The Geopolitical Power Balance is Tilting from West to East

Most global crises and disasters compel countries and people to join together to tackle the troubles they are faced with more successfully, and to build a better society and wider world. However, the response to the coronavirus pandemic that has engulfed the world has been the complete opposite so far.

Many analysts including those in the United States now note that the world order and how it is tilted depends on a number of conditions, and a strong leader of a country that could guide the world through these times is particularly important. However, this kind of leadership is not being shown today. On the contrary, countries are refusing to share their personal protective equipment (PPE), there is what you could call a sort of arms race to develop a vaccine faster than other countries, borders have been closed completely, and the finger is being pointed at who is to blame for the all the suffering caused by the outbreak without any proof, which certainly does not further global unity. Some of the obvious causes of the current disputes that can easily be discerned include how US President Donald Trump is constantly looking to find external excuses to blame for steps he himself has taken to withdraw from international agreements, withdrawing from any agreement of an international legal nature that gives Washington responsibilities and puts America on an equal footing with its other global partners. President Trump’s announcement that America would be terminating all its relations with the WHO and its official withdrawal from this international organization is not the only example, as the Iran nuclear deal was also scrapped, which had taken more than a decade of negotiations to secure. The White House has added to the cracks in the supporting pillars propping up global security by pulling out of other international treaties: the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty), the Treaty on Open Skies, and there have also been statements made about America’s possible withdrawal from the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).

By exploiting anti-Chinese sentiment to further his election campaign, Donald Trump is stoking tensions with China to boiling point, and this is not just a trade war anymore, the conflict has spilled over into international politics and the fight against the coronavirus pandemic that the world is currently grappling with. The heated confrontation between the world’s two biggest economies, nuclear-weapon states and permanent members of the UN Security Council, which are ultimately the world’s most influential countries, is affecting the entire world. In a situation where countries all around the world are facing a common challenge and looking for the same cure, a vaccine which has not been created yet, it would be logical for countries to work together within international organizations to get through all of this as soon as possible. However, the American President is now busy promoting his 2016 campaign slogan about how useless international structures are.

That is why The Washington Post notes the need to acknowledge that the White House is to blame for this global disunity. The article explains why, reminding people that the United States had been the most powerful country in the world, led by presidents who understood the responsibility to countries around the world that comes with this power, and who understood that the best way to promote national interests is to share the fruits of their labor with other countries. However, they are now led by a president who despises international cooperation, and a staunch anti-globalist who believes that the United States will prosper as a nation state, by putting “America first!”. This is why the world is now unfortunately becoming more divided.

A report was published on the RAND Corporation website titled “Peering into the Crystal Ball: Holistically Assessing the Future”. The report is the fruit of the labor of over 120 military experts and academics from the USA, the UK, Belgium, China, Germany, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Poland and the UAE, and it paints a clear picture of how America’s military might is now waning in comparison to other countries amid China’s growing economic, geopolitical and
military ambitions along with Russia’s actions. The digital publication Defense One also heavily criticizes White House’s US military strategy and military spending, writing that the kind of actions Washington is taking will only lead to suffering in the world and suffering among Americans themselves who will forfeit their own security.

Although the economic damage caused by the coronavirus outbreak is on a global scale, Western countries seem to have suffered the most. The US and EU are mournfully watching the cataclysmic collapse of their economies, facing what is the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. An analytical report from the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) predicts that the pandemic will accelerate the shift in the global balance of power from the West to the East. “It will act as an accelerant of existing geopolitical trends, in particular the growing rivalry between the US and China and the shift in the economic balance of power from West to East,” the report states. As the coronavirus pandemic has shown, multilateral cooperation and partnerships are more important than ever in a world facing existential threats.

The exceptionally high coronavirus mortality rates in the United Kingdom and the United States have shown that the socio-economic systems in these countries are far from ideal. The Anglo-American model of capitalism has essentially failed. While some European countries with prevalent social democratic ideological models have been more successful than others in fighting the pandemic, commitment to the values of neoliberal capitalism has nevertheless made a significant contribution to the damage caused by the infectious disease in the European Union, the most visible examples being Italy and Spain.

The point is made in the French media that the West can no longer consider itself an example to the rest of the world after the whole world has watched Western foreign and domestic policies fail, especially considering the massive coronavirus death toll in the United States and many EU countries. The coronavirus pandemic has shown that Asia’s political and socio-economic systems were better at dealing with the crisis, and the West has a lot to learn from Asia. Even countries such as Thailand and Vietnam which are considered far less affluent than countries in the EU were able to put practical measures in place straight away, such as distributing free masks and making it compulsory to wear one, and many Asian governments strengthened their positions during the first phase of the crisis, and they have certainly gained greater public approval. This is just one small example.

French daily Le Figaro highlights that while policymakers in the United States, Britain and France thought their empire of capitalism and democracy was growing as part of the process of globalization, Asian countries pursued a policy of national revival, involving rearmament and building a richer middle class. It has been said many times over the last few years in the West that “the 21st century will be the Asian Century”, but no one really gave it that much thought. But then the coronavirus came crashing down over politicians and hospitals in a huge wave, and they sank like stones. The human cost of the pandemic which is still taking its toll has become a reliable barometer of the quality of sanitary and healthcare systems around the world, and it is the developed countries that have taken a nosedive. It turned out that “the Emperor has no clothes,” Le Figaro comments.

Although there is still a long way to go in the battle against the coronavirus before a complete victory can be declared, it is already safe to say that we will see significant changes in international relations. The main showdown will be between China, which will be looking to strengthen its foreign policy, and the United States, which will be trying to hold onto its global hegemony. A serious confrontation between the US and China unfortunately looks set to be the main feature of the historical process that is currently taking place, which could not only ultimately transform international organizations, but could also change relations between individual countries, including traditional allies.

The European Union’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell has also recently stated that the coronavirus pandemic could be the catalyst to shift power from West to East, noting that the upcoming EU-China summit this autumn could be an opportunity to do so. He recognizes that the future of the EU lies with Eurasia. As China, India, Japan, Indonesia and Russia will become some of the world’s biggest economies by 2030 according to Standard Chartered PLC, the 21st century is known as the "Asian Century."

However the confrontation may unfold between the US and China in the near future, the world has now clearly seen the very effective approach taken to combating the threat posed by the coronavirus in example set by people living in countries in the East, while the United States and Europe made a show of themselves with a chaotic policy of containment that has had disastrous consequences for societies which pride themselves on their civil liberties.

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