

COMMENTARY

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

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*

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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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“ADVANCING DIVERSITY”

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All the President's Tweets: Trump's Twiplomacy amidst the Coronavirus Crisis and the Way Ahead for the American Foreign Policy

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The coronavirus crisis, except for its various implications in the economy, healthcare and various aspects of everyday life, has highlighted the role of social media in political communication and foreign policy. Political leaders have used social media platforms to communicate with their followers sharing news and state policies online.

Twitter, in particular, has changed not only the way news are transmitted but also reformulated diplomatic practices. Diplomats devote considerable time in conducting their statecraft on Twitter which is being characterized as a platform of political discourse that offers politicians the opportunity to establish a network with their counterparts and also a tool for real-time response in crises. The use of Twitter by politicians and diplomats has enacted the term “twiplomacy” having managed to influence the image and reputation of the nation according to the way its representatives announce, promote and comment on political issues.

President Trump during his political campaign back in 2015 made extensive and daily use of Twitter to inform his fanbase on his decisions, post his criticisms towards his counterparts, and threaten them and mostly praise himself.

The coronavirus crisis has been tweeted extensively by the American President; nonetheless in an unsystematic, highly polarized and divisive way, intensifying the crisis while showing no collective initiatives.

Trump as an influencer and his “Twitter foreign policy”

@realDonaldTrump, according to the twiplomacy rankings, is the most followed leader with 81.2 million followers having tweeted 51, 282 times since he signed up in the platform in March 2009. The American President follows only 46 other accounts, mainly those belonging to members of his government and family members. His informal and assertive tone has left many of the world leaders wondering about how to reply to these Twitter

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outbursts and threats. Trump has referred to North-Korean leader Kim Jong Un as “little rocket man” and called the Syrian President Bashar Assad a “gas killing animal”.

Having said that, there have been political figures that did not hesitate to respond directly to the American President, such as the Mexican President in regards to the notorious Trump’s wall along the US-Mexico, border, and the Pakistan’s Prime Minister that engaged with him in a twitter spat after the American President announced his decision to stop funding Pakistan because of the country’s alleged support for terrorist groups in Afghanistan.

In addition, the American President has threatened to go to war with Iran, calling the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) “one of the WORST Trade Deals ever made” and threatened to “devastate Turkey economically if they hit Kurds”. Unsurprisingly some of his proclamations were never fulfilled and somewhat were appeased in his later tweets.

The many faces of Trump’s twitter – The coronavirus crisis

The outbreak of coronavirus in late December 2019 in Wuhan was reported quite often by President Trump who seemed to have been supportive to the Chinese authorities’ efforts to battle the spread of the virus – when the spread of the disease, of course, had not surpassed China’s borders. The American President even praised the government’s efficiency in building hospitals in just a few days.

Nonetheless, as the coronavirus started becoming a worrisome issue in the USA with the number of cases and deaths increasing, the American President on his self-centred tweets glorified his prompt responses in closing early the borders to China and Europe. Later on openly accused China of mishandling the crisis, referring to coronavirus as the “Chinese virus”, Wuhan virus and Plague from China.

Besides, the World Health Organization had been targeted on Trump’s tweets until he announced his decision to stop funding the organization for its cover-up of the coronavirus threat and for being heavily influenced by China.

After Trump announced taking hydroxychloroquine to ward off coronavirus and made suggestions to inject disinfectant into coronavirus patients, many implored the social media platforms to employ a stricter fact policy that also applied to political leaders.

On May 11, Twitter announced that it would be introducing “new labels and warning messages that will provide additional context and information on some Tweets containing disputed or misleading information related to COVID-19”. The platform for the first time on May 27, flagged with a fact-check label Trump’s tweet on Mail-In Ballots.

Trump’s notable use of Twitter has tarnished the United States’ public image as a credible power and global, multilateral leader. However, it also

has revealed that social media have redefined the way US foreign policy is presented, proving that new codes of diplomatic interactions are being constructed.

To that end, this misuse of twiplomacy not only poses unprecedented challenges to traditional diplomatic codes but also raises questions on how politicians should be held accountable for fake news, misinformation and for endangering crisis management responses.

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