ANDIE DIVINE TOMBRA

16/sms09/011

IRD 402

Foreign Policies of the Great Powers

The world is frightened by the coronavirus and no country no matter the influence is immune to this tragic pandemic, not the United Kingdom, not Russia, not France, not America and certainly not China. Covid 19 has intensified the war between America and China but has also strengthened international cooperation.

The United States of America, the most powerful country in the world and, to many, the go-to-leader in times of global crisis, has, under President Donald Trump, turned its back on world leadership.

But even when looking inward, under Mr Trump’s America First policy, Washington has stumbled as it denied coronavirus threatened America, and fumbled as it pretended it had every tool in place to contain the pandemic.

China, the rising power many proclaim will overtake the US as an economic and military powerhouse in two decades, and bring back a bipolar world, has not risen to the occasion either.

According to the international paper “The News”

The coronavirus pandemic, named Covid-19, is going to change global political trends. It has shaken the basic foundations of the balance of power and the existing world order.

This ongoing outbreak will have long-lasting repercussions on world politics. Like the time post Second World War, during the cold war and post cold war and post-9/11, the world order will be compartmentalized into the pre- and post-Covid-19 era. With a complete global shutdown, Covid-19 is a defining moment as a watershed between the pre- and post-Covid-19 global system with a new world order.

China took the lead in curbing the menace of the virus. It launched a very successful campaign to counter it by authoritative or totalitarian order of strict social distancing in Chinese society and mass-decoronaising with sprays and medicines. However, the rest of the world got late in responding to deal with the situation effectively and emphatically. Moreover, China is leading from the front in donating and giving medical/precautionary supplies (masks, medical aid and safety gadgets) to the world, especially Europe.

Super and great powers are limited to their own selves for dealing with Covid-19. However, only China is going all out in the challenge for global leadership. Its ‘mask diplomacy’ is successful and it is running from pillar to post to win the hearts and minds of global audiences. Is it a show of power or a tool to influence the world? The answer is a blunt no.

It’s an historical fact that strong countries have usually supported areas of the world hit by natural or man-made tragedies and disasters. After the Second World War, European economies were completely ruined and shattered. In the circumstances, the US came up with the Marshall Plan to support European economies with a handsome aid of $15 billion (later on, it was limited to Western Europe only).

Thus, China’s mask diplomacy is a modern ‘Xi Plan’ (after Xi Jinping) to save humanity from the scourge of Covid-19. As per a ‘don’t let any crisis go waste’ policy, if the Xi Plan succeeds, a New World Order is in the offing. It has been witnessed in history that all world orders were pronounced either by Europeans or the US. However, this time the world order will be marked and dominated by the East ie China. Hence, it will be East-oriented; this post-Covid world will be led by China.

Civil liberty campaigners are with governments for the promulgation of emergency laws to guard people’s health and lives. In times of crises, human rights NGOs and IGOs are silent over curfew and lockdown laws. This further proves that in the future, emergency powers of states will further be strengthened constitutionally and legally. Moreover, political units will be more integrated politically and socially in the post-Covid era.

The Corona crisis has exposed the health sector not only in the developing but also in the developed world as it has spread to more than 170 countries. Lack of medical equipment to deal with a pandemic is the tip of the iceberg across the world. Very minor items like sanitizers, testing kits and face masks are not available enough with countries so they can guard themselves against the virus. Take the case of ventilators: Pakistan has 2400 and it needs 10,000 more; the UK has 5900 and it direly needs 20,000; the US has 172,000 and it needs 742,000 to deal with the respiratory patients. In Italy, for every ventilator, there are four acute respiratory patients.

Over and above, the coronavirus has also exposed the weaknesses of the WHO. They are acting like a powerless watchdog – doing nothing practically but talking a lot. This proves that humanity needs an institution beyond the WHO. It could be a World Health Research Facility (WHRF) where anticipated diseases are studied, autopsied and managed with a doable approach. Humanity will not wait for another coronavirus pandemic to teach it a futuristic lesson. It already had experienced SARS and MERS. But it didn’t learn much from them.

Health workers are also caught off-guard during the crisis. They don’t have any such education in their curriculum that may equip them to deal with something like this at such a mass scale. Most of the paramedics are found to be ignorant of the SOPs of the issue and how to handle it. During the crisis, medical doctors, while treating patients, forgot to take care of themselves and thus became victims of the disease. There is a dire need for the introduction of a subject on ‘Health Management’. This subject will focus on management of such pandemics at a mass level, taking care of patients, treating them in quarantine, and taking care of health workers’ well-being simultaneously.

Surprisingly, when nature is angry over the entire world, wars are still going on. The Kashmir curfew/lockdown is still persistent. Palestine is still a case of humanitarian crisis. Somehow, humans are ready to fight against their common enemy but when it comes to their fellow-beings, they fight with each other no matter what. Humans are neither fully equipped to deal with a common enemy in the shape of a virus nor have they learnt to live together by sharing the planet earth justly. In times of natural and human-made calamity, armed conflict must come to an end. There is a dire need for the revision of international humanitarian law and laws of armed conflict in the post-Covid era.

More surprisingly, the world order was based on regionalism (regional organizations) and internationalism (UN). With Covid-19, every country is taking steps to safeguard its own people and territory. Borders are sealed; imports are banned; but no joint action has been taken to deal with the virus. This further proves that whatever the catchy slogans – regionalism, think globally act locally, and global village – the ultimate refuge is provided in one’s own nationalism. No one is coming over to rescue anyone.

Saarc countries called a meeting of member countries for a joint strategy. They failed. So was the case with the EU and Aseam. Other regional countries even didn’t bother to call a virtual meeting. The OIC (an ideological organization) and the Arab League are silent. ‘Everyone for himself and God for us all’ (George Canning in 1827) seems to be the order of the day. China is out to assist others only after dealing with its own people first. In the post-Covid-19 era, like national security, health security will also be taken exclusively and on nationalist grounds.

Covid-19 also uncovered a lack of coherent global leadership. US President Trump preferred to call Covid-19 a ‘Chinese Virus’ cynically. During the Wuhan crisis in China, none of the world countries was so farsighted that it offered any assistance. No one can substitute honest and proactive leadership that Italy, Iran and now Spain lacks. Countries like Pakistan need to take lessons from them and learn from China – a country with a robust, effective, on-the-spot and immediate decision-making mechanism. It also proves that the global leadership is in crisis. The post Covid-19 era will emerge with a New World Order with new trends in international politics.

With hundreds of millions of people now isolating themselves around the world, the novel coronavirus pandemic has become a truly global event. And while its geopolitical implications should be considered secondary to matters of health and safety, those implications may, in the long term, prove just as consequential—especially when it comes to the United States’ global position. Global orders have a tendency to change gradually at first and then all at once. In 1956, a botched intervention in the Suez laid bare the decay in British power and marked the end of the United Kingdom’s reign as a global power. Today, U.S. policymakers should recognize that if the United States does not rise to meet the moment, the coronavirus pandemic could mark another “Suez moment.”