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Security Nexus Perspectives

COVID-19: END OF HYPER-GLOBALIZATION AND START OF HYPER-LOCALIZATION?

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The 1918 Spanish flu immediately following World War-I, the Second World War, breakdown of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War, 9-11 terror attacks, and collapse of the Lehman Brothers and the 2008 Financial Crisis, all of these events were world altering events. They changed the course of human societies and political, economic, and societal organizations in some fundamental ways. The 2008 collapse of the financial markets saw the tightening of the loan requirements and consumer credit markets, 9-11 terror attacks saw the implementation of rigorous airport security checks and immigration control at every airport across the world, the collapse of the Soviet Union gave birth to several new countries and the world witnessed a burst in global cooperation, globalization, and a rapid increase in international trade. The end of Second World War gave birth to the post-War liberal international order led by the victorious allies and an aggressive, territorial, brooding, militaristic, and insecure Soviet Union that sought to create an alternate communist-dictatorial political model, and partially succeed in its endeavors. The remnants of the Soviet model still thrive in the Soviet successor state of Russia, and in the Communist Party led capitalist China, North Korea, and parts of Southeast Asia and Africa.

The COVID-19 is such a path altering global pandemic, which will forever the change the way as to how we not only interact with each other at an individual and societal level because of the new rules of social distancing, but it will also determine how nation-states demonstrate resilience and how they respond to the pandemic and regenerate after the end-state of this crisis is eventually realized. COVID-19 is said to have

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originated in a rare animal meat market in Wuhan city in Hubei Province in Central China and then the virus hopped on the well-used routes of globalization facilitated by modern air travel and caused an explosive global contagion. COVID-19 is unique because it has successfully resisted containment, it spread invisibly and it was carried by humans to every corner of the world, thereby effectively shutting down every social, economic, and political dimension of the world. COVID-19 has challenged government preparedness and it is testing the limits of effective governance both in authoritarian and democratic states.

The political impact of COVID-19 is going to be far reaching and already such signs are evident with parts of the world impugning China for its lax controls, information suppression, and poor communications that allowed the virus to detonate on the world without warning. Despite all of the global negative press, China is seeking to take advantage of this crisis situation and it is trying to turn the narrative on its head by blaming the West for its poor preparation and readiness and it is actively promoting counter-narratives. Official Chinese news media is pushing a story that the COVID-19 virus is a bio-weapon engineered in a lab in the United States that escaped its controllers and now it is triggering global havoc. Another theory has it that this genetically modified pathogen—Novel Coronavirus—escaped from the Wuhan Institute of Virology by accident. The Wuhan Institute of Virology is the only lab that is authorized to handle such virulent pathogens and Wuhan also happens to be the epicenter for this pandemic.

Conspiracy theories run rampant on the internet, but it is clear that the damage done by this virus is insidious. The blame-game and the security and economic implications are far-reaching. Global air-travel is unlikely to reach the pre-COVID-19 levels for the next 3-5 years, and it very well might be that it would never reach such levels again. People will avoid travelling to certain parts of the world for leisure or for other reasons. Particularly heavy hit countries such as China, South Korea, and Italy will continue to face much isolation at least for the next several years. Recreational travel and tourism through cruise liners such as *the Diamond Princess* and the *Grand Princess*, which served as major vectors for the spread of the virus, is unlikely to attract customers back again in the near future. As fear, anxiety, and doubt will continue to dominate consumer behavior.

COVID-19 has also exposed the vulnerabilities in the global-supply that is heavily dependent on Chinese manufacturing and just-in time delivery system pioneered by modern manufacturing and retail. In the next 3-5 years, countries will attempt to shift some of its manufacturing to their home base and reduce dependency on China. In fact, some countries will actively use this occasion to boost domestic production

and reduce its import dependence causing a lagged domino effect leading to economic competition, lack of cooperation, and distrust among countries. The domino economic impact of COVID-19 is already being felt in every corner of the world and this effect will continue to reverberate causing mass unemployment, shrinking of the labor force, slow production, and volatility in the capital markets.

The world is hunkering down, drawing up the moats, and preventing the global movement of people. This drift was already well underway in the west even prior to the arrival of COVID-19 and this trend will intensify and accelerate the process of nationalism and deepen isolation. Sadly for some and maybe happily for others, the world has retreated suddenly and very hastily from the era of hyper-globalization and interconnectedness. Human societies are quickly coming to the realization that they could very well do fine by going hyper-local. If previous global pandemics such as the Spanish Flu of 1917-1919, the Black Death (1347 and 1351 CE), and the Justinian Plague (541–542 CE), and the Athenian Plague (430 BCE) are any indication, COVID-19 is unlikely to usher in an era of cooperation and peace, but it will only accelerate the conflictive aspect of international politics. COVID-19 instead of reducing great power rivalries will only intensify the rivalries by splitting the world into pro-China, anti-China, and non-aligned states. It is very likely that the world will enter a phase of less cooperation, less prosperity, and less openness, and enter a period of more uncertainty and precariousness.

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