

GEOPOLITICS IN THE COVID- 19 ERA: A BRIEF REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The world has been facing a global threat for the past few months. This Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) now declared as the “pandemic” is having a profound effect on the world economy, globalization, employment status, health system and tourism. This pandemic has challenged the world and had major impacts on geopolitics of all countries which are affected by this virus currently. Geopolitics is a discipline which studies how the political power is reinforced or undermined by geographical arrangements. By reviewing the literature, the present study explores how the pandemic may change and affect society, the economy, employment, health system and tourism. This pandemic has triggered the global economic crisis, slows down the sales, a sharp drop in the production, massive job losses, exhausted the resources and health security risks. In India, the Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and informal labour were found to be the most vulnerable and worse hit sectors. Because of this pandemic severe financial crisis, decreased global economy, increased health issues, increased unemployment during lockdown has been reported. Governments and organizations should think and must take appropriate actions about how to deal with the consequences of the economic crisis that were created by COVID-19, especially in the area of unemployment. The challenge is now to collectively learn from this global tragedy to accelerate the transformation of geopolitics. Therefore, it is important to understand the geopolitical issues in the COVID-19 era.

Keywords: Geopolitics, Coronavirus, Economy, Tourism, Unemployment, Globalization

INTRODUCTION

Presently, a health disaster is going on across the worldwide. The outbreak of pneumonia of an unknown etiology that was first reported in Wuhan, China since December 2019. As it is affecting globally, it has taken a form of a pandemic due to zoonotic viral infection, known as the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Since past few months a significant increase in mortality and morbidity rate has reported

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due to this pandemic. In the wake of this global health crisis, stringent public health measures have been implemented to curtail the spread of COVID-19. It is still unknown whether COVID-19 is seasonal or not or otherwise sensitive to the outside temperature. The current measures to cope with this pandemic are quarantining, travel bans, wearing masks and social distancing more broadly. As a consequence, it cannot be saying how long the pandemic will last. Thus, its future severity and duration is unknown and is responsible for uncertainty in predicting its economic, social and political consequences. This pandemic has raised questions about the sustainable nature and development of human, community and nation. Therefore, the purpose the present study is to explore the various geopolitical issues in the COVID-19 era.

GEOPOLITICS

Geopolitics is a discipline which contributes significantly in national prosperity and safety. Although it had been focused by the research that political and military groups were the factors which contributed the relationship between different countries or nations. It was also found that for the development of great powers geopolitics is a powerful and dynamic foundation. Interpreting and responding to pandemics by the people is always a political act. The decision to impose border controls, the quarantining of population, the management of public information and attitudes towards others are never free from such things.

GEOPOLITICAL ISSUES DURING COVID-19

Global economy in COVID- 19 Era

Due to COVID-19, the rise in the global strains is making cooperation difficult at the international level. It is noticeable that the coronavirus pandemic has triggered the global economic crisis. Due to various reasons the opportunities for economic growth are exhausted like resources become too expensive, sales are down, credit is exhausted, rise in the production cost etc. As a result, the economic cycle ends with a cyclical crisis, crises are associated with a collapse in stock prices, a sharp drop in production, and mass financial failures as a result, the world economy as a whole has weakened and growth rates have slowed. There is an interconnection between economic conditions and financial conditions which increases the challenges for authorities.

This pandemic had put stress on economies and healthcare systems and exacerbated regional conflicts. Due to this Covid-19 there was reduction in trade, investment and aid from abroad. Also, there were major economic, social and political problems. The global economic effects of coronavirus are falls in trade, remittances and FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) in the region. The Sustainable Development Goals are less likely to be fulfilled in the future. It was found that the decrease in oil prices globally had hit many African countries like South Sudan, highly dependent on oil exports. More than intra- African trade, the region as a whole (Europe, Asia and America) is dependent on global trade. Political tensions in the country have been created by the Covid-19 because the as opponents of the

government were not happy with the restrictive measures and they were also worried about the delay in the elections. Practically all countries and organizations have curtailed their normal activities to a major and massive extent. It was reported that China's GDP had fallen by 6.8% during the first quarter (Q1) as compared to the Q1 level of 2019. The Estimates range was -18% in China and -31% in Japan and -25% in the US and France. Scientists throughout the world are still trying to understand and address COVID-19 and its geopolitical strains. Nations are disputing the source of the new coronavirus and the extent to which information is being shared. US leaders had referred to COVID-19 as the "Wuhan Virus," and Chinese leaders have blamed the US Army for allegedly bringing the virus to Wuhan. The COVID-19 pandemic has not changed the nature of strategic competition between the major powers. This pandemic has eroded the international trust in the country like US due to its inconsistent handling of the pandemic and its abandonment from its traditional leadership role. In contrast to this, China and Russia restored the cyber and industrial espionage and present themselves as having the situation under control. America and China disengagement has posed serious challenges for democracies. To maintain the international stability, they must adopt a common approach to manage these conflicts.

The most appropriate responses for financial crisis could be

- a) Focus on the operational disruptions in the financial system
- b) Strengthen and encourage the confidence in financial markets
- c) Preparation for possible interventions and resolutions.

Globalization in the COVID-19 time

The Globalization is the process of deterritory, with national dominion deeply set in the neoliberal environment. The novel Coronavirus has challenged the whole model of neoliberal globalization. The new technology is recasting the geo-cultural and geo-economic industries and areas with great geopolitical significance. Due to this new technology the relationship between geopolitics and new media becomes and helps in social reconstruction and remodeling of geopolitical vision. The topic of exploitation of resources (oil, water, etc.) is highly important in geopolitical studies. The production and consumption of global energy has affected by reserves, mining technology and competing interests of geopolitical game between countries. The globalization interdependence is perceived as contrary to essential national interests in this time of health crisis. Faced with this concern, the relocation of certain production sites is supposed to be essential as well as an improvement in the measures which control human travel at the borders is supposed to be essential for human security. The key sectors of national security are health security and biosecurity. Health risks are considered as security issues for many years. Disputes have arisen over the allocation of protective equipment between different levels of government in several federal states. In Europe, the tension is particularly felt between vulnerability and reinforcement. Due to thus tension, the European Union (EU) has suffered a lot due to its risky decision-making and health policies. On the other hand, it could strengthen and prove particularly effective in putting together a comprehensive response to the pandemic. The most considerable

geopolitical impacts due to COVID-19 pandemic are strengthening the state in a context of de-globalization, speed up the competition between major powers as well as aggressive disinformation operations.

Unemployment in the COVID time

In a recent report on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, youth were already vulnerable within the workforce prior to the crisis; the recent advent of massive job losses and growing difficulties in the work was having particularly painful impacts on young people across the globe. The COVID-19 economic crisis with vast increases in unemployment (and competition between workers) and the probable growth of digitalization may result in a major dislocation of young workers from the labor market for some time. Governments and organizations (such as universities) should begin thinking about how to deal with the immediate and long-term consequences of the economic crisis created by COVID-19, especially in the area of unemployment. Because of this diversity of contextual and personal factors, various interventions will be required for different patterns of individual. Unemployment has disturbing effects on the psychological, economic and social well-being of individuals and communities. Thus, there is a need to build an exemplary research on the effects unemployment on mental health and impact on communities.

Tourism and pandemic

Tourism is a major source generating greenhouse gases and causing global warming and thus a factor increasing the risk of pandemics both directly and indirectly. The relationships between pandemics and travel are essential to understand health security and global change. Travel and tourism both are the contributory factor for disease spread and its economic consequences. The restrictions in travel have spread out from the Wuhan which is the epicenter of COVID-19 as the number of COVID-19 cases increased dramatically. There were restrictions of people arriving from other countries as well as borders were closed. Using country population data, it can be estimated that over 90% of the world's population are in countries with some level of international travel restrictions. There were also wide-spread restrictions on public gatherings and community mobility, thus, tourism chiefly ceased in March 2020. Many countries also have some degree of restrictions on internal movement like limited air travel and stay at home orders. Travel restrictions and lockdowns had affected global tourism largely and had slowed down significantly as the number of global flights reducing by more than half. In one of the recent reports on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on national tourism, the NHO (Norwegian Tourism Organization) published weekly survey data on 31 March 2020. It was found that by 5th March of 2020, 41% of member businesses had cancelled their bookings including hotels, camps, car rental, activities and destination marketing organizations. And by 26th of March, 90% of member had temporarily laid off staff, with 78% of businesses reducing at least three quarters of the workforce. It was found in a research that among the overall estimated 13.4 million jobs could be affected in the restaurant industry, 3.6 million involve food preparation and serving which includes fast food businesses, 2.6 million restaurant servers and 1.3 million restaurant cooks were vulnerable. Significantly, workers in the accommodation and food services sector have the lowest annual earnings.

Tourism also supported the pandemics indirectly. As noted above, there is much evidence that food production patterns were responsible for repeated outbreaks of the corona virus, including SARS, MERS and COVID-19. Due to Covid 19 effects, the urgency to revive tourism is intensifying with imminent introduction of medical screening and boarding arrangements for air travel. Tourism has challenged and reinforced the geopolitical narratives. COVID-19 provides striking lessons to the all the tourism industries of the world and tourism researchers about the effects of global change.

GEOPOLITICS IN INDIA

In India, MSMEs (Micro Small and Medium Enterprises) and informal labour were found to be the most vulnerable and worse hit sectors. Sociological impact was identified in cultures, traditions and living spaces of migrants and destitute. Psychological impact was found to be distress and fear factors. The lockdown situation impacted Indian polity on its quasi-federal structure and the importance of centralized health care system within the latter. Estimates suggested that 75% of the Indian economy was closed during the lockdown period of 21 days. It resulted into 4.5% direct output loss to the economy. MSMEs contributed more than 28% to India's GDP and created 11.08 crore jobs and accounted for 45% of total manufacturing output and more than 40% of exports. To address the economic concerns, on 26th March, 2020, Government of India has come up with an immediate relief package of INR 1.70 lakh crore. There were also many causes of concern like supply of healthcare equipment's such as the protective gears and masks, ventilators, medicines, testing kits etc. Policy design based on current economic scenario includes public goods distribution with food safety and security as the top priority and it is one the important political decisions under consideration. This pandemic had brought to surface the difficulties for the welfare of the people in India through the localized administration. COVID-19 has completely different aspect of security. Today, it is no longer national security for which the world is fighting; it is for a borderless human security. While it was alleged that strategic investments are being tried by some countries - such as to fund corona virus vaccine research and use it selectively by the US they are being thwarted out. All these events attached to COVID-19 have a potential to become an unintended backlash against globalization. Furthermore, the costs of post-COVID-19 recovery will weigh heavily on geo-economic and by extension geopolitical choice. The most important and unpredictable factor in determining geopolitical transformation will likely be the ongoing changes that the pandemic is producing in the population. COVID-19 has changed the internal and external dynamics of our polities and societies.

CONCLUSION

The outbreak of COVID-19 has led to significantly impacts on geopolitics. Because of this pandemic severe financial crisis has built on, decreased global economy, increased health issues, increased unemployment during lockdown has been reported. COVID-19 provided striking lessons to the nations, community and individuals about the effects of global change. This crisis may have changed their

priorities, the meaning of work, and their lifestyle. The challenge is now to learn from this global tragedy to accelerate the transformation of geopolitics for the sustainable development. That is why, it is important to understand the geopolitics and geopolitical issues in the COVID-19 era.

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