



Covid19 Outbreak --- A Test to Global Governance

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On March 11th, 2020, Robert Redfield, the director of US Center for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), dropped a proverbial bombshell when he testified to the US Congress admitting that numerous virus deaths might have been miscategorized as flu.¹ This belated admission of misdiagnosis has further lent credence to the earlier speculation that many pulmonary fibrosis cases, which resulted in deaths due to patients' inability to breathe, might in fact have been caused by coronavirus. These cases where symptoms might have been masked by attributions to e-cigarette or vaping happened well before the virus outbreak in Wuhan, China.

These had triggered a host of doubts, ranging from the inexplicably abrupt closure of the Fort Detrick, Md, bio-warfare lab² to the immediate repatriation of 5 American militiamen diagnosed with flu-like symptoms in Wuhan after the World Military Games³. The origin of the

¹ https://edition.cnn.com/world/live-news/coronavirus-outbreak-03-11-20-intl-hnk/h_1319f66f92245a2fe4ec63fe91ab66c9

² <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/virus-biological-us-army-weapons-fort-detrick-leak-ebola-anthrax-smallpox-ricin-a9042641.html>

³ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/13/asia/china-coronavirus-us-lijian-zhao-intl-hnk/index.html>

outbreak was thus immediately shrouded with more questions than answers. Yet, bipartisan politicians of the United States have insofar remained deafeningly silent on the public uproar, both domestically and internationally.

Very clearly, these are no longer the issues of America's domestic governance, but the conspicuous missing link in the investigation of the virus' origin that has turned out to be a global crisis afflicting the entire mankind. While the origins of this deadliest virus outbreak since 1918 have yet to be established, both the gaffe-prone US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and his mercurial President, Donald Trump, seemed to be more inclined to engaging themselves in an open yet undiplomatic tirade with China by labelling the pandemic as 'Wuhan Virus' and 'Chinese virus' respectively.

The unapologetic stigmatization of Wuhan and China went into the open and was characteristically chorused by the US domestic media. This seemed to have taken precedence over the urgent need for its domestic contingency to countervail the acute inadequacies in testing kits and the other medical facilities in face of the virus outbreak in America.

The xenophobic backlash incited by such an undiplomatic remark bereft of decorum and political finesse was immediately felt when Orientals of Chinese and North-East Asian descents have been targeted and discriminated against⁴. The Trump Administration might have succeeded in exploiting the visceral public agony of the unprecedented pandemic to heap blame on China and the Chinese. But little could the President ever mask his egregious passivity, if not inaction, in handling the spread of coronavirus across the nation.

In retrospect, China had been buying time for the world, US included, as early as early January 2020, to better prepare for the onslaught of coronavirus. The Middle Kingdom decisively imposed an unprecedented lockdown, first on Wuhan, the epicenter of the outbreak, and later, on more provinces to contain the contagion within the country. The enormous sacrifices made, both economically and socially, by China and its populace was however hastily greeted with travel bans against China by some countries in the West.

In the US, media practitioners ranging from TV Talk Show hosts to columnists and opinion leaders had their field day in tongue wagging against the lockdown, in their perspective, of human rights. Parallel to this, China was targeted and pilloried for allegedly spreading the virus worldwide, thus stoking Sinophobia within the American social fabric.

The precious two months since China first rang the alarm-bell lapsed wastefully amid President Trump's perceived passivity of recognizing the threat. His upbeat predictions had time and again be contrasted by the unpreparedness at both the Federal and local levels. Little attention was paid to the outbreak despite his pretentious claim of the nation's preparedness to fight the raging pandemic. Mitigating the potential political damage in home

⁴ George Takei: Trump's Usage Of The Chinese Virus Signal Is A Signal To The Haters (MSNBC)
<https://youtu.be/SgSfFsHHjOs>, <http://on.msnbc.com>.

politics seemed to have displaced any urgency of his in coordinating a global crisis response.⁵

The Imperial College Covid-19 Response Team of epidemiologists further revealed in its report that if no action to limit the viral spread was taken, as many as 2.2 million people in the United States could die over the course of the pandemic. Even if some mitigation strategies, such as isolating those suspected of being infected and social distancing of the elderly, were to be adopted to slow the pandemic, the death toll would only be halved to 1.1 million, though the demand for health services would be remarkably reduced by two-thirds.⁶

This is no alarmist postulation that has stunned the international community which is now grappling with fighting the pandemic. Against such a gloomy global backdrop, the world is yearning for efficient and decisive global leadership, both in terms of coordinating a decisive global crisis response as well as an efficient supply and dispatch of public healthcare goods across the globe.

Parallel to this, domestic governance in managing a calamity of such magnitude also served as a good barometer for global confidence in any forerunner. Unfortunately, the Trump Administration has hitherto provided no global leadership to the world. The United States' anxiety of being displaced by China as a global leader is now growing day by day. More so, when China unhesitatingly dispatched its medical teams and therapeutic materials to Italy, Spain, Serbia, Iraq and many other countries in dire need of external help. This embodied its call for realizing a shared future for humankind particularly in the face of existential threats.

On the contrary, Europe, currently the new epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak, was unexpectedly snubbed by the United States when President Trump abruptly suspended the air traffic to Europe without any prior alert. Italy, one of US' allies in NATO, was too desperate to seek help from China when none of its EU partners responded to its plea. Neither was the much-anticipated Trans-Atlantic help from the US seen to be forthcoming. Plainly speaking, the United States did not rise to meet these critical moments with aid and direction.

In contrast, China, the first country bearing the brunt of Covid19, which is now on the threshold of gradual recovery after successfully battling the virus, swiftly rose to fill the void of global leadership.

While it is undeniable that saving lives in the interest of global public health overrides any geopolitical implications, nonetheless one can hardly deny that the latter would inevitably be consequential. Humanitarian help in the face of a global crisis is the bare minimum expected

⁵ Stephen Collinson, "Trump claims coronavirus is under control -- contradicting reality and his own top expert", <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/16/politics/coronavirus-us-president-donald-trump-fauci-politics/index.html>.

⁶ Neil M Ferguson, Daniel Laydon, Gemma Nedjati-Gilani, Natsuko Imai, Kylie Ainslie, "Impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) to reduce COVID-19 mortality and healthcare demand", Report of Imperial College COVID19 Response Team, <https://doi.org/10.25561/77482>.

from such powerful nations as the United States and China. This is a sheer humanitarian issue. And responses to pleas for help within the limits of affordability, too, are always touted as part of the norms of Confucius' teaching.

The heart-warming deeds of China have no doubt set an illustrious benchmark for benevolent global governance that provides leadership through promoting mutual help in times of crisis. This stands out clearly as a stark contrast against the prevailing global dominance which is very much self-centered and merely serving the very geostrategic interests of the hegemonic power of the day.

Perhaps this would serve as a good eye opener to those who have been habitually obsessed with the conventional notion that global leadership must necessarily be synonymous with global dominance, which is a euphemism for global hegemony.

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