



apcss.org/nexus

# SECURITY NEXUS

A free, open access, international, peer-reviewed, online publication for the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies faculty and alumni.

Security Nexus Perspectives

## THE STATE OF THE WORLD ORDER IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS: TIME FOR A RESPONSIBLE CONNECTOGRAPHY

By Dr. Lailufar Yasmin \*

A State is the product of a social contract among its citizens who willingly transferred a part of their freedom to a central authority in lieu of assurance of security. In a way, this represents the management of internal anarchy. The internal bargain is strengthened by the external assertion of sovereignty, which separates a community of people legally, and therefore, all political communities are theoretically *equal*. This idea of external anarchy runs the international system, where there is no international government. External anarchy logically flows from this, and is the realist dictum of 'there is no international community beyond the border.' Only after the end of the Second World War did we witness the emergence of an international community and, consequently, a world order based on rules and regulations. Known as a liberal international order, its political arm was imbued in the making, and functioning of the United Nations (U.N.) and economic arms were manifested in the Bretton Woods institutions. The United States of America (U.S.) emerged as a clear guarantor of the system, which gradually veered off to the role a reluctant superpower, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The erosion of such an international social contract is manifested in the unprecedented lack of trust and cooperation associated with the unfolding of the current global pandemic.

The Novel Coronavirus, known as COVID-19, has led to the vital reminder as to why we need a clear world order—or international order. The fundamental difference between a world order and an international order is the lens through which we see our external dealings—from a statist perspective or from a globalist perspective. Whichever way we call it, the imperative for such an order, from World Order 1.0 to World Order 2.0 or from International Order 1.0 to 2.0 to even 3.0, is that we attempt to identify which nations will emerge as responsible power that can be trusted with global responsibility. While hard-core realists would argue that such a responsible global power would only emerge out of its own interest and may not sustain in the long run, nonetheless, the scope and the breadth of the COVID-19 pandemic are showing us that states alone cannot fight against such an outbreak. True, we have seen outbreaks of pandemics in a less globalized world. In fact, as humans have travelled from one part to the other part of the world, they have carried their pathogens, which did not conform to the local systems. As a result, humanity has witnessed pandemics since

---

\* Lailufar Yasmin, PhD, is a Fellow of Daniel K Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Strategic Studies (DKI APCSS), Hawaii, United States, and teaches in the Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh.

its known recorded era from Antonine Plague to the present day COVID-19. Mark Honigsbaum, dissecting the pattern and nature of 20<sup>th</sup> Century pandemics in his *The Pandemic Century* (2019), asserted that it is only natural that there will be ‘new plagues and new pandemics,’ and it is only a question of ‘when,’ not ‘if.’

The COVID-19 outbreak has inspired some to argue against the pitfalls of globalization. The economic disaster upon the tourism industry, including airlines, hotel businesses, and to even animals who depend on foods provided by tourists, have led some to ponder whether it is time to decelerate on connectivity. The cry of separations and building of ‘walls’ have once again found their justifications as a *foreign* virus affected jobs and livelihoods. Racist attacks on people of Asian descent manifest the rise of a new type of xenophobia. Simultaneously, the pictures of pollution-free China taken from the space as a result of the slowing down of the ‘Factory of the World’ and stories of dolphins back in the canals of Venice are perpetuating the idea that, perhaps it is time to slow down. *Deglobalization* seems to be the order of the day that COVID-19 has opened our eyes to.

All these apprehensions overlook the nature of connections and globalization that has unfolded since 1970s—complex interdependence. The nature of complex interdependence has a nonlinear effect on the parties involved—Lorenz’s butterfly effect—“Does the Flap of a Butterfly’s Wings in Brazil Set Off a Tornado in Texas?” This particular shift shows that humanity is now tightly connected in a manner that is irreversible. What we rather need to pay attention to is how to minimize the cascading effect of disasters, or in this case the COVID-19 pandemic. Geoff Mulgan in his *Connexity* (1997) argued that the telling feature of the world is not in its weapons system but the nature of connectivity of humans beyond their borders. Disruptions in the patterns of connections would have more disastrous effects than the effects of nuclear weapons. Parag Khanna in his much-celebrated *Connectography* (2016) argued that the arms race of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century would be replaced by the race of connections in 21<sup>st</sup> Century—who you are connected with will determine your development and future. True, Saskia Sassen (1995) pointed out the role of big cities in modern capitalist system as hubs of connections and playing determining roles. COVID-19 in fact adds to this argument while unveiling certain fundamental flaws of these arguments.

Connectivity in the age of complex interdependence is not the only key to growth and flourishing. A stable international order from a statist perspective is a key to Connectography. Connections will not survive through the performances of big cities or being connected to key states. No matter how many global pandemics or climate disasters we experience, the legal regime of sovereignty, unfortunately, is the telling feature of the modern international system. We have to, often reluctantly, go back to a state or a coalition of states, who would like to assume responsibility of global problems. Being stateless is a modern curse—we have to return to the statist umbrella for our protections when we see the global travel ban has stranded a number of people in stateless conditions in foreign lands. A clear answer to who shall assume such global responsibility has not yet emerged. In fact, the nature of global economic and security mapping tells us it is increasingly impossible, if not also improbable, for a single country to emerge as a leader in the present world. The postwar world in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in which the U.S. President Harry S. Truman and his Secretary of State Dean Acheson together outlined a stable international order with a clear U.S. leadership bears little resemblance to current times. The multiplicity of actors and particularly the complex nature of interdependence have made the world a much more vulnerable place in which to live. That is why we see regional organizations reviving their efforts to connect and advance coordinated plans, especially SAARC in

## Time For A Responsible Connectography

South Asia, which has become a moribund organization. It is time that such coordinated efforts are taken at the global stage despite much uneasiness between the West and China. With the rise of China, a number of authors have argued that strategic competition among Great Powers is back. But this particular crisis has shown us that one person infected at any corner of the globe is a threat for us all in any other corner. We cannot keep our borders closed indefinitely. Without cooperating with each other and initiating negotiations regarding our international responsibility as sovereign states, as Richard Haas calls it 'sovereign responsibility,' humanity cannot survive.

*The views expressed in these articles are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of DKI APCSS, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, the U.S. Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.  
April 2020*