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ASSIGNMENT QUESTION: From late December 2019 to January 2020, the world was struck unawares by a new corona-virus with rapid spread and devastating consequences. Attempt a critical assessment of the impacts of the pandemic. Parts of the issues you need to address include the epicentre of virus outbreak; the conspiracy theories; was occurrence natural or man-made? What are the impacts on global health and global economy and state relations? How have the Great Powers handled the pandemic? Do at least a two-page write-up and digest.

Corona virus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered corona virus. Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment.  Older people and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness. Two months after [Chinese](https://www.cnbc.com/china/) authorities locked down the city at the centre of the country’s corona virus outbreak, the end is in sight.  Hubei province said Tuesday that travel restrictions on the capital city of Wuhan will be removed starting April 8, which would end a [lockdown that began on Jan. 23.](http://www.hubei.gov.cn/zhuanti/2020/gzxxgzbd/zxtb/202003/t20200324_2189256.shtml)  The virus first emerged in the city in late December and has killed more than 2,500 people there. That means Wuhan alone accounted for nearly 80% of the country’s total deaths of more than 3,200. In the last few weeks, COVID-19 has spread to well over 100 countries in a global pandemic that has killed more than 11,000 people. Countries from Italy to the United States and Iran are struggling to contain the virus, with large cities shutting down schools and public places, or issuing stay-home orders.

New confirmed virus cases in China have dwindled in the last several days, with nearly all now attributed to travellers returning from overseas. Travel restrictions for the rest of Hubei province will be lifted starting Wednesday, while schools will remain closed until further notice, according to an [online announcement.](http://www.hubei.gov.cn/zhuanti/2020/gzxxgzbd/zxtb/202003/t20200324_2189256.shtml)In another sign that the virus appears to be under control in China, [Shanghai announced](https://m.weibo.cn/2539961154/4485582367767783) Monday that beginning Tuesday, the city’s emergency response level to the corona virus will be lowered by a notch — down from the most severe level. Zhejiang, the third-largest province by exports, also [lowered its emergency response level](http://www.zj.gov.cn/art/2020/3/24/art_1554467_42360100.html) on Tuesday by one notch. There are at least three levels of emergency response in China. At least 24 other provinces or regions in China are at levels of two or less severe, Morgan Stanley analysis showed Tuesday, indicating that risk levels in much of the country are coming down.

**WHAT ARE THE CONSPIRACY THEORES ON CORONA VIRUS?**

There are several conspiracy theories on the corona virus which comes normally with issues people find hard to understand but the conspiracy theory that stands out is the one discussed below. The new conspiracy theory that blames COVID-19 on the 5G broadband system is one of the most bizarre pieces of misinformation. There are [several strains of this theory](https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/coronavirus-and-5g-a-case-study-of-platforms-content-moderation-of-conspiracy-theories), ranging from the claims that 5G alters people’s immune systems to the idea that 5G changes people’s DNA, making them more susceptible to infection. Then there’s the idea that [secret messages about 5G and corona virus](https://fullfact.org/online/5g-coronavirus-20-note/) were hidden in the design of the new £20 note in the UK. In reality, 5G relates to viruses and bank notes as much as the tooth fairy relates to zoology – not at all.

The 5G conspiracy theory originated in early March when an American physician, Thomas Cowan, proposed it in a YouTube video (which has since been [taken down by YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFN5LUaqxOA) according to their [new policy](https://www.businessinsider.com/youtube-delete-5g-coronavirus-conspiracy-2020-4?r=US&IR=T)). Some people have taken this conspiracy theory so seriously that it led to [people setting 5G towers in the UK on fire](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-52164358) and [threatening broadband engineers](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/apr/03/broadband-engineers-threatened-due-to-5g-coronavirus-conspiracies).

The conspiracy theory has begun to penetrate mainstream society. Among other celebrities, UK TV personality [Eamonn Holmes](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/apr/13/eamonn-holmes-says-5g-coronavirus-claims-may-not-be-false) and US actor Woody Harrelson have [given fuel to the idea](https://www.gq.com/story/coronavirus-5g-conspiracy-theory-explained).

**IS CORONA VIRUS MAN-MADE OR NATURAL?**

New findings from the Scripps Research Institute confirm the SARS-CoV-2 corona virus has natural origins and was not made in a laboratory or artificial setting, as many have speculated. To reach the conclusion the team used analysed public genome sequence data from SARS-CoV-2 released by China and identified several tell-tale signs suggesting COVID-19 IS an organic virus.

Since the virus was first reported in Hubei Province in December it has infected over 1.4 million people in more than 200 countries. The WHO has classified COVID-19 as a pandemic, with global governments and healthcare systems rallying to "flatten the curve" and save lives.

**WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF CORONA VIRUS ON GLOBAL ECONOMY?**

Confirmed [cases of COVID-19 have now hit nearly 2.5 million](https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html) globally. Businesses are coping with lost revenue and disrupted supply chains as [factory shutdowns](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-health-scale/under-chinas-coronavirus-lockdown-millions-have-nowhere-to-go-idUSKBN2081DB) and quarantine measures spread across the globe, restricting movement and commerce.

Unemployment is skyrocketing, while policymakers across countries race to implement fiscal and monetary measures to alleviate the financial burden on citizens and shore up economies under severe strain.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on 9 April said the corona virus pandemic had instigated an economic downturn the likes of which the world has [not experienced since the Great Depression.](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-imf/imf-chief-says-pandemic-will-unleash-worst-recession-since-great-depression-idUSKCN21R1SM)

Here are some of the ways the outbreak is sending economic ripples around the world.

**Predicted slump for Asia**

On 15 April, the IMF warned [economies in Asia would see no growth](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-52305258) this year, for the first time in 60 years, with the service sector particularly under pressure. National lockdowns across the region have meant airlines, factories, shops and restaurants have suffered the greatest economic shocks. Just a day after the IMF warning, official [data showed the Chinese economy had contracted in the first quarter](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-economy-gdp/hobbled-by-coronavirus-chinas-first-quarter-gdp-shrinks-for-first-time-on-record-idUSKBN21Z08Q) - the first time since quarterly records began in 1992. GDP in the world's second largest economy fell 6.8% in January-March year-on-year - more than the 6.5% forecast by analysts and the opposite of the 6% expansion in the fourth quarter of 2019. The Chinese economy is likely to be hit further by reduced global demand for its products due to the effect of the outbreak on economies around the world. Data released on 16 March showed [China's factory production plunged](https://news.trust.org/item/20200316071843-1rb9t/) at the sharpest pace in three decades in the first two months of the year. For 2020, the country's [economic growth is expected to fall to 2.5%](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-economy-gdp/hobbled-by-coronavirus-chinas-first-quarter-gdp-shrinks-for-first-time-on-record-idUSKBN21Z08Q), according to a Reuter’s poll - its slowest in almost 50 years.

**WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF CORONA VIRUS ON STATE RELATIONS?**

**A POSSIBLE COLD WAR**

Considering the sheer chaos inflicted upon global public health and the international economic system – dominated by American commerce and Chinese manufacturing fed by fossil fuel energy producing countries, including the Middle East – there has been very little discussion on the impact the corona virus pandemic has had on existing power structures in the international system.  For a change, global political events are not being dictated by one or two superpowers, but governments everywhere are now racing to face the same challenge, adopting different methods from total quarantine and lockdowns to herd immunisation. The virus, although originating in China’s Wuhan, has been one of the world’s great global equalisers. Unlike humans, viruses do not care where its victims come from, what religion they follow, or what ideology they believe in. All are at risk, and as economies shut down and resources are stretched, international power dynamics may see a shift in the age of the corona virus.

**Trump risks American power for short-term gain**

Of course, it is too early to state just how long this “age” will last, although I am certain it will feel like an age to those who are now isolated in their homes and spending their days mainly watching Netflix.  Everything could be over in a few months, while other predictions state that the virus could be [plaguing us until 2021](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/15/uk-coronavirus-crisis-to-last-until-spring-2021-and-could-see-79m-hospitalised). However, and irrespective of how long it takes to get a handle on the virus, it is certain that things are about to change in the long-term. Already, the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) managing director, Kristalina Georgieva, has stated that the human cost of the pandemic has been “immeasurable” and that the global economic outlook was negative, saying “a recession at least as bad as during the global financial crisis or worse.”  For the head of the IMF to say that the economic impact of the virus may be [even worse than the defining financial crash of our time](https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/03/23/pr2098-imf-managing-director-statement-following-a-g20-ministerial-call-on-the-coronavirus-emergency) that occurred in 2008 will be causing politicians, businessmen, and employees the world over to feel a bit hot under the collar, and rightly so. Ever the businessman, President Donald Trump has announced that the measures the United States has taken in terms of social distancing that has undoubtedly had an impact on trade will be abandoned in favour of [opening America for business in weeks](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/live/2020/mar/23/coronavirus-us-live-news-updates-donald-trump-fauci-us-cities-spike-cases) and not months.  Trump’s decision comes despite an enormous surge in corona virus cases afflicting the US, with over [143,000 confirmed cases resulting in 2,490 deaths](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2020/mar/27/coronavirus-map-of-the-us-latest-cases-state-by-state). However, what this shows is weakness, and not strength. Trump has based his entire political manifesto on economic prosperity and strength through isolation. He has gone to incredible lengths to boast about how the [American economy has never been better](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-45827430) and the US military is now [completely rebuilt and stronger than ever](https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2074985/trump-touts-military-rebuilding-space-force-strikes-against-terror/) under his direction. Nevertheless, the virus has forced significant shut downs across the economy with stock markets plummeting and share prices falling. Trump’s commercial instincts cannot tolerate such losses and blows to his prestige as the man who apparently rebuilt the economy, and believes his re-election campaign may be damaged unless he re-opens the markets and allows the American people to work again as if nothing was happening. What this means is that, without preventative options by way of a vaccine, Trump is gambling with the long-term interests of the United States. If the virus is still an active infectious agent in a few weeks when Trump re-opens America for business, and all indicators suggest that to be the case, then the pandemic will simply continue to rip through the population, stressing the healthcare system and the economy all over again.  Trump will therefore be banking on some kind of herd immunity to take hold, but if that does not happen then we may see an irreversible blow to American power as the virus decimates its human resource potential.

**China may live to regret corona virus secrecy**

Of course, waiting in the wings of any American decline is China. For decades, Beijing has steadily enhanced its power, primarily through the economics of becoming the world’s factory and manufacturing most of the things we see sold in shops around the world, not to mention vital components for other non-Chinese technology giants, including Apple, Sony, and Microsoft. However, China has also been busy [producing its own indigenous aircraft carriers](https://www.businessinsider.com/china-adds-second-aircraft-carrier-to-its-rapidly-growing-navy-2019-12?r=US&IR=T), expanding its military influence and hard power, and making it one of a handful of countries able to produce such weapons of war that are capable of global power projection. Indeed, China has been [acting belligerently in the South China Sea](https://www.cfr.org/interactive/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/territorial-disputes-south-china-sea), engaging in territorial disputes with neighbouring and smaller countries that it can easily bully while claiming sovereignty over vast swathes of these international waters. With China’s economic clout and growing military might allowing it to use both significant levers of power within the international system, this places it at odds with the reigning power, the United States.  As the world is racked by the corona virus, China – the epicentre of the pandemic – is slowly beginning to recover as everyone else is getting mauled. This could grant it a head start, and it is indeed already playing the role of the good Samaritan and building its influence and soft power by [sending aid to countries such as Italy](https://www.dw.com/en/covid-19-china-steps-in-to-help-italy-battle-the-virus/a-52901560) who have suffered tremendous human losses as a result of the virus. This has allowed Beijing to [control the corona virus narrative](https://atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/is-china-winning-the-coronavirus-response-narrative-in-the-eu/) in the West, showing itself to be proactively assisting in alleviating suffering globally. However, and since the time of the outbreak, China has been shown to have suppressed and censored information relating to the corona virus which allowed the disease to not only spread out of control in China but across the world, creating the present problem. The Chinese government may live to regret that decision as the impact on populations around the world has now acted as something of an eye-opener to governments who were previously content to avoid confronting Beijing. Now that China has directly impacted the global economy as well as public health by failing to alert the international community, the lack of trust engendered by such censorship could serve as a catalyst for a global consensus on clipping China’s wings. If the corona virus leads to a new cold war with China rather than Soviet Russia as the adversary, Beijing will find itself forced into more direct confrontation with Western powers it would rather do business with. Those same powers will now feel suddenly vulnerable at diminishing their own domestic production capabilities in favour of subcontracting out to cheap Chinese labour controlled by one of the most pervasive economic powers in the world.  Such an outcome could see an entire process of rebalancing as governments clash and economies recalibrate to prepare for a whole new confrontation ushered in by the unpredictable effects of an invisible virus that will have very visible consequences.

**How have the great powers handled the pandemic?**

Three of the United Nations Security Council permanent five members will be analyzed for the sake of this question. These are United States of America, China and Britain. Starting with Britain. Every Thursday evening for the past month, the streets of the U.K. have erupted with noise as people stand on doorsteps or balconies, clapping or banging pots and pans, in a weekly sign of appreciation for healthcare workers. But many doctors, nurses and carers say they don’t want applause—they want better testing and equipment. The U.K. has more than 100,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19, making it the sixth-worst affected in the world—but its real number is widely believed to be far higher due to a shortage of test kits. And more than 14,500 people are confirmed to have died in U.K. hospitals from COVID-19, putting it behind only the U.S., Italy, Spain and France. That number, too, is an underestimate: the U.K.’s official statisticians suggested Tuesday that the real number could be as much as 15% higher, due to a combination of delayed reporting of deaths, and the fact that those who died in nursing homes and private residences are not included in official figures. Although daily deaths in British hospitals appear to have flattened over the last week, there is uncertainty over the real figures, and experts worry the U.K could soon overtake its neighbours. A senior government health adviser has [warned](https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-uk-could-be-worst-affected-country-in-europe-11972251) the U.K. could end up being the “worst affected country in Europe,” while a British former WHO official has [questioned](https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2020/04/17/world/europe/ap-eu-virus-outbreak-britain.html) the “system errors” that “led us to have probably the highest death rates in Europe.”

 Chinese hospitals overflowing with COVID-19 patients a few weeks ago now have empty beds. Trials of experimental drugs are having difficulty enrolling enough eligible patients. And the number of new cases reported each day has plummeted the past few weeks. These are some of the startling observations in a [report released on 28 February](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/who-china-joint-mission-on-covid-19-final-report.pdf) from a mission organized by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Chinese government that allowed 13 foreigners to join 12 Chinese scientists on a tour of five cities in China to study the state of the COVID-19 epidemic and the effectiveness of the country’s response. The findings surprised several of the visiting scientists. “I thought there was no way those numbers could be real,” says epidemiologist Tim Eckmanns of the Robert Koch Institute, who was part of the mission. But the report is unequivocal. “China’s bold approach to contain the rapid spread of this new respiratory pathogen has changed the course of a rapidly escalating and deadly epidemic,” it says. “This decline in COVID-19 cases across China is real.” The question now is whether the world can take lessons from China’s apparent success—and whether the massive lockdowns and electronic surveillance measures imposed by an authoritarian government would work in other countries. “When you spend 20, 30 years in this business it’s like, ‘seriously, you’re going to try and change that with those tactics?’” says Bruce Aylward, a Canadian WHO epidemiologist who led the international team and briefed journalists about its findings in Beijing and Geneva last week. “Hundreds of thousands of people in China did not get COVID-19 because of this aggressive response.”

Exactly a month after Donald Trump tweeted that the US had the corona virus outbreak “very much under control”, the World Health Organization delivered [a stark and jarring reality check](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/24/us-may-become-centre-of-coronavirus-pandemic-who-says): America faces being the centre of a pandemic that has paralysed much of the world. Corona virus has raced across the American continent with the aid of [a chronic lack of preparation](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/24/trump-cuts-undermine-coronavirus-containment-cdc-watchdog-report), deep-rooted dysfunction in the US healthcare system, and a president who has repeatedly dismissed the crisis and is now looking to scale back containment efforts in favour of restarting economic activity.

More than 46,000 people in the US have been diagnosed with Covid-19 and nearly 600 have died. On Monday, for the first time, more than 100 people in the US died in a single day. The sharp acceleration in cases – just two weeks ago the official number was less than 2,000 – has led to the WHO warning that the US is overtaking countries such as Italy as the global hotspot for the virus. The true scale of infection in the US is almost certainly far worse; with a severe lack of testing having stymied efforts to contain Covid-19 once it emerged near Seattle. Trump initially referred to media coverage of the outbreak as a “hoax” before banning travel from China, where the virus originated, and claiming it had been nearly vanquished on US soil. But the US response has been hobbled by the administration’s rejection of standard WHO testing kits, instead opting to develop its own, which turned out to be faulty. The Trump administration previously dismantled a federal team working on pandemics and cut back a Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) group based in China tasked with tracking new threats such as Covid-19.