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IRD 402: FOREIGN POLICY OF THE GREAT POWERS

ASSIGNMENT

The Great Powers and the War against COVID-19

Introduction

On Dec. 31, 2019, Chinese authorities alerted the World Health Organization of pneumonia cases in Wuhan City, Hubei province, China, with an unknown cause. What started as a mystery disease was first referred to as 2019-nCoV and then named COVID-19. COVID-19 is a zoonotic virus. From phylogenetics analyses undertaken with available full genome sequences, bats appear to be the reservoir of COVID-19 virus, but the intermediate host has not yet been identified. However, three important areas of work are already underway in China to inform our understanding of the zoonotic origin of this outbreak. These include early investigations of cases with symptom onset in Wuhan throughout December 2019; environmental sampling from the Huanan Wholesale Seafood Market and other area markets, and the collection of detailed records on the source and type of wildlife species sold at the Huanan market and the destination of those animals after the market was closed.

COVID-19 is transmitted via droplets and vomits during close unprotected contact between an infector and infectee. Airborne spread has not been reported for COVID-19 and it is not believed to be a major driver of transmission based on available evidence; however, it can be envisaged if certain aerosol-generating procedures are conducted in health care facilities. Faecal shedding has been demonstrated from some patients, and viable virus has been identified in a limited number of case reports. However, the faecal-oral route does not appear

to be a driver of COVID-19 transmission; its role and significance for COVID-19 remains to be determined. Symptoms of COVID-19 are non-specific and the disease presentation can range from no symptoms (asymptomatic) to severe pneumonia and death. As of 20 February 2020 and 12 based on 55924 laboratory confirmed cases, typical signs and symptoms include: fever (87.9%), dry cough (67.7%), fatigue (38.1%), sputum production (33.4%), shortness of breath (18.6%), sore throat (13.9%), headache (13.6%), myalgia or arthralgia (14.8%), chills (11.4%), nausea or vomiting (5.0%), nasal congestion (4.8%), diarrhea (3.7%), and hemoptysis (0.9%), and conjunctival congestion (0.8%). People with COVID-19 generally develop signs and symptoms, including mild respiratory symptoms and fever, on an average of 5-6 days after infection (mean incubation period 5-6 days, range 1-14 days).

As of 20 February 2020, a cumulative total of 75,465 COVID-19 cases were reported in China. Reported cases are based on the National Reporting System (NRS) between the 6 National and Provincial Health Commissions. The NRS issues daily reports of newly recorded confirmed cases, deaths, suspected cases, and contacts. A daily report is provided by each province at 0300hr in which they report cases from the previous day.

Epicenter of the Virus Outbreak

The novel corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak was first reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) in late December as a cluster of pneumonia with unknown aetiology in the city of Wuhan. The city became the epicentre of the outbreak in China and was locked down for months. Residents and travellers lived under a quarantine that included strict measures like limitations on the number of times per week that a residence could be left.

Although 32 new cases were confirmed in the country on Tuesday, it was the first day since January that China reported no new deaths . Wuhan is located in the central Chinese province

of Hubei. Hubei has publicly reported 67,803 confirmed cases and 3212 deaths of patients with COVID-19, though US intelligence officials have argued that China has understated the spread and damage of the virus.

The Chinese government itself does not, however, intend to declare victory over the virus quite yet. “In order to deeply implement the spirit of General Secretary Xi Jinping ’s important instructions...the Central Guiding Group once again held a meeting to study the deployment of measures after the release of control of departures from the Han Channel on April 8, and urged the implementation of various measures for epidemic prevention and control. The Central Guiding Group traveled to stations, shopping malls, supermarkets, restaurants, etc. to investigate epidemic prevention and control,” authors of a statement on Xinhuanet wrote.

As several countries cautiously relax social distancing, public health officials will now be able to observe the impact of these policies as well as the course the pandemic takes once they’ve been lifted.

The Conspiracy theories

The conspiracy theories are falsely claiming that the coronavirus pandemic is an elaborate hoax. The number of coronavirus infections and deaths continues to rise at an alarming rate, reminding us that this crisis is far from over. In response, the global scientific community has thrown itself at the problem and research is unfolding at an unprecedented rate.

At the same time, the pandemic has been accompanied by disinformation, half-truths and conspiracy theories that have spread virally through social networks. This damages society in a variety of ways. For example, the myth that COVID-19 is less dangerous than the seasonal

flu was deployed by US president Donald Trump as justification for delaying mitigation policies. The recent downgrading of COVID-19 death projections, which reveal the success of social-distancing policies, has been falsely used to justify premature relaxing of social distancing measures.

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, 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 coronavirus 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 according to their new policy). Some people have taken this conspiracy theory so seriously that it led to people setting 5G towers in the UK on fire and threatening broadband engineers.

The conspiracy theory has begun to penetrate mainstream society. Among other celebrities, UK TV personality Eamonn Holmes and US actor Woody Harrelson have given fuel to the idea. For example, the introduction of 5G in 2019 coincided with the origin of COVID-19 and hence is interpreted to be causally related. But by that logic, other factors that were introduced in 2019 could also be interpreted as a possible cause of COVID-19. Correlation does not equal causation. The 5G conspiracy theory is also immune to evidence, despite having been debunked extensively. To illustrate, some of the countries worst affected by the pandemic (such as Iran) do not have any 5G technology. Some claim that maps of 5G hot spots match up with COVID-19 outbreaks or think it has something to do with interfering with atmospheric oxygen (or maybe it's a plan to turn humanity into cyborgs, which is also in

there). Some strains combine all of the above, spinning a nonsensical narrative about an effort by Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates to depopulate the planet using vaccines, 5G, and the coronavirus.

Impacts on global health and global economy

As business close to help prevent transmission of COVID-19, financial concerns and job losses are one of the first human impacts of the virus; not knowing how this pandemic will play out also affects our economic, physical and mental well-being; despite this fear, businesses and communities in many regions have shown a more altruistic response in the face of crisis – actions which could help countries preparing for COVID-19.

COVID-19 is in decline in China. There are now more new cases every day in Europe than there were in China at the epidemic's peak and Italy has surpassed it as the country with the most deaths from the virus. It took 67 days to reach the first 100,000 confirmed cases worldwide, 11 days for this to increase to 200,000 and just four to reach 300,000 confirmed cases – a figure now exceeded.

Fort Detrick has been connected to the creation of the virus in his lab which makes people question whether the virus was manmade or natural, but research shows that the new coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is the result of the natural process of evolution rather than a product of laboratory engineering.

Impact on state relations

According to the second meeting held by the World Health organisation, all countries should be prepared for containment as it is expected that further international exportation of cases may appear in any country; including active surveillance, early detection, isolation and case management, contact tracing and prevention of onward spread of 2019-nCoV infection, and to share full data with WHO. Countries are reminded that they are legally required to share information with WHO under the IHR.

Any detection of 2019-nCoV in an animal (including information about the species, diagnostic tests, and relevant epidemiological information) should be reported to the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) as an emerging disease.

Countries should place particular emphasis on reducing human infection, prevention of secondary transmission and international spread, and contributing to the international response through multi-sectoral communication and collaboration and active participation in increasing knowledge on the virus and the disease, as well as advancing research.

The Committee does not recommend any travel or trade restriction based on the current information available. Countries must inform WHO about travel measures taken, as required by the IHR. Countries are cautioned against actions that promote stigma or discrimination, in line with the principles of Article 3 of the IHR.

The Committee asked the Director-General to provide further advice on these matters and, if necessary, to make new case-by-case recommendations, in view of this rapidly evolving situation.

Stringent measures have been put in place by various countries including the affected and not affected as trade, travels and direct contact has been restricted in order to curb the spread of

the pandemic bringing states' physical relation to the barest minimum. However, the media has been resourceful such as social media and news networks.

Great Powers and Covid-19

The great powers in their rivalry instrumentalise everything, so it was only to be expected that they would instrumentalise the coronavirus too. Though, perhaps, not how far they would take this: the suggestion by the spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry that the US army is somehow to blame is preposterous, and unworthy of China – and the Chinese Ambassador to the US has actually said as much. The same goes for similar Russian disinformation campaigns (alternatively blaming the US, Europe, and China), and for Trump pretending it was all just a Democrat hoax. Trump's initial insistence on identifying corona as a Chinese virus was not helpful either. Viruses do not have a nationality; governments do.

The balance of power on those governments will depend whether the corona crisis will change the balance between the great powers. This is a relative matter: the virus affects everybody, but will it have more impact on some than on others? Those who attach more importance to their image of omnipotence than to the facts put their country at risk. The later one acts, the more people die, the greater the economic and societal disruption, and the slower the recovery. Vladimir Putin, instead of taking early measures, sent aid to Italy (in military aircraft marked "from Russia with love"; one assumes that Russian forces in Syria and Ukraine use other markings). As a result, Russia may be hit hard, and it has but limited means to spend on recovery (and low energy prices will limit them even further). Nevertheless, it is hard to imagine a change of political system in Russia. In any case, Russia already is the weakest of the great powers, so if it lags further behind the impact on the balance of power will be limited. In a positive twist, a weakened Russia might seek to normalise its relations with the European Union, in order to avoid having to become truly

subservient to China. If the EU manages its own recovery effectively, it might actually leverage that to stimulate such a move, and engage Russia from a position of strength. But this scenario is probably overoptimistic.

China is doing its utmost to prove that it has overcome the crisis. This will not just be a repeat of the 2008 financial crisis, when China was able to take advantage of the lack of investment from US and EU sources. The question is whether in the medium term all three powers recover more or less to the same extent and at the same pace. The US, where Trump belatedly awoke to the seriousness of the threat, is obviously at great risk. Fortunately, the US can mobilise massive means for recovery. So can the EU; now indeed the EU must prove that it can do better than after the 2008 financial crisis and protect the livelihood of its citizens rather than just the banks.

After the 2016 British vote for Brexit, leaders of all colours finally discovered the need for a social Europe – and then forgot about it again. The EU cannot afford to make this mistake twice: strong Keynesian policies must create an economically vibrant and socially just Union. (How the UK will fare, on its own now and under a Prime Minister who unfortunately seems to have taken his cue from Trump, is another question). If one power falls behind the other two, it will lose global markets and influence to the benefit of the others. But, paradoxically, if one really collapses, that risks pulling down the others as well, so to some extent all three have an interest in a minimal recovery of the others (though not all of their leaders may see it as such).

At the same time, the corona crisis will accelerate US and even EU action, which they were envisaging already, to reduce the interdependence with China (and others) by reviewing the supply chains in critical sectors. Chinese attempts to use the crisis to increase their presence in Europe and America (provided Beijing can mobilise the means in view of its undoubtedly

underreported domestic problems) will be viewed with a lot more suspicion this time. Nevertheless, this is about reorganizing globalisation, not undoing it – at basis, deep economic interdependence will remain.

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