

# COVID-19 AND THE MODERN CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

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## Abstract

The urgency of the research topic is determined by the global context of the problem itself. The impending threat from COVID-19 has exposed the world community to a new reality. The global epidemic has revealed many problems that the international community is facing. Although the coronavirus, like other global pandemics, is primarily a medical problem, at this stage, it already has a pronounced negative impact on the economies of more than 190 countries around the world. Therefore, the world is facing the threat of a new economic crisis, which will inevitably affect the modern agenda of world politics.

The purpose of the paper is to provide information to interested people about the political challenges and current trends of the COVID-19 global pandemic and to highlight the multilateralist and unilateralist approaches in the context of the new political reality, the analysis of which provides a more or less complete picture of the problem.

The research topic aims to demonstrate and explore the cause-and-effect relationship between COVID-19 anatomy and the current challenges of the New World Order, which will help us to better understand the political processes in modern international politics and seek new models of international cooperation that can avoid and resist new global risks.

The article presents the author's conclusions on the correlation between the need to create effective COVID-19 global crisis management and to radically change international approaches.

**Keywords:** Unilateralism; Multilateralism; Right – extremists; National Populists.

## 1. Introduction

COVID-19 global pandemic has radically changed the world policy agenda, although some alarming trends in the development of the modern system of international relations were revealed long before the COVID-19 global epidemic, still at the end of the Cold War, when the entire international relations system was reconstructed – because of the birth of a new unipolar world and the beginning of the process of globalization of world politics. The advantages of the United States, the only superpower – “the world hegemon” – were colossal. The military advantage was obvious, the US economy was leading the process

of globalization, and its ideology was spreading all over the world. Scholars Stephen Brooks and William Folfos agree that „there has never been a system of sovereign states where one country dominated to such an extent“, only the Roman Empire at its peak could be compared to the American Empire. But the unlimited power of the United States not only could avoid crisis management, on the contrary, has provoked crises in international relations.

## 2. Presentation of the main research material

The crisis could not be resolved even at the edge of the new millennium after the change in the political configuration of forces when the political balance changed dramatically and several centers of political and economic gravity emerged – according to 2020 data, the US GDP is 9.764 trillion USD, Japan – 4.667 trillion USD, China -1,198 trillion USD. Currently, the United States (24.2%) and China (14.1%) occupy almost 40 percent of the world economy (IMF data) [ავტორი, 2020:3]. Russia’s ambitions as a global player were also highlighted. This format of the new world order has also created many financial and political crises in recent decades – the financial crisis in Russia in 1998, the debt crisis in East Asia in 1999, the global financial crisis in 2008, and the financial crisis in the Eurozone in 2008.

Political crises also matured in the wake of the financial crises. International Democratic Institutions – The UN and EU Crisis After Brexit, the Syrian political crisis, followed by an increase in global migration, especially illegal migration. The large number of refugees from Syria and other countries affected by the Middle East conflict has further exacerbated the already difficult situation and led to a crisis of European political and cultural identity.

Risks from global security have become a serious challenge, which includes: the illegal trade in weapons and radioactive materials, illegal banking, cyberattacks, trafficking, piracy, etc., which have arisen in the so-called „Uncontrolled black holes“ created by conflicts in some regions of the world, including Georgia. „In 2014, Europol (European Police Office) determined that there were almost half a million firearms lost or stolen in the EU“ [Joseph. E. Stiglitz, 2020].

According to another observation, „the cybercrime industry generated at least 1.5 trillion USD in 2018“, more than 50% of the world’s population is connected to the Internet and about one million new users are connected daily. Two-thirds of the world’s population has a mobile device [Casey Crane, 2019]. These are global achievements. Further organization of cyberattacks will lead to the „collapse of the information infrastructure“, which is one of the most influential risk factors.

Modern political and economic crises have been exacerbated by increasing natural disasters, large-scale medical illnesses, disruptions to communication channels (strong earthquakes in Asia, the United States, and Europe, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, global epidemic waves). Statistics on the number of natural disasters worldwide in recent decades alone look like the following: 2011 – 352, 2012 – 355, 2013 – 362, 2014 – 373, 2015 – 373, 2016 – 375, 2017 – 393, 2018 – 415, 2019 – 409 [Global Risks Report 2020]. Climate change is having more severe and rapid consequences than expected. The last five years, according to available data, will be the warmest, with natural disasters becoming more intense and frequent; Statistics on the years of pandemic disasters are as follows: HIV/AIDS – 1981, SARS – 2002/2003, swine flu – 2009/2010, MERS – 2012, Ebola – 2014/2015 [Casey Crane, 2019] and lastly, the impending threat from COVID-19 in 2019-2020 has put the world community in an even worse reality. Although the above-mentioned pandemics, and of course the coronavirus among them, is primarily a medical problem, at this stage, it already has a pronounced negative impact on the economies and policies of more than 190 coun-

tries around the world. Therefore, it is obvious that the world is facing the threat of a new economic crisis, which will inevitably affect world politics as well.

The pandemic revealed the unpreparedness of international organizations to avoid and manage global problems. The multilateral approach – the regular summits of the leading state's leaders, primarily within the framework of COVID-19, failed to address new global issues (such as social development, migration, environmental, security issues, etc.). Consequently, an active political and scientific discourse on the effectiveness of multilateralist and unilateralist models has begun.

Multilateralist and unilateralist approaches were changing dynamically in a modifying world following in the footsteps of the political tastes of different policy actors. The approaches of Clinton and Obama were as multilateral as possible and were unilateral only when necessary. The approach of Bush Jr., especially during his first term, was unilateral and multilateral only when necessary. As for the former President of the United States – Donald Trump – his approaches were unilateral both during the election campaign and during his rule. „America First“ – with this stance Donald Trump came to power in the United States. Through unilateralist rhetoric, he was able to mobilize and manipulate the national sentiments of the population based on negative maxims about strengthening immigration legislation, free international trade, NAFTA, the Transatlantic Partnership and „global warming“, and other treaties. This policy influenced the withdrawal of the United States from UNESCO and the weakening of this organization. He criticized the UN, NATO, and the European Union from a national point of view. The Trump administration's trade policy was based on strengthening national economic interests and strictly enforced measures taken by some European countries (Germany). These measures serve the support of commercial interests of corporations (including high-tech and automobile manufacturing).

In contrast to the multilateralist positions that see the great potential of global governance, expressed in the structures and processes that allow different governments to work together and in no way replace them, Trump has taken a much more lucrative position by appealing to America's uniqueness. During the election campaign, unlike his rival multilateralist Hillary Clinton, Trump appealed throughout the entire election campaign with a unilateralist concept, claiming that he was only concerned with „what is good for America“.

The election of Donald Trump as President of the United States was followed by a Brexit vote when the United Kingdom voted to leave the EU in June. These two events have led to the rise of political parties that have declared populist programs and ideas of economic nationalism in Western society. „One of the most significant changes in Western European party systems in recent decades is the rapid growth of the populist radical right-wing (PRR) parties“ [Krogstad, 2017:10], among them are pro-governmental groups from the conservative elite, as well as the legal successor political forces of Europe's Nazi past, which Italian scholar Piero Ignazi calls the traditional right-wing extremist forces [Lortkipanidze, 2018: 2]. Conditionally, this political organization has several subgroups with different positions – right-wing populists (nationalists), Eurosceptic forces, groups of „reformists and conservatives“ and right-wing extremists.

Here we want to emphasize the fact that not all populist political parties are right-wing and not all populist right-wing parties, in turn, may be radical. In the notion of radical right-wing parties (RRPs), we can unite those political organizations that:

1. Do not belong to the traditional right-wing camp, the Christian-Democratic Community, for Europe;
2. Distinguished by rhetoric and skepticism against the EU in common European institutions;
3. Declare their ideology to be different forms of nationalism, based on the phenomenon of xenophobia,

show less acceptance, resistance to different types of minorities;

4. Characterized by support for non-liberal interpretations of democracy or even authoritarianism;

5. Characterized by populist rhetoric, with the view of dividing society into two homogeneous and contrasting groups, including the tendency to declare the existing conflict as the main subject of the political process [Lordkipanidze, 2018:5].

However, it is necessary to note the dynamics of the transformation of some of the radical right-wing parties' views at the present stage. While radical right-wing political parties are more vulnerable to authoritarianism than liberals, radicalism and populist nationalism, with strong balancing and control mechanisms for democratic development between democratic institutions and branches of government, has immunity against authoritarian deviations, as confirmed by the examples of several cases in Western Europe. After the victory in the European Parliament, under the pressure of the people, some radical forces transformed their fundamental views and they began to talk not about rejecting the European idea, but only about the ideological revision of ideas and liberal principles unacceptable to them, but unfortunately did not reconsider attitudes towards Russia. In the event of a possible coming to power of the radical right-wing parties, the political sympathies of most of these forces towards Putin and their legitimacy of the annexation of Crimea could become some obstacle to traditional support for Georgia's territorial integrity and Georgia's European integration process. Therefore, we consider it important to intensify this problem and start a discussion on future specific foreign policy scenarios, which, if the radical right-wing forces come to power, will prevent the negative consequences of Georgia's European integration process.

The dynamics of the transformation of the radical right-wing parties' views – the acceptance of certain signs of multilateralism in the prism of national political and economic interests, we think, is a very important process, because the so-called „Overdose“ of national ideology may damage the balance between sound and adequate protection of national political and economic interests and the development of full-scale international cooperation. This balance, we believe, is the only acceptable formula for stable international cooperation.

### 3. Conclusion

Multilateral approaches in areas such as peacekeeping, healthcare, and environment protection [Cas Mudde and Cristobal Roviza Kaltwasser, 2017], has no alternative, although COVID-19 has revealed cracks in the area of global confidence. Multilateralist approaches alone – the involvement of multinational organizations and joint efforts – did not seem to be enough to prevent us from heading for a global pandemic and managing it. COVID-19 has identified the shortcomings of global interdependence and the problem of global governance. It is clear that the existing mechanism of managing global crises needs to be updated and these challenges need more effective management – a new model of international cooperation in preventing and resisting global risks, which will be created with significant changes and amendments, primarily taking into account national and international approaches at all levels.

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