



# BRIEFING NOTES

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## COVID-19 PANDEMIC IMPACTS ON WORLD GEOPOLITICS

Authors: Mohammad Reza Nematollahi<sup>1</sup> and  
Kash Khorasani<sup>2</sup>

1 Graduate student, Department of Electrical and Computer  
Engineering, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada

2 Professor, Department of Electrical and Computer  
Engineering, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada.

## SUMMARY

- ✚ This note examines the COVID-19 pandemic geopolitical and economic impacts, focused mainly on “How has the COVID-19 pandemic changed the nature of strategic competition between great powers, most notably between the US (and the West) and China?”
- ✚ Most analysts and policy makers expect the pandemic would negatively affect both hard-power and soft-power attributes of key world actors before its occurrence.
- ✚ Passivity and unilateralism of U.S. and strong nationalist ideology of its current administration and policy makers, and lack of sufficient solidarity among EU member states have facilitated empty grounds for China to rebuild its global prestige and expand its political influence in other countries, following the politics of generosity and disinformation, while also enjoy stable and aligned domestic policies.
- ✚ The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates negative trends in US-China relationship that has been building up in the last few years. However, logically reason for it to be escalated beyond its current state, since both countries are now dealing with negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic as they both have mutual vulnerabilities.

## CONTEXT

- ✚ This briefing note (BN) provides background information on the issue of medical personnel shortages in long-term care centers (known as CHSLDs) in Québec during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ✚ In this briefing note, the frameworks that were discussed in [1] and [2] are utilized for geopolitical analysis, collaboration and interaction analysis among countries. We focus specifically on China, the starting point of the Coronavirus outbreak, and one of the important international actors during the past few months to assess what one should expect in future.
- ✚ Due to global inter-dependence of countries, the current COVID-19 pandemic requires a high level of international collaboration. This pandemic has also provided a great opportunity for improving international interactions, yet, unfortunately, countries mostly have adopted the reverse trend at least during the early stages of the outbreak.
- ✚ Given the current COVID-19 pandemic and global connectivity of nations have created mutual vulnerabilities as most governments cannot close their borders for an extended period of time. Therefore, the challenges resemble the “weakest link” property, implying that the countries are only as safe as the weakest link in the global network [2] and strict nationalism and protectionism cannot be the solution to present and future challenges.

- ✚ The fears triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated nationalism and populism in many countries. The rise of populism, and in some cases, the trust crisis in leadership could trigger severe social conflicts, while the upcoming economic crisis could re-activate tensions that pre-date the COVID-19 pandemic as well [3].
- ✚ On the other hand, to have more control over situations many governments have issued emergency state and other contingencies and strategies by using for example widely using artificial intelligence as part of the solution, and limiting the freedom of expression to manage the crisis [4]. If these conditions last for too long time, this could be a source of conflict especially in countries with low power distance index and people where democratic rights are a major concern before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ✚ The rise of nationalism and lack of solidarity will definitely affect international relations and provide a good opportunity for China to expand its soft-power beyond its borders. Due to lack of solidarity in EU and US, the only choice for many countries to survive is to approach and lien further toward China.
- ✚ The COVID-19 pandemic along with confinement measures that are introduced by governments to manage spreading of the virus provide a unique opportunity for evaluating each country's critical infrastructure such as healthcare system, bureaucratic structure, information flow, leadership trust by its people.
- ✚ Without a question the global economy has and continues to be badly affected. According to the IMF, the global GDP can fall by 3%, and the merchandise trade can be reduced up to 32% in the worst-case scenario. Also, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO) one should expect over 195 million unemployment around the world [3].

## CONSIDERATIONS

- ✚ The above timeline indicates opportunities in which CAF could have provided personnel aid to CHSLDs earlier than it did.
- ✚ Possessing a highly centralized decision-making process, there is no surprise that during the Coronavirus outbreak in December 2019, the Chinese government quickly responded to the problem by shutting down the business in Wuhan, issuing the required restrictions on the city to avoid further propagation of the virus, along with many other medical strategies.
- ✚ The Chinese government from the early days of the pandemic has attempted to convey the message that their confinement measures for controlling the virus propagation were highly effective and their centralized decision-making system works properly.
- ✚ Chinese people are not willing to risk reporting the weaknesses and negative news since that can lead to their conflicts and personal security concerns with the central Communist party. Given that there are no independent news media to reveal the state wrongdoings, there is no feedback to also correct the incorrect decisions. Additionally, without public engagement through elections in choosing the national level decision-makers, the appointed politicians also lack incentives to care about the peoples' suffering [2].

- ✚ Therefore, information released by the Chinese government should not be over trusted and in some cases should not be pre-trusted at all [5].
- ✚ In studying China's geopolitics, one should consider that their history is tied with high power distance [6], and democratic rights are not currently considered as the main expectation of majority of their people [7, 8]. Hence, compared with democratic countries, there is lower chance to see street protest, public outcries and conflicts.
- ✚ The Chinese government has been criticized by other countries (such as Canada, U.S, Brazil), due to the manner that they have dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ✚ Moreover, some other countries such as Spain, Turkey, and Netherland have announced that many of the testing kits and medical masks that were shipped from China did not meet high quality standards [9].
- ✚ The Chinese economy mainly depends on trade with and investment by other countries, which die to the COVID-19 pandemic will show their deteriorating effects on future GPD growth of China [11].
- ✚ In the worst-case scenario, it has been predicted that China's GDP growth will fall from 6.8% in 2019 to 1% or 2% in 2020 [12].
- ✚ At the international level, China has followed the "politic of generosity" [13] also known as the "mask policy" by sending medical aids, test kits, and masks to those countries that are badly hit by the virus. They continue to send these aids to 82 countries, as well as the World Health Organization (WHO), and the African Union.
- ✚ The Chinese government have also followed a disinformation plan [9] to rebuild their global prestige, after being criticized by other countries for the manner that COVID-19 was disclosed to the world population. This is while through their mask policy, and given that the world scene was left empty of other powerful competitors such as U.S. and EU, they intend to leave an image that they are more responsible and reliable partners [14].
- ✚ China has targeted the Euroskeptic governments and parties in the Eastern European countries such as Hungary, Serbia and other parties such as the "Five Star Movement" in Italy, while they try also to gain ground due to the current emergency state by taking advantage of them in rebuilding its prestige, while there is not sufficient solidarity and strategic plans among the EU's powerful partners [15].

### **NEXT STEPS (If applicable)**

- ✚ A great challenge and impediment or obstacle to effectively managing the current COVID-19 pandemic situation is exaggeration and escalation by certain world leaders unfortunately were the dominant trend at least during the early months of the pandemic.
- ✚ As always, the key actors of the world, such as EU, US, and China will have significant role during and after this current pandemic.
- ✚ The current pandemic situation revealed many gaps, deficiencies, and weaknesses in governmental pandemic response preparedness and contingencies around the world and provide opportunities that decision makers can learn from for the next pandemic situation.

- ✚ US current nationalistic agendas along with lack of solidarity among EU member states have provided a fertile ground for China to rebuild and repackage its compromised global prestige and to gain grounds beyond its border. Continuing along these trends and currents, two scenarios are possible, namely “coexistence” and “rise of mid-level powers”.
- ✚ One should also not underestimate and underscore China’s aid in managing pandemic, although there are many critics on this point, the pandemic has provided good opportunities for collaboration among countries. On one hand US and EU use the “blaming” tactics on China for its role in the virus spread and global propagation, while on the other hand they have not taken adequate and significant steps toward prevention of the spread of the COVID-19 that could compromise future collaborations among these states going forward.

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