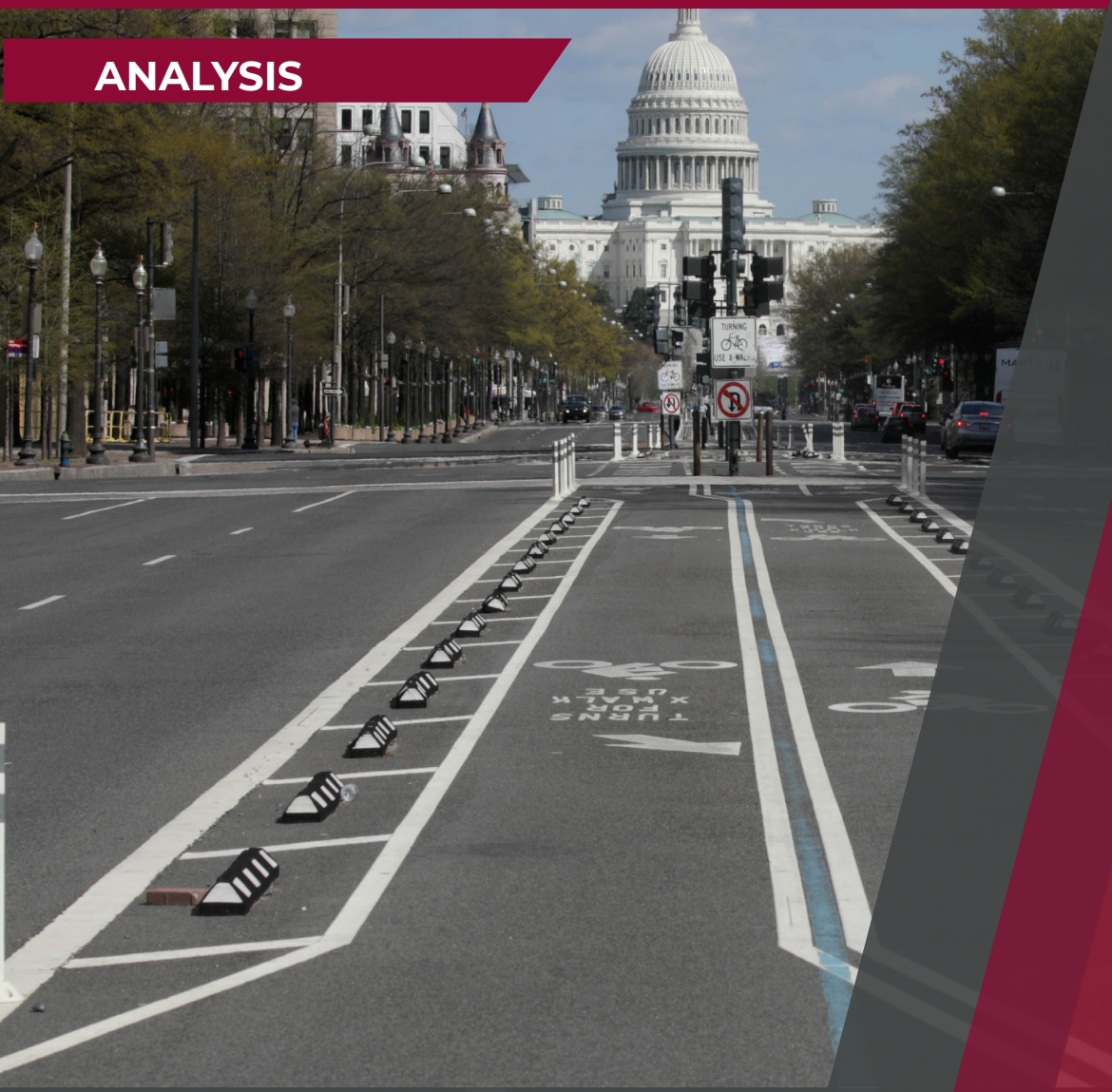
WHAT COMES AFTER THE PANDEMIC?: PREDICTING THE WORLD TO COME

ANALYSIS

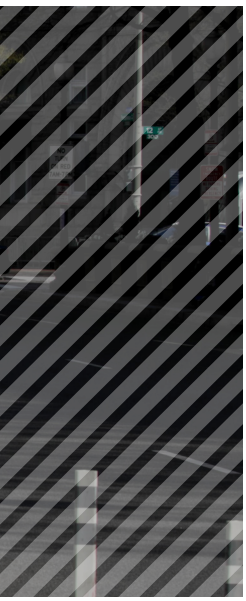


BASHEER NAFI

25 APRIL 2020

الشرق للأبحاث الاستراتيجية
AL SHARQ
STRATEGIC
RESEARCH

Contents



CORONAVIRUS AND THE WORLD: WE'RE NOT IN THIS TOGETHER, OR EVEN EQUALLY	5
A GREAT DEPRESSION AND THE DECLINE OF NEOLIBERALISM	7
THE UTOPIA OF GLOBALIZATION	11
THE TIES BINDING THE STATE AND ITS PEOPLE	12
DECISIVE GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS?	14
THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD	17
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	19
ABOUT ALSHARQ FORUM	19

It was no surprise that the covid-19 pandemic catalysed major controversy surrounding the future of the modern world, and the institutions and systems underpinning the international order. The covid-19 pandemic is unprecedented, at least in terms of individual and community awareness. While historically more severe and virulent pandemics have been recorded, such as the Black Death of the mid-14th century and the Spanish Flu of 1918-192, covid-19 is the first far-reaching pandemic to occur in modern times. In stark contrast to past pandemics, communication is fast and instantaneous, while citizens' expectations from their governments are significantly higher than ever before. Within weeks of the spread of the covid-19 pandemic outside of China, tens of millions of people began to experience the spread of the viral outbreak, with its high human and socio-economic impact felt in real time around the world.

By April 10th, the pandemic had infected more than 1.5 million people (with many more still undetected and therefore not included in official numbers). At present, well over 100,000 have succumbed to the virus, with life as we know it disrupted in a way beyond the disruptions of wars. While the northern hemisphere seems to be the most affected, more than 200 countries have reported cases. At least one third of these countries, as of the first half of March, have declared a complete or near total lockdown on social and economic activity, in addition to enforcing strict social distancing measures in hope of containing the pandemic. Major cities across the world, from Istanbul, to London, to Paris, to New York, once teeming with life, have since turned into silent, desolate cities mired in fear, worry, and uncertainty.

In recent weeks political scientists, historians, philosophers, and international relations experts have posited critical questions: what world will be born out of the pandemic? Will the world, and international order, see change for the better? Or will humanity return to what once constituted the norm after fears of the pandemic come to an end? Moreover, how and to what extent can the pandemic reshape state institutions, the nation's social contract, and its relations with others? What

> ***How and to what extent can the pandemic reshape state institutions, the nation's social contract, and its relations with others? What economic pattern can the pandemic establish?***

economic pattern can the pandemic establish? There can be no doubt that the global pandemic is dragging the world into a heavy economic recession. What is the fate of globalization which was rapidly manifested since the 1990s? Isn't the pandemic itself a tragic witness to the unity of the world and the equality of its peoples?

These are some of the major contentions of our time, eliciting tireless debate around the post-covid-19 world, which will be duly addressed in the coming segments. Before tackling these issues however, it is necessary to examine the known and what remains unknown regarding the pandemic's trends, and to further explore the linkages between the pandemic and the world, its countries and their populations.

Coronavirus and the world: We're not in this together, or even equally

To date, the world has yet to learn everything there is to know about past pandemic viruses. The virus that caused the Spanish influenza remains under study today, more than 100 years after it brought about one of the deadliest pandemics known to humanity. However, science has been able to provide answers with a high degree of certainty to questions surrounding modern pandemics. One of the challenges posed by the novel Coronavirus is that some of the fundamental questions pertaining to it are yet to be answered with any degree of confidence.

For instance, it's confirmed that China witnessed the first coronavirus infection in mid-November 2019 (and not in late December, as China previously announced). But identifying an infected case and isolating the virus by no means indicates that the virus was not previously transmitted between humans, possibly for months, maybe even asymptomatically. So when did the virus first make the leap from animal to human, and when did it mutate the ability for human-to-human transmission? The answer to this question may provide some data regarding the pool of persons who already acquired the virus, and developed immunity to it. This is particularly the case after a significant sample tested in Iceland and Germany indicated a sizable number of subjects tested already had immunity to the virus, without showing known symptoms.

Another significant question concerns whether covid-19, like other common influenza viruses (which cause a cold or flu), is affected by rising temperatures and daylight hours during the spring and summer months. If the answer is yes then covid-19 should also be seasonal, meaning that its spread accelerates in the winter, and decreases in summer. To that end, the relevant question becomes, to what extent can societies hit by the

pandemic gain sufficient immunity before the coming winter season? Moreover, does this mean that the intensity of the pandemic will find a new epicentre in the southern hemisphere, where the temperatures will decline in coming months? Can immunity last for months, or at least a year, as with other influenza viruses?

Yet another question of importance is whether virologists and vaccine researchers will soon end up identifying the most suitable drug to treat covid-19, at least in terms of mitigating its symptoms. To what extent have efforts been made to reach a vaccine to prevent infection, and can there really be an effective vaccine ready by next spring? Ultimately, as with any other viral pandemic, it cannot be contained without the development of effective herd immunity among most populations. This barrier does not evolve without the spread of disease among the majority of people, thereby acquiring immune survivors, or realizing a vaccine that can build immunity without exposure to risk of disease.

These, perhaps, sum up the most prominent questions relevant to predicting the time it will take for this pandemic to make its way through the world, the virulence of the disease, and the right measures to deal with the pandemic in different countries. But until science answers these questions, we can assume that the covid-19 virus, which has become a global pandemic since the end of January, will continue to plague human societies for at least several months to come.

This pandemic, then, represents a global crisis of nature, and will not exclude any state or society. But as voices rise that humanity is in this crisis together, and that covid-19 acts without discrimination between human societies, reality seems different altogether.

There are countries that have already declared massive spending budgets to support their health institutions, to provide care for their labour forces who lost their jobs due to the pandemic, and to rescue companies, factories, and services that have been affected by a total or partial shutdown. Even within western countries

This pandemic, then, represents a global crisis of nature, and will not exclude any state or society. But as voices rise that humanity is in this crisis together, and that covid-19 acts without discrimination between human societies, reality seems different altogether

that have been severely affected by the pandemic, the disease appears to be more lethal to the working classes, the poor, and the minorities than to the elites and upper classes. Meanwhile, there are countries that do not have effective health institutions in place, in any form, and cannot adopt high-spending policies, not even at much lower levels than affluent countries. Few of the capable countries, only a few, took the initiative to support the poor countries.

In truth, the most notorious pandemics of the past furthered isolationism in its ugliest forms. Most of the world's producers of tools and health and medical materials, including the United States, a primary producer, have had to halt exports without governmental permission. In some cases, freight trucks en route to another country were actually seized by another country. With the exception of some of the aid given by China and Turkey to a number of countries, there is no evidence that wealthy countries are providing the necessary aid to impoverished countries. Even within the European Union, the world's most effective regional organization, the countries most affected by the pandemic such as Italy and Spain complain of the absence of solidarity among EU states. Meanwhile, criticism is mounting from north European countries of their southern partners' weakening the latter's financial structure, not to mention indications of their inability to counter the economic effects of the pandemic.

The Ethiopian Prime Minister delivered remarks on April 5 2020, emphasizing his government's refusal to adopt a lockdown policy. This is stark evidence of the contrast between different countries around the world and their ability to cope with the pandemic. Abiy Ahmed said the majority of his country's workers depend on their work and daily income to survive, "and lockdown means saving them from the Coronavirus, only to die of hunger."

The global economic recession is an indicator of the fate of nations and different countries in a post-pandemic world.

A Great Depression and the Decline of Neoliberalism

On March 20, Larry Elliott, the Guardian's Economic Editor, was one of the first to anticipate a sharp contraction in the global economy due to the pandemic. In only a few weeks, international and private financial institutions, including the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank confirmed that the global economy had already entered a phase of economic downturn, and that the worsening of the situation could lead to a crisis well beyond the 2008/2009 financial meltdown, and perhaps even the depression of the 1930's.

> ***In general, with the exception of medical, health and food industries, resuming productivity in a country does not amount to much, as long as the means of transport and distribution are not operational, and consumers are reluctant to spend***

Unlike the financial crises of 1929, 1987, 1998, and 2009, the deterioration of the global economy this time is not unique to any specific region of the world, nor is it localized to a specific economic/financial sector. Deterioration, this time, is truly global in nature, and will affect all major, mid-sized, and small economies. As long as no one can predict the pandemic's trajectory or its containment, its impact on individual countries will continue to be up for debate. Some assert that countries such as China, have succeeded in containing the pandemic early on, and are on their way to regaining pre- pandemic productivity rates. And that Sweden and countries of the southern hemisphere that avoided the total or partial lockdown will be less affected by the economic crisis. These calculations however, are probably inaccurate.

The problem at hand is that the pandemic has affected the world's economic process in all its stages: production, distribution and consumption. The growing complexity of the distribution and supply chain network, which constitutes the lifeblood of the global economy, makes its structure much more fragile. After the end of the Cold War, major powers resorted to this complexity as a motive for interdependence among States, and as an effective means to prevent war, so long as vast sectors of goods and products are based on materials and parts manufactured in different states, as opposed to one State. But, the more complex an economic system is, the more difficult it becomes to fix or salvage, in the event that it comes to a halt or weakens. With tensions rampant among major economies, the reparation process is expected to be difficult.

In general, with the exception of medical, health and food industries, resuming productivity in a country does not amount to much, as long as the means of transport and distribution are not operational, and consumers are reluctant to spend. What exacerbates economic deterioration is that the pandemic has caused an unprecedented decline in the service sector; from tourism and air transport, to financial transactions, to the limited use of cafes and restaurants.

Therefore, it was unsurprising that warnings of the economic crisis and reactions by major economies would lead to another controversy over the fate of neoliberal economic policies, which proliferated significantly since the 1980s to become a cornerstone of the global economic framework. The neoliberal model was born from a group of economists, politicians, historians, and philosophers who met regularly since the beginning of the Cold War, thinking about ways to confront the communist threat. However it wasn't adopted until countries like the United States, under the Reagan administration, the United Kingdom under the Thatcher government, Pinochet in Chile, and Ozel in Turkey, implemented neoliberal policies. This ultimately led to the rise of free-market policies, a decline in the role of the state, and reduction in public spending, manifesting a new tangible reality in the international order. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc in the late 1980s and early 1990s gave the neoliberal model more global appeal, making it the new orthodox economic policy of choice.

In truth, neoliberalism's dominance over economic policy making did not go on for long, particularly in the countries that first promoted it. During the 2008 financial meltdown, Gordon Brown's government in Britain confronted the crisis with a new spending package and steps to nationalize troubled institutions, by returning to borrowing policies, citing what was then known as New Keynesian economics. To help the US economy out of its recession, the Obama administration also adopted a policy of quantitative easing (printing more notes) alongside the implementation of large spending programs to reform the infrastructure across the US. Erdogan's last government did the same, as did Davutoglu's in Turkey. Chile, on the other hand, has abandoned neoliberal patterns since the late 1990's financial crisis.

However, the changes in economic policies were not maintained nor did they become a global phenomenon. Conservative governments in Britain have returned to neoliberalism since 2010, while Turkey cut public spending after pressure on the Turkish lira in 2018. For the moment, it is a given that

> ***Promises of spending and massive financial support, announced by Britain, the United States, Germany, and a number of other Western and Asian countries, and to a lesser extent, Turkey, are raising critical questions about the fate of the neoliberal economy***

promises of spending and massive financial support, announced by Britain, the United States, Germany, and a number of other Western and Asian countries, and to a lesser extent, Turkey, are raising critical questions about the fate of the neoliberal economy.

During these months of crisis, people placed their confidence in the state to protect them from grave danger. In most countries that have adopted the neoliberal model, there are growing indications that governments will no longer be overly concerned with the rise of public debt, rising inflation, or budget deficits. The expectation that neoliberal dominance will be reduced is reinforced by the blatant overextension of public services, and health services in particular, especially in major Western States, due to the steady reduction of public spending over decades.

The problem, of course, is that there are clear differences in capabilities and methods of dealing with the economic crisis between different countries. States with large financial reserves, internationally attractive currencies, or dynamic economic structures, such as the United States, Britain, Euro zone countries, China, Japan, Arab rentier states, and Turkey, can better bear the burden of large government spending packages to cope with the consequences of the pandemic. Furthermore, they can afford to advance the economic process during and after its decline, possibly through the adoption of quantitative easing measures. But other countries already in debt, or with fragile economic structures, such as Egypt, Lebanon, most Maghreb countries, and many sub-Saharan African countries, may find it difficult to move toward further borrowing, or printing more currency to meet rising inflation rates.

The biggest contention for the second group of countries is that the debate over the fate of the neoliberal economy is almost entirely absent from the political and academic arena. This is largely because the business class in these countries has become a main partner in the regime, or because these countries do not have the requisite intellectual and political freedom to initiate a debate on fundamental changes to the prevailing model. In the countries of this disenfranchised group, the economic crisis will certainly have a greater impact and take a longer time.

In most countries that have adopted the neoliberal model, there are growing indications that governments will no longer be overly concerned with the rise of public debt, rising inflation, or budget deficits

The Utopia of Globalization

From its conception, the idea of globalization was linked to the neoliberal economic model, first born in America and Britain. The term actually originates from English, while other European languages had to create a new word to translate it. As with the neoliberal economy, the idea of globalization became popular after the West's victory in the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. It was reinforced by the claims of the end of history and the resolution of the conflict in favour of Western liberalism, democracy and individual freedom.

Globalization, which has always been a more ambiguous concept, has essentially revolved around the free movement of individuals, money, goods and ideas, and of the steady bias of human societies in favour of Western culture and arts. But these promises have not been kept regularly or permanently, even by countries that promoted the idea of globalization and established their mantras. This has led to mounting doubts whether the role of globalization was in effect to assert the control of the Western Atlantic Bloc over the fate of the human community; both materially, culturally and spiritually.

With the spread of the pandemic, predictions about the end of globalization were made. Most countries have closed their borders, placed restrictions on the movement of people and goods, enacted relatively restrictive legislations, adopted different policies to cope with the pandemic, and implemented laws to contain the emergence and spread of the virus. Countries are levelling accusations of responsibility for the start and spread of the virus against each other. For now, only the virus has the freedom to move freely, transcend borders, laws and regulations. As per the experience of major crises before, it is expected that the end of the pandemic or its decline will not necessarily mean the end of all emergency measures that have been imposed. Therefore, the world must now witness the end of Utopia, and by extension the globalization and promises it once preached.

However, the problem at the heart of the globalization debate is that it does not distinguish between two basic levels. The first pertains to the tools and means that work on, and continue to work on, accelerating transfer, communication and rates movement, whether for humans, transactions, texts or art. Second, is the idea at its core of one universal hegemonic perception of all human societies, regardless of their traditions, values, and beliefs.

On the first level, there is no indication, with or without the pandemic, that humanity will abandon the rapid air, land and sea transport that has evolved steadily since the steam machine entered the transport

sector in the mid-nineteenth century. The world will not give up the Internet, the smartphone, Banking applications, or even Amazon, the most prominent symbol of commercial globalization. A country cannot ban a book, given that it takes only minutes to download the book online. It cannot censor the news, as long as the news, whether correct or fake, is transmitted on Facebook and Twitter with the lowest possible restrictions.

On the second level, internal contradictions of globalization have been clear since its inception. Most countries in the world, including major economies, welcomed the free movement of money and investments, but refused to accept the free movement of people. Even the EU, which was the most attractive expression of the ideas of free movement, soon faced significant domestic reactions to labour migration between countries, which came to a head when Britain voted to leave the EU after a contentious referendum in 2016. Once Trump's administration assumed the reins of the White House, it began a series of actions to abandon or reconsider the membership of regional free-trade organizations, previous trade rules with China, and Europe, and to impose stricter immigration restrictions on the US.

It may be that the pandemic will result in more cracks in the idea of globalization while the authority, interest and values of the nation-state are being reasserted: a trend that has been emerging for years prior to the pandemic.

The ties binding the State and its people

The concept of state sovereignty was born with Westphalia in 1648; but it was only in the second half of the eighteenth century that the state began to manifest as a central institution of control. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed the maturation of the state as an institution, and its transformation into the fundamental block of the international order, gradually growing from a means to magnify power and capability, into an objective in its own right, and in some cases into a very powerful secular God.

In constitutional democracies with solid legal structures, legislation was used to strengthen the coercive, regulatory, and supervisory capacities of the state. In dictatorial states, the law was by no means needed to achieve the same goals. Moreover, there is nothing like a period of crisis, war or threat, whether real or imagined, that presents a state with an opportunity to reaffirm control, given

the dwindling of society's resistance to the growth and rise of the state in such times. Over the past century, the world has experienced something of the controversial relationship between the state's level of power and control, on the one hand, and between times of crisis, war, and risk, on the other hand, when the state becomes a refuge for people who aspire to its protection.

The first duty of a state is to protect its people from danger. During times of crisis however, it is customary for the state, often by popular consent and acceptance, to acquire exceptional powers. Historical experience however reveals that after crisis, war, and risk comes to an end, states do not usually relinquish all these powers; but rather retain some of it. Thus, the institution of the state emerges from crisis periods as altogether more powerful and controlling. Its people are therefore increasingly dependent on them and aware of their protective capabilities in future times of crisis, war and threats.

There is no doubt that some of the powers acquired by the states to deal with the covid-19 pandemic will be abandoned after the end of the crisis. But it is also a certainty that they will not be completely abandoned. Most of the control and authority acquired by the state during the years of the so-called 'war on terror', especially in areas of transportation, travel, education and the use of modern technology, remain in effect today.

However, the pandemic provides another opportunity to reaffirm the role of the state, with its exclusive national dimension on the international stage. In very intriguing words, the former German foreign minister, Social and Democratic Socialist Sigmar Gabriel said: "For thirty years we have been working to downsize the state," he said, noting that future generations will not be so naïve. The truth is that the pandemic has brought contradictory connotations to the relationship between countries. On the one hand, the pandemic has revealed that no single country, however powerful and capable, can cope with a crisis of a global nature, including crises caused by pandemics, climate change and the global economy's slowdown. On the other hand, the pandemic increases the nation-state's tendency for conflict, and boosts its impetus to take part in immoral and inhumane competitions, often to obtain the tools and medical materials necessary to combat it.

There is no doubt that some of the powers acquired by the states to deal with the covid-19 pandemic will be abandoned after the end of the crisis. But it is also a certainty that they will not be completely abandoned

Despite the contact between leaders of major countries, including the remote G-20 meeting, it is clear that the pandemic is being fought on a national basis, and that there is no level of international coordination, not with regards to identifying the best treatment for the disease, developing a vaccine against covid-19, nor is there a consensus on the range of economic measures that should be taken to contain the expected consequences of the pandemic.

The end of the Cold War, the continuous expansion of regional organizations, the emergence of transnational corporations (incorrectly known as multinationals) and the appeal of globalization's discourse have contributed to a belief in the decline of the nation state and its diminishing importance and role. But the last 10 years have shown that betting on the decline of the nation-state was remarkably impetuous. The rise of right-wing nationalist forces to power in a number of EU countries, and the sharp retreat in the power and effectiveness of many regional organizations, including the success of the America First campaign in previous US presidential elections, have revealed that the predictions about the retreat of the nation state were ultimately incorrect. Meanwhile, acute trade tensions among major economies have revealed the true size of transnational corporations, shedding light on the fact that ultimately, they are nation-state entities that cannot defy their home state and its policies.

The pandemic is essentially confirming the trend of "the return of the state" to the theatre of international relations, which has been underway in a ruthless manner for at least a decade now.

Decisive geopolitical shifts?

One of the most prominent aspects of the post- pandemic controversy concerns America's retreat and China's rise as a driving force for a new international order. If official Chinese data is taken at face value, it seems that China has managed to control the pandemic early-on, with the least possible losses, although multiple sources of evidence indicate that it is the source of the pandemic. Beijing has taken swift and harsh measures to isolate cities and counties, transporting tens of thousands of health workers from one area to another to deal with patients, and has begun experimenting with a number of drugs to alleviate the disease's symptoms.

Thus, most Chinese provinces have returned to normal life, or at least something similar to it, since the first week of April, with little humanitarian and economic

In other words, China's rapid return to normal life may not in itself claim an extraordinary advantage over its Western rivals after all. Low global demand, the enormous disruption of logistics networks and interdependence among nations means that the burden of the covid-19 pandemic will affect all, both producers and the least productive

burden, given the size of the country and its economy. After terrifying reports of the pandemic resounded around the world, the Chinese government has now begun to sell medical equipment to other countries worth hundreds of millions of dollars, while sending symbolic aid to its friends and to countries that have been suffering the most from the pandemic. Accordingly, China is expected to be the first country to emerge from the nightmare of the covid-19 pandemic. Given that the United States and Western European States are among the most affected countries both in economic and in humanitarian terms, it is not unlikely that the covid-19 global pandemic will serve as a critical turning point for China's ultimate rise, economic growth and by extension, political and military ascendancy.

In fact, China's national income was already expected to rise to equal, or perhaps even slightly higher than that of the United States by the end of 2030, well before the pandemic. The pandemic will likely only accelerate China's steady economic growth. In fact, most states that implemented lockdown policies, including Turkey, have not closed the productive industrial sector entirely, except for industries whose production was not urgently needed, such as the automobile industry. In other words, China's rapid return to normal life may not in itself claim an extraordinary advantage over its Western rivals after all. Low global demand, the enormous disruption of logistics networks and interdependence among nations means that the burden of the covid-19 pandemic will affect all, both producers and the least productive.

But, even assuming that the pandemic will accelerate China's economic rise, achieving a high level of sufficiency and well-being requires the study of average per capita income, not simply national income. The quality of life in a country of one million people, whose national income is ten million dollars, is not the same as that of another with half a million people and the same national income.

The United States, of course, has, since the Trump administration took office, shown a major national reversal, and a renunciation of its leading role in the world, including in dealing with the pandemic crisis. But that retraction may not last that long after the end of Trump's term, especially since the United States' tendency of isolationism has occurred previously, for both long and short periods since the beginning of the twentieth century. More importantly, regardless of the American administration's policies, there is an agreement between the big powers' rise and decline on the fact that economic power is not the only determinant of the strength of states and their influence in the international arena. There are dozens of other forms of influence, such as language, religion and religious heritage, arts and literature, and the pattern of political and social life, which must all be taken into account. It is hard, and in some cases impossible, for China to compete in many of these arenas.

Moreover, the United States, militarily, is still the only country among major world powers that can project force throughout the world. Any other major force would require decades to reach the level of military capability enjoyed by the United States at present. Moreover, the United States' spending on research and development remains the highest in the world, with spending higher than both China and the EU combined.

In the coming months, the world is certain to witness widespread controversy - that has already started to rage - regarding the effectiveness of different countries in dealing with the pandemic and its consequences: liberal regimes, most of which have fallen prey to the spread of disease and death, or the centrally controlled states, such as China and Singapore, where the relationship between the state and its people is closer to the relations between the military commander and his soldiers. Yet, countries like South Korea and Taiwan (in addition to Denmark, Germany, Australia and New Zealand) who succeeded in quickly containing the virus, proudly attribute the success of their efforts to their democracy. Alternatively, the credibility of democratic liberal regimes is posited in comparison to that of authoritarian regimes to question their guarantee or waste human life.

There can be no doubt however, that when the United States emerged in the 1990s as a unilateral superpower in the world's political and economic decision-making, its status as a superpower lasted much shorter than expected. The world began to move to a multi-polar scene as soon as the United States sank its teeth into

> ***The world began to move to a multi-polar scene as soon as the United States sank its teeth into Iraq and Afghanistan in the early 2000s, China began to record steady increases in growth rates and Russia destroyed the Georgian military machine, imposing its will on Tbilisi***

Iraq and Afghanistan in the early 2000s, China began to record steady increases in growth rates and Russia destroyed the Georgian military machine, imposing its will on Tbilisi.

Over the next decade, this scene could become more pronounced, with the US finding in China an economic rival difficult to overcome, alongside a rival in Russia in terms of military and political might even if limited, and a number of smaller regional powers becoming increasingly independent in decision-making. However, the United States' multiple and unique elements of power will help it maintain the most prominent and influential state position among its competitors, perhaps for more than a decade ahead.

The Post-pandemic World

Lenin once said, "There are decades where nothing happens, and weeks where decades occur." There is no doubt that the time of the pandemic from the end of January to the present has witnessed a number of unparalleled realities that the world has not experienced since World War II. The pandemic will have different effects on the very pulse of the economy, sociology and mental health, as well as on policy, patterns of political interaction as well as international relations. But it is an exaggeration to say that the post-pandemic world will be completely different from the world before it.

Certainly, there have been political, economic and international trends that have been emerging for years and were accelerated by the pandemic; other new variables were certainly introduced by the pandemic, while some systems, relationships, and trends will not witness any change. The world is facing a severe economic crisis, and one that will impact countries to different degrees (in proportion with the capabilities of the former state, and not the virulence of the pandemic). That this may lead to political upheaval, is not a controversial analysis. But indications of the return of the state, the decline in the role of regional and international organization regimes and the mitigation of their mandates, not to mention the progress of the international system towards multipolar pluralism, have been recorded in multiple instances around the world for years. On the other hand, it is more likely that the level of

> ***On the other hand, it is more likely that the level of competition and motivation, regionally and internationally, will continue unabated, and that the hopes that the pandemic will rebuild international relations on a more humane and fair basis will remain mere hopes***

competition and motivation, regionally and internationally, will continue unabated, and that the hopes that the pandemic will rebuild international relations on a more humane and fair basis will remain mere hopes.

In the midst of the pandemic and what once seemed to transcend borders, class, and social stratification without discrimination, it is perhaps unsurprising that the widespread feeling of grief and loss among some has led to the expectation of the birth of a better world out of the crucible of tragedy. But past human experiences do not necessarily support such optimistic expectations. Some historians believe that the Black death of the mid-fourteenth century was a strong catalyst towards ending the feudal system giving birth to the modern world. But recent memory of the world's great crises tells a different story, of entirely different consequences.

In spite of its tragic impact, World War I did not make humanity more rational, or international relations more just. In fact, the peace that came with the end of the First Great War planted the seeds of the Second World War, leaving behind a Middle East plagued by incessant conflict and war. Even the global depression of the 1930's served as a precursor to the rise of Nazism; just as the end of the Second World War led to a costly and dangerous Cold War, and a series of regional wars waged by proxy outside the European continent. There is no doubt that it is a terrible pandemic, but it seems that modern humans have yet to gain the level of wisdom necessary to see through to the catastrophic consequences of their way of life, organizations, and relationships.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Senior Associate Fellow at Al Sharq Forum and Senior Research Fellow at Al Jazeera Centre for Studies. He writes weekly columns for Middle East eye. Research Interests: Egypt, Iraq, Political Islam, and Middle Eastern Politics in general.

ABOUT ALSHARQ FORUM

The Sharq Forum is an independent international network whose mission is to undertake impartial research and develop long-term strategies to ensure the political development, social justice and economic prosperity of the people of Al-Sharq. The Forum does this through promoting the ideals of democratic participation, an informed citizenry, multi-stakeholder dialogue, social justice, and public-spirited research.

Address: Istanbul Vizyon Park A1 Plaza Floor:6
No:68 Postal Code: 34197
Bahçelievler/ Istanbul / Turkey
Telephone: +902126031815
Fax: +902126031665
Email: info@sharqforum.org

AL SHARQ
STRATEGIC
RESEARCH
للأبحاث الاستراتيجية

research.sharqforum.org

SharqStrategic