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Conflicts Of The Past As Lessons For The Present

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CHINA AFTER THE PANDEMIC

IN THIS ISSUE

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The Coronacrisis Will Simply Exacerbate the Geo-strategic Competition between Beijing and Washington

By Michael R. Auslin

Even before the outbreak of the novel coronavirus in Wuhan, China, late last year, the Sino-U.S. relationship had been in a period of flux. Since coming to office in 2017, President Trump made rebalancing ties with China the centerpiece of his foreign policy. Claiming that it would no longer be business as usual with Beijing, Trump began to respond more forcefully to what he had long claimed were unfair Chinese trade practices, cyberespionage, military intimidation, and global propaganda campaigns. Yet the COVID-19 pandemic raised even more fundamental questions about the state of U.S.-China relations and how the two appear to be locked into a more antagonistic dynamic for the foreseeable future.

Unlike in the early months of the pandemic, it is now increasingly accepted that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its local officials ordered a cover-up of what was happening in Wuhan. From intimidating whistle-blowing doctors to a silencing of social media, and from destroying laboratory samples to buying up billions of pieces of personal protective equipment such as masks and gloves from around the world, the common wisdom now sees that the CCP prioritized protecting its own reputation and forestalling any domestic or international criticism of the kind that damaged it during the 2003 SARS cover-up. Most egregiously, Beijing lied to the World Health Organization about the nature of the virus in Wuhan, falsely claiming that there was no evidence of human-to-human transmission. This, and the decision not to restrict Chinese travel abroad during the Lunar New Year, destroyed any meaningful attempts to contain the virus inside China, and instead allowed it to ravage the globe.

As the scale of the catastrophe became clear, the party-state orchestrated a worldwide propaganda campaign to portray Beijing as successful in its battle against the coronavirus and as having selflessly helped the rest of the world, from “donating” medical supplies to sharing scientific information. Indeed, Chinese officials went so far as to claim that the United States created the disease and planted it in China.

Beijing’s propaganda campaign, while designed to divert any criticism of the regime, has poisoned relations with Washington, not to mention other countries, and is likely to result in an intensified bout of counter-campaigning from the United States. As Beijing steadfastly refuses to acknowledge any shortcomings in its response to the coronacrisis, voices across the globe are understandably questioning how it can be trusted



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as an international actor. The new dynamic in China's relations with the world will be a deep-seated distrust of Beijing's statements.

Moreover, Beijing is slowly reaping the fruits of its decision to denude the world of needed medical supplies and then sell defective masks and virus tests to numerous countries. Across Europe and Asia, governments are returning shoddy equipment and useless tests, sometimes after having paid tens of millions of dollars for them, as in the case of Spain, which bought \$497 million dollars-worth of items that it declared were unusable. In the case of Great Britain, all 3.5 million antibody test kits the government ordered failed to work properly, and were returned. The ill will that Beijing has engendered by selling back items that were sometimes donated by countries, as in the case of Italy, or providing defective equipment will further drive a wedge between China and those countries that now see it as an untrusty partner with whom a buyer must beware when doing business.

President Trump's trade war had already raised questions about the degree of "decoupling" that the United States and other major economies could undertake, so as to diversify their supply chains and be less beholden to Chinese manufacturers. Yet during the coronacrisis, it became widely known that America was nearly entirely dependent on China for everything from active pharmaceutical ingredients to the supply of daily medicines, as well as the production of medical masks, gloves, and gowns, among other items.

Commentators across the political spectrum ramped up calls for American businesses to produce vitally important medicines and equipment domestically, and to reduce U.S. dependence on Chinese importers. Sens. Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Tom Cotton (R-AR), among others, argued that the American supply chain had to be more diversified, raising the question of how far U.S. business can go in moving away from Chinese producers. Already, however, other countries were beginning to make moves in this direction. Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe, for example, announced that Tokyo would provide financial support for Japanese companies to move their operations out of China and back to Japan, while back in 2019, the then head of Foxconn called on Apple to move all iPhone production to Taiwan and off the mainland.

For Beijing, any significant reduction in exports will be a further strain on an economy that was slowing down significantly over the past decade. As an early indicator of just how damaging the pandemic has been, the Chinese economy shrank in the first quarter of 2020 by a record 6.8 percent, the first decline since records were kept starting in 1982. In response, the CCP will ramp up policies to capture new markets, putting it into greater competition with the United States, Japan, and other advanced economies.

Beijing is likely to double down on its One Belt One Road initiative, despite lackluster progress so far, by targeting smaller, developing nations throughout Eurasia, or weaker European states, such as Greece and Italy. It is possible that Beijing will seek to establish exclusive trade blocs, should measurable declines in trade with advanced economies take place. Using Chinese-dominated institutions, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, as well as international organizations run or influenced by Chinese officials, such as the UN's International Telecommunications Union, Beijing will continue to push forward with favorable deals for Chinese companies, like Huawei, part of a pattern of using IGOs to push state goals.

The ill will engendered by the coronacrisis may well play out in more traditional geopolitical ways, as well. In the South China Sea, recently an arena of military jockeying between Beijing and Washington, it has been business as usual. The PLA conducted military exercises with Cambodia and sent both fishing fleets and patrol ships into Japanese and Philippine waters, while flying air force planes near Taiwanese airspace. The U.S. Navy, for its part, has kept up freedom of navigation operations in the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea. The global crisis has not resulted in a dampening of the long-running competition between America and China, as Beijing continues to try to assert its influence if not control over Asia's strategic inner seas. As both Chinese and American leaders settle into a more adversarial mind-set, it is all too likely that geopolitical

jousting will intensify in Asia's skies and waters, with the attendant danger of an accident or miscalculation that results in an armed skirmish or worse.

All this raises the question of whether the U.S. and China are now enmeshed in a new Cold War. From one perspective, it is hard to see how Washington, as well as other capitals, will go back to business as usual with Beijing, as noted by British foreign secretary Dominic Raab. With Beijing continuing to reject accountability for the pandemic, despite increasing evidence of its cover-up, stifling of whistle-blowers, destruction of virus samples, and the like, there are increasing calls to fundamentally rethink relations with China. Canadian and American lawmakers and Indian lawyers have discussed filing lawsuits for reparations, while countries other than just Japan are considering moving production facilities out of China. The sense of betrayal that much of the world feels is only compounded by the defective medical supplies and equipment that Chinese companies have shipped around the world.

All of this, moreover, comes on top of unresolved issues between China and the rest of world including unfair trade practices, cyberattacks emanating from Chinese soil, moral outrage at the imprisonment of a million Uighurs, attempts to suppress Hong Kong's democracy movement, and a relentless influence campaign on college campuses, social media, and through exchange organizations around the world.

Whether there is a new Cold War or not, Sino-U.S. and China's relations with the world going forward are unlikely to look like they have in the recent past. The main geopolitical result of the coronacrisis will be a reduction in dependency on China, both economically and politically. With unrestrained globalization under fire, Washington and other capitals will have to reduce their national security vulnerabilities in critical medical materials, rare earths, and the like. Beijing essentially nationalized the production of N95 masks by American companies based in China like 3M; such an inability to produce vital materials at home must be rectified, by government mandates, if necessary. This will naturally lead to some decoupling of the American and Chinese economies, though how quickly and widely will remain unknown for a while.

From a political perspective, the CCP's mishandling of the coronacrisis, subsequent cover-up, and attempts to blame the United States will push Washington and other capitals away from the type of uncritical diplomatic engagement that marked the first forty years of China's modernization. In lieu of the decades-long attempts to engage Beijing in the hopes of getting it to become a good global actor, Washington will likely turn to deepening economic and political cooperation with other nations. Long-standing allies such as Japan, Great Britain, Australia, and Canada, among others, stand to reap the benefits of an American policy that fully embraces the importance of prioritizing ties with fellow democratic nations.

One of the countries that may benefit the most from the new environment is Taiwan. The Trump administration has already done more to deepen relations with Taiwan than any since the 1970s, including agreements to sell advanced defensive equipment and upgrading diplomatic contacts. Given Taipei's laudable actions during the pandemic, such as donating millions of masks and trying to warn the World Health Organization about the virus, Washington should push for Taiwan's inclusion in international organizations such as the WHO and International Civil Aviation Organization, as well as expand diplomatic and grassroots ties.

The dangers of overreliance on China, and of assuming ever-more engagement will change the nature of the CCP regime, are now unambiguously clear. The question Washington and other capitals must answer is, How far can they work with Beijing? No responsible voice is calling for a complete disengagement from China, or believes that such is possible. However, the crisis should make clear that national interests demand prudent distancing from the PRC, and that national security depends on a skeptical attitude towards Beijing. The time for a course correction in U.S.-China relations was long overdue, as recognized by observers on both ends of the political spectrum. The coronacrisis has merely exacerbated trends that were already apparent.

By its own choices, the CCP surrendered the benefit of the doubt, and responsible statecraft mandates that a guarded and self-interested approach to Sino-U.S. relations now guide America's China policy. Such a recalibration will be difficult after so many decades of unrestrained engagement, and it will undoubtedly result in heightened geopolitical tensions, but the tragedy of the COVID pandemic reveals the danger of continuing to indulge in unrealistic expectations.



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China Is Flailing in a Post-Coronavirus World

By Gordon G. Chang

Beijing's propagandists believe the coronavirus pandemic will bring about the end of U.S. hegemony, "the American Century" as they call it.

They are right in one narrow sense. The disease, which has reached almost every country and crippled societies across continents, has the feel of an epoch-ending event. What is likely to end, however, is not U.S. leadership. It's Beijing's audacious grab for global dominance.

The trend of elite thinking at the moment is that China has already shoved America aside. "This is the first great crisis of the post-American world," tweeted Carl Bildt, a former Swedish prime minister, on April 1.

That's music to the ears of Xi Jinping, China's ambitious leader. He has been busy capitalizing on the crisis, trying to use the pandemic, which his country started, to extend Chinese influence. For instance, Xi, in a mid-March phone call with Italian prime minister Giuseppe Conti, rolled out his "Health Silk Road" initiative to show his regime's responsibility as a global citizen.

There's a limit to how far China can make gains, however. For one thing, Beijing's typically selfish behavior has caused uproars elsewhere. One uproar resulted when China sold Conti's Italy medical protective gear that Italians had donated to Beijing a few weeks earlier.

China's main problem, however, is not irate Italians; it is that the disease has finished off the post-Cold War period, a time of peace, prosperity, and globalization.

That period was unusually beneficial for the Chinese state. In a globalizing world, Americans and others poured money and technology into China at unprecedented quantities because, it was thought, politics no longer mattered.

Many elites still believe more globalization is the answer to the coronavirus epidemic. "Wealth comes from communication, collaboration, and competition," writes Matthew Rooney, managing director of the George W. Bush Institute-SMU Economic Growth Initiative. "Security comes from cooperation that limits the scope for conflict."

All this may be true, but China has been undermining cooperation—and globalization—in two principal ways. First, it has been acting maliciously during the epidemic. Chinese leaders from about the second week in December knew or had to know that the coronavirus was transmissible person-to-person. They not only concealed this fact for weeks—grossly irresponsible by itself—but also tried to mislead the world into thinking the pathogen was not contagious in this fashion. At the same time, Chinese leaders pressured countries



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not to impose restrictions on arrivals from their country. President Donald Trump, at his April 18 press briefing, wondered whether Beijing “deliberately” allowed the virus to spread beyond China.

China, in short, turned an in-country epidemic into a once-a-century pandemic and thereby lost trust around the world.

Second, China through predatory and pernicious policies has been killing globalization over the course of decades. In reaction to China’s actions, countries, such as the U.S., have begun to protect themselves. The result is deglobalization, specifically the bypassing of multilateral institutions, the reshoring of manufacturing, the re-erection of political barriers to trade, and the reassertion of sovereignty. The world, in short, is fracturing.

The biggest victim of this fracturing—deglobalization—will almost certainly be China.

China needs the world. As an initial matter, its economy is ailing. Beijing’s National Bureau of Statistics reported gross domestic product fell, year-on-year, 6.8 percent in the just-ended calendar quarter, the first quarterly fall since 1992. In reality, the drop was far steeper.

Moreover, China’s prospects do not look good. Xi is returning the country to a state-dominated system and steadily closing China off to foreign business. Even in prosperous times, his model is unsustainable. It is especially unsustainable in periods of reduced trade and capital flows, like the era the world is now entering.

This coming era will be especially inhospitable for China because an export-dependent Beijing is pushing away customers. Such as its most important one, the United States. As Fox Business Network’s Maria Bartiromo reported in February, China turned around a ship carrying medical protective gear heading to New York hospitals.

At about the same time, Peter Navarro, Trump’s director of trade and manufacturing policy, said Beijing imposed export restrictions on N95 masks and nationalized an American factory producing them there. “How is anybody going to trust China in terms of keeping up their end of the bargain again in business?” Bartiromo asked.

Beijing is beginning to feel blowback. Tokyo is slated to announce it will subsidize Japanese companies to the tune of \$2.2 billion to move factories from China. Larry Kudlow, Trump’s chief economic adviser, this month talked in public about allowing U.S. companies to write off all the cost of moving facilities off Chinese soil. In Europe, Great Britain is now reconsidering a decision, made in January, to buy 5G telecom equipment from China’s Huawei Technologies.

Beijing’s responses to the international community have been belligerent, thereby creating a coalition against itself. Since the beginning of March, the People’s Liberation Army has started a new round of provocations in its peripheral waters, with boat-bumping and other incidents in the South China and East China Seas involving Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

The increased tempo of provocations shows that China is moving against many neighbors at once. The belligerent acts are also occurring at a time of mass arrests in Hong Kong, a special administrative region of the People’s Republic, and an unusually bold attempt to absorb Kazakhstan, a neighbor on its western border, into the Chinese state.

Is Beijing, recovering from the coronavirus, feeling strong or is it showing insecurity and flailing?

It does not matter. The Communist Party, since the founding of the People's Republic, has faced many internal challenges, but in those times it had possessed, on its own, the means to prevail. In the current crisis, however, the Party cannot succeed without the support of other nations.

Yet Beijing, through its new assertiveness, is alienating others at the worst possible moment.

The new era of deglobalization, therefore, is not going to be kind to China.



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Image credit: Poster Collection, CC 229, Hoover Institution Archives.

China Lies, China Kills, China Wins

By Ralph Peters

As a plague compounds our political divisions, it's essential to recall that the cause of the global carnage is not across the congressional aisle or parliamentary divide. This pandemic came courtesy of the breathtaking (literally, in this case) ruthlessness of the Chinese dictatorship, whose policies nurtured, hid, and fostered the spread of the COVID-19 virus currently killing our citizens by the tens of thousands and crippling economies worldwide.

Even the origin story of this pandemic, suggesting that the virus escaped from a "wet market" that trafficked in exotic animals, may have been propaganda. Given that China continues to deny access to trustworthy international investigators, conjectures vary, but the actual disease source may have been the Wuhan Institute of Virology, a lab with inadequate security that had been

researching coronavirus strains (for domestic defense, not germ warfare).

Initially, the Chinese sought to smother news of this plague—abetted by a dubiously credentialed head of the World Health Organization indebted to China for his appointment. When the outbreak could no longer be concealed, President Xi directed a propaganda campaign to shift the blame for the outbreak, even suggesting that visiting U.S. Armed Forces personnel had brought the virus to Wuhan, while—we now know—drastically underreporting the Chinese body count. Beijing piled lies atop heaps of corpses.

Despite subsequent mistakes from Milan to Manhattan, the guilt for this avoidable slaughter and economic destruction lies exclusively with Beijing. President Xi deserves to be charged in the International Criminal Court as an accomplice to mass murder, if not genocide.

Instead, China is the state likeliest to profit strategically from this global catastrophe, with much of Europe plague-ravaged, the European Union (EU) in an existential crisis, and the United States abandoning its vital leadership role. Barring an improbable upheaval in China's leadership circles, and despite China's own financial battering, Beijing will not let this unprecedented opportunity pass by.

Yes, China will pay more than one price for its monstrous behavior. Among governments, there is a broad awareness of—and anger over—China's atrocious behavior. And despite Beijing's vigorous disinformation campaign, populations also grasp that the sickness scything through families and neighborhoods was "made in China." Should the virus continue to spread in Africa, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere, we may see local pogroms against ethnic Chinese. Of far greater concern to Xi's regime, we will see scattered attempts by multinational corporations to diversify supply sources or even repatriate some manufacturing functions (China's control of drug manufacturing has come as one shock among many). Beijing could even see its flagship tech enterprise, Huawei, lose contracts for 5G-network equipment.

But increased dislike of China will be eclipsed by increased dependence on China: Ready money rules. The lynching of Chinese émigrés or "development-project" personnel will not drive Beijing from vulnerable

countries. Popular discontent is merely another cost of doing business once you have bought off the local political elite and ensnared a bankrupt government in a web of strategic payday-lender debt. China may do many things, but it will not retreat from its pawnshop empire.

As for multinationals diversifying supply sources, the effects will be trimmed by our greed: Access to the huge Chinese domestic market will be judged too important to corporations seeking to compete globally. China also will offer discounted terms to retain business. Corporate resolve will last barely longer than a rice wine hangover. As overextended companies struggle to recover from this pandemic, moral, ethical, and even long-term practical considerations will disappear: Getting bottom lines back in the black fast will outweigh every other consideration.

This effect will be exacerbated by China's anything-goes determination to recover first and be ready to reap all possible benefits from its open wallet. Despite deep structural weaknesses in its banking system, post-plague China will launch a strategic buying drive that will further divide Europe, frustrate the United States, and corner its East Asian neighbors. (China realized decades ago that economic power can equal or exceed the utility of military force in a hard-power role.)

Europe will be target number one for Beijing's global landlords. Buying up key industries at post-plague fire sale prices, China will seek to degrade what remains of EU unity and become a *de facto* hegemon in southern Europe—with Italy its primary beachhead.

Italians know full well that China is responsible for the horrific human toll and economic devastation their country has suffered over the past few months. As COVID-19 raged in Wuhan and beyond, the extensive business travel between China and Italy remained at normal levels, while Chinese tour groups continued to arrive through January (as I can personally attest, Chinese tourist groups seemed to be the only ones squeezing together in off-season Rome). Beijing did not halt the business exchanges or tourism because that would have required an explanation. For President Xi, dead Italians were not an issue.

And the response from Italy's all-but-anarchic left-wing government? As Italians died at rates not seen since nineteenth-century cholera epidemics, the foreign minister, Luigi Di Maio, welcomed a planeload of Chinese medical supplies with obsequious hoopla—then said nothing when Chinese testing kits proved worthless and face masks lethally shoddy.

Italy is a paradigm worthy of study. Chinese economic subversion has been going on in *il bel paese* for more than a quarter century. One of the first victims was the world-renowned Italian textile industry, with its incomparable fabrics—produced not *en masse*, but by small-to-medium-size family-owned firms. With excess capacity at home, the Chinese launched a strategic assault on the industry, increasing the quality of its own textiles and dropping prices sharply. The Chinese textiles were never as fine as those “made in Italy,” but the reduced costs won over European and global firms: if Chinese fabrics were not as good, they were deemed to be good enough. Then, as one Italian firm after another collapsed, Chinese investors bought up the plants and hired back skilled Italians to teach (often-illegal and all-but-enslaved) immigrant Chinese laborers how to make higher-quality cloth—enabling the new masters to sew on the prized “Made in Italy” label. In Italy's traditional textile regions, expat Chinese business communities now wield political clout, while local employment of Italians has never recovered.

This pattern is about to recur on a much larger scale, in far-more-sensitive industries. Suffering economic toxic shock, Italy will welcome investment from any source that can boost its convalescence. And the only major source with ready money and resolve is going to be China, which will gain backroom veto power in the EU and backdoor influence in NATO. Spain and Greece, as well as France, also will face corporate takeovers and the purchase of poison-pill minority stakes in strategic industries. For Beijing, an economic occupation of southern Europe is a means to disrupt northern Europe and crack the EU block into less-competitive, more-cooperative pieces.

And what incentive will the EU have to resist, when it's plunged into deep recession, when the transatlantic relationship is on life support, and the United States threatens trade wars against its closest allies? Beijing will supercharge its quest for economic empire just when Washington's embittered factions cannot even agree on constitutional lines of authority.

As for Putin's Russia, now facing the COVID-19 onslaught after insisting it had escaped, our grim consolation will be that Moscow's domestic authority and international capabilities will be further weakened by a systemic frailty masked until now by bluster.

We cannot know precisely how all of this will end, but, at present, it looks as though only China will profit strategically from the terrors and devastation of the plague it unleashed on the world.

POLL: How will the world look at China after the coronavirus pandemic?

- China wins, given it stopped the virus relatively quickly and sent aid to others.
- China both wins and loses, since it will always be blamed for delaying proper responses to the viral spread.
- China loses all around because it will be rightly faulted for spreading the virus and lying about its origins and nature.
- China is in decline due to a worldwide growing dislike of its policies on trade and health.
- The Chinese economy will crash, with worldwide implications as businesses pull out of the country.



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Discussion Questions

1. Has the coronavirus strengthened or weakened the Chinese Communist Party?
2. Is the Chinese “New Silk Road” initiative no longer viable?
3. Why exactly was the global reaction to the coronavirus epidemic so different from the 2009–10 H1N1 swine flu worldwide response?
4. Will China tighten down or liberalize as it faces global scrutiny?
5. To what degree will or should the U.S. disengage economically from China?

Suggestions for Further Reading

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U.S. Recognition of Taiwan



Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of “War, Revolution, and Peace.” Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: “The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man’s endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life.” From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the “Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict” has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution’s dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

Strategika

Strategika is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.



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