

World after COVID-19: A Postmodernist Perspective

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Abstract

The idea of collective security that surfaced right after the September 11 attacks was largely centered on the threat of terrorism and non-state actors. Where the world prepared itself to guard against terrorism, it largely ignored the other spheres of security and that is saving human capital against pandemics. COVID-19 has not only re-shaped the meaning of collective security but can contribute in re-shaping the global order. The paper aims at the event of COVID-19 and it argues that Covid-19 is challenging the status of United States of America and paving way for China to act as global leader. The analysis is augmented through the lens of Postmodernism. The theme of deconstruction is central to Post modernism. It relies on the acme of breaking away from the past discourses and developing new patterns of reality. The paper argues the configuration and de-configuration of any totality within the realm of international relations.

Key Words: COVID-19, World Prospective, USA Response, Political Development on Pandemic

Introduction

An advertising The historical illustrations of events have largely defined the functioning of international relations. The key historical events that demonstrated global change includes World War II, Cold War and 9/11. These events largely shaped the interpretation of previous narratives and geared the world to believe in new narratives. The outcomes of these events have been the emergence of United States of America as global leader. The previous events lead to the construction of a new reality, similarly the pandemic of COVID-19 is also in a position to establish new understandings of knowledge.

The paper argues that current event of COVID-19 is challenging the status of United States of America and paving way for China to act as global leader. The analysis is augmented through the lens of Postmodernism. The theme of deconstruction is central to Post modernism. It relies on the pinnacle of breaking away from the past discourses and developing new patterns of reality. Deconstruction is concerned with both configuration and de-configuration of any totality within the realm of international relations (Devetak, 2005). In this case it can be asserted that previous totality (United States of America) is in the process of change. Secondly, post modernism laid emphasis on the interpretation and perspective that rise due to an event. As Nietzsche puts forward 'There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective 'knowing' (Nietzsche, 1969, p.12). COVID-19 is an event that is shaping the new totality or perspective (China). This is going to be a continuous cycle as events will keep on labeling, drafting and constructing new interpretations leaving little room for absolute knowledge.

The previous global leadership has been largely enjoyed by United States of America. The 'new normal' after 9/11 re-positioned United States of America and refreshed its status of world leader, where it interfered in other countries in the name of nation building and terrorism. Iraq, Afghanistan became the new example of fighting terrorism and containing rogue states in order to secure world peace. When United States of America was manifesting itself in chasing terrorist and fighting wars on foreign soil, China was working its way towards economic prosperity and stability. Post 9/11 era has been marked with Chinese enormous growth internationally. The Chinese policy of non-intervention, and relations on the basis of trade served a positive manifestation for it. In the 21st century or more specifically era after 9/11 has given the national economic power lead attention, leaving the previous notion of military power in the background (Fisher and Carlsen, 2018).

According to Fisher and Carlsen (2018), one of the most important changes that emanate at international level was the multiplication of economic power centers and world geared towards a polycentric system. In 2010 China became the world's second economy; it surpassed Japan and is exceeding United States of America (Fisher and Carlsen, 2018). The 'new normal' or new interpretation of these events is the rise of new centers of economic strength, where India, Russia and Brazil are also emerging as significant global players (Armijo, 2007). The economic, political and strategic center of gravity is transferring from Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific, due to the immense economic growth of the Asian tigers, Japan and China (Yahuda, 2014). In 2012 the United States of America faced a budget deficit of 6.9% of the GDP; total public debt became 72.5% of the GDP, with external debt totaling \$ 15.93 billion. Also in 2019 the budget deficit reached \$984 billion and the Federal government gap increased by 26% (Dmitrieva, 2019). However, Ferguson says that an increase in public debt and budget deficit cannot erode the U.S. force, but can contribute to the weakening of trust in the United States of America's ability to surpass any crisis (Hussain, 2010). This has been proven true in the current crisis of COVID -19.

The response of nation states towards this pandemic has channeled new spaces of understanding. This pandemic has largely changed the interpretation of previous identities of nation states: America emerged as poor controller of this pandemic where as China emerged as a strong nation capable of guarding its citizens and warding off the dangers of COVID-19. Current pandemic has generated a debate on the reversal of current functioning order of world (Sultan, 2020).

Human progress is not limited to per capita income, it is a broader view of development that includes; rights of health and education, food security, political inclusion, governance and gender equality. Pandemic of COVID-19 surfaced the pitfalls in the practices of power politics that has blindfolded perception of human growth. Chinese leadership since the revolution has worked on the path of development of people of China. China re-shaped its national interest to one single objective: 'betterment of its people' that was in sheer contrast with other global practices at that time. Atlantic Council has asserted that, the national character exhibited by people of China and its leadership in the current crisis is the fruit of decade's long work of human development. The realm of expertise in dealing COVID-19 has given China a legal claim as a global leader. Chinese President Xi Jinping has repeatedly said that his country stands ready to work with the international community to effectively curb the

spread of the cases caused by the new strain of corona virus in order to uphold global health security (Nyenkan, 2020). “This could be the first major global crisis in decades without meaningful U.S. leadership and with significant Chinese leadership,” said Rush Doshi, director of the China Strategy Initiative at the Brookings Institution in Washington (Myers and Rubin, 2020).

European response and their call of help from China have a clear message to interpret. The initial response of EU and its member states, towards COVID-19, fell short. The Italian government’s first appeal to EU’s solidarity mechanism went futile when no country came to its aid. Instead Germany and France, instigated export bans on medical equipment (Atlantic Council, 2020). At one end this approach paved the way for China to step in and carry on medical assistance and on the other end it narrates the negative situation emerging among the EU cooperation. China’s global corona virus rescue campaign has focused Europe as a key area. Beijing sent millions of surgical masks (including 200,000 advanced masks) and 50,000 testing kits to Europe. Chinese medical experts have been sent to Italy. Alibaba and the Jack Ma Foundation airlifted shipments of medical gear to Belgium, Ukraine, and Spain (Atlantic Council, 2020). It can be asserted that, future cooperation components among EU will undergo a re-definition after COVID-19 has ended.

Increasing importance has been given to BRIC countries, which is expected to exceed OECD countries production by 2030 (Sachs, 2010). Previously it was believed that these rising powers, require increasingly more global vision and their ability to effectively lead globally is limited because it does not provide yet sufficient global public goods such as security, monetary arrangements, development aid, like the U.S., EU and Japan. This has been proven wrong by the role played by China in the recent crisis of COVID-19. The aid, assistance and research articulated by China, have designated it to a potential new leader of the world.

US and Chinese response to COVID-19

Being a super power, US response to Covid-19 was very sluggish. When Xi adopted lockdown policy, Trump banned non-US citizens who had the recent history of traveling to China. He only lauded on the travel band and focused on tweets. When Trump was claiming robust formation of vaccine, Xi’s China was building hospitals and containing the virus to possible extent.

By the time when WHO declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic, China was successful in containing and mitigating the virus at home. Chinese government and Jack Ma foundation sent group of doctors and medical supplies to various countries including Belgium, France, Cambodia, Italy, Iran and Iraq (Hiro, 2020). By the last week of March (2020), China delivered medical supply to 28 Asian, 16 European, and 26 African, 9 American and 10 South Pacific countries.

On the other side, situation in United States of America was not satisfactory. The Center for disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported first Corona death on February 29 (Corley, 2020). Till the time, Trump was making tweets about the satisfactory points of stock market. By mid-March Trump declared nation emergency in the wake of COVID-19 and in the last week of March United States of America

became leading country in corona cases lagging China far behind. United States of America responded lethargically at home and abroad to COVID-19.

When United States of America woke up to mitigate the threat of Virus, by this time, China was vigorously helping world to contain COVID-19.

Since the emergence of China as a rising power, a constant antagonism has been observed in United States of America. Especially during Trump's election campaign, he provocatively accused China for trade policies; When he took charge of Oval office, he faulted previous administration for mishandling the growing influence of China and US' dependency on Chinese goods and labor ("Trump Accuses China", 2016). Thus, a trade war emerged between two great economies in 2018. This was Trump style to contain the growing influence of China. United States of America also vowed on Chinese debt policy under OBOR (One Belt, One Road Initiative) projects to Asian and African countries as debt-trap diplomacy (Lindberg and Lahiri, 2018). Financial assistance to these countries was taken as a predatory debt by Chinese Government to trap them. When Sri Lanka handed over Chinese financed port to Chinese company on lease for 99 years, Bharna Chellaney commented in his article titled as 'China's Debt Trap Diplomacy' that huge infrastructure loan to the developing countries is making them stumbled and under the direct influence of China (Chellaney, 2017).

United States of America also cancelled its Peace Corps program which was initiated in 1993 between China and United States of America (Hessler, 2020). In recent times, when Trump is close to next term elections, on the one hand, he is failed to mitigate the pandemic at home and abroad as a hegemonic power. On the other hand, China is projecting "mask diplomacy" smartly and swiftly not only in Asia but Europe also. China has supplied medical supplies from Serbia to Italy promptly. The generous act of medical and financial assistance by China is helping her in a soft projection of China as a responsible nation. Her, humanitarian efforts during COVID-19, are also helpful in reconstruction of Chinese image in Europe.

To prove United States of America, world leader during the recent crisis, USAID and State Department has announced 775 million \$ aid to combat novel Corona virus ("Novel Corona Virus", 2020). To contest China in medical and financial assistance, United States of America mainly focused on Asia pacific countries such as The Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam (Williams, 2020). In South Asia, United States of America announced aid for India and Afghanistan along with other South Asian countries. India and Afghanistan are important countries for China as India is also raising power in the region and China has border disputes with India since last Sino-India war in 1962; Afghanistan is a matter of concern for China because of Islamic terrorism and extremism in the region Xingjian is China's fear for extremism (Williams, 2020). United States of America has elegantly tried to retain her position as a great leader. By comparing Chinese mask diplomacy with the moves of United States, it can be presumed that China responded in the hour of need timely and promptly.

In the recent turn of events it can be legally argued that COVID-19 is shaping the previous interpretation of United States of America as hegemonic entity. According to Ashley (1989) hegemony is not merely an over reaching knowledgeable practices, it is a projection of a model which modulates as an adjustable ideal. It is a universal

knowledge cold war and 9/11 decided the status of United States of America as hegemonic power, however Covid-19 is moving China towards new hegemonic power of world. The aid practices and national cohesion by Chinese nation during lockdown has largely modified the image of China in world. The support by China particularly in Europe is a new adjustable ideal, which is potentially leading China to claim the world.

Derrida (2003) in an interview after September 11 said ‘We must also recognize here the strategies and relations of power. The dominant power is the one that manages to impose and, thus, to legitimate, indeed to legalize....on a national or world stage, the terminology and thus the interpretation that best suits it in a given situation’ (p.105). Derrida (2003) has also outlined and set clear goals for the states in order to amplify the role of global power. The suitable interpretation, after 9/11, for United States of America was that of dominant power. COVID-19 is a context or given situation in which China can be interpreted as dominant power. However, it would be very early to conclude that the China will lead world after COVID but changing scenarios and actions are creating new interpretations for China. As virus has helped China in image building in Europe particularly but pandemics cannot alter role of major powers abruptly. Viruses like COVID-19 can help in shaping the upcoming events of geo-economics, geopolitics and geo-strategic arena.

Conclusion

The idea of collective security that surfaced right after the chaos of 9/11 was largely centered on the threat of terrorism and non-state actors. Where the world prepared itself to guard against terrorism it largely ignored the other spheres of security and that is saving human capital against pandemics. COVID-19 has not only re-shaped the meaning of collective security, it is also in position to reverse the process of globalization. COVID-19 is steering world towards enhancing the measures of less connectivity and dependency. The concept of interdependence can be obsolete or less practiced in coming years.

United States of America’s failure in perceiving and pre-empting the threat of COVID-19 despite warnings has exposed its vulnerabilities to apprehend new and unforeseen threats. The behavior adopted by United States of America to its allies in Europe has ignited the debate on the credibility of U.S in any possible future threat. In contrast to that China is penetrating into the U.S influential areas through its medical diplomacy. The timing of actions taken by China has positioned it to dwindle apart the trust of U.S allies.

The previous history of Spanish flu and black plague exuberantly showed the harrowing affects and largely shaped the political, social and economic aspects of world. Pandemics do have the tendency to change the global framework of collective actions and relations of states among each other. However, it is not necessary that these outcomes arise immediately after pandemics end. Currently coming years will decide the future course of world and conclude the debate of who rules the world.

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