OFOBRUKUETA OGHENENYEROVWO

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Foreign Policies of the Great Powers - IRD 402

The Great Powers and the War Against COVID-19

COVID-19 is the name given by the World Health Organization (WHO) on February 11, 2020 for the disease caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. It started in Wuhan, China in late 2019 and has since spread worldwide. COVID-19 is an acronym that stands for coronavirus disease of 2019 (Doyle, 2020). The war on COVID-19 has also shown that nation-states are still the most legitimate entities to provide the most effective remedies to the virus plague. Boosting different economic sectors by injecting great sums of money, adopting strict lockdowns, locking people in their homes, asking them to respect the social distancing, treating them in well-equipped hospitals and tracing the physical movements of those who are infected by the virus could not have been handled by any authority but states. the years ahead will likely see the geopolitical rivalry between the U.S. and China intensify. This power competition will likely transpire within a post-liberal international order in which neither the U.S. will continue to act as the chief provider of global public goods nor China will acquiesce in the role of norm-taker. The U.S. under President Donald Trump's presidency has already begun questioning the liberal international order from within. No matter if Trump is reelected in November, the isolationist and nationalist tendencies within American society will continue. Also, China under President Xi Jinping has already adopted a more assertive and claimant role in international politics, and China has changed its course from the "bide your time and hide your capabilities" dictum of earlier times (Oğuzlu, 2020).

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. It is digging in to fight to protect its image and benefit economically from the crisis. Shunning global leadership, Washington and Beijing have been bashing each other over who owns the dreadful coronavirus. Rather than lead the world in stopping Covid-19 and the looming recession, these two have chosen to skirmish in a quarrel which says they are happy to compete rather than cooperate (Watson, 2020). The United States nationally is in the acceleration phase of the pandemic. As 50 states have reported cases of COVID-19 to CDC. The United States, now approaching 650,000 infections, is the new epicenter of the outbreak.

France had the continent’s first confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus, but the French government failed for weeks to take decisive action to impose strict social distancing measures or promote large-scale testing. In an address to the nation on March 16th, French President Macron employed military metaphors to describe the battle against coronavirus. He declared: “We are at war … the enemy is there - invisible, elusive - and it is advancing.” (Ward, 2020).

on 7th of April BBC news reported that 10,238 people died from the virus since 1 March. In the past 24 hours, 607 deaths have been recorded in hospitals and a further 820 deaths were recorded in nursing homes. France has been under lockdown since 15 March, with fines for violations (BBC News). All establishments throughout France remain closed except for grocery stores, gas stations, and pharmacies. The police are enforcing the lockdown, with patrols as well as the use of surveillance drones. The lockdown order has been extended until at least April 15th. Before the coronavirus public health crisis, France had 5,000 intensive care units with ventilators, and has since had to increase that number to 8,000. Authorities say the healthcare system can further boost capacity if need be (Cohen, 2020).

On March 28, most regions of Russia introduced ‘Recommended Restrictive Measures’ due to the situation with coronavirus. Cafes and catering establishments, shopping and leisure centers, cinemas and cultural institutions were closed. In some regions, a ban on visiting religious institutions came into force and public transport stopped working. President Putin announced the week of 28th of March to 5th of April as paid, non-working week while asking citizens to keep self-isolation regime and stay at home. Later he extended quarantine till the end of the month (30th April). The total confirmed cases in Russia as at April 12th is 18,328, with 148 deaths. Most of the cases are in the Moscow region with 11,568, St. Petersburg with 557 and the Komi republic in Russia’s Northwest with 208. The government of the Russian Federation, in order to prevent the spread of a new coronavirus infection in Russia, temporarily limited the entry into the Russian Federation of foreign citizens and people without Russian citizenship, including those arriving from the territory of Belarus, as well as citizens of Belarus, from March 18. The restriction will be valid until May 1, 2020. On 27th of March, Russia suspended all charter and regular international passenger flights from and to any country. There were only export flights that were arranged by the government to evacuate Russians who could not return from other countries.

While much of the rest of the world grapples with the virus, China appears to have overcome the worst of it. On Friday, it reported 26 new confirmed cases, the lowest daily total in two weeks. Overall China has reported more than 3,000 deaths and 80,000 infections from the coronavirus. Even as Chinese authorities over the past month have pushed to restart the economy, fears of new infections have forced some parts of the country to enact new restrictions. China has closed its borders to almost all foreigners arriving from abroad and limited international flights (Teslova, 2020).

Military action taken against COVID-19 by the Great Powers

Given that militaries often operate in close quarters and share living spaces, they are a hotspot for coronavirus infections. With armed forces being deployed across Europe to patrol streets in lockdown, disinfect public spaces and support border control, it is vital that transmission of the virus is minimized. From mass-testing to self-isolation of those infected, here's how armed forces across Europe are tackling coronavirus. Military forces across Europe have scaled back operations and imposed stricter rules on personnel to try to stem the spread of the coronavirus among staff who often live and work in close quarters, making them more vulnerable to infection. Preventing the virus’ proliferation among the military is important both for national security and because specialist army, navy and air force units are being drafted in to help governments tackle the virus in many countries.

Germany mobilized 15,000 soldiers to help local authorities tackle the crisis, for example, while Poland activated thousands of troops to patrol streets under lockdown, disinfect hospitals and support border control, its defense ministry said. Events aboard the U.S. aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt have highlighted the risk of the disease spreading rapidly among personnel. The nuclear-powered vessel with 5,000 crew is now docked in Guam, a U.S. territory, so everyone can be tested. The U.S. Navy has relieved the ship’s captain of his command after he wrote a letter flagging concerns about a lack of proper measures to contain the highly infectious disease. In France, Italy and Spain, among the nations hardest hit by the outbreak, military operations have been curtailed or in some cases suspended. Germany has changed rules, with no roll-calls or mustering of troops and the quarantining of some staff, while Turkish armed forces have imposed social distancing in mess rooms and dormitories, among other measures. Turkey said it was limiting troop movements in Syria as cases of the coronavirus jumped (Baker, 2020).

How COVID-19 is affecting the Economy of the Great Powers

There is no doubt that April will be the most disastrous month in the Russian economy in modern history. According to the consulting company Finexpertiza, a week of self-isolation costs Russian businesses Rs.123.3 billion rubles. A full month of temporary closures will cost private sector businesses Rs.530 billion rubles. One months of self-isolation in April will cost Russia 1.5% – 2% of annual GDP. Business losses in terms of unrealized income are estimated at Rs.917 billion a week and Rs5.5 trillion a month, which is 5% of GDP (Briefing, 2020) .

The Paris-based Observatoire français des conjonctures économiques (OFCE) released a report estimating that during the two months, between 17 March, the beginning of the Covid-19 confinement measures, and 11 May, the expected end, GDP in France will have shrunk by 32 per cent (rfi,2020).

As U.S. officials rush to contain the spread of disease, the federal government is also grappling with the dramatic—and unprecedented—toll the epidemic has had on the economy. In four weeks, 22 million Americans have filed for unemployment benefits. Technical glitches have prevented millions of Americans from receiving their stimulus checks from the U.S. Department of the Treasury. And the Small Business Administration, which supports U.S. entrepreneurs with loans and funding, has run out of money for its Paycheck Protection Program. Therefore, it is evident that coronavirus (COVID-19) has triggered a deeper recession than that of the 2008-2009 Global Financial Crisis (COVID-19’s historic economic impact, in the U.S. and abroad, 2020).

The UK is expected to suffer a 35% drop in economic output as a result of the coronavirus lockdown measures, according to forecasts by the Office for Budgetary Responsibility (OBR) published on 14 April. The OBR expects the UK economy to slump by 35% between March and June before recovering in the last six months of 2020, although it would still contract by 12.8% for the year as a whole. Unemployment is set to increase by more than 2 million to 10% in the second quarter, before gradually falling (Fox, 2020).

China’s economy shrank 6.8% in the first three months of 2020, the country’s first such contraction on record and a stark sign of the financial impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

The news came as Chinese authorities revised the death toll in Wuhan, the hardest-hit city and where the virus first emerged, up by 50%, to 3,869 from 2,579. The economic contraction, reported by China’s National Bureau of Statistics came after months of paralysis as the country went into lockdown to contain the virus, which emerged in central Hubei province in December. It has infected more than 2 million people globally and killed more than 140,000 (Kuo, 2020).

In conclusion, the great powers are fighting what president Donald Trump of United States has severely referred to as ‘an invisible enemy’. There is uncertainty about how the great powers will handle the state of unrest and increase in death toll caused by the virus because unlike other wars, the great powers are fighting an invisible enemy with the ability to mutate. Even as the virus continues to cripple the economy of each country, the government is challenged with the responsibility of securing the lives of its citizens, maintain economic stability and finding a cure to end the pandemic. China's economy contracted in the first quarter of 2020,the first time since records began in 1992. More than 5 million Americans filed for unemployment last week, bringing total US jobless claims to 22 million over a four-week period. Also, The International Monetary Fund says Asian economies will see zero growth for the first time in 60 years and the UK's Office for Budgetary Responsibility has warned the economy could shrink by 35% with 2 million job losses.

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