

COMMENTARY

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COVID-19 Crisis Deepening in Azerbaijan *by Javadbay Khalilzada*

All the President's Tweets: Trump's Twiplomacy amidst the Coronavirus Crisis and the Way Ahead for the American Foreign Policy *by Maria (Mary) Papageorgiou*

INTERVIEW

Interview with Professor Adeeb Khalid *by Dr Ozgur Tufekci & Dr Rahman Dag*



Preparedness for an Uncertain Future

“The Only Thing We have to Fear is Fear Itself”

by Professor Mark Meirowitz

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Preparedness for an Uncertain Future

“The Only Thing We Have to Fear is Fear Itself”

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The world seems headed for anarchy. There is no end in sight for the COVID-19 pandemic, China imposed a repressive national security law on Hong Kong,ⁱ engaged in a bloody clash with India in the Galwan Valleyⁱⁱ which could lead to further tensionsⁱⁱⁱ and had installed Xi Jinping as leader for life.^{iv} Overall there is a perception of a “new world disorder”.^v

We are also facing what one commentator has called a “global political pandemic,” namely “a global democracy blight causing political life in many countries to become more polarized and less democratic”.^{vi} The COVID-19 Pandemic has exacerbated the trend toward “democracy dysfunction”^{vii} where “the strength of democratic institutions has declined”.^{viii}

Amidst the world chaos, probably the most pressing issue facing the United States and the world is how to “frame a strategy toward the inexorably rising China”^{ix}. The West appears to be in decline pitted against a rising China. “Graham Allison has warned of a ‘Thucydides Trap’ invoking the history of the Peloponnesian War which was caused by the rise in power of Athens and the feat it created in Sparta...Thucydides famously attributed the outbreak of the Peloponnesian war to two causes: the rise of a new power—Athens, and the fear that created in an established power—Sparta”^x. However, Prof. Joseph Nye is of the view that “[m]ost readers focus on the first half of Thucydides assessment, but the second is equally important to strategic planning and more within our control”^{xi}. Nye adds that “[m]ost Sinologists properly doubt that U.S. foreign policy can prevent the rise of China’s economy, but if we use our contextual intelligence well, we can avoid the exaggerated fears that could provoke a new cold or worse, a hot war”.^{xii}

The challenge from China is real and formidable. Through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has expanded its power and influence throughout the world^{xiii} and even placed many developing nations into a “debt trap”^{xiv} where nations give concessions and control to China^{xv}. There may even be an underlying Chinese military strategy related to the BRI whereby China receives rights to strategic ports that expand its power and influence,^{xvi} or perhaps China even has a hidden agenda to develop military installations arising out of its BRI initiatives.^{xvii} The pandemic has, however, interfered with China’s progress with the BRI.^{xviii}

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In the South China Sea (SCS), China has markedly increased its influence and pressure on the various littoral States in the area, claiming that the SCS is in effect “China’s Caribbean”^{xxix} subject to China’s control, and even sovereignty. The United States has countered China’s influence through the use of Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS) intended to assert the freedom of the high seas^{xx}. A highly controversial assertion by China is that military vessels may not traverse what China claims as its exclusive economic zone, which the US argues is contrary to international law.^{xxi} It was extremely worrisome that China rejected the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in China’s dispute with the Philippines.^{xxii} Further the search for a SCS Code of Conduct by China with the ASEAN nations may continue^{xxiii} but there is little room for optimism that China will agree to restrictions on its rights in the SCS.

Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic, China has reacted harshly to efforts to look into the causes of the pandemic, seeking to determine if China was the source of the Pandemic. When Australia called for such an inquiry, a Chinese official stated that Australia was like gum on the bottom of China’s shoe^{xxiv}, and imposed harsh tariffs on imports of Australian beef.^{xxv}

Soft Power, Hard Power, Sharp Power

“China has also invested heavily in soft power, the ability to get preferred outcomes through attraction rather than coercion or payment” (which would be examples of hard power). A commentator has observed that while “[c]ultural exchanges and ... BRI projects can enhance China’s attractiveness,...the BRI is more like a successful marketing program than a true Marshall Plan for the world”^{xxvi}. Further, “Chinese soft power faces two major limits. Ongoing territorial conflicts with neighbours such as Japan, India, Vietnam, and the Philippines make it difficult for China to appear attractive while contesting rival claims. And domestic insistence on tight Communist Party control deprives China of the benefits of civil society that European countries or the United States enjoy”^{xxvii}. In addition, “[t]he ongoing Covid-19 pandemic is a stark example of China’s ‘soft’ economic diplomacy. Accused to be covering up the issue at first, it has since embarked in so-called ‘mask diplomacy’ to portray itself as a responsible and helpful international actor. Even in this case, reactions have been mixed. But it is undeniable that the China has been able to provide assistance in various forms because of its economic capabilities. More recently, Xi Jinping promised that, whenever ready, the vaccine would be universally available”^{xxviii}. I would add that China’s actions at the outset of the COVID-19 crisis, especially withholding vital information on the spread of the disease in China, certainly undermined China’s soft power initiatives.

In addition, it has been argued that China has used “sharp power”^{xxix} to “pierce, penetrate, or perforate” the political and information environments of targeted countries... to degrade the integrity of independent institutions through manipulation, ...”^{xxx} This, it has been alleged, is accomplished by the use of “‘CAMP’ Vulnerability, since [i]n

democratic countries, the spheres of culture, academia, media, and publishing (the so-called CAMP sectors)” which “[u]nfortunately, however, ... makes them ripe targets for sharp-power penetration”.^{xxxix}

Addressing the Challenges that Face the World

The first imperative is to avoid fear of China’s rise. America and its allies have many assets and options available to it to counter China’s rise. The worst approach would be to express fear, so we need to follow FDR’s admonition that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself^{xxxix}.

The United States and the world have faced, and overcome, formidable challenges, including two World Wars. Following WWII, the world powers created international institutions designed to counter any future aggression. Unfortunately, at present, these institutions, such as the United Nations, have been co-opted by China through deft international diplomacy and strategy. Despite China’s ambivalence towards international law, “China’s stature is growing along with its contributions—it now pays 12% of the UN budget compared with 1% in 2000. Its diplomats head four of the UN’s 15 specialised agencies, and America just one. If other countries do not act, the system will come to reflect China’s expansive views of national sovereignty and resistance to intervention, even in the face of gross human-rights violations”.^{xxxix} When the World Health Organization was criticized for being under the control of China and too sympathetic to China, President Trump announced that if the issue of inordinate Chinese control was not resolved within 30 days, the US would pull out of the WHO; the US did then pull out^{xxxix}. However, China’s reaction was to pledge \$2 billion to deal with the COVID-19 crisis^{xxxix}. At the World Health Assembly, China acquiesced to the adoption of a resolution launching an inquiry into the causes of the pandemic^{xxxix}, an exercise in utter futility. China has a veto in the UN Security Council which prevents the UN from ever taking action against China.

The United States must not withdraw from participation in international institutions as the Trump Administration appears to have been advocating. Instead, the United States must become an active participant in international institutions not so much to pursue multilateral solutions to problems, but rather to prevent such institutions from becoming subservient to China’s influence

The United States also has formidable power and advantages to counter China’s rising influence: “geography... The United States is surrounded by two oceans and benign neighbours that are likely to remain friendly. China has borders with fourteen countries and has territorial disputes with India, Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines among others. Energy independence is another American advantage...The recent shale revolution has transformed it from energy importer to energy exporter...Meanwhile, China is becoming ever more dependent on energy imports, and much of the oil it imports is transported through the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, where the United States and others maintain a significant naval presence”^{xxxix}.

The greatest asset the United States has is its dedication to a “rules-based” world order based on freedom and democracy. China’s actions in Hong Kong and the recent clash with India in the Galwan Valley are a wakeup call to the world and present a stark contrast to what the United States has and will offer to the world: stability and a liberal international order.

America must use its soft power to convince the nations of the world that working with the United States is the course to follow. America which rescued the world in two World Wars can show the world what American leadership can accomplish when the world is faced with a crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic is such a world crisis.

Further, “[j]ust as the second world war prompted leaders to create institutions to prevent wars, Bill Gates believes the covid-19 crisis will lead them to build institutions to prevent pandemics and, alongside national and regional bodies, to guard against bioterrorism. Co-operation on viruses could serve as a model for collaboration to strengthen resilience in cyberspace. The shock to the system could even be profound enough to prompt a serious go at reforming the UN Security Council before it grows even less representative of the realities of power in the 21st century. Ample groundwork has been done. What is missing is political will.^{xxxviii} We may need to create new international institutions or restructure the current international institutions so that they work better in the post-COVID-19 world.

The United States must counter China’s BRI by providing aid and assistance to the States in China’s debt trap because of the BRI. There is still time to undermine the influence of China’s BRI.

The United States and its allies must push back against China’s “sharp power” and protect American society and institutions (and those of its allies) from interference by China.

In the SCS, the United States must continue the FONOPS, work with the various littoral States to counter China’s influence in the SCS and rebuff China’s specious legal arguments to buttress China’s claim to hegemony over the SCS (including China’s building “islands” in order to create exclusive economic zones (EEZ), or claiming that China is an archipelagic State capable to using the “straight baseline” approach to measuring the EEZ. Perhaps the United States ought to form a regional organization for the States in the SCS under the leadership of the US – together the United States and these littoral States can counter China’s influence.

America must maintain, rather than eschew, its alliances, especially with Japan, India and Australia which together can balance Chinese power^{xxxix}. It has even been suggested that the US, Japan, Australia and India (also known as the “Quad”) might even form an Asian NATO^{xl}. This will not require a commitment to internationalism or multilateralism, but rather a practical way to counter China’s rising influence.

America has as its greatest asset the soft power impact of the American legacy of democracy. Indeed, it is a fact that “a majority of the countries on

this planet have their own Declarations of Independence”^{xli} many of which were inspired by America’s own Declaration of Independence. The only caveat is that America should not try to engage in nation building^{xlii}. America should lead by example and show the world how American leadership can build a rules-based and stable international order.

To deal with China, the United States needs to be pragmatic. “The U.S.-China relationship is a cooperative rivalry where a successful strategy of ‘smart competition,’ ..., will require equal attention to both aspects of that description. But such a future will require good contextual intelligence, careful management on both sides, and no major miscalculations. That will be a hard test of the skills of our leaders.”^{xliii}

In terms of asserting American leadership and also preparing for the next pandemic, the United States should establish a National Pandemic Preparedness Centre with a cabinet-level Secretary of Preparedness reporting to the President or National Security Adviser.

The United States also needs to revisit the National Defense Strategy, mobilize defense assets for an uncertain future and continue the policy of support for a strong military.

The United States must be engaged in the world, not distanced or isolated from it. America needs friends and supporters. We need to build a post-COVID-19 world under American leadership, which emphasizes the rule of law and a liberal international order, not the Chinese world order. We need to build a post-COVID world which combines preparedness with American Leadership, not globalization but Trump Doctrine 2.0 which allows the US to remain engaged in world affairs but provides American leadership to other nations, and in international institutions.

Finally, and of vital importance, is the need for the United States and its allies to work hard to deal with the “global political pandemic” which has caused intense polarization in the United States and throughout the world. America’s domestic problems are certainly challenging, but “America’s problems, worrying as they are, pale in comparison with what countries with weaker institutions, less robust economies, and a shorter experience with democratic experience with democratic governance now face”.^{xliv} Weak States will be vulnerable to coercion by stronger powers which will lead to international instability and crisis.

America and its allies must not succumb to fear of a rising China, but must instead work together to achieve a peaceful future for the entire world.

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