

Грег Саймонс

PhD, доцент Института исследований России и Евразии (IRES), Уппсальский университет (Швеция), профессор Департамента коммуникаций, Университет Туриба (Латвия),
greg.simons@ires.uu.se

**THE GLOBAL GEOPOLITICAL AND POLITICAL ORDER:
BEFORE AND AFTER COVID-19**

From the late 20th century it has been apparent that a transformation in the global political and geopolitical order was taking place as the relative attractiveness and strength of the US geopolitical hegemony and the global liberal hegemony became increasingly under strain from external and internal pressures. The unipolarity of the United States is gradually in the process of being replaced by multipolarity with non-Western characteristics. Global liberalism is under pressure and threat from anti-political establishment forces that have been branded as being “populist” in nature.

The current Corona Virus pandemic has swiftly spread across the planet causing massive disruption to human life and activity, and creating mass panic along the way. Many see the very obvious risks and hazards associated with the virus and its spread. However, conversely, there are those that have attempted to benefit and have benefited from the crisis situation. On the level of politics and geopolitics, an attempt has been made to “reset” the existing transformations that were occurring before the virus and in favour of US geopolitics and liberal politics. On the level of individual rights and freedoms, the interaction between mass media and national politics created a massive amount of fear concerning the virus, which created the cognitive environment where many people have been willing to trade their remaining rights and liberties for a sense of security. Furthermore, a significant shift in wealth has occurred, where the world’s richest have accumulated a vast amount of wealth in a very short space of time during the pandemic. The question remains, shall these attempts to freeze the global order succeed or not?

Global Geopolitics

Before the Corona Virus pandemic, there was a noticeable transformation in global geopolitics, where the United States' power, influence and capabilities are seen to be in relative decline to other rising geopolitical powers, such as China. Even though Russia has appeared as the prime opponent of the US-led global order in the popular geopolitical narrative characterisations, China is in fact the main competitor in terms of its economic and military strength. This was evident in the recent economic and political clashes initiated by the United States against China, such as the trade wars and events to destabilise Hong Kong. Some even coined the term, the New Cold War, to characterise the global geopolitical tensions where non-Western powers were beginning to challenge the hegemony of the United States. As its power has declined, the US has increasingly resorted to the use of coercive force as a means to preserve its global position, however, multiple endless wars of choice have in fact weakened its position further.

The Corona Virus was seen as an opportunity by the United States, to use against its opponents and competitors. This was seen in the US moves to secure Corona Virus supplies, even at the expense of allied countries, such as successfully taking equipment consignments intended for France and Germany from their supplier, and attempting the same against Canada. At the same time as interfering with other countries ability to secure supplies, they criticised the global humanitarian efforts of Cuba, China and Russia. US has also used the crisis to add further pressure against Iran, Syria and Venezuela by increasing sanctions against them, in spite of the obvious lack of morality and ethics in doing so. The US has also attempted to brand the Corona Virus as the "China Virus" in an attempt to deflect its own poor management of the issue and to try and weaken the global image (and therefore appeal and power) of China.

Global Politics

In the period before the Corona Virus, the global liberal order was put under tremendous strain from anti-establishment politics, and there was seemingly little they

could do to hold the decay. This was evidenced by such popular voting events as BREXIT, the 2016 US presidential elections and the gains by political parties as the AfD in Germany and the Swedish Democrats in Sweden. Establishment politics is hobbled by an increasing lack of legitimacy in the eyes of the public that result from two intractable crises — a financial crisis that is the result of mismanagement and resulting in neo-liberal “austerity” and the mass migration crisis and the resulting demographic and crime wave shocks.

The Corona Virus has created the opportunity for a rally around the flag effect, where the public temporarily unites when the country is seen as being under threat from external or foreign forces (such as George Bush’s use of 9/11 to get re-elected). Thus countries with liberal governments had mainstream media that supported and promoted the efforts of the political leadership. Various liberal political mainstream “heroes” have been sold to the global publics, such as the New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Adern, the resulting logic being the message of public safety in the liberal status quo. Those leaders not in the political establishment have been attacked, such as Donald Trump, where the political opposition switched from the ‘traditional’ of him being a Russian stooge, to poor handling of the Corona Virus pandemic.

Global Rights, Freedoms and the Distribution of Wealth

One of the main selling points by the US and liberal hegemony has been the supposed superiority of its ‘civilizational system’ based on the values and norms of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. This was held as being a superior system for the public in all respects and in a messianic vision, as such, it shall be the final stage in human development that was signalled by such slogans as “the end of history”. Those countries and systems that were branded as being undemocratic or authoritarian were dismissed as being inferior social, economic and political systems that should mould themselves in the image of liberal democracy.

One of the almost universal reactions of liberal democracies in reaction to the Corona Virus has been to immediately ignore the core values and norms of democracy, rule of law and human rights and impose, at times, draconian measures in a time of uncertain and contradictory information on the virus. For example, in Romania private citizens were fined for breaking the regulations in a period of some weeks, the sum exceeds what all companies and businesses in the country pay in company tax for quarter of a year! All rights and freedoms were suspended at times and there was heavy use of law enforcement by police and military forces to impose the government's will often in the face of a lack of public debate or transparency. The lack of information and contradictory information hints at the instrumentalisation of figures for political purposes by either emphasizing risk or minimising it (Japan and Olympic Games for example). Mass media and journalism are complicit in driving mass fear that has created a moral panic, where people are increasingly prepared to trade their liberty for a false sense of security, the result being that they lose both their liberty and security. The cognitive result is a division of society where it becomes divided between those that believe and enforce the government line even if it contradicts their objective interests and those that challenge it and are declared as being risks to society.

While many people have been suffering psychologically, physically and economically from the effects of the virus and draconian government policy, new classes of people emerged. For example, the class of "essential workers" that have benefited somewhat from the situation, but the largest beneficiaries have been billionaires that have increased their accumulated wealth by hundreds of billions of US dollars in several months. At the same time, small businesses are going bankrupt at an alarming rate owing to being forced to remain shut as a health measure, while at the same time people are allowed to riot and protest in large number concerning race relations. Thus these contradictions are merely further reinforcing the lack of democracy, transparency and accountability of governments in countries that consider they have a superior political system.

Conclusion

Will these changes likely become permanent? My estimation and evaluation tells me, no. The reasons why is that we are currently experiencing a rally around the flag effect. But this is no evolving into a huge schism in society at different ideological and pragmatic levels — political, economic, social and so forth. There are increasing challenges to the government and their attempts to protect and guard their orthodoxy of knowledge that supports their policy line. Furthermore, the underlying crisis conditions that caused US global hegemony the supremacy of global liberalism remains unresolved and are likely to be exacerbated as a result of the policy line of various governments. Instead of achieving the intention of reversing the global transformations, the Corona Virus may well in fact speed up these transformations.