

Coronavirus Crisis Has Created “Major Political Fault Lines” in Relations Between the World’s Regions and Countries

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It is curious that the coronavirus pandemic in which we unwittingly find ourselves is exposing both praiseworthy and unattractive features of the world we inhabit. On the one hand, countries are sharing vital information with each other. Medical personnel are doing everything they can to alleviate suffering and save lives. The heroic actions of those proverbially on the front lines—medical professionals, construction workers, plumbers, and electricians, among others—surely have kept the virus from wiping out entire cities. They perform work to earn their salaries and wages, but also to serve the common good.

On the other hand, political leaders are exposing themselves as selfish and corrupt. Ideological agendas are blinding their purveyors to the fact that countries stand to lose far more than gain in international credibility by the misguided actions of those in power. Examples of such short-sighted behavior appear below. Various scenarios and predictions aside, regardless of how and when the world’s civilization will cross the finish line of this catastrophe, major fault lines will have appeared that will be difficult to repair. A scar when healed differs permanently from unincised skin. The body and the mind will remember the circumstances of the wound.

Through the coordination of the World Health Organization (WHO), countries such as China and Russia have shared their growing knowledge about the virus with the world. China shared the coronavirus genome with WHO in January, 2020. That same month *Xinhua* reported:

“The genome sequences of five 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) strains on the National Genomics Data Center (NGDC) have been synchronized and shared with an American database, according to the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS).”[i]

Russia received genome information from China and was able to decipher the entire genome sequence of the coronavirus in March, 2020, and sent it to the WHO database.[ii] In a recent interview with *Consortium News* journalist par excellence Diana Johnstone notes, “in early April, Vietnam donated hundreds of thousands of antimicrobial face masks to European countries and is producing them by the million.”[iii]

When the coronavirus was first identified as a threat to public health in China, one of the steps the country took to combat the disease was to turn to world-class Cuban biotech innovation:

“Amongst the 30 medicines chosen by the Chinese National Health Commission to fight the virus was a Cuban anti-viral drug called Interferon Alfa-2B . . .”[iv]

Despite its own limited resources as a result of the now 62-year-old economic embargo by the U.S., Cuba on many occasions has sent its doctors and virologists to help other countries.

“As the world fights to stop COVID-19 claiming more lives, Cuba has dispatched 593 medical workers to 14 countries in their battles against the pandemic . . .”[v]

Despite its own struggle to contain the virus, Russia has generously helped other countries—even sending a cargo plane-load of medical supplies to the U.S., the country imposing severe sanctions on it and interfering with the completion of the gas pipeline Nord Stream 2 at every turn.

After the EU did nothing to help Italy in response to its plea for assistance with battling the coronavirus, leaving its member country in effect alone, Cuba, Russia, China, and Venezuela efficiently came through with the needed help. Cuba, Russia, and China sent supplies and virologists to northern Italy. Russian medical personnel disinfected many nursing homes, military specialists set up field hospitals, and doctors treated 80 people and helped cure 40 suffering from the coronavirus.[vi] Venezuela provided doctors and other medical specialists.

Serbia, not an EU country but located on that continent, also was denied assistance; Russia and China stepped in and gave invaluable aid. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that Russia would help Serbia “as always.”[vii] With the four planes that contained the coronavirus medical equipment and personnel now having returned to Russia from Belgrade, the outcomes of Russian assistance can be summed up as follows:

On April 3-4, the Russian Aerospace Forces’ planes transported to Serbia Russian military medics, including virologists, radiation, chemical and biological protection specialists, special medical equipment as well as protection gear and military vehicles.

The Russian servicemen have disinfected 178 facilities in 37 Serbian cities, including 367 buildings on the area of more than 1.6 mln square meters, 69 sections of motorways on nearly 488,000 square meters. The military doctors have examined and treated more than 800 patients.[viii]

This bitter experience of rejection of aid from the EU led Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic to re-evaluate, in his words, the “*fabled international and European solidarity*” as something that “*only existed on paper . . .*”[ix] RT senior writer Nebojsa Malic sums it up well:

“For the rest of Serbia, but also much of the world, the Covid-19 crisis is turning into a sobering experience. It has revealed not only which friends are fair-weather and which ones are true, but also that globalization is hardly inevitable . . .”[x]

Moreover, Serbia has not forgotten NATO's brutal 78-day bombing campaign of Yugoslavia that began on March 24, 1999—not very long ago in historical time. Political fault lines are emerging.

In both the cases of Italy and Serbia, the U.S. provocatively warned Europe about the dangers of receiving help especially from Cuba and Russia—countries with universal health care built into their respective national budgets and constitutions. *Forbes* expressed concern about Russia's "trying to win favor from Italian authorities." [xi] Perish the thought! Reasonably speaking, it is a normal gesture for one country to offer help to another in a friendly way—that is what characterizes good international relations. And to practice medical diplomacy during a pandemic represents normalcy, humanitarian goodwill, and neighborly relations. When a *BBC* interviewer implied that Russia's coronavirus aid was sinister and ideologically motivated, Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte replied with annoyance,

"To think that the aid that we are getting from Russia, China or other countries could influence the geopolitical stance of Italy is a big offense - and not just for me, also for Vladimir Putin, with whom I had a long phone call and who would never dream of using this as leverage in this moment." [xii]

What is actually at play here for the U.S. is not a concern for the welfare of the people of Italy and Serbia, but rather that the medical internationalism manifested by countries not its client states—Cuba and Russia in these instances—may result in the U.S.'s losing control of Europe. However, the U.S. is doing a first-rate job of bringing about that rupture between itself and the European Old World all by itself with its hostile, erratic, and self-centered foreign policy even concerning countries and regions hitherto considered its allies. The same holds true of Western Europe itself: Voices in the EU have become so depraved that they twist these countries' humanitarian acts of badly needed solidarity into political grandstanding. The EU will not tolerate that Cuba, Russia, China, and Venezuela—all with twentieth-century socialist roots—brought help to those in need, with no preconditions attached. The cynicism of the EU is clear—politics and Russia-bashing (more recently, China-bashing) matter much more than genuineness and compassion for countries in their own backyard.

Concerning the U.S., the government at one point sought to have Germany develop a vaccine for the coronavirus that would be purchased and used for itself only—an instance of disturbing selfishness and shortsightedness. [xiii]

In addition, the disorganization that has reigned in Washington produced, among other problems, bickering between the national and state governments (such as with New York); the lack of a consistent and clear message from the president and his staff (such as differences between Dr. Anthony Fauci's predictions and those of Pres. Trump); and the government's outright requisitioning of medical supplies already purchased by various states for reasons not made clear (*Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 7, 2020). One has the impression that in the midst of such chaos states are on their own to muddle through the crisis as novice explorers in a dark tunnel.

But the bloom is off the rose. Here is where lasting fault lines will form: The countries that received help will long remember those that stood with them in their hour of need, and those that disdained their pleas for medical assistance. I have argued the following point

before, but will state it again: lasting, productive socio-political relations are forged by the diplomacy of moral equivalence and generosity, not by threats or sanctions, both of which are manifestations of an imagined moral superiority.[xiv] Regardless of individual views on different approaches to governing—whether socialist, tribal, democratic, or plutocratic—in a far-reaching crisis a well-organized, centralized, and decisive government with even a moderate level of trust from its constituents has a much better chance of responding effectively to a given crisis than a government that emerges as chaotic and contradictory in important directives to its people.

The post-coronavirus future will evidence some new and strengthening alliances among countries and political entities, based on how compassionately and courteously their governments respond in the present moment to this global threat to health and economic stability. It may be true that traditional deal-making among well-established alliances will not change significantly, but the coronavirus crisis has all the earmarks of shuffling around the geopolitical positions many analysts take for granted. And some of this shuffling, with where the resulting cards finally land, may lead to a wiser and more ethical approach to international relations.

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Notes

[i] http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-02/07/c_138763999.htm

[ii] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPZcxocQ6jU> (from pravdareport.com)

[iii] <https://consortiumnews.com/2020/05/17/a-circle-in-the-darkness-post-war-europe/>

[iv] <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/latamcaribbean/2020/03/18/cuba-and-coronavirus-how-cuban-biotech-came-to-combat-covid-19/>

[v] <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/cuba-history-sending-medical-teams-nations-crisis-200331112744040.html>

[vi] <https://tass.com/world/1149591>

[vii] <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/483335-coronavirus-pandemic-serbia-border/>

[viii] <https://tass.com/society/1157339>

[ix] <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/483335-coronavirus-pandemic-serbia-border/>

[x] <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/483335-coronavirus-pandemic-serbia-border/>

[xi] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/isabeltogoh/2020/03/26/from-russia-with-love-putins-medical-supplies-gift-to-coronavirus-hit-italy-raises-questions/#1d1c71984a47>

[xii] <https://eastandwest.me/2020/04/11/italian-pm-conte-insinuations-about-russian-aid-offend-me-deeply/>

[xiii] <https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-tried-convince-german-scientists-make-coronavirus-vaccine-only-united-states-1492416>

[xiv] <https://russia-insider.com/en/politics/clash-worldviews-moral-equivalence-or-moral-superiority/ri20229>

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