

Coronavirus; a pandemic with history-defining implications for the Global Commons

It would not be amiss of me, nor unexpected, to begin this paper by stating that the current pandemic, the COVID-19 (C19) worldwide outbreak, is an unprecedented event; an international challenge the likes of which have never been seen before. Assessing states and their responses to this crisis will need the lens of hindsight. Still, it is clear as events unfold that there are many International Relations (IR) theoretical conclusions that can be drawn. I aim to address in this paper a few instances of this: namely, the implications of a 'Global Commons' (GC), potential benefits or drawbacks to a Realist, Liberalist or Constructivist analysis of events, and finally the history-defining nature of Coronavirus, its potential impact on future IR academic theory and discussion, and the need for collective responsibility.

A health pandemic is a critically dangerous phenomenon for our globalized world because it inhabits the GC. Coronavirus respects neither sovereignty nor borders and has affected every nation on Earth to date. Arguably, a GC in the globalized, 21st century means the global economy and interconnected trade. They are one and the same. Without this economic community, when events threaten and disconnect it, the world begins to be devastated. This is the case today, as states rush to cope with the socio-political and economic impacts of C19. Examples include falling stock prices, mass unemployment and huge public spending on revitalizing business across the world. This setup - a globalized world of interrelated and multifaceted international affairs - relies on the increasing importance of a GC. As a result, it highlights that when a pandemic or another major crisis occurs, there are an increasingly large number and variety of more potent threats that can cripple it. Other dilemmas and negatives to globalization and interconnectivity are similar, such as the writing of Hardin where he addresses the Tragedy of the Commons and how it ultimately brings ruin for all. This assessment of common self-interest leads well into the below discussion of the current emergence of all-encompassing Realist state behaviour.

As Snyder argues, none of the three accepted theories for IR: Realism, Liberalism or Constructivism, have a strong ability to predict or analyze change. Often it is perhaps better, therefore, to use all three to check against each other. However, in the case of this global pandemic, arguably, it has become clear that Realism is best suited to describing and analyzing current events. Morgenthau presents a realist theory of international politics, with power as its immediate aim. He suggests that human nature results in this endless struggle for power and that as a result, national interest takes precedence over moral principles. This is amplified in times of crisis and danger. It is clear currently that states are becoming more self-interested and isolationist, following Morgenthau's Classical Realism at a time of international crisis, with these decisions carrying immense global impacts. For example, vaccine development will surely be done on a first-come, first-serve basis, to protect the interests of the first state to make a breakthrough, while others remain in lockdown measures. Also, this C19 pandemic undoubtedly damages the principle of state sovereignty, and many countries are still fighting for self-preservation within their borders in line with Realist theory. An example of this is China's inability to report infection figures early and accurately, and willingness to cover them up, and also the state's more recent reluctance to allow investigators into the country. Ideals of transparency and shared information have been sacrificed, and this attempt to cover up and save the government from shame has been to the detriment of the entire world community.

On the other hand, many Liberalism proponents amongst IR theorists would argue that Neoliberal Institutionalism in a world of GC provides evident benefits and illustrates the importance of shared liberal institutions, such as the World Health Organisation (WHO). These theorists include Keohane, who proposes that if Realism did indeed accurately describe international politics, patterns of cooperation based on shared purpose wouldn't exist. Instead, he illustrates that international intergovernmental regimes help states deal with problems such

as transaction costs and misinformation at a time where global cooperation is arguably most necessary and very useful for governments. Unilateral rules may fit an individual country's situation better, but under bounded rationality, the convenience of international regimes triumphs.

Also, arguably, multiple examples across the world in everyday media of kindness and community, such as the celebration of health services through clapping and cheering, highlight the shared incentives for working together, as well as the value of a Constructivist analysis regarding shared norms and ideals. Sen discusses that there is little need for these ideals to be purely Western in their origin or focus. As mentioned previously, C19 does not discriminate, and neither should the shared principles that will help the world defeat it. Sen finds no sense in the dichotomy between the Western and non-Western legacy of Human Rights. The Western and non-Western traditions of rights and ideals for humanity have much variety within themselves, and this should be celebrated and utilized in a time of global need. However, there are contrary examples also of the impact of different ideals at a time like this. Over five years ago, President Obama spoke of the need for shared work towards furthering pandemic prevention and advancing tactics for dealing with one. Now, however, the Trump administration has a different view on the subject, scaling back pandemic control resources, and the US and the world are suffering accordingly. Various leaders and personalities have a significant influence on world events, in particular about how they deal with a crisis.

We all are living in a history-defining, future world-shaping moment. Huntington discusses in *Clash of Civilizations* that future war will not be fought over land, say, but instead that culture clashes will lead to conflict, as the West faces off against the Rest. Fukuyama also discusses this dominance and universalization of Western liberal capitalist democracy through intense globalization. They may have been proved right by this crisis. Fundamental changes of the like both predict are undoubtedly underway, at a time where

there is nothing in history to which we can look for guidance. In this period of immense upheaval, an IR theoretical analysis has a tremendous amount to offer when discussing the implications of individual states' attempts at addressing the Coronavirus pandemic.

Yet, what are these potential changes we will see? Can the pandemic ultimately become of environmental benefit or a positive for civic society and democracy at a time when it is widely threatened? For example, already, keys to future environmental health are becoming clear: taking cars off the roads and closing factories have meant the Himalayas are visible from points in India for the first time in over 50 years. It is not just healthcare procedure and resources that states across the world must look to improve, but everything and anything. They must be progressive, not reactive, and instead of rushing to get old, 'normal' life back on track, there must be fundamental sustainable changes. In this vein, what becomes essential are theories such as Keck & Sikkink's Transnational Advocacy Networks. They introduce that international actors must be bound together by shared values, everyday discourse and exchange of information and services. By blurring state boundaries and changing practices of national sovereignty, one can build new and beneficial links among civil and democratic societies, states and international organizations.

In conclusion, despite the potential strengths of Realism in a time where states must look inward to protect their citizens and rebuild, there are inherent dangers to becoming wholly isolationist at a time of crisis as dangerous as C19. A GC works best when all come together as a globalized world force, and all states can benefit from this system. As China and the USA rush to reopen their economies in the name of self-interest, and selfish political world leaders irresponsibly dumb down the threat, more and more people will suffer, particularly disadvantaged minorities who overwhelm death statistics. This behaviour is having a devastating impact at a time of global struggle. Realist self-interested politics cannot be justified in the name of preservation. History will not judge kindly those who turn away

from the value of international cooperation at a time where it is needed most. Preparing for the future after this pandemic must be the essential goal, and collective responsibility is required to achieve it.

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