

FPRC Journal

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Focus : **COVID-19**

Impact on World Geo-politics and Economy

Foreign Policy Research Centre

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School of Social Sciences | **University of Waikato, Hamilton , New Zealand****Response to Questionnaire****1. Misplaced priorities - Expenditure on Armament vs. Public Health Care have been exposed in the context of COVID-19 pandemic. Do you agree?**

This question reminds one of the classic guns versus butter opportunity cost relationship whereby producing more guns means producing less butter. A brief analysis of the global figures on military and healthcare spending, however, shows that both are increasing and that the latter far exceeds the former. According to SIPRI figures published this year, total global military expenditure was US\$1917 billion in 2019, up by 3.6% from 2018 (the largest annual growth since 2010). Although global spending on health only increased by 1.29% from 2016 to 2017 this still led to total spending of US\$7.8 trillion in 2017 (the figures come from a WHO report released in 2019). According to Deloitte, global spending on health is projected to rise by 5% over the period 2019-2023. In the case of New Zealand, the 2020/21 budget provides NZ\$20.27 billion for Vote Health and NZ\$1.77 billion for defence. In announcing the latter, the Defence Minister recognised the NZ Defence Force's current involvement in the national response to COVID-19 so there is not necessarily a clear dichotomy.

2. Do you believe the efficacy of International Organisations--UN and WHO - is at stake in the light of COVID-19?

Although the efficacy of such international organisations may not (yet) be at stake in the light of COVID-19, their reputations in many cases are. This is no more so than in the case of the UN's WHO which is seen as having been slow to respond to the emergence of the disease in China and apparently politicised in the delay in declaring COVID-19 a pandemic. Regional organisations have also suffered reputational damage of course. The EU was criticised, for example, for its failure to come up with a financial response to the economic impact of COVID-19 and then for the effects of the massive recovery fund on the debt burden of already heavily indebted EU member states. Closer to home, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) demonstrated some of its familiar problems concerning the taking of coordinated action, the funding of agreed initiatives (in this case the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund), and preferences by states to take measures within their own national control first and foremost without always taking into consideration their neighbours. ASEAN, of course, is not alone in this.

3. COVID-19 and the Environment: Is there a Relationship? Issues that deserve urgent attention.

There is undoubtedly a relationship. First, it appears to be the case that climate change and population growth is creating situations whereby there is increased animal-human interaction which is allowing the transmission of infectious diseases such as COVID-19. Secondly, and this has been probably the only positive to result from the pandemic, many countries have witnessed a reduction in pollution due to a decrease in industrial production, car usage, and international travel. This, in turn, has had a beneficial impact on many people's health and given wildlife some respite.

4. How do you visualise the shape of Future World Geo-Politics?

-Bipolar or Multipolar ; Impact of US –China rivalry.

Views on the impact of COVID-19 on future geopolitics fall into two camps: it changes everything or it heightens or intensifies ongoing developments. The America IR scholar, James Rosenau, when commenting on how he knew that the post-Cold War world was very different was when he noticed that the number of things he placed in his anomalies file was growing. A survey of news articles in the first months of the virus seemed to suggest that normal international politics had more or less stopped. Then, slowly, familiar patterns of behaviour began to re-emerge and even accelerate. Nowhere was this more apparent than with regard to China's renewed testing of the limits of what it could get away with whether in terms of territorial disputes in the South and East China seas, the Sino-Indian border, or with regard to Taiwan's security and Hong Kong's special status. The response by the US – both rhetorically and in practical terms – has been robust. When you add in each state's attempt to control the narrative over the origins of COVID-19 and the responses to it, then increased Sino-US rivalry and competition has been the major geopolitical movement thus far. Not only has the US pushed back against China, there has been greater cooperation amongst like-minded states concerned about issues such as Huawei's role in national telecommunication networks and cyber attacks thought to emanate from the PRC and more assertive behaviour in the maritime domain. This cooperation has been both multilateral (the Quad, Quad + and the Five Eyes), and bilateral (arguably the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement between Australia and India can be seen in this light). Given that China has sought to strengthen its relationships with traditional partners and garner support and loyalty from smaller and/or weaker countries in Asia and elsewhere, it is not unimaginable to see the world dividing along a China-US axis with edifices not dissimilar to elements of the Cold War. Hopes that the world may become more multipolar and that there may be increased space for middle powers appear unlikely to be realised with bipolarity predominating.

5. Do you see enhanced role for India in the post-COVID-19 World Order?

Following on from the previous question, if India continues to strengthen its ties with the US and other like-minded states then it can play an enhanced role in maintaining the current rules-based order which is under growing pressure from China and other revisionist challengers. From an outsider's perspective, India's current pre-occupations with responding to the effects of COVID-19, the predicted economic downturn, frictions with Nepal and Pakistan and, especially, China's seizing of territory in Ladakh suggest that it may not have the bandwidth to pursue an expanded global role.

16) Dr Raj Verma

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Reply to Questionnaire

1. Misplaced priorities - Expenditure on Armament vs Public Health Care have been exposed in the context of COVID-19 pandemic. Do you agree?

I think the question is regarding India. That being the case, India has (like all countries) have to strike a balance. In normal circumstances, India (and other countries) would spend more on health care when confronted by an epidemic/pandemic. But when the territorial integrity and sovereignty is challenged