Covid-19 Pandemic and the Global Order: Interrogating International Relations and Security Studies

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Abstract

Globalization had ushered in, as the proponents and theorists argue, the concept of 'one-worldness'-the notion of viewing the Earth as a single space, connected, in real time, through advanced information and communications technology. The world had virtually become a; global village'(Mc Luhan). A vexed question remained that whether IR had really witnessed the 'truly global moment'. Of late, COVID-19 has become a buzzword, created a global stir and ushered in a global medical emergency in the form of a global pandemic, that has impacted most of the countries across the globe-humanity as a whole seems to be under a severe existential threat. Covid pandemic seems to have pressed a global 'Reset' button. How the discipline of IR and security studies will interrogate the crisis, remains a vexed question. Covid seems to have implications for both traditional and non-traditional security. COVID-19 is showing us the link between human and planetary health . COVID has threatened the developed parts of the globe and is poised menacingly for the Global South.

The paper attempts to trace the impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic on IR and Security studies.

Keywords: *Pandemic, Global Reset, Global Moment, Human Security*

Globalization had ushered in, as the proponents and theorists argue, the concept of 'one-worldness'-the notion of viewing the Earth as a single space, connected, in real time, through advanced information and communications technology. The world had virtually become a global village'(Mc Luhan). Kishore Mahbubani argued through his logic of the one-world that there was an extreme possibility of civilizational convergence, especially across Asia and the West. International Relations had been elevated to the level of global politics, as global problems, issues and challenges were emerging, that required global solutions, with states working in tandem, in a spirit of 'complex interdependence'.

Environmental challenges, human rights, gender issues, global trade, global terrorism had emerged as issues that affected the world as a whole and could emerge as factors determining global security. The search for comprehensiveness in the realm of security, provoked theorists like Barry Buzan, Ole Waever etc to argue for emergent notions of non-traditional security, Human Security. But emergence of Global Terrorism and the scourges of the same, severely challenged the notion of 'security' of the states across the globe. **Another vexed question remained that whether IR had really witnessed the 'truly global moment'.** The state

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has again grabbed the centrestage in tackling the Covid endemic-the primacy of the state has emerged in this Covid-affected global order.

Of late, COVID-19 has become a buzzword, created a global stir and ushered in a global medical emergency in the form of a global pandemic, that has impacted most of the countries across the globe-humanity as a whole seems to be under a severe existential threat. Covid pandemic seems to have pressed a **global 'Reset'** button, thereby stimulating a process wherein policy makers across the globe are virtually working in tandem to combat the crisis and attempting to formulate alternative socio-economic policies that can perform in a futuristic post-Covid world.

Covid has maintained the renowned North-South global divide but there is perhaps a role reversal this time around; parts of the global North have been more severly affected compared to the global South although potency of futuristic spread and escalation threaten the latter due to patterns of underdevelopment, higher population density and comparatively inferior public health management systems. Covid is genealogically speaking a public health crisis and has potentially fatal demographic impact with secondary implications for the economy, and society at large. Lockdowns and social distancing as immediate containment measures have the potential for containing rapid spread of the pandemic but have a disastrous side-effect of slowing down the economy and can have psychological effects on the population who are compelled to maintain social distancing due to lockdown.

Covid-19 is threatening global food, health and human security, and related economic insecurity can further stimulate crisis of political and military security cutting across the globe. The world is entering a volatile and unstable new phase. Scientists are increasingly confident that the COVID-19 pandemic threat will persist, possibly for years. The global economy is headed for an economic nose dive that could rival, even exceed, the Great Depression. With supply chains fragmenting, food supplies coming under strain, and prices rising, the lights are flashing red. Not only will this translate into rising unemployment and food insecurity, but it could quickly escalate into political unrest, violence, and conflict.

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War zones can witness increased **military violence**, resource scarcity can fuel ethnic violence. The Global South can be more vulnerable in this respect. Human Security concerns can loom large with the **global economic meltdown** which can fuel job losses, lack of employment. Liquidity crunch has hit the banking sectors though the Central banks (like RBI in India) are attempting to instil measures to keep the system afloat. The Global Trade sector has taken a beating with borders closed during lockdown and will take quite a period to revive. In the wake of more protectionism and decaying supply chains, the global depression will be longer and more painful.

Health security concerns seem meanacingly threatening-public health sector across countries have bore the brunt of tackling the Covid pandemic. It will take quite a time to restore normalcy in public access to traditional healthcare and medical facilities. At the very least, the risks of violence will rise in the most vulnerable countries and cities. Keen not to let a good crisis go to waste, armed groups, terrorists and organized criminals are already exploiting the pandemic. They will find further opportunities - including in cyberspace - once bailout packages begin to flow. **Violence against women and human rights abuses** have already spiked – both of which are harbingers of other forms of violence. This is set to intensify as at least 1.5 billion children and young people are sent home from their schools and universities. Many will be angry as they lose opportunities and a minority will convert this anger toward more dangerous purposes.

The lack of international cooperation to tackle a global pandemic is not helping. The UN Secretary-General has called for a global ceasefire, reductions in sexual and domestic violence, and proposed a plan to tackle the devastating consequences of the crisis. But major powers have been slow to rally in support. The Security Council didn't meet to discuss COVID-19 until the 100th day of the pandemic, and then it failed to come up with any meaningful way out of its crippling paralysis. The G20 and G7 have yet to set out a comprehensive plan toward response and recovery. Calls for debt relief and cash injections for lower-income countries from the World Bank and IMF are critical, but need to be rapidly scaled-up. Trade restrictions can trigger shortages and inflate the prices of food items abruptly. Similarly, travel restrictions, suspended flight operations, border closures and labour shortages can also disrupt our food supply chains.

Considering food supply chains as an essential sector of economy and guaranteeing movement of essential workers and food – with necessary precautions- as many Member States have

done, will ensure stability in the supply. We should also protect Small and Medium Enterprises in the food sector including retailers who are highly vulnerable to economic shocks. These measures would help us preserve consumer trust in the availability of food at affordable price, which is key to stability in these difficult times.Job losses could be worse than those following the 2008 financial crisis.

The past weeks have seen the world waking up to the scale of the coming economic crisis. Global banks and investment firms are bracing themselves. The real economy is also under unprecedented strain with massive numbers of small and medium-sized businesses closing down. In the process, joblessness is rising to record levels - in the hundreds of millions - and trillions of dollars of growth are being shaved off the global economy. A similar awakening is now needed to the seriousness of emerging security threats, accompanied by a willingness to take action that is as bold as the huge cash injections being made available in loans, grants and debt forgiveness by the G20, IMF and World Bank. The virus has resulted in mass unemployment and further threatens millions of jobs. Given the intrinsic link between poverty and food security, we must prioritise social protection measures which will safeguard the most vulnerable, including those working in the informal economy; and women who are also disproportionately affected.

The Global South-Impact of COVID

COVID-19 will hit the most vulnerable populations hardest. Prior to the spread of coronavirus, there were: 820 million people suffering from hunger; 2 billion people malnourished; and 700 million people lived below the poverty line. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) predicted that 100 million people would be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2020. These numbers are set to proliferate if urgent multilateral action is not taken now.

The Global South faces a very difficult choice as it is nearly impossible to socially distance and get food(work on a daily basis and earn bread). Then there is the acute problem of the migrant labourers. Without a social safety net, the lockdown has increased their misery by leaps and bounds as they are facing joblessness and many a migrant labourer are finding it extremely difficult to return to their native places. The pandemic has slowed international trade even further and has virtually shut down domestic commerce as well in most of the poor countries. Without a proper fiscal stimulus package managed by respective governments , the plight and misery of idle workers therein is incrementing daily. Many countries of the Global

South are unable to replicate measures adopted by their wealthier counterparts and are counting on warm weather to contain the contagion at their borders. The worst of the financial fallout is hitting the warmer nations of the Global South. A slightly favourable climatic condition is unable to act as a balancer against unfavourable factors like, population density, inadequate public health management systems, poverty and underdevelopment (in variable patterns) etc.

The COVID-19 pandemic is revealing the fault lines in every country, not just those already struggling with conflict, violence and fragility. Through the Sustainable Development Goals, every country in the world promised its people that they would live free from fear and that they would deliver significant reductions in all forms of violence. We now all fear for our futures but must take the choice to use this decade to put humanity back on a peaceful, healthy and sustainable path.

Impact On Globalization

History has witnessed that despite epidemics being undeterred by borders and demanding greater global cooperation for their eradication, distrust and skepticism have invariably characterized the international system during such times.(Sanchari Ghosh, The Geopolitics) The pandemic is providing legitimacy to the national restrictions on global trade and companies are realizing the risk of relying on the complex global supply chains. In other words, the travel bans and imposed restrictions are making the economy much narrower and nationalistic. (Sanchari Ghosh, The Geopolitics) And if the present momentum of Covid-19 continues to persist, globalization would take a backseat.Neoliberal economic globalisation will have taken a major beating in the wake of the pandemic. Economists are warning of a global recession. Even as the virus is pushing back the 'successes' of neoliberal globalisation, globalisation's political counterpart is found wanting in dealing with the situation. The first instinct of every major economy was to close borders, look inwards and localise. The pre-existing structural weakness of the global order and the COVID-19 shock will further feed states' protectionist tendencies fueled by hypernationalism. A more inclusive global political and economic order is unlikely any time soon, if ever. Instead, as former National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon warns, "we are headed for a poorer, meaner, and smaller world."

The ability of big corporations to dictate the production, stocks, supply chains and backup plans will be limited by increased state intervention to avoid unpredictable supply sources, avoid

geopolitically sensitive zones, and national demands for emergency reserves. The profits of big corporations will reduce, and the demand for stability will increase.

Some would gladly argue all this could potentially mean a retreat from hyperglobalisation and its attendant flaws. However, the assumption that COVID-19 will bring about a more balanced and inclusive form of economic and political globalisation is perhaps misplaced. State intervention in economic matters and protectionism are the easy way out, and that's precisely what states will do once the crisis is over. It would be return of the 'Licence Raj' through the backdoor, not a push for inclusive and responsible globalisation with its associated political benefits.

Not all analysts, however, are pessimistic with regard to the prospects of globalization. The crux of their arguments is that the globalization process is so deeply entrenched that a mere virus cannot undo the years of interconnectedness that the world has gotten used to. (Sanchari Ghosh, The Geopolitics) In addition to the economic component, globalization also has a socio-cultural component and transnational networks in science, health, and entertainment aided by the rapid rise of digital connectivity cannot be quarantined.(Sanchari Ghosh, The Geopolitics) Just as the disease spread at a whirlwind pace due to the unprecedented levels of physical interconnectivity, experts are hopeful that its cure will also come in the same manner, i.e. through collective action based on information sharing among states with a greater role of global governance. Hopes have been placed on international agencies to lead the battle against the disease. G20, for instance, pledged 5 trillion USD to the global economy as an attempt to forge a 'united front' against the pandemic. However, such efforts have been sporadic and clearly lacking in intent to form a truly global alliance.(Sanchari Ghosh, The Geopolitics)

A new world order?

The rampant spread of COVID-19 is also a failure of the contemporary world order and its institutions. The contemporary global order, whatever remains of the institutions created by the victors of World War II, was a hegemonic exercise meant to deal with isolated political and military crises and not serve humanity at large will fundamentally transform the world as we know it: the world order, its balance of power, traditional conceptions of national security, and the future of globalisation. The lethal combination of an interconnected world and a deadly virus without a cure is taking humanity into uncharted waters. When we emerge from the lockdown, we must be ready to confront new political and social realities.

Another major theme to emerge from the different analyses of the crisis is that it would not fundamentally change the global economic directions, instead, it would only accelerate the already existing trend of moving away from a US-centric globalization to China-centric one.(Sanchari Ghosh, The Geopolitics) Trump led USA's unpreparedness to lead a global response has dealt a body blow to its carefully crafted image of a global order not just militarily but also as a provider of global public goods. The possibility of China stepping in and filling the vacuum of global leadership has raised the talks of an imminent reshaping of global order.(Sanchari Ghosh, The Geopolitics)

Likewise, the Covid-19 outbreak is a tipping point.It has come at a point when all analysts of foreign policy were confident of the American power to secure its citizens. The global war on terror showed us what globalisation and liberal democracy can do when it is armed up to teeth. The technological developments on the 21st century inter alia achieved a dramatic shrinking of the world – a process that is called globalisation. The two institutions that spearheaded this – the World Bank and the IMF are in more than one way, US led. These institutions have also influenced the global economic development since the cold war. While the US has considerably benefitted out of this, what has often been overlooked is how many other countries have benefitted. China, is unmistakeably one. (Happymon Jacob, The Hindu)

Geopolitical Rivalry among the Major Powers and the China Factor

Will geopolitical contestation increase in the wake of the pandemic? China is already making headlines as a 'virus creation and dissemination centre", accusations of instituting a sort of a biological warfare with Chinese antecedants are also grabbing headlines.

COVID-19 is putting hard security threats among nations back into the spotlight. The **geopolitical rivalry between the great powers is likely to worsen a**s the American and Chinese economies become less interdependent. The next tier of major powers poses risks as well. Europe has been hit hard by the virus, once again fraying ties between the Eurozone's stronger and weaker economies. A lot of speculative analysis are on the rampage regarding China's loosening grip on the post-Covid world order.(Aneek Chatterjee, The Diplomatist)

There are many conjectures, of late, over the future of China in international politics and economy after COVID-19. One popular proposition, as aired by statesmen like the U.S. President and reported by the media, and as observed in the social media (supported by a few academics, and somehow believed by the common man), refers to China's loosening grip over international

affairs post COVID-19. In simple words, these persons believe that China will no longer be the powerful voice in international politics as it is today, due to its, what they think, mishandling of the COVID-19 issues.(Aneek Chatterjee, The Diplomatist) Their projections are bolstered by the U.S. stand on China after the outbreak of the coronavirus, which indicates tough measures including strengthening of a trade war where the U.S. would hike tariffs substantially on Chinese goods. China is already under attack from the U.S. for suppressing facts about the coronavirus, and the U.S. would continue to mount pressure on China on this issue through economic and political maneuvering after the pandemic eases somewhat. (Aneek Chatterjee, The Diplomatist)

China's position after COVID-19

Therefore, emotional outbursts notwithstanding, China will not be in a disadvantageous position in global politics and economy after the pandemic. Like other nations, China will have some initial problems due to the slowdown of the global and Chinese economy. But China has the ability to recover more quickly than any other nation, including the U.S. (Aneek Chatterjee, The Diplomatist)

It will be the first crisis in about eighty years where the USA has consciously taken a back seat in coordinating the global response. China has duly intervened by lending a helping hand to Italy, Iran, the Philippines, Spain, Cambodia, and a host of African countries. China stands at a natural advantage as it already happened to be the largest exporter of medical supplies including masks, respirators, and antibiotics and as such, it should not be a surprise that it is trying to turn a health crisis into a geopolitical opportunity. Filling in the role of a global donor can be seen as an attempt on its part to solidify the claim of its 'peaceful rise (or development)'.(Aneek Chatterjee, The Diplomatist)

Apart from the factors outlined above, there are still certain other issues that will favour China after the pandemic. Among these issues, the most important is China's permanent membership of the UN Security Council, which helped China come out of adverse situations in the past, while simultaneously helping the nation influence global decision making. China clout in the WTO also, due to its economic strength. In every other global forum, like the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), or International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), or World Health Organisation (WHO), or G 20 countries, to name a few, China has a strong presence. President Trump of the U.S. has already accused the WHO of favouring China in connection with COVID-19 and stopped American financial assistance to the WHO. This again proves the proposition

that China has the capability, in every global forum like the WHO, to influence decision making. Therefore, it will not be easy to put severe pressures on China politically or in areas of economic diplomacy. China certainly has the ability to overcome these pressures post COVID-19 as it did in the past. There will be some ethical issues, like how and why the virus was allowed to grow and spread! But sooner or later these moral issues will be lost in the face of trade and commercial calculations. (Aneek Chatterjee, The Diplomatist)

Advantage for India

However, a changing global economic order will make many focus on India as a preferred destination for investment. From that perspective, India's eastern states will be critical. They have all four factors of business in abundance: namely, human capital, social capital, natural capital and an improving physical capital. This part is relatively less explored and can be the fulcrum of development of the region in the post-Covid world. While the global economic system is slated to go to a slump, opportunities and challenges for India occur through all avenues. Whether India will be a net winner or loser depends on the sensitivities of the coefficients of the economic variables, the dynamics of the global order, and the "soft power" that the nation can wield in the international domain.

Looking at the Covid crisis through the Theoretical lenses in International Relations

The statist viewpoint of Realism has come to the forefront. *Realism* posits that states are still the main actors in international politics and the situation arising from Covid-19 just reaffirms that point. Citizens of every state are seeking protection against the crisis not from non-state actors, but from their own respective national governments. States have been the drivers, engines of the 'global fight' against Covid. The primacy of the states, state sovereignty, state borders , border controls seem to loom large, although military security dilemma (as championed by Realism) has somewhat taken a backseat and health and demographic security concerns are virtually tormenting statesmen and policymakers alike.

Researchers in IR often takes recourse to the *Constructivist paradigm* to find any alternative explanation of global events, once the Realist research agenda falls short. Constructivists argue that everything in IR is a conscious construction the states and the people who constitute them. If anarchy is created by the states, power politics is a social construction and material interests of states have a covering of ideas and values around them, then Constructivism could possibly provide a realistic explanation of the Covid pandemic as something originating in the Chinese

mindset, getting shape in the Wuhan medical laboratories, then taking the material reality of the global pandemic stimulated frantic efforts of states to fight and contain this health emergency. Here, anarchy could refer to the utter crippling of the global regulatory agencies, in preventing the pandemic to take such a fatal shape. But, the existing theories do not have as yet, as a part of their research agenda, any possible explanations of how the post-Covid global order may take shape.

How to manage a Post-COVID World order?

First, an urgent and clear signal is needed from global institutions and major powers that security and safety are key priorities. The UN Security Council must do everything it can to de-escalate tensions between the US and China. The current batch of non-permanent members and those that will be elected in June bear a heavy responsibility, given deep divisions among the P5. The G20, G7 and NATO – along with the African Union, the EU, BRICS and other regional bodies - must also contribute to deescalating geopolitical tensions and set out strategies to ensure peace and security on the ground. The Security Council should rally to support the Secretary General's call for a global ceasefire.

Second, there must be levels of international solidarity and coordination that are on par with the Second World War. The crisis underlines the importance of ensuring redistribution and especially support for the most vulnerable - not least the unemployed, underemployed and working poor. At the very least, this is about enlightened self-interest. These are often the very same groups that deliver essential health services, maintain food supplies, and keep utilities operating. A global fund for social protection that supports the poorest of countries and a concerted focus on tackling inequality is essential. This is not just a matter of need. Billions of people worlwide are facing joblessness and futuristic starvation scenario.

Third, the international system needs a global insecurity monitoring system to track grievances and signal unrest before they escalate into violence. A shared platform for analyzing conflict risk has long been promised but not delivered. The World Bank and UN have agreed in principle to undertake shared analysis of conflict risks. It is now time for them to draw on external expertise to gain access to the real-time mapping, remote sensing and digital data they need to deliver a comprehensive assessment tool. The monitor can then feed other early-warning systems, especially those for food insecurity and hunger, so that they become more sensitive to triggers such as spiralling unemployment, rising mistrust of government, unrest in

prisons and more.

Fourth, the world needs to commit to massively ramping-up programmes to prevent and respond to violence against women and children. The UN Secretary-General has called for urgent action to protect women and children during the pandemic. The evidence for how to respond to this call is compelling. Indeed, WHO, UNICEF, UN Women, the World Bank and others are already united behind a common set of strategies and are working with governments on their implementation.

One must ensure food equity based on inclusive and efficient food systems. We need to appropriately distribute the abundant food reserves in the international market and prepare for the positive crop forecasts.

We must also leverage all forms of international cooperation, including South-South and North-South Cooperation, to strengthen agriculture systems which underpin food security.

In order to open up market access and e-commerce, the need is to improve access to technology and agricultural finance to key actors in food supply chains such as family farmers, women farmers, and smallholders.

As the entire globe tackles the novel coronavirus, food security and nutrition must be prioritised in both rapid response and longer-term planning.This health crisis should not be allowed to escalate and become a food crisis.

It will take time for the world to reinstate its faith in the interconnectivity and free flow of people, goods, and services across borders. And given the unfolding of the social crumbling and economic setback coupled with the citizens' reliance on their respective governments, it is unlikely that the world would immediately go back to being more open and free once the crisis is over. In the wake of widespread travel bans and sealing off of borders, the pandemic is not just a health issue but is also proving to stoke up the xenophobic tendencies which had already gripped the world. If Covid-19 is used by world leaders as a justification for their increasingly xenophobic policies and strict migration restrictions thus acting as political fodder for the nationalists, it is time to rethink and introspect. Undisputed commitment to sovereign territoriality has hardly favored mankind and it is certainly not an antidote to the pandemic; global solidarity is.

A truly global moment can be ushered in while tackling the emergent challenges in the post-Covid world order which should be an era of interdependence and cooperation among states, governments.

How IR can possibly interrogate a post-Covid emergent global scenario?

A new global order may see the light of the day, once the virus bids adeau all-comprehensibly, leaving behind its impact on humanity across almost all parts of the globe. The post-Covid global order seems most likely to be an interdependent one (The Pluralist dream project). Competition and rivalry among states may be a shade subdued as they may have to join hands for rebuilding the global socio-economic and political architecture. Social distancing and electronic communication among people will continue, transborder trade across the globe should continue amicably, the need for politico-economic cooperation among the states should be felt more strongly than ever. Humanity should plan to grapple with this new 'reality'-the one which dawned with the spread of the virus and its impact construction. Containing the contagion and then managing the collateral damage to the global socio-economic and political architecture should engage policy makers, and the common mass cutting across the entire globe. Experts, researchers in IR and security studies should attempt to academically interrogate the crisis and the policy responses attempted to manage the same. Global Governance network-can it be a platform for managing the post-Covid global order? Non-Traditional security analysts should come up with more succinct analysis of public health security systems especially the global divide in standards. IR specialists in the Global South could face an even daunting task as the impact of the pandemic will be far more entrenched and long-lasting, given the lesser patterns of development, demographic density, resource scarcity, poverty and the climatic conditions prevailing therein. The pandemic should have given a clarion call for bridging the North-South divide –how they can join hands in managing the crisis with information, resource sharing, socio-economic and political cooperation should be a futuristic research agenda in IR. The war against coronavirus is even harder than the War On Terror, the enemy is all the more faceless and non-human, even more lethal. Military weapons are meaningless, non-applicable, socio-economic and health engineering are only preventives when applied demographically, but objectives are easier to be set than achieved. Descalation of conflict, peacebuilding, followed by multilateral action by forming a global consortium of states. The importance of national state systems are at an all time high, be it in parts of the Global North or the Global south, as societies become more inward looking due to adherence to social distancing norms and the common mass looking up to the state for this crisis management. The Post-Covid global order needs to be well managed for humanity to survive . Researchers and analysts in IR and Security Studies should academically interrogate this changed scenario and through soul-searching research, should strive to provide

policy prescriptions for the decision-makers, using their theoretical insights in sync with the new realilties of a 'Coronized' globe facing them.

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