

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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“ADVANCING DIVERSITY”

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World News

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The Coronavirus Updates



By mid-June, the number of COVID-19 cases all over the world has passed 8 million, and the pandemic has taken more than 450 thousand lives. Most of the European countries have, sooner or later, contained the pandemic. However, the countries in South America and Africa are undergoing the first stages of the pandemic. In the countries where the pandemic has been restrained in large part, the governments are loosening preventive measurements, although no vaccine has yet been developed.

The Economics

The necessary protection measures to control augmented COVID-19 pandemic are severely impacting economic activity. Unemployment rates have increased, WTI prices in the US fell below zero due to the storage problem of unused oil. The IMF says that the global economic contraction will be around 3% this year if COVID-19 is controlled in the second half of 2020. The Asian Development Bank, on the other hand, has anticipated that the global economy could lose between \$5.8 trillion and \$8.8 trillion — equivalent to 6.4% to 9.7% of global GDP in a report published on 15 May 2020. There is so much to do.

The African Enigma

The pandemic has arrived in Africa relatively later and still numbers aren't high as in other regions. However, the fragile healthcare systems and underdeveloped economies of most of the African countries are raising the concerns. Most of the central African countries are already receiving emergency financing from the IMF. It is puzzling to see governments, trying to apply some lockdown measures on the one hand and people in streets

protesting against lockdown since it is financially challenging their living as in Senegal on the other hand. Still, the lockdown is not very effective in Africa because the majority of the employees are working unofficially. The pandemic, for sure, will hit the low-income countries of Africa the most, where it is also the hardest to apply social distancing and quarantine rules while people keep working hard to survive the day.

Vaccine update

Medical initiatives are competing to develop COVID-19 vaccines. They have advanced ten candidates into clinical trials and companies have started to produce the vaccines despite the risk of failure according to a paper published in the Lancet. Experts are mostly supporting global coordination for the development of vaccines, which takes 10 years on average. The world is desperate to have a vaccine and when to have it points to the next critical moment for global governance. Donald Trump's attempt to reserve vaccines only for the US is a token of what the policy may look like after the advent of the COVID-19 vaccine. Furthermore, financial, governmental, social, or geographical factors will be decisive for access to the vaccine. Therefore, international organizations, at first WHO, should be hand in hand with all of the governments, especially in underdeveloped regions, to prevent the further rise of global inequality.



Iran Sends Gasoline to Venezuela



Five Iranian vessels, carrying gasoline and equipment to oil-starved Venezuela, arrived at their destination without any international confrontation in May 2020, albeit all the sanctions and pressure on countries. Their akin hostile relations with the US and the sanctions to which they are subject to have fostered strong and durable Iranian-Venezuelan relations. The Iranian shipment was a critical moment that can provoke a conflict between Iran, Venezuela, and the US, which has recently deployed naval forces in the Caribbean for an anti-drug operation. During the shipment, the Iranian part officially warned that any retaliation from the US would be replied.

Such support of both gasoline and refinery work is vital for Venezuela, which has massive oil reserves yet traumatized oil industry for years. On the other hand, it is a win-win game and Iranian acquisitions should not be overlooked. A senior Pentagon officer Craig Faller has claimed that Iran is seeking to enhance its influence in neighboring countries of the US so that it can counter the US interests. Withdrawal of Russian Rosneft from Venezuela as a consequence of American sanctions in March 2020 provided room for Iran in the Venezuelan energy industry as well, delivering not only economical but also political leverage to her. Moreover, the Iranian action is critical to ameliorating the Iranian regime's deteriorated image both nationally and internationally, beginning with the killing of Qassem Soleimani and the accidental downing of a civilian Ukrainian plane.



Masses say #BlackLivesMatter in the United States



Police violence against African Americans is only a part of an established racism problem in the United States for years and many cases so far have caused protests against fatal use of force by law enforcement, particularly against African American people in the United States, by civil rights movements and other activists. In 2013, the acquittal of George Zimmerman, a white, armed man, after killing of a 17-year-old African-American teen, Trayvon Martin, sparked the protests in the US, when the first time Black Lives Matter movement was founded. One more time, the ongoing protests, swiftly spread across the country, amid black lives matter slogan against police brutality, have been fueled by the killing of George Floyd by a white policeman on May 26.

The ongoing protests may look different than those that took place earlier, however, the immediate stimulus are of the same category-a violent act against an African American citizen by law enforcement. Furthermore, an underlying extreme condition is evident in most of the protests, such as a post or pre-war period or an economic crisis as in the 1960s, 1919 Chicago

riots. For today, it is the pandemic with its various consequences. The inefficient initial measures in the US have ended up with more than a hundred thousand deaths (the highest death toll in the world), the lockdown led up to 14.7 percent unemployment rate and social disorder fears emerged.

Catastrophic consequences have been felt more by the African-Americans together with the Hispanic than white Americans in the US. The data, proving the vulnerability of African-Americans to coronavirus, is startling. In Chicago, as of early April 2020, 72% of people who died of coronavirus were African-Americans, although they consist of only one-third of the city's population. Unemployment rates in April 2020 have been recorded, too, higher for African-American workers (16.7%) than white workers (14.2%) in April 2020. The other underlying factor is the polarization in American society accompanied by the populist discourse of US President Donald Trump. Such discourse renders already constructed social inequality between citizens of the US (in favor of white Americans) more intolerable. Trump is, nonetheless, relying on the silent majority (a term became popular after former US president Nixon used for describing conservative Americans, dissatisfied with the anti-Vietnam War protests' so-called radical character) and emphasizing the devastating effect of the protests. It is important to not underestimate such moments for gaining equality by the African-Americans, nevertheless for a solution of such problem penetrated in the social, economic and political institutions of the country, more commitment from the government is the most vital factor that can deal with racism.



The forces of Khalifa Haftar pull back to the East



Khalifa Haftar, a former Libyan Army general, and his fighters lost the last strongholds, most of which they gained in the operation they started on 4 April in Tripoli to the internationally-recognized Libyan government. In March, the government forces retook the Al-Watiya airbase and Tarhuna city - very significant strategical points for the future of Libyan civil war. The fate of the country, nonetheless, does not depend only on the Libyan foes because the conflict has become very similar to what we call proxy war. Turkey, Italy, and Qatar are supporting the Fayez al-Sarraj government. On the other side, Haftar is accompanied by Russian mercenaries, Egyptian and UAE financial and military support, although Russia has not declared any direct official support for Haftar.

In January 2020, in the Berlin Conference, where world leaders met, Angela Merkel announced that leaders agreed to abide by arms embargo. Although this initiative failed to ensure a cease-fire in the war-torn country or to deter the foreign actors from intervening in the civil war, any peace agreement will be expected to follow it. Just after the capture of important points in Tripoli by the Libyan government and its allies, Egypt's El-Sissi, alongside Haftar and Agila Saleh, the chief of Libya's allied elected parliament, has announced a plan, called the "Cairo Declaration," suggesting a ceasefire, pullback of foreign militias and handover of their weapons. It is unlikely to apply such a plan for now, although it is appreciated by Russia's Putin.

It seems that the Tripoli government is determined to capture Sirte, important for access to oilfields, before it sits to the negotiation table. What is important here is to assess how dedicated the foreign actors to the conflict are before one can anticipate the future of the civil war. One of the most assertive ally of the Libyan government is: Turkey. In November 2019, Turkey signed a maritime deal with the Libyan government, which may interrupt the Mediterranean energy plan (between Southern Cyprus, Greece and Israel) that potentially bypassed Turkey as a player in the region. Furthermore, Turkey strives to secure its critical economic interest in Libya. Russia, as the most important actor who is militarily supporting Haftar, is following a pragmatic political course. For its part, it is interested in keeping a dialog with the Sarraj government, and I supporting Agila Saleh and parliament, which is also recognized by the UN. It is important to remember that Russian involvement in the Middle Eastern politics is a part of rebuilding its super power role, which is possible in a Libya where Haftar does not get all he wants and Agila Saleh rises again as another player.



WHO is the new battlefield of American-Chinese war?



The outbreak of COVID-19 brought about a new battlefield to the American-Chinese war: The World Health Organization. American President Trump recently announced that the US would quit the WHO. Trump and his supporters from the academic and political world have been targeting the close Chinese-WHO ties. Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the director-general of WHO, receives his share of critiques. First, he comes in for criticism of his appreciation of Chinese efforts and other governments' insufficient policies in the fight against the virus.

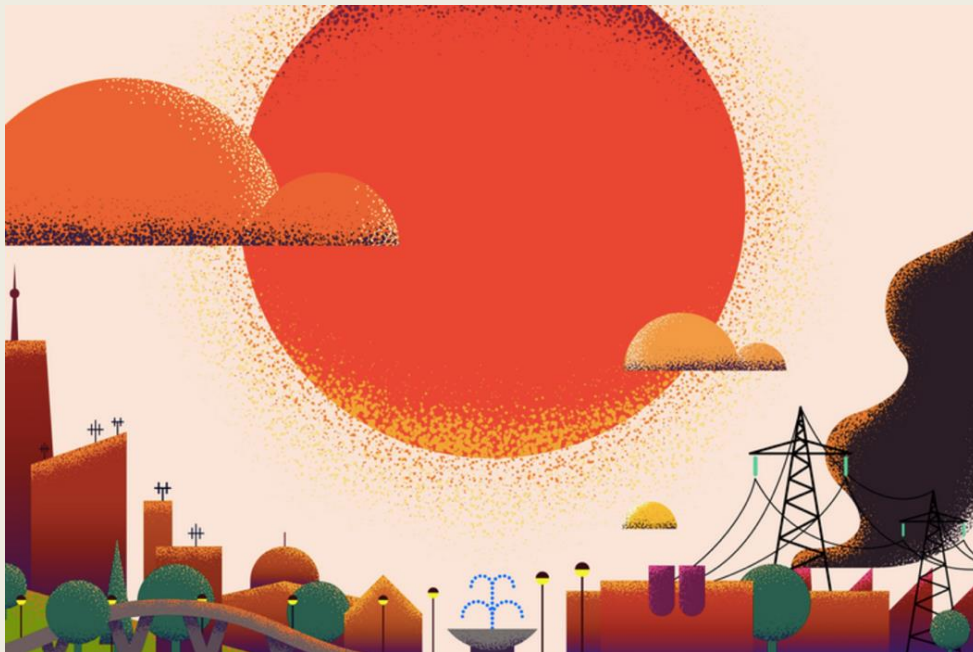
Another subject of disagreement and criticism on the director-general is the status of Taiwan since he has not taken any step on this issue. China opposes Taiwan receiving an observer status, which may be meaningful for recognition of its sovereignty. Moreover, increased Chinese financial support to the WHO budget calls attention that it could contribute to Chinese-WHO bonds. In fact, Chinese contribution (\$10,2M) to WHO is much lower than American contribution (\$893M), which recently has been reduced almost by half.

Meanwhile, there is a war of words between China and the US. Trump is persistently naming the virus as Chinese, and the Chinese officials are blaming American soldiers for bringing the virus to China. Chinese unwillingness to start the investigation to understand the outbreak of the virus has become another basis for American allegation on Chinese opacity. It is no surprise seeing WHO is subjected to these political discussions in such an international atmosphere of rising nationalism and populism. Since his election for the presidency, Donald Trump has been directing criticism to international organizations of the liberal world order, some of which are WTO, UNESCO, WHO.

It is irrefutable that there are serious problems in these institutions regarding effectiveness, equality, representation that have to be addressed, yet it is not the daily populist-nationalist rhetoric of political leaders that would fix them. In an era of rising nationalism, Trump's isolationist policy and economic war with China are only undermining the values of the liberal world, which Western countries, first the US, has been advocating for years. Beyond all disputes about the Western values, international organizations, like WHO, are supposed to exceed political barriers and disputes to cope with the international humanitarian questions, where they have a critical role, especially in urgent situations.



Climate Changes



The discussions around climate change, challenged by the international disputes, and rejective policies of the governments for the last few years are surpassed by the novel coronavirus. Nevertheless, global warming hasn't stopped since then. According to the scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, May 2020 has been the warmest May recorded.

Although the slowdown in the industry and reduction of carbon dioxide emissions was promising for the climate change activists and anti-globalist movement, the change will be temporary and minor, if no substantial step is taken. The economic crisis ahead will not let governments come to terms with any notion that could decelerate the economy more. It is important to bear in mind that following the 2008 economic crisis, the emission

increased to record levels after a temporary decline. Most of the presented pandemic-recovery plans for the economy are not taking into account the climate conundrum. Still, there are significant points made, for example, in The Special Report on Sustainable Energy, International Energy Agency has suggested a plan, having energy sector driving force of the economy, as decreasing greenhouse gas emission, boosting global economic growth by an average of 1.1 percentage points a year and creating 9 million new jobs a year. IEA clean energy transition summit on 9 July, where the governments including the US and China, investors and private sector will be represented is critical for the future of our planet.



Crisis Escalates Around the Chinese-Indian Border



The China-India border along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has been disputed since the first confrontation between the neighboring nuclear powers in 1962. The recent mobility on the disputed Himalayan Chinese-Indian border flared up since early May, being the most serious confrontation since 2017. India's investment in the infrastructure of nearby areas is shown as the start point of the clashes among the Chinese-Indian armies, where they threw stones and got into fights, nonetheless, no gun has been fired yet. On 15 June, the Indian government announced the death of 20 Indian soldiers in the conflict. Both of the sides, facing the challenges of the pandemic are showing willingness to keep the diplomatic channels open and maintain the peace in the region, but the reciprocal accusations are not cleared out. Chinese assertiveness on the issue has been evaluated

as a part of a strategy of expansionism aiming to increase its sphere of influence, making use of the current global situation of obscurity. Indeed, the Aksai Chin region of China near this disputed area is strategically very important for China as it is the only door to Xinjiang and Tibet. On the other hand, the rising tension pushes the Indian Prime Minister Modi to the wall, who has done a lot to keep Indian-Chinese relations stable. An increased tension among these two rising powers would possibly limit their capacities and contribute to the enhancement of an already established western-oriented system.

Netanyahu's Annexation Plan Amidst Criticism



Since he was leading the campaign for parliamentary elections, Benjamin Netanyahu has promised for the annexation of the West Bank settlements, the target date of which is July 1, 2020. Although the annexation of the settlements is what most of the Israeli politicians want, including Gantz, the possible hazardous consequences of such a unilateral step are frightening for the most.

Mahmoud Abbas has announced Palestinian Authority's withdrawal from the agreements signed with Israel, pointing out that Israel is no more implementing them. Moreover, the plan has drawn international criticism, as well. Such move is publicly criticized by Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Russia. The countries firmly stand for the UN resolutions and draw attention to the threat posed to two-state solution. Furthermore, the Mideast UN envoy Nickolai Mladenov stated that annexation would

encourage radicalization of all sides and diminish prospects of normalization of ties between Israel and Arab states. In May, the European Union, for its part, has taken a stand against the annexation decision, supposing it would be a violation of international law. The Palestinian issue has been an overriding issue of international relations with its direct effect on countries of the region along with Israel and Palestine, its centrality for the great power competition since the Cold War. The Trump Administration's policies towards the Israeli-Palestinian problem have at most encouraged Netanyahu to work on the annexation plan. Pro-Israeli policies of the Trump Administration have deepened obscurity as Palestinian Authority rejects mediatorship of the US and favors Russian mediatorship. Russia has gained leverage in the region since its return to the Middle Eastern issues in 2015,; it has ties both with Israel and Palestine, put an effort in negotiations to unify the Palestinian side. Nevertheless, it is unlikely to see Israeli support to replacement of the US by Russia, especially in the current situation where Israel has the full support of Donald Trump.

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