead to greater prosperity for the Asia-Pacific region. RCEP will improve China's market access to the world which is in China's national interest to upgrade its industries. India has withdrawn from this agreement as it believed that it can be a threat to Indian market because China will get opportunity to takeover different industries including steel, textile and dairy.

These geopolitical changes will make the region stronger and a rivalry may be created between the major trading blocs of RCEP, EU and CUSMA (Canada, US, Mexico Agreement). But since US is not able to regulate its trade, so China has edge and can become the biggest beneficiary of RCEP. It will help China to further integrate into the region and beyond. China is at the driving seat of this agreement so it is most likely that China will receive maximum benefits from this agreement. China uses its economic muscle to overcome different political tensions. RCEP can also strengthen China's infrastructure strategy which is Belt and Road initiative thus reducing US space in this region.

---

<sup>18</sup> David Uren, "Southeast Asia will take a major economic hit if shipping is blocked in the South China Sea", The Strategist, December 8, 2020. <https://www.aspistrategist.org>.

<sup>19</sup> Sharavan Nune, "China's Cabbage Strategy in South China Sea", Jagran Josh, January, 2018. <https://www.jagranjosh.com/current-affairs/dachinas-cabbage-strategy>.



## China's infrastructure development

China's Belt and Road initiative is enhancing its overseas investments. Apart from trade, this project is very significant as China gets access and continued presence on the most prominent areas including Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, Gwadar port in Pakistan which is close to the Persian Gulf, a gateway to Middle East and base in Djibouti overlooking Bab-ul-Mandab. China also finds its interests in Myanmar and Cambodia ports, the Kyaukpyu deep-water port in the western Rakhine State of Myanmar, is set to become another model project under the Belt and Road Initiative framework, benefiting both Myanmar and China<sup>20</sup>China is using different ports to exercise economic and political influence as required. These strategically significant points will help China to expand its network. It includes wide ecosystem with Chinese technological, commercial, diplomatic and military connectivity. It also includes oil refineries, mining, power plants and optical fiber networks. From Asia to Africa, there are many infrastructure projects including roads, railways and bridges. Over seventy countries have signed agreements on these projects with China because China promotes it as a win-win for all. For example, Pakistan has been facing economic stagnation due to severe corruption and no country wanted to invest in Pakistan. But now China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is expected to increase Pakistan's economic growth by around 3.5 percentage points<sup>21</sup>Whereas, China has greater advantage as they can move their goods quickly and efficiently through Pakistan and also connects to energy suppliers in Middle East, evading 'Malacca Dilemma'. China keeps paying loans to these nations even if they're not able to pay it back still China keeps lending. For instance Sri Lanka couldn't pay its loan back to China instead they gave China control of their port as a part of ninety-nine year lease. This is how China's infrastructure development is paving its way for Global Leadership.

## Combination of Pragmatic Policies

Socialism, similar to communism, advocates that the means of production be owned by the people, either directly or through government agencies. Socialism also believes that wealth and income should be shared more equally among people.<sup>22</sup>Means of production like factories and industries when having power in their hands exploit the workers which leads to extreme inequality. China has socialist policies in which the state controls the means of production rather than private company ownership. Due to which, workers contribute to greater production to get equal part from that production. Politically, they are socialist and communist when it comes to strengthen their domestic industries while economically they are no more communist as they invest and compete overseas. They participate in international treaties and organizations and are spreading their infrastructure for more trade and greater influence.

## Eradicating Poverty

In the five years of Xi's first term, an average of 13 million people were lifted out of poverty each year, according to the government<sup>23</sup>. His goal is to completely eradicate poverty till 2021 and they have been successful enough to lift many. The government has set incentives and rewards for those who follow the rules while they have set punishments for those who do not. By following certain rules and regulations, people are coming out of poverty. Which has secured basic human rights, health, shelter and education. Making it possible for all citizens to equally participate in everything. There is no extreme inequality in China because the state has control over everything that is the reason why private owners cannot exploit the labor.

---

<sup>20</sup> Xinhua Headlines, January, 2020.

[http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-01/18/c\\_138716099.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-01/18/c_138716099.htm).

<sup>21</sup> Salman Siddique, "CPEC is likely to contribute 3.5% to Pakistan's GDP", Tribune. March, 2019. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1934475/2-cpec-likely-contribute-3-5-pakistans-gdp>.

<sup>22</sup> Shobith Seth, "Socialist Market Economies", Investopedia. December, 2020. <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/081514/socialist-economies>.

<sup>23</sup> Yuan Yang, "Inside China's race to beat poverty", Financial Times, June, 2020. <https://www.ft.com/content/b818aece-4cd7-4c99-8b62-e52ae4aa1b21>.

## **Impact of Covid-19 on the Geopolitics of the World**

The Covid-19 pandemic is remaking individual lives, societies, economies and geopolitics. The countries which will be able to respond to the pandemic and will be able to help others are likely to shape their global role. The pandemic has brought many geopolitical changes and also has accelerated some already existing trends. It has proved that neither US nor US-led Liberal world order was helpful to save the world from this crisis.

### **Lack of International Leadership from US**

In the past, US has been practicing international cooperation but in the recent years and especially after Covid-19, they have completely refused to cooperate. They stopped supporting international organizations and have proved that their interests are most important to them. The main objectives of US after the World War II were global leadership, spread of democracy, defense, promote liberal world order and to contain the rise of any regional power. But due to the incompetent leadership and Covid-19, US has completely disappeared from its global standing. They have entered a situation where they are struggling with their own survival as a global power. The new administration is faced with a daunting task of controlling the virus and the inherited problems. Later they can think to recover economically and then globally.

### **Rise of Realism**

Realism is based on 'Us First' and self-help which is clearly suitable for the current situation more than any other theory. States are the most important actors, selfish nature, anarchy all these exist in the world; today states are seeking ways to ensure their own survival. Where US and China are engaged in competition instead of cooperation there is anarchy seen in the time of crisis as well. The most important assumption of Realism is that nation state is the most important actor in the international system, individuals and organizations do have power but their power is very limited. Covid-19 has proved that state is the unitary actor; in difficult situations survival becomes the utmost priority for which nation states become selfish to look after their own interests at first. Decision makers go for rational policies in accordance with their national interests. It cannot be expected that there would be any help from the international organizations so when there's no one to call then nation state becomes the leader and handles situation on its own.

### **Impact on Oil Industries**

Oil has always been considered very vital to carry out daily routine activities but Covid-19 has led to unexpected consequences for the oil industry. From supply side, there has been competition between Saudi Arabia the dominant country in OPEC, and Russia. Saudi Arabia sought to reach an oil output agreement with Russia and OPEC+. But Russia opposed, most probably because it was trying to win a bigger slice of a shrinking market. In response Saudi Arabia raked up its production levels to historic highs, resulting in the biggest one day drop in oil prices since 1991 Gulf War<sup>24</sup> Many of the Oil industries have remained closed while the ones which were open are not working much because of which there is less demand. The pandemic wiped out almost a third of global oil demand because of lockdowns and travel bans<sup>25</sup>

### **Globalization slowed down**

The more the world was interconnected more was it easier for the virus to spread around the world. After facing severe consequences, borders were closed. There is a drop in the global demand as governments are engaged to protect their own industries. In the Covid world, people are connected more on online platforms rather than physically traveling to places. This world is no more a borderless village for everyone to come and have opportunities, because in this situation of crisis governments are struggling to deal with the rising demands of their own citizens at first. Globalization is also reversing due to the rise of populism since previous decade, some leaders did adopt nationalistic policies way before Corona virus. The decline of globalization will see rise of regionalism and nationalism.

---

<sup>24</sup> Mathieu Blondeel, "Covid-19 and the Climate Energy Nexus", JSTOR, May, 2020.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24707?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=Covid-19+>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

## Impact on Migration

The pandemic has led to closure of borders which has put migrant families at greater risk. They cannot even work from home so their lives are at most risk because they contact more with people and also live at vulnerable places. For example; Turkey has been host to more refugees and forced migrants than any other country. But due to pandemic Turkish government has refused to accept more refugees. This might increase migration flows in developing countries because the developed countries have imposed restrictions on immigrants. They constructed fences, increased border security and closed the borders. This is the situation all around the world due to which the refugees are struggling with even worse consequences. The developing countries with migrants are losing remittances at a larger scale. The World Bank already estimates a 20% decline in global remittances, which are vital to the economies of countries such as India and Nigeria.<sup>26</sup> The loss of remittances is a threat to the governments as it can increase political instability and the countries which depend on labor migrants are facing labor shortages.

## Travel ban

The World Travel and Tourism Council has warned that the COVID-19 pandemic could cut 50 million jobs worldwide in the travel and tourism industry. Asia is expected to be the worst affected. Once the outbreak is over, it could take up to 10 months for the industry to recover. The tourism industry currently accounted for 10% of global GDP. The coronavirus epidemic is putting up to 50 million jobs in the global travel and tourism sector at risk, with travel slumped to a quarter in 2020, Asia being the most affected continent in the estimates of the World Travel and Tourism Council.<sup>27</sup> Many airlines which have imposed travel bans are facing decline in stock value. Cancellation of events has also affected tourism and thus the economy of different nations, sea travel restrictions have also seen downfall in stock prices. Covid-19 has led to a world which is less interconnected and more nationalistic. Airlines losses in 2020 are estimated at around \$370 billion, “with airports and air navigation services providers losing a further 115 billion and 13 billion, respectively”, said ICAO in a press statement.<sup>28</sup>

## Supply Chains

Supply chains around the world are greatly disrupted, the world has been so deeply interconnected that disruption in one area have led to overall disruptions. Many are unemployed, so people are not stepping forward to buy products because of which demands have been reduced which led to the closure of many industries. So the world is now less open and more nationalist and governments are focusing to meet their national needs first. Many companies around the world depend on US to provide them parts of their manufacturing but since US itself is facing enormous issues due to Covid, they are also not able to provide assistance to any other country. Many manufacturing industries are facing issues because of this. The World Trade Organization forecast that world trade will decline between 13 and 32 percent in 2020, much more than the expected fall in world GDP<sup>29</sup>.

## Protectionist policies

All governments have adopted protectionist policies to secure their local companies and the jobs of their local people. These policies can help nations to increase their GDP by lowering imports. In the situation of crisis, it is the utmost goal of governments to ensure the survival of their local industries. They will reduce their dependence on supply chains and have inclined towards self-sufficient industrial, health and economic means. China is promoting its “Made in China 2025 Vision” and US politicians are openly calling for a new US industrial policy.

---

<sup>26</sup>SamuealBranan, “Covid-19 reshapes the future”, JSTOR. July, 2020.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep25198?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=Travel+ban+during+Covid-19>.

<sup>27</sup> Joan Faus, “This is how Coronavirus could affect the Travel and Tourism Industry”, *World Economic Forum*, March 17, 2020.

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/>.

<sup>28</sup> “Air travel down 60 per cent, as airline industry losses top \$370 billion: ICAO”. *UN News*, January 15, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Douglas A. Irwin, “The Pandemic adds momentum to the deglobalization trend”, PIIE. April 23, 2020. <https://www.piie.com/blogs/>.

## Wakeup call for other dangers

Coronavirus has been a Wakeup call to be ready for natural disasters. If the environment is not protected, then there can be many dangers coming our way in the future. It is important to join global agreements on climate change. Along with Britain and Canada, New Zealand's Prime Minister has also raised her voice on UN platform to declare climate global emergency. Rise in global temperatures would also increase the risk to human health, disease, drought, increased fires and tropical storms and civil unrest. Preserving the climate is the way how we can stop naturally existing dangers and risks.

## II. CONCLUSION

It is not necessary for a war to determine a new global leader, but sometimes other challenges can also decide that. It depends on how the governments deal with such challenges, if they fail then this could result in the downfall of their superiority no matter how powerful a state is. This time that challenge is Covid-19 pandemic, which has imposed serious complications for the United States. US was considered as the great power with immense military and economic strength, but their incompetent leadership and Covid-19 together have brought them to a position from where recovery will not be easy. The nation which has always promoted democracy worldwide is now not able to maintain democratic standards on their national level either. United States itself has contradicted democracy and US-led liberal world order by isolating itself from all international engagements. US focused on spreading its worldwide influence by spreading democracy, while China focuses on spreading its influence through development and trade. China has been rising on regional level since years, they have also lifted their populations from extreme poverty. They have spread a web of development infrastructure which connects Asia, Europe and Africa and gives China territorial influence in the region. China's effective policies to deal with the virus early and providing assistance to other nations has helped them to gain recognition as a leading power and the absence of US in this critical situation was the right time for China's emergence. Now China has focused more on their progress and have focused on their domestic industry so that it can bloom. They are also working on many projects like roads and railways in different countries which are a part of Belt and Road Initiative. Along with this, they have also performed their lunar mission in December, 2020. China's socialist policies have ensured equality in the country whereas in the US, inequality is extremely high. This year China has correct timings for everything and they have clearly shown it to the United States that post Covid world would be led by China. From international organizations to trade agreements, US has lost its overall role while China is actively participating in international organizations. Initially, US would have to deal with the crisis at national level then they can step out for global role but till then it would be too late for them as China has a very strong hold in the region now and is planning for even bigger projects for upcoming years. According to CEBR, China will now overtake US as the largest economy in 2028, five years earlier than the pre-Covid forecasts. Covid-19 has become the reason for the decline of the United States superiority as they have witnessed huge disruptions economically, politically and socially. Covid-19 has seriously undermined United States Global standing with major impact on the world's geopolitics.

## REFERENCES

1. "Air travel down 60 per cent, as airline industry losses top \$370 billion: ICAO". *UN News*, January 15, 2021.
2. Bhattcharyya, Saikat. 2020. "Covid-19 accelerates Chinas Rise!" *Regional rapport*. <http://regionallrapport.com/covid-19-pandemic-to-accelerate-chinas-rise>.
3. Bolder, Patrick. 2020. "Covid-19 and world peace: An overture to a new era or business as usual?" *JSTOR* 6. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24189>.
4. Bindt, KlaudiaKlonowska and Pieter. April 1, 2020. "The Covid-19 pandemic". *JSTOR* 15. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24004>.
5. Busby, Joshua. 2020. "What International Relations tells us about COVID-19". *E-International Relations*. <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/04/26>.
6. Doshi, Kurt M. Campbell and Rush. 2020. "The Coronavirus could reshape Global Order". *Foreign Affairs*, March 18. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-03-18>.

7. Gellman, Peter. 1988. "Hans J. Morgenthau and the legacy of Political Realism". *JSTOR* pp-247-266(20 pages).<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20097151>.
8. Jervis, Robert. 1994. "Hans Morgenthau, Realism and the scientific study of International Politics". *JSTOR* 24.<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40971063>.
9. Kretchmer, Harry. 2020. "How Coronavirus has hit employment in G7 economies". *WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM*.<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/>.
10. Maher, Irfan. 2020. "Impact of Covid-19 on Global Economy Structure". *Modern diplomacy, April 22*.<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/04/22>.
11. McCarthy, Niall. 2020. "The Coronavirus pandemic could push half a billion people into poverty". *WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM*. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04>.
12. Oba, Mie. 2020. "Coronavirus and the future of Globalization". *The Diplomat*, March 18. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03>.
13. Rachman, Gideon. 2020. "Coronavirus and the threat to US Supremacy". *Financial Times, April 13*.<https://www.ft.com/content/2e8c8f76>.
14. Reinhart, Carmen M. 2020. "Covid-19 Impact on Global Food Supply". *WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM*.<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05>.
15. Tailor Riley, Elizabeth Sully. 2020. "Estimates of the Potential Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Low-and middle-income countries". *JSTOR* 19. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1363/46e9020>.
16. David M. Morens.1992. "Epidemiology of the plague of Athens". *JSTOR*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/284374>.
17. Rebecca, Flemming. 2019. "Galen and the Plague". *JSTOR* 28. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctvrkx2wj.12?Search>.
18. RS Bray. 1996. "Armies of Pestilence: The impact of disease on history". *JSTOR*. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1131h60?turn\\_away](https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1131h60?turn_away).
19. Nickolas, Restifo. 2000. "The story of great influenza pandemic". *Nature Medicine* 6. [https://www.nature.com/articles/nm0100\\_12](https://www.nature.com/articles/nm0100_12).
20. Walter, Scheidel. 2017. "The Black Death". *JSTOR* pp: 291-313. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv346rs>.
21. Scott, Huffard. 2019. "Fight of Yellow winged Monster". *JSTOR*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469652832>.
22. John, Morill. 2020. "Great Plague of London". *Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Great-Plague-of-London>.
24. Robin, Hableton. 2020. "The Covid-19 Effects". *JSTOR*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/>.
25. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/>.
26. Mike, Hills. 2020. "Covid-19 in the US: Is this coronavirus wave the worse yet?". *BBC News*.<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52771783>.
27. Daniel, Runde.2020. "Covid-19 has consequences for U.S Global Leadership". *CSIS*. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/covid-19-has>.
28. Gerarad, McCann. 2020. "Covid-19 and Inequality". *JSTOR* 12.<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv18gfz7c.22>.
29. Daniel, Inouye. 2020. "COVID-19 CRISIS AND THE COMING COLD WAR". *JSTOR* 3.<https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24876>.
30. Sabastian, Munchow. 2020. "The Security Impacts of Covid-19 Pandemic" *JSTOR* 5. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26937605?Se>.
31. Burhannetin, Duran. 2020. "The Future of Global Great Power Competition after the Corona Virus". *JSTOR* 15. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26918124?Search>.
32. Glenn, Muschart. 2020. "Social Problems in the age of Covid-19". *JSTOR* 92.<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv15d8>.
33. Namrata, Goswami, 2020. "Why is China going to moon", *THE DIPLOMAT*. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/12/why-is-china-going-to-the-moon/>.
34. Lorenzo, Mariani, 2020. "US-China 5G Contest", *JSTOR*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep19676>.
35. Zhang, Yuyan, 2020. "China's International Strategic environment", *JSTOR* 23. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvrxpxnf>.
36. Anu, Anwer, 2019. "Belt and Road Initiative: what's in it for China", *JSTOR*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/>.

37. Taylor, Fravel, 2020. "China's strategy in the South China Sea", JSTOR 28. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4144>.
38. John, Lee, 2020. "China's economic leverage in Southeast Asia", JSTOR 21. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43410712>.
39. Snehesh, Alex, 2020. "China's aggression in Ladakh is also a message for domestic and external audience". The Print. <https://theprint.in/defence/chinese-aggression-in-ladakh>.
40. Samuel, Brannen, 2020. "Covid-19 Reshapes the Future", JSTOR 24. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep25198>.
41. Mulrenan, Stephen, 2020. "China's future in a post covid world", International bar association. <https://www.ibanet.org/Article/NewDetail.aspx?ArticleUid>.
42. Douglas, Irvin, 2020. "The Pandemic adds momentum to de-globalization trend", VOXEU. <https://voxeu.org/article/pandemic-adds-momentum-deglobalisation-trend>.
43. Anthony, Faiola, 2020. "The virus that shut down the World", The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/world/coronavirus-pandemic-globalization>.
44. Seekin, Mehmet, 2020. "Impact of Covid-19 on the food supply chains", Oxford Academic. <https://academic.oup.com/fqs/article/4/4/167/5896496?login=true>.
45. Blondeel, Mathieu, 2020. "Covid-19 and the climate energy nexus", JSTOR 8. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24707?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText>.
46. Tardy, Thierry, 2020. "Covid-19 shaping Future threats and security policies", JSTOR 8. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep25148.8?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=impact+of+covid-19+on+migration>.
47. Brannen, Samuel. 2020. "Covid-19 reshapes the future", JSTOR 24. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep25198?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=Travel+ban+during+Covid-19>.