

THE REALM OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY DURING THE YEAR ONE OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC THE DECONSTRUCTION – CHRONICLE NEXUS (PART I)

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Abstract. The present study/article would, intentionally, not begin with the traditional “Executive Summary”. During the Covid-19 Pandemic age, the scholarly and academic environment had been awash with an uninterrupted flux of writings, related or not specifically to the nexus International Relations & Diplomacy – the novel coronavirus global health crisis aka Pandemic: books and studies in printed form, plus those, even more numerous, dissipated virtually, in the various channels of social media, including, as more recently, through Webinar(S), Podcasts, and so on. With the synergetic role, the opening(s) of the present article (Part I) is interested in confirming the several directions for the journey of Diplomacy’s involvement in connection with the broader global health landscape at the time of Pandemic.

Keywords: *Global Diplomacy; Multilateral Diplomacy; Bilateral Diplomacy; Global Health Diplomacy in the Year 2020; COVID-19*

Opening the window toward the subject-matter with a *Quartet of Guiding Mottos*¹:

– “A worldwide tragedy like the Covid-19 pandemic momentarily revived the sense that we are a global community, all in the same boat, where one person’s problems are the problems of all. Once more we realized that no one is saved alone; we can only be saved together”².

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¹ The present paper would, intentionally, not begin with the traditional “Executive Summary”. Putting at the start of a study an “Executive Summary” could risk, figuratively said, “killing” the work in case, as the reader would not be interested/having no more time to continue reading the full text *per se*, once satisfied with the “Executive Summary”. In a sense, we would witness transposing literally, this time, the benign above-stated sentence into a “bloody and lethal” paraphrase: “Summary Execution” of an honest and sometimes long work. Instead, a Guiding Quartet of Mottos was put at the head of our enterprise here, with an intended dual synergetic role: giving some directions for the journey of Diplomacy’s involvement in connection with the broader global health landscape at the time of Pandemic, plus, as a “Siren Call” hopefully mesmerizing the potential reader to go through the entire text.

² Pope Francis’s Social Encyclical “*Fratelli tutti*”, 3 October 2020.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

– “We have been brought to our knees – by a microscopic virus. The pandemic has demonstrated the fragility of our world. It has laid bare risks we have ignored for decades: inadequate health systems; gaps in social protection; structural inequalities; environmental degradation; the climate crisis... The pandemic has been likened to an X-ray, revealing fractures in the fragile skeleton of the societies we have built. It is exposing fallacies and falsehoods everywhere; (among them) the myth that we are all in the same boat”³.

– “With COVID-19, we are all in the same storm. We are not all in the same boat. Some boats have holes that leak, and some boats are more vulnerable”⁴.

– “We are conditioned to think in terms of national affairs on the one hand, and international affairs on the other. Coronavirus has already done much to hasten the disappearance of the distinction between the two”⁵.

*Prolegomenon:
Premises, from Concepts to Technicalities for Diplomacy’s
“Call to Action” During the Novel Coronavirus Pandemic*

Mottos: “The pandemic has been both tragedy and teacher. Its very etymology offers a clue about what is at stake in the greatest challenges of the future, and what is needed to address them. Pandemic. Pan and demos. All people”⁶.

“A pandemic in 2020” was one of the scenarios imagined by the experts consulted by *US National Intelligence Council* in 2004 in the drafting of its 2020 Project: “Some experts believe(d) it is only a matter of time before a new pandemic appears (In the Year 2020), such as 1918-1919 influenza virus that killed an estimated twenty million worldwide. Such a pandemic in megacities of the developing world with poor health-care systems... would be devastating and could spread rapidly throughout the world. Globalization would be endangered if the deaths rose into the millions in several major countries and the spread of the disease put a halt to global travel and trade during an extended period, prompting governments to expend enormous resources on overwhelmed health sectors. On the positive side of the ledger, the response to SARS showed that international surveillance and control mechanisms are becoming more adept at containing diseases, and new developments in biotechnologies hold the promise of continued improvement ... The nation-state will continue to be the dominant

³ United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’s Nelson Mandela Lecture: “*Tackling the Inequality Pandemic: A New Social Contract for a New Era*”, 18 July 2020.

<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-07-18/secretary-generals-nelson-mandela-lecture-%E2%80%99Tackling-the-inequality-pandemic-new-social-contract-for-new-era%E2%80%9D-delivered>.

⁴ David Williams, a Harvard University Professor, quoted in <https://www.politico.com/states/new-york/albany/story/2020/05/16/new-yorks-safety-net-hospitals-were-the-front-lines-of-the-coronavirus-now->.

⁵ Peter Marshall, *The United Nations Charter: 75 Years On*, Commentary, The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), 1 July 2020, <https://rusi.org/commentary/united-nations-charter-75-years>.

⁶ How Ed Yong, *How the Pandemic Defeated America. A virus has brought the world’s most powerful country to its knees*. *The Atlantic*, September 2020 Issue.

https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/09/coronavirus-american-failure/614191/?utm_source=email-promo&utm_medium=cr&utm_campaign=ed-yong-cover-top-.

unit of the global order; but economic globalization and the dispersion of technologies, especially information technologies, will place enormous strains on governments"⁷.

*"The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the need to reimagine how to conduct diplomacy remotely or virtually"*⁸.

*"Genetically, viruses are extremely similar in all countries. But they have strikingly varying effects worldwide because not all societies are equally healthy, equally fat, equally elderly or equally well-prepared"*⁹.

For well-founded reasons, *the interconnections between the novel coronavirus Pandemic, a truly global event, and the not less global system of International relations and Diplomacy*, have taken a priority place on the agenda of national governments and policymakers, as well as for regional and international institutions, in both principled and pragmatic terms, being also widely debated by scholars from different academia circles, think tanks, universities.

As the time went by after the genesis of the COVID-19 crisis with the beginning of the fateful year 2020, it had become clear that the ensuing Pandemic's impact and effective consequences had started to *"rescript daily life"* for quasi-totality of the Humanity. In other words, *"the Coronavirus Pandemic altered daily patterns of life"*¹⁰, *the multi-layered ripples generated as such being tangibly felt including in the area of foreign policy and diplomacy*.

On the other hand, *the novel coronavirus pandemic, as a global stress test*, has proved to be a crisis requesting being comprehensively and holistically dealt with from all of the global –, regional – and national – wide perspectives. As a *first conceptual and practical consequence*, the needs of the Pandemic age would *"appeal" to a Diplomacy in its various ways of manifestation, from "traditional branches": the Bilateral Diplomacy (BD and the Multilateral Diplomacy (MD), to the emerging and still elusive vision and concept of a Global Diplomacy (GD)*, the latter in the very much consonance with the fundamental characteristics of the Covid-19 Pandemic whose elusive emerging could be considered the biggest threat to human civilization in a century.

All these under the "umbrella" and at the service of a concept already in the making for several years: *"Global health diplomacy (GHD)": "a burgeoning field*

⁷ *Mapping the Global Future*, Report of the National Intelligence Council's 2020 Project, Based on consultations with nongovernmental experts around the world, December 2004, p. 30.

https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Global%20Trends_Mapping%20the%20Global%20Future%202020%20Project.pdfz.

⁸ William J. Burns and Linda Thomas-Greenfield, *The Transformation of Diplomacy. How to Save the State Department*, in *Foreign Affairs*, September 23, 2020.

https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-09-23/diplomacy-transformation?utm_medium=newsletters&utm_source=on_the_ballot&utm_campaign=on_the_ballot_2020_prospects&utm_content=20200923&utm_term=prospects-OTB-021020.

⁹ Marco Evers, *What the Pandemic Has in Store for the World*, in *Spiegel International*, 08.10.2020.

https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/covid-models-what-the-pandemic-has-in-store-for-the-world-a-acf8f13c-842c-4cf4-afd1-c6a2a8735945?sara_ecid=nl_upd_1jtzCCtmxpVo9GAZr2b4X8GquyeAc9&nliid=bfjppghxz.

¹⁰ <https://www.csmonitor.com/Business/2020/0714/Hunger-jumps-travel-plummets-Tracing-pandemic-s-ripples-in-3-charts?cmpid=ema:mkt:20200721&src=highlight>.

bridging the priorities of global health and foreign affairs. Given the increasing need to mobilize disparate global health stakeholders coupled with the need to design complex public health partnerships to tackle issues of international concern, effective and timely cooperation among state actors is critical. According to the World Health Organization, global health diplomacy (GHD) is an emerging field that bridges the disciplines of public health, international affairs, management, law, and economics, with a focus on negotiations that impact the global policy environment for health”¹¹.

As a second conceptual and practical consequence, the pandemic-stricken world felt a “natural” and “organic” necessity of upholding a quasi-permanent “call to duty & availability of intervening” from the Foreign policy and Diplomatic realm. Hence, “no Quarantines for Diplomacy”, as the specific application to this very domain of human activity of the critical Pandemic’s paradigms, among them *the Quarantine*.

Indeed, the dynamic heralded from the early phase by *the Global Pandemic*, bringing with it an unbending emergency nurtured by the rapid and impossible to control spread, had been inherently inducing a particular dynamic into countries’ foreign policy institutions & Diplomatic initiatives and operations. Reminding, even if in a way it could sound immodest, a biblical echo: “That there should be delay no longer”¹², with alternate versions essentially identical in meaning: “There will no longer be a delay” or, “There will be no more delay”¹³, and so on.

Against the backdrop substantiated by the above two set of considerations, one of the most consequential determinants for the Diplomacy’s conceptual and operational realm in the time of Pandemic had been related to the fact that the *Pandemic itself started functioning as a catalyst for geopolitical changes in the surrounding “hosting” world of the once-in-a century virus*, and that both by extrapolating some of the trends already in play at the moment of Pandemic’s genesis, but also by incubating itself new directions of international evolutions, up to be seen (possibly) as “*the Great Accelerator of world history*”¹⁴.

Consequently, reckoning with the *Pandemic time’s Diplomacy* implies, as a matter of preparedness – seemingly the element so much missing in the world when the novel coronavirus “knocked at its door” – a minutiae’s exploration through the entire surface of the globe, namely the very social, economic and political fabric covering our Planet, at this Pandemic time.

As for the very moment, January 2020, when the novel coronavirus entered “the Pantheon” of “modern” viruses, the UN Secretary-General advanced a tellingly profile of the world: “I see “four horsemen” in our midst – four looming threats that endanger 21st century progress and imperil 21st century possibilities. The first horseman comes in the form of the highest global geostrategic tensions

¹¹ *Applied global health diplomacy: profile of health diplomats accredited to the United States and foreign governments*, Brown et al., *Globalization and Health* (2018), 14:2 DOI 10.1186/s12992-017-0316-7.

¹² New Testament, *The Revelation 10:6*, Nashville, TN, The Gideons International.

¹³ <https://biblehub.com/csb/revelation/10.htm>; <https://biblehub.com/isl/revelation/10.htm>.

¹⁴ Joseph Borrell, *The pandemic should increase our appetite to be more autonomous*, 04/07/2020.

https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/82060/pandemic-should-increase-our-appetite-be-more-autonomous_en.

we have witnessed in years. Second, we face an existential climate crisis. The third horseman is deep and growing global mistrust. The fourth threat is the dark side of the digital world"¹⁵.

"A fifth horseman was lurking in the shadows – the COVID-19 pandemic" while the UN Secretary-General was speaking in the first month of 2020, which happened to be the First Month of the Year One of the coronavirus Pandemic. Hence, "the tableau of the world", drawn nine months later by the same UN head: *"Since January, the COVID-19 pandemic has galloped across the globe – joining the four other horsemen and adding to the fury of each. And every day, the grim toll grows, families grieve, societies stagger, and the pillars of our world wobble on already shaky footings. We face simultaneously an epochal health crisis, the biggest economic calamity and job losses since the Great Depression, and dangerous new threats to human rights"*¹⁶.

More nuances and touches would be introduced into *the global tapestry for Year One of the Pandemic* by other politicians, but also an array of analysts:

– *"A world characterized by a diffusion of power, a changing and multidimensional international system, political polarization, populism, and distrust of elites"*¹⁷.

– *"We are suffering from the incompatibility of 20th century multilateralism and 21st century geopolitics. The latter is marked by renewed great-power rivalries, lack of consensus in practically all international themes, absence of global leadership, the collapse of a supposed liberal world order, ballooning nationalism, governments brazenly turning to authoritarian methods, discord inside democracies, and reluctance of states to abide by the international norms that had hitherto prevailed, for better or worse"*¹⁸.

– *"The COVID19 pandemic is the first major crisis in decades where the US is not in the lead and this Administration has mostly withdrawn from the global order the US has built in the past. China for its part is increasingly assertive and we witness an US-China strategic rivalry, which will probably be the main axis of global politics for years to come. We have now a real crisis of multilateralism: the G7 and G20 are absent; the UN Security Council is paralyzed and many 'technical' organizations are turned into arenas where countries compete for influence. The result is a world that is more multipolar than multilateral"*¹⁹.

¹⁵ <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2020-01-22/remarks-general-assembly-priorities-for-2020>.

¹⁶ *Secretary-General's address to the Opening of the General Debate of the 75th Session of the General Assembly, 22 September 2020*, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-09-22/secretary-generals-address-the-opening-of-the-general-debate-of-the-75th-session-of-the-general-assembly>.

¹⁷ Francis J. Gavin and James B. Steinberg; Daniel W. Drezner, Ronald R. Krebs, and Randall Schweller, *The Vision Thing. Is Grand Strategy Dead?*, in *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2020.

https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-06-09/vision-thing?utm_campaign=tw_daily_soc&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter_posts.

¹⁸ Marcos Peckel, *Is The UN Security Council Destined To Disappear?*, in *El Espectador* English edition Worldcrunch, 2020-09-14, <https://worldcrunch.com/opinion-analysis/is-the-un-security-council-destined-to-disappear>.

¹⁹ Josep Borrell, *In a world of disorder; Europe needs partners*, 10/07/2020.

https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/82725/world-disorder-europe-needs-partners_en.

– “The United States but also European countries, including from the East, have become far more dependent on China and other nations for critical drugs and medical supplies. A pandemic that idles Asian factories or shuts down shipping routes thus threatens the already strained supply of these drugs to Western hospitals ... in a strategic showdown with its great-power rival, China might use its ability to withhold critical drugs to devastating effect”²⁰.

– From a regional perspective, if until the Coronavirus outbreak it was the Middle East which used to focalize first the world attention, now the radar of the global geopolitical situation has been directing the attention towards Asia-Pacific region, with the Indo-Pacific emerging as the world’s most strategically consequential region. In August, 2020, U.S. Defence Secretary Mark Esper described the Indo-Pacific as the epicentre of a “great power competition with China”²¹.

In an assessment on “China, the U.S., and the Geography of the 21st Century”, published in August 2020, Rodger Baker, Senior VP of Strategic Analysis, Stratfor, underlines that, “The geographical perspective of the 21st century is just now being formed. And at its heart is a rivalry between China and the United States to succeed Europe’s 500-year centrality in the international system, which will be framed by a shift in global economic activity and trade, new energy resource competition, a weakening Europe and Russia, and a technological battle to control information”²².

In The 2020 strategic assessment of the Australian government, the Indo-Pacific region is perceived as being “in the midst of the most consequential strategic realignment since the Second World War. The region is becoming the main theatre for greater strategic competition between major powers, making the region tenser, more contested, and more prone to conflict”²³.

Relevant is also “the ark of evolution” involving the novel coronavirus which became a sort of emblematic pattern for the Middle East situation in particular: “The world’s highest rates of contamination are to be found in the Gulf monarchies, where the pandemic mainly affects migrant workers. Covid-19 has also hit Israel very hard, mainly in the ultra-orthodox communities. At a time when these countries have undertaken a normalisation of their relations, this convergence of their sanitary situations raises questions about exponential demographic growth and urbanisation, coupled with traditional lifestyles”²⁴.

²⁰ Michael T. Osterholm and Mark Olshaker, *Chronicle of a Pandemic Foretold*, in *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2020.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-05-21/coronavirus-chronicle-pandemic-foretold>.

²¹ https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-defence-china/u-s-wont-cede-an-inch-in-pacific-esper-says-in-swipe-at-china-idUSKBN25N0D6?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=EBB%2008.27.20&utm_term=Editorial%20-%20Military%20-%20Early%20Bird%20Brief.

²² <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/china-us-and-geography-21st-century>.

²³ Dave Sharma, *A diplomatic step-up to match our military step-up. We need to strengthen the arm of Australian diplomacy just as much as we need to strengthen the military*, in *The Interpreter*, 13 Jul. 2020.

<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/diplomatic-step-match-our-military-step>.

²⁴ Ezra Nahmad, *Gulf-Israel. The Covid-19 Mirror Effect*, in *Orient XXI*, 8 October 2020.

<https://orientxxi.info/magazine/golfe-israel-l-effet-miroir-de-la-covid-19,4182>.

Whatever the apparent labyrinthine nature of the considerations previously reviewed, several conclusions of principle and pragmatic value appear indisputable:

(i). *“The international community can mitigate the consequences of COVID-19 only through cooperation and a strengthening of the institutions of multilateralism”*²⁵, all that with the corresponding movements and concrete actions on the Diplomatic conceptual and operating “territory”.

(ii). Despite the arguments for the erosion of state sovereignty and declining relevance of states for international affairs, *the Covid-19 pandemic has revealed that states still maintain their positions as primary actors: “... as citizens have turned to their national governments as the final authority in the face of a pandemic threat, states have clearly reinstated their authority. With the adoption of inward-looking policies in response to the pandemic by closing their borders, restricting travels, shutting down businesses, and declaring emergency measures, states have further strengthened their autonomy from other actors... (along the reality that “The State Reinstates its Authority”) Nationalism is a side effect of coronavirus”*²⁶.

(iii). Under the emerging circumstances with the Pandemic breakout, hardly predicted & shared in advance, Diplomacy could find itself between *“a rock and a hard place”*. On the one hand, by its very nature, Diplomacy is supposed to act with *“all-consuming focus”* as the *“the voice, the messenger and the (soft & peaceful) fighter”* on behalf of the State in case. On the other hand, whatever a Diplomat’s creative/ innovative potential and effective capability would scale, it is the Government of the State operating as the ultimate decider on policy risks versus advantages, including in the foreign affairs, and that by keeping and using, in and through its specific institutional statecraft toolkit, “the keys” to the crucial and referential “engine” permanently directing the Diplomacy – *The National Interest(S)*.

And in the light of the consequential Pandemic, the generic matrix of *the National Interests* will be structured by *“the three interlocking emergencies generated by the COVID-19 pandemic: a public health disaster that is unlikely to fully end for two years; an economic, employment and financial crisis that will take five years or more to unfold; and a political, social and cultural dislocation that will transform societies over a generation”*²⁷.

Critical for the Diplomatic arena would be *“the third interlocking emergency”*, whose evolution should be carefully monitored on both the national political radars and, respectively, the regional and global geopolitical monitors. With a warning already signalled here and there, namely on the danger of *“rising*

²⁵ Farid Shafiyev, *Ibid*.

²⁶ Muhammed Lutfi Türkcan, *Deepening the Divide: Global Politics and the Covid-19 Pandemic*, TRT World Research Centre, 2020. https://www.academia.edu/43123516/Deepening_the_Divide_Global_Politics_and_the_Covid-19_Pandemic_POLICY_OUTLOOK.

²⁷ Alex Evans and David Steven, *Building Trust, Confidence and Collective Action in the Age of Covid-19*, In *Resilience In The Face Of The Coronavirus Pandemic*, A World Politics Review (WPR) Report, May 2020, <https://worldpoliticsreview.s3.amazonaws.com/WPR-Resilience-Coronavirus-Pandemic.pdf>.

nationalism, which threatens to undermine international cooperation on vital issues including not only global public health but climate change and trade"²⁸.

Interestingly how Henry Kissinger came into the debate in the month of August 2020, enough time after the coronavirus Pandemic had sufficiently played with people's state of body and mind, individually and collectively: "*Nations cohere and flourish on the belief that their institutions can foresee calamity, arrest its impact and restore stability. When the Covid-19 pandemic is over, many countries' institutions will be perceived as having failed. Whether this judgment is objectively fair is irrelevant. The reality is the world will never be the same after the coronavirus... Leaders are dealing with the crisis on a largely national basis, but the virus's society-dissolving effects do not recognize borders. While the assault on human health will – hopefully – be temporary, the political and economic upheaval it has unleashed could last for generations. No country, not even the U.S., can in a purely national effort overcome the virus. Addressing the necessities of the moment must ultimately be coupled with a global collaborative vision and program. If we cannot do both in tandem, we will face the worst of each*"²⁹.

Two Notes:

1. We are not alone in invoking the renowned diplomat *cum* historian's views in the present world juncture. "*Welcome Back to Kissinger's World. Neo-conservatism has died, and liberal internationalism is discredited. Perhaps it's time to return to the ideas of one of the last century's greatest realists*"³⁰ was a sort of *sui generis* "invitation" extended in the month of June 2020, with a dual motivation, both aspects being still valid: (i). "*We desperately need Kissinger's ideas and instincts about how to muddle our way through a world that, we now realize, isn't working very well – and probably never will*"; (ii). "*To be sure, the liberal international order and the system of alliances that emerged out of World War II three-quarters of a century ago still exist, thankfully, and we'll continue to make use of them. But mistrust among allies is high, cooperation all but non-existent, and each country seems inclined to go its own nationalist way. Global institutions like the United Nations and WTO have become meek poor relations at the table, pleading for policy scraps, while Washington, Beijing, and Moscow jostle for a seat at the head... The world's chosen system is prone to continual collapse... In particular, Washington needs a reversion to tried and tested realpolitik that will be deft enough to turn great-power rivalry into a stable and peaceable modus vivendi*"³¹.

²⁸ Edward Alden, *The World Needs to Reopen Borders Before It's Too Late. Even as they struggle to control the pandemic, governments should move quickly to reopen borders instead of giving in to xenophobia, nationalism, and illusions of autarky*, in *Foreign Policy*, August 25, 2020.

https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/25/reopen-borders-now/?utm_source=twtw&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=TWTW%202020August28&utm_content=B&utm_term=TWTW%20and%20All%20Staff%20as%20of%207-9-20.

²⁹ Henry A. Kissinger, *The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order*, in *Wall Street Journal*, April 3, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-coronavirus-pandemic-will-forever-alter-the-world-order-11585953005>.

³⁰ Michael Hirsh, *Welcome Back to Kissinger's World*, in *Foreign Policy*, June 7, 2020.

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/07/kissinger-review-gewen-realism-liberal-internationalism/>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

2. Henry Kissinger wasn't the only referential name brought to the fore for the needs of helping clarifying and understanding the global Pandemic landscape, in both dimensions – health Pandemic genesis and evolution, respectively Diplomacy involvement. The writer and author Bernard-Henry Lévy had put to his most recent book, released in the middle of *Pandemic Year One*, an extremely challenging title, to say the least: “*The Virus in the Age of Madness*”. More than that, *Chapter 1* of the book had no other title but “*Come Back, Michel Foucault – We Need You!*”. An academic gesture motivated by “*the pages that Foucault devotes to the management of outbreaks of plague up to the eighteenth century*”³².

In rationalizing such ideas one important caveat should be made: “*COVID-19 resolutely refuses to fit into any preconceived political theories, woke or otherwise. Insofar as we can tell, it doesn't like humans very much at all, regardless of their politics. It is a nasty bug, which does its own thing. Trying to get it to support one agenda or another just ends up making you look silly*”³³. It is on such a background that we can proceed to shed light on a wider range of analytic tools, implicitly opinions, mirroring as such the complexity of the nexus Pandemic – International relations & Diplomacy.

Here is the “*liberal internationalism school*”, in relation to which among an array of views expressed on the Pandemic's backdrop, Nadia Schadlow, a former US deputy national security adviser for strategy argues that, “*Although liberal internationalism encouraged interdependence and multilateralism, it also rested on a faith in Washington's ability to indefinitely maintain the uncontested military superiority it enjoyed in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. In reality, U.S. military dominance is now challenged in virtually every domain... Nothing is likely to reverse these trends*”³⁴.

As for “*the realism school*”, which has “*expressed its tenets in vocal adherents amid the Covid-19 crisis. But perhaps we need something more*”³⁵, besides the above Kissingerian contextualization, maybe it is also worth mentioning how Stephen M. Walt, professor of international relations at *Harvard University* had reflected on what “*the realist approach*” is capable to provide as an added-value in this Pandemic juncture, that put in a comprehensive balance with the respective approach own “*limitations*”³⁶:

³² Bernard-Henry Lévy, *The Virus in the Age of Madness* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2020), pp. 1-2.

³³ Matthew Lynn, *Covid doesn't care about your political theories*, in *The Spectator*, 28 July 2020. https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/covid-doesn-t-care-about-your-political-theories?utm_medium=email&utm_source=CampaignMonitor_Editorial&utm_campaign=LNCH%20%2020200729%20%20House%20Ads%20%20SM+CID_30231973d066b1113b999700a3a30b43.

³⁴ Nadia Schadlow, *The End of American Illusion. Trump and the World as it is*, in *Foreign Affairs*, Sept./Oct. 2020.

https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/americas/2020-08-11/end-american-illusion?utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter_posts&utm_campaign=tw_daily_soc.

³⁵ Abdel Moneim Said, *Kissinger*, in *Ahramonline*, 19 Jun. 2020.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/50/1204/372297/AIAhram-Weekly/Opinion/Kissinger.aspx>.

³⁶ Stephen M. Walt, *The Realist's Guide to the Coronavirus Outbreak*, in *Foreign Policy*, March 9, 2020; Stephen M. Walt, *The Global Order After Covid-19*, *Institute For Security Policy (ISP) Working Paper*, Vienna 2020. <https://www.institutfuersicherheit.at/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ISP-Working-Paper-Stephen-M.-WALT-The-Global-Order-After-COVID-19.pdf>.

First, *“The realist approach to international politics and foreign policy does not devote much, if any, attention to the issue of potential pandemics like the COVID-19 outbreak ... It has little to say about interspecies viral transmission, epidemiology, or public health best practices, so you shouldn’t ask a realist to tell you whether you should start working from home”*.

Second, however *“realism can offer useful insights into some of the issues that the new coronavirus outbreak has raised: (i). The present emergency reminds us that states are still the main actors in global politics. When new dangers arise, however, humans look first and foremost to national governments for protection. All over the world, citizens are looking to public officials to provide authoritative information and to fashion an effective response...; despite globalization, states remain the central political actors in the contemporary world. Realists have emphasized this point for decades, and the coronavirus is providing yet another vivid reminder. (ii). Thus far, responses to the coronavirus outbreak are exposing the strengths and weakness of different types of regimes. Scholars have previously suggested that rigid dictatorships are more vulnerable to famines, epidemics, and other disasters, largely because they tend to suppress information and top officials may not recognize the gravity of the situation until it is too late to prevent it. This is precisely what appears to have happened in China and also Iran, plus the “particular situation” of the US president at the time, namely, Donald Trump’s response to the coronavirus which combined “the worst features of autocracy and of democracy, mixing opacity and propaganda with leaderless inefficiency”. (iii). Realism also reminds that achieving effective international cooperation on the Pandemic issue may not be easy, despite the obvious need for it. Realists recognize that, cooperation happens all the time, and that norms and institutions can help states cooperate when it is in their interest to do so. But realists also warn that international cooperation is often fragile, either because states fear that others will not abide by their commitments, worry that cooperation will benefit others more than it benefits them, or want to avoid bearing a disproportionate share of the costs”*.

In the end, Professor Stephen M. Walt appears inclined to a rather *“dilemmatic”* conclusion: *“I’m guessing that the high-water mark of contemporary globalization is now behind us, and that a virus that crossed the boundary between two species is going to be one of the reasons that borders between states will become a bit higher”*.

In any case, whatever the doctrinaire inter-play, one should not lose sight on *“The three main objectives of the pandemic era: maintaining public health and protecting citizens; avoiding further damage to the social fabric, economic welfare, and financial viability; and minimizing restrictions, also in the interest of avoiding “pandemic fatigue”*³⁷.

³⁷ Mohamed A. El-Erian, *The Pandemic’s Complex Cocktail*, Project Syndicate, Oct. 6, 2020. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/tenuous-factors-behind-strong-markets-despite-weakening-fundamentals-by-mohamed-a-el-erian-2020-10>.

How much Diplomacy – knowing that “*COVID-19 has made diplomacy more challenging*” – will be of help in this regard will also depend on the set of “*technicalities*” commanding the concrete Diplomatic actions and operations.

A first category is what we can call “the physical technicalities” which had been intimately linked to the consequences and restrictions derived from having the Diplomacy to operate in the unique Pandemic circumstances, practically being impacted all categories of diplomatic démarches.

Here is just one example – taking care that, as *the Babylonian Talmud* cautions, “*For example, is not proof*” – the diplomatic species of *Mediation*: “*mediation can be a very personal endeavour, an almost tactile reading of a person or a room. With movement restrictions limiting such contacts and with online discussions often the only alternative, it can be harder to establish the trust and nurture the willingness to compromise that are at the heart of preventive diplomacy*”, warned António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General in his speech at the UN Security Council video teleconference convened on 2 July 2020 regarding the agenda “*Maintenance of international peace and security: Implications of COVID-19*”³⁸.

In fact, the actual UN Secretary-General could be considered one of the persons in high positions internationally most entitled to issue such a statement: The United Nations’ Secretariat and other UN institutional structures located in New York – itself a very epicentre of the Pandemic in the United States – represented a true epitome of how the novel coronavirus Pandemic had impacted the current functions and decision-making process of the Multilateral Diplomacy.

As Thomas Wright, a scholar at the Brookings Institution, noted: “*The summits are forcing mechanisms for action, and in a crisis, they take on an added importance. If you don’t have that, you’re more likely to just have more inertia*”. And it was exactly “*a real summit*” which proved impossible to organize, namely that in order to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations’ founding. Instead, even if it was called “*a high-level meeting*”, the event, programmed for September 21st, 2020, had to be held, for the first time in UN history, in a “muted fashion”, almost entirely online, due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and regulations on international travel and large gatherings.

Starting the next day, the *General Debate of the UN General Assembly*, traditionally the most high-profile UN event of the year, had also to be a slimmed-down affair, with world leaders staying away from New York, and contributing set-piece speeches via video link and broadcast “as live” in the General Assembly Hall. In the respective traditional Hall there will be only one government representative behind the country’s delegation sign.

The new virtual format was largely due to the ongoing *COVID-19 pandemic* with many countries continuing to grapple with the health, social and economic fallout from the crisis.

³⁸ S/2020/663, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2020_663.pdf.

The same procedures were to be applied for a series of special high-level sessions scheduled to take place, besides the commemoration of the landmark 75th anniversary of the United Nations: a summit on biodiversity; and a meeting to commemorate, and promote, the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

Using the novel '*silence procedure*' method, draft resolutions were to be circulated by the President of the General Assembly, giving Member States a deadline of at least 72 hours, to raise objections. If there were no objections, the President would circulate a letter, confirming that the resolution had been adopted.

Besides the *Multilateral Diplomacy, with the United Nations as its centrepiece*, equally affected were specific activities within the realm of the *Bilateral Diplomacy*, including meetings at the level of Head of State or Government. An example: Chinese President Xi Jinping delayed a highly anticipated trip to Japan – one that the Japanese Foreign Minister called a "*once-in-a-decade event*".

In a sense, the Global pandemic, at least in its beginning, has "*trimmed out*" much of the protocol infrastructure, generally of "*the rituals of diplomacy*" to the benefit of the operational and the setting norms functions, albeit that as such one wouldn't guarantee that the "grass roots" activities wouldn't be impeded. That was evident in relation to the basic diplomatic institutions, namely *Embassies/Missions, which suddenly saw themselves unable to fulfil their core advantage – meeting the locals and getting a feel for conditions on the ground.*

*Foreign services worldwide have had to get used to conducting a large part of their work online, through nonsecure networks. Remote bilateral political-level meetings have become common, and multilateral Zoom conferences proliferate*³⁹. Hence, a new arrangement informally called *Zoomplomacy* became "the normal" at least for a period, albeit indefinite. Surprisingly or not, *Zoomplomacy* had yielded results. In early April 2020, the *OPEC* energy ministers, meeting with external *online support* from the *G-20*, succeeded in reaching a historic decision on a cut in oil production. On the other hand, *G-7* and *G-20 video summits* since the onset of the virus have produced no concrete decisions. These particular failures are likely better explained by the usual differing interests of the member states than by the medium.

In all circumstances, one caveat is *de rigueur*: one cannot say that *online conferencing tools aren't flawed mediums for diplomatic work*, and normalizing them will take no small effort⁴⁰ given that *concrete diplomats' grievances are many: it is difficult to conduct real negotiations and engage in actual give-and-take without human contact, side conversations, and even the ability to understand body language; the capability to build and maintain significant relationships is undermined; day-to-day matters can be decided remotely at lower levels, but*

³⁹ Daniel B. Shapiro, Daniel Rakov, *Will Zoomplomacy Last? As the coronavirus rages on, diplomacy has moved completely online—with mixed reviews*, in *Foreign Policy*, May 18, 2020.

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/18/will-zoomplomacy-last/>.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

bigger decisions are elusive without the personal engagement of leaders. For instance, in a multilateral summit, final details of many agreements are often reached through the personal diplomacy of leaders, which requires informal, private discussions on the sidelines of a high-level meeting. Those opportunities are hard to replicate online.

Nickolay Mladenov, *the U.N. Middle East envoy*, after using extensively online diplomacy platforms declared that, if the platforms didn't work well for confidential issues, instead, day to day, meetings were more efficient: *"It's weird, but it works. ... There is no time for niceties, so you get straight to the point. In that sense, it is more efficient than a meeting that requires travel time, starts with informal discussions, cups of coffee or meals, and only then gets into the substance at hand"*⁴¹.

Shortly, on another element pertaining to technicalities, this time related to *communications*, and which existed before and continued even larger in the Pandemic time – *Twitter Diplomacy*, awarded meantime the accolade as – *"The new Nuclear Diplomacy"*

It is true that *Twitter Diplomacy* had preceded *the Covid-19 Pandemic* but, with the genesis and global spread of the new coronavirus, it was observed that the rise of *Twitter Diplomacy*, in the new circumstances, was making *"the world more dangerous... The increasingly common use of Twitter as a platform for both domestic and diplomatic communication poses a risk for conflicts to escalate unintentionally"*⁴².

The expression *"nuclear Diplomacy"* used above is taken from a study elaborated and released in July 2020 by *The Centre for Science and Security Studies (CSSS) at King's College London* entitled *Escalation by Tweet: Managing the new nuclear diplomacy*, which had as starting premise the reality that, at times of crisis, *"whether caused by a political conflict, market failures, or a pandemic"* there is *"an enormous appetite for news as people try to establish what is going on and how governments and international organizations intend to act"*⁴³. And here comes the *Twitter* *"a hybrid of traditional means of diplomatic communication, such as retweeting official statements by the President, along with informal personal reflections. In the absence of a shared Twitter protocol, messages are often left open to interpretation and shaped by pre-existing views and interactions, not always with a positive effect"*⁴⁴.

A case in point: in the summer of 2020, i.e. at the pick of the Covid-19 Pandemic impact on the world's countries, Chinese and Australian diplomats sparred on Twitter over Beijing's actions in the South China Sea following Australia's endorsement of a U.S. statement that it would recognize virtually

⁴¹ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/18/will-zoomplomacy-last/>.

⁴² Alexi Drew, *The Rise of Twitter Diplomacy Is Making the World More Dangerous*, in *World Politics Review* (WPR), Aug. 10, 2020, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28976/the-rise-of-twitter-diplomacy-is-making-the-world-more-dangerous>.

⁴³ Heather Williams and Alexi Drew, *Escalation by Tweet: Managing the new nuclear diplomacy*, The Centre for Science and Security Studies (CSSS) at King's College London, July 2020, p. 4.

<https://preview-kcl.cloud.contensis.com/csss/assets/10957%E2%80%A2twitterconflictreport-15july.pdf>.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

none of China's territorial claims there: after an Australian diplomat accused Beijing, by Twitter, that its moves in the South China Sea were "*destabilizing and could provoke escalation*", the Chinese diplomacy answered through the same way of communication, underlining that the Australian diplomat was "*disregarding facts*" with the "sentence": "*It's clear who safeguard peace & stability & destabilize & provoke escalations in the region*".

Generally, during the 6-7 weeks after the start of April 2020, China has pushed out 90,000 tweets from 200 diplomatic and state media accounts in a COVID-19 information war offensive. From another perspective, Twitter output from China's official sites almost doubled in less than half a year since January 2020, and the number of diplomatic Twitter accounts has tripled, to 135, up from just 40 accounts that time the previous year. Many tweets were in English or Mandarin, but the diplomatic accounts were often in the language of an embassy's host country. The Chinese accounts "*have become more aggressive, more conspiratorial, and the ones who have done that are their most popular accounts and have by far the most engagement*". Xinhua, the official state-run news agency, puts out a steady stream of COVID-19-related content on Twitter, and on April 30 it posted a two-minute video titled "*Once Upon a Virus*" mocking the U.S. response to COVID-19 and hailing China's. It has been retweeted almost 26,000 times and liked 50,000 times.

Hence, a relevant conclusion drawn by observers after going through thousands of "products" released by the "*Tweeter factories*" spread all over the world: "*Diplomatic language fails on Twitter*"⁴⁵ with the TWEETS, be they issued in Beijing or Washington, on the "origin" of the Covid-19.

In the same context of *the Diplomacy's "physical technicalities"* under the Pandemic unique circumstances, there is an additional element of apparently less relevance but directly linked to the day's sufferings: the issues of *wearing masks, including during official encounters*.

Indeed, Diplomacy wouldn't be exempted from one of the many features specific to a world *engrafted* with a global deadly virus, in time becoming overwhelmingly compulsory, namely *donning Masks*, that single item of dress which "*caught on so widely and quickly from Melbourne to Mexico City, Beijing to Bordeaux, spanning borders, cultures, generations and sexes with almost the same Earth-shaking speed as the coronavirus*"⁴⁶. More so, *the Mask* eventually became "*the obvious symbol of the current crisis, COVID-19 ... a symbol not just for the health crisis itself, but it has also triggered crises of trust, law, politics, and culture, just to name a few... (Becoming) so much more than a form of medical protection*"⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/china-launches-new-twitter-accounts-90-000-tweets-covid-19-n1207991>.

⁴⁶ John Leicester, *The global march of face masks: A mirror on humanity*, in *Associated Press*, July 24, 2020. https://apnews.com/e0f1513d565ef383d257a088adbb5209?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=morningwire&pnespid=0eNxpeBHXgeN0z8qlAcjY2QZzpwnbWkq6kY3oDdp.

⁴⁷ David Davenport, *When is a mask more than a mask?*, in *Washington Examiner*, July 22, 2020. https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/when-is-a-mask-more-than-a-mask?utm_source=Hoover+Daily+Report&utm_campaign=4b8450ed7d-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_07_22_06_33&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_21b1edff3c-4b8450ed7d-72881821.

One people in particular would not convulse with such “crises”: “Long before the coronavirus pandemic struck, Japanese people were comfortable with covering their faces – for both medical reasons and to conform to the norms of society (a habit that has been widely practiced for more than a century and appears to have its roots in religious festivals). While citizens of other countries around the world struggling with the coronavirus pandemic have railed against face masks as unnecessary, ineffective or an infringement of their civil liberties, Japanese people have in virtual unison done as many experts have suggested and covered up. Though wearing a mask may not be the only reason why Japan has a relatively low infection and death rate from the disease, epidemiologists say it is almost certainly a positive contributing factor”⁴⁸.

Particularly striking is when the Mask, as Pandemic’s prevalent object and tangible symbol, comes to intersect, as in the present paper, with the Mask as an innermost feature, albeit in a “virtual/subliminal” determination, for that human activity deservedly called Diplomacy.

A “diplomatic Mask” could be practiced and recognized as such up to the highest level of governmental and other official encounters: “When Trump first introduced tariffs on Chinese goods in 2018, the atmosphere between the two countries was icy, the South China Morning Post reports. Throughout trade negotiations, President Xi Jinping and President Trump refrained from directly criticizing their counterparts. However, once the pandemic hit, each side took off its diplomatic mask. Instead of prompting cooperation, the pandemic deteriorated the already chronically bad relations between the U.S. and China”⁴⁹.

“Beijing’s unyielding stance along with the friendly overtures has now become part of China’s diplomatic mask when dealing with India. It was seen in the ceremonial extravaganza that Xi had staged on the occasion of Prime Minister Modi’s visit to China in May. But behind it all was the underlying Chinese policy to contain India”⁵⁰.

Seemingly, the Chinese had consistently been bearers of “Diplomatic Masks” along the time, pre-Pandemic, but in the Pandemic time too: “the talks held with envoys of the Dalai Lama were a diplomatic mask to conceal China’s actual policy” (2015); “whether it’s Hong Kong, China’s diplomatic mask has slipped” (30 June 2020).

The link between “the mask” and one individual diplomat could also be a source of interesting “meditations”, as when one “slips up” occasionally from the scripted speech or the talking-points in front of him, to reveal the man behind that bland diplomatic mask and when he does, the consequences could be severe, as concrete cases demonstrated. Generally, a glimpse into some of the reality behind someone’s diplomatic mask could be a “professional” temptation for

⁴⁸ How Japan’s mask culture may have saved lives during coronavirus, in DW.COM, 19.10.2020.

<https://www.dw.com/en/how-japans-mask-culture-may-have-saved-lives-during-coronavirus/a-55321518?maca=en-NL-Corona-Compact>.

⁴⁹ Daniela A. Maquera Sardon, COVID-19 Worsens Wounded Sino-American Relations, in *The Diplomatic Envoy*, August 28, 2020, <http://blogs.shu.edu/thediplomaticenvoy/files/2020/08/Summer-2020-Edition.pdf>.

⁵⁰ <https://www.dnaindia.com/analysis/column-china-s-ambivalent-india-policy-of-engagement-and-containment-2104953>.

other diplomats and intelligence officers, or just fascinating for journalists and ordinary people, with a caveat few persons are aware of even if one century and a half old: “*Diplomats betray everything except their emotions*” (Victor Hugo)⁵¹.

By its very intricacies, the masks issue has eased the passage to our second category of technicalities engendered for the Diplomacy’s Policies and Institutions operating within a constraining Pandemic environment, and they are what we would call *semantical technicalities, not less connected to the Covid-19*. It is expected that they would be found in a particular *Diplomatic toolkit* including several types of specific instruments, from the Pandemic-inspired paradigm of “*Diplomatic Distancing*, with its conceptual and operational imprint, to the *semantic luggage* capable of determining, in a more nuanced way, the state of international relations and Diplomatic involvement in critical areas of the Planet, starting with the *Metaphors* – “*Metaphors (which), far from mere linguistic adornments, are central to our ability to navigate the world around us*”⁵². Going, as such, closer to the *intangible specialness of the Diplomacy*.

Speaking about “*The virtues of the virus*”, Rocco Ronchi said that “*It is difficult to resist the temptation of analogy when trying to make sense of the proportions of the pandemic event. In the reflections that accompany its uncontrolled spread, Covid 19 has become a sort of generalized metaphor; almost the symbolic precipitate of the human condition in post-modernity... The pandemic appears as a sort of experimentum crucis, able to test hypotheses that go from politics to the effects of globalization, to the transformation of communication at the time of the internet – reaching the heights of the finest metaphysical speculation*”⁵³.

And here comes Bernard-Henry Lévy with a challenging input for the overall *experimentum cruces* process: “*If there is just one thing one should know about a virus, Georges Canguilhem used to tell us, it is that, unlike a microbe, which, etymologically, signifies “small life”, a virus is a poison. It is not alive or dead and may be nothing more than the radicalization of, and a metaphor for, Martin Heidegger’s concept of “being-toward-death*”⁵⁴.

And this “*being-toward-death*” translates for a human being contaminated with the virus, the new coronavirus in case, with life-threatening sickness, yet another *source of... metaphors*.

Coming back to “*our virus*”, we are of the view that we can develop further the idea that “*Covid-19 has become a sort of generalized metaphor*”⁵⁵, and that by carefully noticing that the 21st Century Virus had also been functioning, on

⁵¹ <https://booksbitesbrews.com/victor-hugo-phrases-quotes-and-aphorisms>.

⁵² https://aeon.co/essays/what-the-supply-chain-metaphor-obscures-about-global-justice?utm_source=Aeon+Newsletter&utm_campaign=3fc8c96843-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_09_07_03_10&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_411a82e59d-3fc8c96843-68965817.

⁵³ Rocco Ronchi, *The virtues of the virus*, Coronavirus and philosophers, 14/03/2020.

<https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/coronavirus-and-philosophers/>.

⁵⁴ Bernard-Henry Lévy, p. 22.

⁵⁵ In the No.1/2020 of *Revista de Stiinte Politice si Relatii Internationale* (publication in Romanian language of *The Romanian Institute of Political Studies and International Relations (ISPRI)* of the Romanian Academy) one can find a comprehensive analysis on *The Coronavirus as a Political-Philosophical Metaphor* (pp. 89-97), the author being a distinguished ISPRI’s fellow, Dr. Viorella Manolache. https://79dd720e-4b65-4316-bb39-526d8ea1c51d.filesusr.com/ugd/d1cf60_5306f2fb308344df97686b72807f47a0.pdf.

the one hand, as a dynamic incubator itself for metaphors, and, on the other hand, it had been helping to bring to the fore and put in a stronger light an array of geopolitical and other sorts of metaphors pertaining to the areas of international relations & Diplomacy.

It is worth mentioning that, the No.1/ 2020 of *Revista de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale* (publication in Romanian language of *The Romanian Institute of Political Studies and International Relations (ISPRI)* of the Romanian Academy) one can find a comprehensive analysis on *The Coronavirus as a Political-Philosophical Metaphor* (pp. 89-97), the author being a distinguished ISPRI's fellow, Dr. Viorella Manolache⁵⁶.

PART ONE
THE NEXUS OF THREE DIPLOMATIC INCARNATIONS
GLOBAL DIPLOMACY – MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY
– BILATERAL DIPLOMACY AND THEIR INTERPLAY
IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Mottos: “In the 21st century, the greatest threats we face are not from other states but are transnational in nature, like climate change and epidemics”⁵⁷.

“The virus does not distinguish between continents, borders, nationalities or ethnicities”⁵⁸.

“Diplomats keep the forces of global entropy under control; they help to build order out of chaos”⁵⁹.

“In these dire times, diplomacy – as the art of partnership building – it is needed now more than ever in order to navigate this new era in which we are finding ourselves in and to rebuild our economies with a greater understanding of our global connectedness”⁶⁰.

“Without the software of diplomacy, the hardware of peacekeeping or crisis management stands no chance”⁶¹.

“This crisis has been difficult in terms of coordination. Countries, even here in Europe, have been known to act in their own interest”⁶².

“We also need a multilateral health architecture that is better adapted to today's challenges. That means strengthening our collective alert capacity within the World Health Organization, the only universal public health organization, so that we can respond very swiftly to global crises”⁶³.

⁵⁶ https://79dd720e-4b65-4316-bb39-526d8ea1c51d.filesusr.com/ugd/d1cf60_5306f2fb308344df97686b72807f47a0.pdf.

⁵⁷ *21st Century Diplomacy: Foreign Policy is Climate Policy*, Wilson Center and Adelphi Research GmbH, 2020, p. 7.

https://diplomacy21-adelphi.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/21st_century_diplomacy_report_spread.p.

⁵⁸ Tweet European External Action Service – EEAS, #EEAS #ASEM against #COVID19, 7 sept. 2020.

⁵⁹ Robert Hutchings (Editor), Jeremi Suri (Editor), *Modern Diplomacy in Practice*, Palgrave Macmillan; 1st ed. 2020, p. xi.

⁶⁰ Gesu Antonio Baez, *Post-corona, we're going to need new diplomacy*, in *Modern Diplomacy*, May 26, 2020, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/05/26/post-corona-were-going-to-need-new-diplomacy/>.

⁶¹ Speech by EU HR/VP Josep Borrell: *Navigating a pandemic world: Global disorders and Europe's role*, EU ISS/ Carnegie debate, 09/07/2020. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/82659/speech-hrvp-josep-borrell-navigating-pandemic-world-global-disorders-and-europe%E2%80%99s-role_en.

⁶² <https://www.euronews.com/> Darren McCaffrey Euronews Political Editor, July 1, 2020.

Main takeaway: When nature's playing with and humanity's unable to oppose the "engrafting" of a deadly virus on what seemingly was until then a successful civilization, there could be no way for Diplomacy's "quarantines". Essentially, Diplomacy has been kept busy through all its multifarious network. Meantime, Diplomacy would continue in the Pandemic time too being faithful to its basic determinant and functional "DNA", namely defending and promoting the States/Countries' national interests.

Mottos: "This pandemic is a global affair and we can only beat it through a global solution"⁶⁴.

"If this pandemic teaches us anything, it is that up against contagious disease, we are all in this together... Our society is global; our risk is global; our response and our cooperation must be global"⁶⁵.

"We may not act like we're all in this together, but in a pandemic, like it or not, we are"⁶⁶.

"The global political and economic system is not delivering on critical global public goods: public health, climate action, sustainable development, peace"⁶⁷.

"While the coronavirus pandemic has taught us how deeply interdependent, we are, it should have also taught us how important it is to come together to solve these types of crises. Unfortunately, that important lesson appears to have been overlooked, as we find ourselves instead locking down borders and going it alone in a zero-sum manner. Strengthening the global architecture for tackling these complex, interconnected threats – including anticipating, planning, managing and mitigating them – needs to be done in partnership with all countries"⁶⁸.

"The World Health Organization (WHO), which is ostensibly leading the world's response to the pandemic, is another hostage to political rivalries"⁶⁹.

"To overcome today's fragilities and challenges we need more international cooperation – not less; strengthened multilateral institutions – not a retreat from them; better global governance – not a chaotic free-for-all"⁷⁰.

Main takeaway

As the world leapt itself deeper into the consequences of the Pandemic, the Covid-19 crisis appeared also as an uncontested immaterial and sui generis "whistleblower" for essential shortcomings in the global health governance, whatever the drives through the system of global and multilateral diplomacy.

As it was uncontested, from the very beginning, that *Diplomacy* should had been *called to action* in supporting the world's strives to quelling and eradicating the unfolding *COVID-19 as a Global Pandemic*, it was equally clear that a really

⁶³ Statement by the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, Jean-Yves Le Drian, at the Security Council video teleconference convened on 2 July 2020 regarding the agenda item entitled "*Maintenance of international peace and security: Implications of COVID-19*".

S/2020/663. https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2020_663.pdf.

⁶⁴ Josep Borrell, HR of the EU for FASP/Vice-President of the European Commission, *The pandemic is far from over: we need a strong WHO to deliver*, BLOG, 10/06/2020. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/80687/pandemic-far-over-we-need-strong-who-deliver_en.

⁶⁵ Debora Mackenzie, *Covid-19. The Pandemic That Never Should Have Happened and How to Stop The Next One* (The Bridge Street Press: London, 2020), p. xviii.

⁶⁶ Carl Bergstrom, *Evolutionary biologist*, Twitter Web App, 26 Mar. 2020.

⁶⁷ António Guterres, UN Secretary-General, 18 July 2020, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2020-07-18/remarks-nelson-mandela-lecture-tackling-the-inequality-pandemic-new-social-contract-for-new-era>.

⁶⁸ Karin von Hippel, *Axis of Disruption: Chinese and Russian Influence and Interference in Europe*, Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI), Introduction to a New RUSI Series on Russia and China in Europe, Occasional Paper, July 2020. https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/rusi_pub_181_introduction_final.pdf.

⁶⁹ <https://worldcrunch.com/opinion-analysis/is-the-un-security-council-destined-to-disappear>.

⁷⁰ *The UN Secretary-General — Address to the UN General Assembly, 22 September 2020.*

https://estatemnts.unmeetings.org/estatemnts/10.0010/20200922/cVOFMr0rKnhR/EtkqAoxMM1Nv_en.pdf.

tangible and effective impact would be obtained from appealing to a *not less Global “branch” of Diplomacy*, to name it shortly *the Global Diplomacy*. And that even if, from among the overall Diplomatic drives, *Global Diplomacy* has seemingly represented a more elusive concept rather than a frequently tangible instrument in a pragmatic context. For this reason, we could qualify it here as a *Global Diplomacy Sui Generis (GDSG)*.

Also, the *GDSG’s specific template* implies, in our view, an *operational “alignment” of the three specific determinants*: “a global problem”, “global governance”, and “global institution(s)”⁷¹. Notably, the concept of a “*triad: global issues – global governance – global institutions*” was developed by Dr. Viorella Manolache, a scholar with the *Institute of Political Sciences and International Relations “Ion I. C. Brătianu” of the Romanian Academy* in *Enciclopedia de Diploma?ie (Encyclopedia of Diplomacy)*⁷².

The first determinant of the present *GDSG’s matrix* was “*consecrated*”, and as such becoming practically a major point of the global agenda, on *11 March 2020*, when the *World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General* announced that WHO had been assessing the Covid-19 (*the respiratory illness caused by the SARS-CoV-2 corona virus*) outbreak around the clock and, deeply concerned both by the alarming levels of spread and severity, and by the alarming levels of inaction, “*WHO therefore made the assessment that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic*”⁷³.

That was, practically, *the first global pandemic since the H1N1 swine flu in 2009* and it came after the *Director-General declared, on 30 Jan 2020, the novel coronavirus outbreaks a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC), WHO’s highest level of alarm*.

A *RAND Corporation* report, released in Sept. 2020, indicates that “*worldwide spread*” of the *COVID-19 disease had occurred weeks before the March 11, 2020 declaration by the WHO that the world was officially experiencing a pandemic*.

Using the *CAT-V tool*, *RAND* estimated a *marked increase in the worldwide spread of COVID-19 starting on February 19, 2020*. By the end of February, nearly 40 passengers per week were spreading the disease worldwide via international air travel. The United States, in particular, was facing importation risks from every continent except Antarctica⁷⁴.

Anyway, several of the *WHO Director-General’s observations* in the month of March 2020, even expressed just in short sentences, could be decisive for understanding the processes in their globality: “*We have never before seen a pandemic sparked by a coronavirus. This is the first pandemic caused by a*

⁷¹ In *Enciclopedia de Diploma?ie (Encyclopedia of Diplomacy)*, the first ever such a work published in Romania, Dr. Viorella Manolache, a distinguished scholar with the *Institute of Political Sciences and International Relations “Ion I. C. Brătianu” of the Romanian Academy*, who elaborated *Enciclopedia’s* entry with the title “*Global Diplomacy*”, speaks about “*the triad: global issues – global governance – global institutions*” (Dan Dungaciu, Coordinator, *Enciclopedia de Diploma?ie*, RAO: Bucharest, 2019), p. 219.

⁷² *Ibidem*.

⁷³ *WHO Director-General’s opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19*, 11 March 2020.

<https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19-11-march-2020>.

⁷⁴ https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA248-6.html.

coronavirus. And we have never before seen a pandemic that can be controlled, at the same time. WHO has been in full response mode since we were notified of the first cases. And we have called every day for countries to take urgent and aggressive action. We have rung the alarm bell loud and clear”.

Practically, on 16 Mar. 2020, WHO issued an advisory to all countries to test every suspected case of COVID-19 and to isolate not just the patient but also all those who have been in close contact with up to 2 days before they developed symptoms. *Testing, isolation and care were the three measures emphasized by the organization*⁷⁵.

And what should strike here more any observer is the “testimony” that it was “for countries” that the WHO has been ringing “the alarm bell loud and clear”. Or, the landscape of the novel coronavirus crisis proved to be effectively of a global scale and multi-layered impact. And, if the WHO Director-General was shy to speak more about what had been happening in his own “yard” or others in the same category of the multilateralism realm, for reasons intimate to the organization’s sensitive stand in the global system, we could find analysts affiliated with NGOs going without much restraint to the essence of the issue: “The COVID-19 pandemic has created a global emergency with multiple dimensions: (i). The public health crisis has triggered a wave of sickness and death in every country. (ii). An economic, employment, and financial crisis is hurting billions of people, especially those who are already vulnerable or disadvantaged. (iii). A political, social, and cultural dislocation will transform societies and could exacerbate violence and insecurity, with impacts in both fragile and conflict-affected countries as well as in stable countries”⁷⁶.

Hence the critical need to “activate” the second GDSG template’s determinant – “the global governance”.

The independent Commission on Global Governance defined global governance as “the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative action may be taken. It includes formal ... as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions have agreed to or perceive to be in their interest”⁷⁷.

António Guterres, UN Secretary-General, clarifying his stand in relation to “a very important ideological battle in the months to come” – “I’m on the side of those that believe that the world needs more governance, not less governance”⁷⁸ – considered worthwhile to say more on the issue in case in his Remarks at the General Assembly meeting marking the seventy-fifth anniversary

⁷⁵ <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19-16-march-2020>.

⁷⁶ Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, Justice in a Pandemic - Briefing One: *Justice for All and the Public Health Emergency* (New York: Center on International Cooperation, 2020), <https://www.justice.sdg16.plus/>.

⁷⁷ Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood. Report of the Commission on Global Governance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 2.

⁷⁸ <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/global-translations/2020/09/21/virtual-united-nations-general-assembly-real-problems-490389?nname=global-translations&nid=0000016f-153f-d06a-a5ff-f57f38310000&nrid=00000164-09c2-dda8-a1fd-ed60b5e0000&nlid=2660405>.

of the United Nations (21 September 2020): “No one wants a world government, but we must work together to improve world governance. In an interconnected world, we need a networked multilateralism, in which the United Nations family, international financial institutions, regional organizations, trading blocs and others work together more closely and more effectively. We also need an inclusive multilateralism, drawing on civil society, cities, businesses, local authorities and more and more on young people”.

For an in-depth contextualization of these apparently too “cool” considerations, here are several additional *perspectives*.

In his seminal book “*The World: A Brief Introduction*”, published in the Spring of 2020, Dr. Richard Haass shed light on the very need for “global governance” at the intersection with its basic characteristics, concisely but with enough breadth presented: “Another way government contend with globalization is through collective rather than national responses. This is the essence of multilateralism. No country on its own can shield itself from all the downsides of globalization or harvest solely the positive aspects; what has emerged as a result is a set of global arrangements – legal, political and commercial – for dealing with everything from health, trade, the internet, and climate change to trafficking in nuclear materials, persons and drugs. There is no global government, but there is a degree of global governance to help deal with virtually every domain of globalization”⁷⁹.

Further on, such a logical projection would entail inserting, organically and comprehensively, *Diplomacy* into the *global governance equation*.

An inspiring “model” in this regard can be found in one of the rare books published in recent years dealing with the *nexus Global Governance – Diplomacy*, its very title being “*Global Governance Diplomacy. The Critical Role of Diplomacy in Addressing Global Problems*”. If the author, Jean-Robert Leguey-Feilleux, professor of political science at St. Louis University, shares others analysts’ opinion that “*Global governance does not imply the creation of some supranational government*”, he comes also with an original contribution: “*a surprising variety of diplomatic activity is taking place in the expanding field of global governance... The greater need for international problem solving and the more complex nature of international society are likely not only to expand diplomatic interaction but to produce more innovations in the field*”⁸⁰.

In more practical terms, this referential book uses “*four levels of analysis in the study of diplomacy as an instrument of global governance*”⁸¹, a matrix of direct interest for making, as much as possible, transparent and equally operational, the issue of global governance for the case of health diplomacy, in a Pandemic juncture included:

The first level of analysis is the state level and includes the role of the nation state in global governance. The state remains the most critical global actor even

⁷⁹ Richard Haass, *The World: A Brief Introduction* (New York: Penguin Press, 2020), pp. 163-164.

⁸⁰ Jean-Robert Leguey-Feilleux, *Global Governance Diplomacy: The Critical Role of Diplomacy in Addressing Global Problems* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), pp. 1, 5.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

when it cannot solve global problems by itself. The state often chooses to act independently to protect its national interest. Even when participating in collective endeavours, the national perspective remains a significant element in the diplomacy of global governance.

Note: The above description, which is permeated by the implicit Diplomatic actions, could be transplanted, in its quasi-totality, to account for the major national, regional and global developments, with Diplomacy's involvement and specific inputs, during what the world knew as the novel coronavirus Pandemic's genesis and its following stages.

The second level of analysis looks at intergovernmental institutions and their critical importance in global governance diplomacy. International organizations are both a forum for multilateral diplomacy and a major set of international actors still growing in significance for global governance diplomacy. Some of these organizations are multipurpose, others are specialized. In addition, a multiplicity of regional or limited membership institutions play a role in global governance.

Note: Since the very first incipient information with regard to a possible and later on a real Pandemic outbreak, it has been the World Health Organization (WHO) with the necessary legal and trust credentials to be recognized as the emblematic medical intergovernmental institution and major multilateral actor for the global governance diplomacy in the field.

The third level of analysis is the transnational level including the increased role of civil society institutions and NGOs. This is where new kinds of international actors are found, unevenly contributing to global governance diplomacy beyond the control and increasingly determined to play a role in international affairs of public authorities

Note: At the time of writing this evaluation – September/October 2020, the Covid-19 Pandemic was still continuing, and some regions of the Planet, Europe included, were even expecting “a second wave”. Consequently, there had been an open “list” of civil society institutions and NGOs – medical and pharmaceutical associations, universities' laboratories, and other private specialized entities in the field, involved from the very beginning in a wide range of activities related to the Covid-19 treatment, vaccine and specific equipment creation and production, and so on.

The fourth level is the functional level, where the term “functional” is used in a broad sense, exemplified by professor Leguey-Feilleux as he examined *the role of diplomacy in five areas of global governance*, one of them – “Social Issues”, being opened with the chapter on the “Health Care”, as such anticipating a very concrete and specific category of global issues the world would face some time after the book's publication.

Having in mind the above-reviewed conceptual and pragmatic matrix, we would try now to go deeper into the *Global Governance Diplomacy* particular evolutions for the time of the Pandemic.

By the beginning of the year 2020, a moment coinciding, more or less, with the Chinese novel coronavirus Pandemic's genesis, a bunch of scientific studies,

doubled by positions expressed publicly by officials from governmental institutions, Americans included, had already been delving into the chances of having the world confronted with “a novel coronavirus”. In fact, “*scientists have been warning for decades, with mounting urgency, that this was going to happen*”.

As one of the *Mottos* to our *Prolegomenon* indicated, there were experts who predicted it 15 years ago, today’s experts being firmly in support of what had been projected by the year 2004: “*this pandemic has not exactly been a surprise... this was predicted and could have been, to a large extent, prevented*”⁸².

If people from various countries, some professional elites too, had been receiving such information, at least initially, with disbelief, suspecting a speculative tendency on the sources’ side or a bias toward conspirational explanation, much more important and consequential had proved the sad reality that “*the global governance*”, within the above-defined “*systemic posture*”, appeared, if not totally unprepared, then at best in an ad-hoc operational state by the time the novel coronavirus Pandemic knocked at “*the door*” of the modern civilization. Simply said, “*The world was not prepared for Covid-19, and it is not prepared for pandemics generally*”⁸³.

With the beginning of the year 2020, under the medical emergencies which were becoming day by day more and more acute, the global governance couldn’t refrain anymore to at least sending signals in this domain, within and through the constitutive systems and networks. Only that, the necessary rules, norms and institutional bodies, from up-down – the countries’ national governments, local authorities, non-state entities and traditional communities – began being coalesced, assembled and reacting with different speeds, frequently issuing quite contradictory indicators. And that for the implied Diplomatic actions and operations too, which were made less able to get out easily from the blockages generated by the inherently incongruous looming background essentially structured along the critical dichotomous axes: *the national interests and tasks vs. the global objectives/ global governance and its priorities*.

A particular case in point was that of the US, where the Trump administration’s response to the virus appeared to be increasingly inward-looking, taking measures to combat the Pandemic without consulting its global allies, despite the chorus of warnings from public health officials that such a virus knows no boundaries. The analysts noted also that there was no desire by the U.S. to actually lead on this, a context in which a traditional U.S. response would include a flurry of presidential calls with key foreign dignitaries, joint statements, or other major diplomatic lifts to coordinate a global response. “*You’re just not seeing that here. ... It’s the dog that isn’t barking*”⁸⁴.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

⁸² Debora Mackenzie, pp. x, xvi.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁸⁴ Colum Lynch, Robbie Gramer, *Global Diplomacy Grinds to a Halt on Infection Fears*, in *Foreign Policy*, March 12, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/12/global-diplomacy-halt-coronavirus-covid-infection-fears/>.

More generally, “*The way COVID-19 has become politicized – with partisan divides on a broad variety of issues, including mask wearing, stay-at-home orders and whether the pandemic itself is a myth – has meant some governments have made decisions that fly in the face of empiricism rather than being informed by it*”⁸⁵.

By the end of the US 45th President’s first mandate, it would become clear that its legacy could become an epitome of what analysts would call *American actions to deconstruct the post-WW II global governance system*: “*Over the past three and a half years, the US administration’s America First policy has taken many steps to distance the US from multilateralism. Some of them had been wider reported. In fact, since the Trump administration has been in office since Jan. 20, 2017, it has taken 20 actions to deconstruct the post-WW II global governance system*”⁸⁶ (see in the footnote the inventory of Donald Trump’s “*actions to deconstructing global governance system*”⁸⁷).

In the symmetry logic of the Great Power Competition, China’s positions on the issue provided a totally different perspective: “*No longer seen as a Western Trojan horse to contain China’s rise, the global governance agenda is now seen as a useful mechanism for projecting Chinese interests and values onto the international arena*”⁸⁸. More than that, those who had been monitoring with special focus the issue, have noticed that Beijing has started “*promoting alternative models of governance*”, and that had already been closely felt within the EU leadership realm: “*China is, simultaneously, in different policy areas, a cooperation partner with whom the EU has closely aligned objectives, a negotiating partner with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests, an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership, and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance*”⁸⁹.

⁸⁵ Maggie Koerth, *Coronavirus Models Were Always About More Than Flattening the Curve. And that’s why they’re still useful*, FiveThirtyEight, Sept. 10, 2020, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/coronavirus-models-were-always-about-more-than-flattening-the-curve/>.

⁸⁶ Harris Gleckman and Khalil Hamdani, *UN-Watchers Expect the Worst from Trump at General Assembly Next Week*, PassBlue, September 16, 2020, https://www.passblue.com/2020/09/16/un-watchers-expect-the-worst-from-trump-at-general-assembly-next-week/?utm_source=PassBlue+List&utm_campaign=53a9d5bd33-PB_RSS_GCTV_Aug2020&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_4795f55662-53a9d5bd33-55034713.

⁸⁷ *Inventory of Donald Trump’s “actions to deconstructing global governance system”*: Quitting the Paris climate accord to combat climate change. Withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal, or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Withdrawing from the Human Rights Council, UNESCO and the World Health Organization. Announcing its intent to leave the United Nations Postal Union. Withdrawing from treaties on arms trade and intermediate-range nuclear forces. Vetoing earlier Security Council resolutions on the status of Jerusalem, recognizing the city as Israel’s capital in violation of international agreements and moving the US embassy there. Reversing positions on the occupied West Bank to open the way for more Jewish settlements. Imposing sanctions on staff members, including the prosecutor, of the International Criminal Court. Ending contributions to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA); aid to Palestinian refugees (UNRWA); and to counterterrorism, peacekeeping and the Green Climate funds. Blocking the operations of the appellate body of World Trade Organization (WTO). Refusing to join the international alliance to develop and distribute a COVID-19 vaccine (COVAX). Boycotting international agreements on migration. Meddling in procedures of the Law of the Sea Convention, which it has never ratified (UNCLOS).

Harris Gleckman and Khalil Hamdani.

⁸⁸ David Shambaugh (Editor), *China and the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 158-160.

⁸⁹ *EU-China – A strategic outlook*, European Commission, High Representative of The Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joint Communication to The European Parliament, The European Council and The Council, 12 March 2019.

<https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>.

One year and a half after the EU had released those assessments, *President Xi Jinping's* speech at the *General Debate of the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly* (Sept. 23rd, 2020) came to *finesse his country's stand on the respective "models"*, adapting it conceptually and semantically to the new international circumstances: *"COVID-19 reminds us that the global governance system calls for reform and improvement. COVID-19 is a major test of the governance capacity of countries; it is also a test of the global governance system ... Global governance should be based on the principle of extensive consultation, joint cooperation and shared benefits so as to ensure that all countries enjoy equal rights and opportunities and follow the same rules. The global governance system should adapt itself to evolving global political and economic dynamics, meet global challenges and embrace the underlying trend of peace, development and win-win cooperation"*⁹⁰.

The Chinese "model" of global governance seemingly at an embryonic stage, couldn't but nurture the opinion that, generally, *the global governance* continues to pass through a difficult coalescing process, hardly possible to predict its evolution given both the contradictory moves by the US Administration, as reviewed above, as well as the Chinese promotion of an *"alternative model of governance"*.

Ultimately, the analysts had to notice that *"The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the dismal state of global governance: faced with the greatest emergency since the Second World War, nations have regressed into narrow self-interest. The concept of a rules-based international order has been stripped of meaning, while liberalism faces its greatest crisis in decades"*⁹¹.

For a concrete and thorough assessment we can go to a highly crafted study on *Renewing Multilateralism for The 21st Century*⁹², drafted under the aegis of a number of international foundations and study centres, and *published, in September 2020*, with the financial support of the European Parliament, specifically to the chapter dealing with *The Impact of the Coronavirus on Global Governance, implicitly on the global governance's impact on the Covid-19 Pandemic*, an assessment that would take out of their zone of comfort many people and institutions, with serious ripples for the Diplomacy's arena: *"The pandemic has shown that both national governments and international institutions were not equipped to manage a health emergency of the scope and dimension of Covid-19. Governments have generally reacted in a disorderly manner; without sufficient coordination on the nature and timing of the measures needed to counter the*

⁹⁰ <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-09-23/Full-text-Xi-Jinping-s-speech-at-General-Debate-of-UNGA-U07X2dn8Ag/index.html>.

⁹¹ Bobo Lo, *Global Order in The Shadow of The Coronavirus: China, Russia and the West. It's time to rethink global governance and its priorities*, Lowy Institute, 29 July 2020.

⁹² *Renewing Multilateralism for the 21st Century. The Role of The United Nations and of The European Union*, Drafted by the Istituto Affari Internazionali in coordination with the Foundation for European Progressive Studies. A project done in cooperation with: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung New York Office, Fondation Jean-Jaurès, Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale (CeSPI), Fundación Pablo Iglesias, Olof Palme International Center, September 2020, p. 16, https://www.feps-europe.eu/attachments/publications/policy-report_multilateralism-2020-09-15-pp.pdf.

pandemic. Only through a slow process of 'learning by doing' have national and regional authorities been able to contain the contagion, reduce the numbers of hospitalized patients and collaborate at least on the exchange of information on health protocols and therapies. The emergency has highlighted the need for much more efficient and concerted action at the international level to equip national health services with the necessary human and technical resources, improve transparency on the exchange of data about the pandemic, and define common standards on the measures needed to contain the contagion. Transparency, the exchange of correct information and best practices, standardized methodologies for the collection of data, and cooperation on the supply of medical equipment are the minimum requirements for an effective short-term international response. Major international efforts are required to develop effective therapies and vaccines. The actions undertaken by international organizations have also not been up to the challenge, revealing structural shortcomings".

Hence, the conclusion of the study presented here: "*The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to create a more robust and resilient health governance architecture*".

In light of the above, it remains very much for the third determinant in the GDSG's template – global institution(s) – to withstand the burden in accomplishing a modicum of functions and operations for the entire system, with a direct and tangible impact on the Pandemic evolution.

Essentially, it was the World Health Organization (WHO), which, by its very constitution and specific medical operational procedures, had been conceptually symbolizing, as well as pragmatically carrying out and displaying, what the world would have been able to create, until then, in terms of "Global Health Governance", having as a core-structure the International Health Regulations (IHR)⁹³.

In accordance with the analysts' views, since the adoption in 2005 of the revised IHR⁹⁴, it has functioned as the primary international instrument and governance mechanism that guides collective behaviour in the event of a disease outbreak, so that, in conceptual and pragmatic terms, the International Health Regulations are now perceived as "a cornerstone of global epidemic management"⁹⁵.

Attached to the IHR are eight core capacity criteria that states are expected to meet through legislation, finance, training, laboratory preparedness, etc. Since 2010, the WHO has received State Parties' Self-Assessment Annual Reports (SPAR), which review progress in building IHR core capacities and measure performance against 13 criteria and 24 indicators. In addition, since 2016 the WHO has coordinated nearly 100 joint evaluation exercises (JEE) in which, upon state invitation, an external committee is sent in to evaluate how the state is meeting its IHR obligations. It is in these focused areas that issue-specific agents such as the WHO are attractive to state principals because "they [WHO]

⁹³ International Health Regulations (2005), *Guidance document for State Party Self-Assessment Annual Reporting tool* (Geneva: WHO, 2018).

⁹⁴ Sara E. Davies, Clare Wenham, *Why the COVID-19 response needs International Relations*, in *International Affairs*, Volume 96, Issue 5, 1 September 2020, pp. 1227–1251, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa135>.

⁹⁵ Debora Mackenzie, p. 211.

offer consistent governance schemes that lower transaction costs involved in establishing collaborative ties”.

The question is whether the WHO had been able to capitalize on the consent previously won from its state principals – advising on health emergencies – for a situation such as the current COVID-19 crisis. *“As the COVID-19 outbreak clearly shows, the WHO’s attempt to ascertain state capacity primarily through public health indicators neglects the range of historic, economic, political and social institutions that support state implementation of the IHR (and indeed any international legal instrument)”*⁹⁶.

It is against this background that, on 22nd January, 2020, *the IHR Emergency Committee* convened its first meeting to consider the outbreak. In fact, the beginning of the fateful year 2020 proved far from being clear and transparent as it should had been, a situation raising many questions with regard to China, but to the WHO too. Chinese authorities told the WHO about it on December 31st, 2019; it later emerged that the first case occurred in November; on January 7th, 2020, China announced that a coronavirus was causing the pneumonia; *“despite apparent openness, it seems that China delayed reporting the illness, the virus, and especially the all-important person-to-person spread; there is no question that when China finally did act, it was awesomely effective, if socially and economic painful”*⁹⁷.

The 7th January 2020 vote by *the IHR Emergency Committee* was split on whether the outbreak had at that point acquired *the status of a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC)*. The affected member state’s position is to be considered in the decision-making process.

A week later, on January 30th, a PHEIC was declared, albeit still in markedly political terms, with Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, stating that the decision was not linked to the risks posed in China, but in view of the risks posed to low- and middle-income countries with weak health systems unprepared to manage the demands of a major epidemic.

Historically, the WHO has faced few organizational competitors for its pre-eminent role as *lead actor in international health governance orchestration*, especially in health emergencies. The WHO is uniquely positioned – owing to its history as the conductor of international health for over 60 years – to disseminate advice that can serve to enable cooperation. *“Ultimately, health issues transcend borders, and the WHO has done a brilliant job in understanding the importance of claiming international technical authority; it has done less well, however, in appreciating and understanding the political or problem-solving skills required to understand contemporary sovereign behaviour. The WHO’s failure to grasp the political priorities of its member states, and realize that health is not a first, second or third diplomatic priority for many of its members, has left the organization struggling in recent years with how to manage and*

⁹⁶ Sara E. Davies, Clare Wenham, p. 9.

⁹⁷ Debora Mackenzie, pp. 16, 29.

delegate its authority, as evidenced by the intense contestation about its actions in response to H1N1, MERS, Ebola, Zika and now COVID-19"⁹⁸.

Undoubtedly, the onus in this regard is on *"the main decision-making organ of the WHO – the World Health Assembly, meeting annually in Geneva and engaging in critical policy negotiations. This is where much of the diplomacy of global health governance is conducted, new program launched, and budget issues negotiated"*⁹⁹.

Beyond all these principled considerations and in spite of many of them being consecrated The already cited referential study on *Renewing Multilateralism for The 21st Century*, rightly focus much of its attention, and criticism also, on the WHO: *"In the case of Covid-19, the WHO has been rather slow in recognizing the dimension of the crisis, not particularly effective in addressing consistent policy recommendations to member states, and seemingly reluctant in the search for the origin of and responsibilities for the transmission of the virus. The investigation into the origin of the pandemic that the WHO has been requested to conduct gives it the opportunity to demonstrate its independence and authority. Similarly, regional organizations have not been particularly helpful in providing a rapid and satisfactory answer to the health emergency. Even the EU, by far the most advanced case of regional integration, lacks adequate competences on health as it can only support and complement measures that remain the responsibility of national governments"*¹⁰⁰.

In brief, *"an assessment of how to play the two-level game of diplomacy and domestic politics. This is the game currently being played out between China and the United States through the medium of WHO adherence and interactions. Understanding the relationship between these two key states is vital if we are to understand how best to navigate these discussions and ensure that persistent Cold War-like tensions do not undermine the potential success of global COVID-19 interventions"*¹⁰¹.

The focus on the US-China's Pandemic inter-play, should not take the limelight from what all state nations' governments could, or couldn't do, given that the global health crisis had been continuing: *"As the COVID-19 outbreak progresses, domestic governments are proceeding alone, sometimes independent of the advice offered by the WHO. These actions put multilateral cooperation at risk, at a time when global supply chains, global trade routes and broader international diplomacy will be vital to secure populations and health systems until – if it is ever created – there is a vaccine. And even when (if) there is, coordination of the manufacture, distribution and supply of that vaccine will require more coordinated health diplomacy among very different political regimes and health systems"*¹⁰².

⁹⁸ Sara E. Davies, Clare Wenham, pp. 9-10.

⁹⁹ Jean-Robert Leguey-Feilleux, pp. 143-146.

¹⁰⁰ https://www.feps-europe.eu/attachments/publications/policy-report_multilateralism-2020-09-15-pp.pdf.

¹⁰¹ Sara E. Davies, Clare Wenham, p. 8.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

In the end of the day, even a cursory look would indicate that, in the actions required for an effective novel coronavirus' submission and eradication, *the global health governance through the multilateral diplomatic instrument of the WHO has been having a bumpy ride.*

*During the initial outbreak of the novel coronavirus Pandemic, the WHO was relegated to the sidelines as national governments raced to secure medical material and equipment. The institution's robust defence of China's response to the pandemic demonstrated that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had used its clout to co-opt the WHO rather than support its missions. Osman Dar, global health expert at Public Health England and the Royal Institute of International Affairs, said that "China is no different from other countries that seek to exert influence. WHO had evolved out of colonial-era international sanitary conferences convened by the European powers and expansionist U.S. policy. Since WHO was controlled and largely influenced by the national interests of Western powers before, in the past 20 years, countries like China have started to have more influence in the global health space"*¹⁰³.

Meanwhile, analysts drew the attention to *the broader global health governance landscape* and the need to reaching *the coordinated global response to the novel coronavirus outbreak*. Besides the referential landmarks WHO and IHR, there was a clear necessity to consider the overall international relations environment in which collective action would be more likely to overcome domestic conditions of resistance.

Whatever the set of conclusions and proposals centred on the need to "create a more robust and resilient health governance architecture, a top priority remains *"to address the shortcomings of the WHO"*.

In the first Report¹⁰⁴ (141 pages) of the *U.S. House of Representatives China Task Force (CTF)* (which was established five months before), released on 30th September 2020, one can read: *"The institution responsible for global health, the World Health Organization (WHO), was a co-conspirator in covering up the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan, China, parroting CCP propaganda and disinformation – including that the virus was not transmitting from human-to-human despite evidence from Taiwan and others to the contrary. ... there are a multitude of outstanding questions that require a serious examination of the WHO's handling of COVID-19... it remains clear the WHO has failed to fulfil certain duties required by the IHR"*. In the end, the document *"provided four recommendations: new leadership at the WHO, Taiwan's re-admittance to the WHO as an observer, United States engagement in an international investigation with likeminded WHO Member States regarding the early stages of COVID-19, and concrete reforms to the International Health Regulations"* (for each recommendation being rationalized in the complex context developed throughout the Report).

¹⁰³ Hinnerk Feldwisch-Drentrup, *How WHO Became China's Coronavirus Accomplice. Beijing is pushing to become a public health superpower—and quickly found a willing international partner*, in *Foreign Policy*, April 2, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/02/china-coronavirus-who-health-soft-power/>.

¹⁰⁴ <https://gop-foreignaffairs.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CHINA-TASK-FORCE-REPORT-FINAL-9.30.20.pdf>.

Reminding that, out of “frustrations of President Trump and other US high officials with the WHO’s mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic”, on July 6th, 2020, the United States submitted formal notice of its intent to withdraw from the WHO, effective July 6, 2021, U.S. House of Representatives China Task Force (CTF) Report underlined that, “While the WHO failed to abide by the IHR, uphold its mandate, and fulfil its obligations to Member States, we do not believe the withdrawal of the United States or the establishment of a competing international organization is the best path forward. By remaining part of a WHO that is ready for change, the United States can be drive forward the necessary reforms of the International Health Regulations and the WHO”.

Against that balanced approach on WHO’s “fate”, a voice from the civic society¹⁰⁵ went further, trying to demonstrate why the global health organization could be entitled to receive... the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize. Motivation: In spite of the administration’s campaign, “the WHO has been able to mount a global response to the pandemic that is succeeding in two key ways that are particularly salient to the considerations of the Nobel Committee. First, the WHO is successfully holding the line against covid-19 from spreading through the world’s most vulnerable populations. This is a major victory against the disease, though perhaps one that is underappreciated in Western countries where the disease is running rampant ... The WHO is also at the centre of a global cooperative effort to distribute a covid-19 vaccine worldwide ... As of Sept. 21, 156 economies, representing nearly two-thirds of the global population, were committed to or eligible to receive vaccines through Covax. When a vaccine is available, most of humanity will get it through efforts backed by the WHO. This is what will ultimately end the pandemic. Conferring the Nobel Peace Prize on the WHO would be interpreted in the United States as a political act – and it will be. The WHO is simultaneously playing offense against covid-19 and defence from domestic political forces in the United States that seek to scapegoat the WHO for Trump’s handling of the crisis. Awarding the WHO the Nobel Peace Prize would provide the organization a much-needed morale boost while affirming the fundamental premise that a global pandemic can be confronted only through global solidarity”.

And the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize winner was ... the World Food Programme (WFP). In its citation, the Norwegian Nobel Committee praised the WFP for its “efforts for combating hunger” and its “contribution to creating peace in conflicted-affected areas”. The agency acted “as a driving force in efforts to prevent the use of hunger as a weapon of war and conflict”, it said. The chairwoman of the Norwegian Nobel committee, Berit Reiss-Andersen, said the WFP would have been a worthy recipient of the prize without the coronavirus pandemic. But the virus had strengthened the reasons for giving it to the WFP, including the need for “multilateralism” in a time of global crisis.

¹⁰⁵ Mark Leon Goldberg, *Why the WHO deserves the Nobel Peace Prize*, in *The Washington Post*, Oct. 7, 2020.

Mark Leon Goldberg is editor of UN Dispatch and host of the Global Dispatches podcast.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/10/06/why-who-deserves-nobel-peace-prize/>.

Seemingly, the substance of the respective assertion could have made it easily interchangeable the acronym *WFP* with its “brotherly” one – *WHO*. Why that alternative didn’t become a reality is equally easy to figure out given the geopolitical acrimonies accompanying the *WHO*’s travails through the Pandemic time. Anyway, even if the nominees are not to be officially disclosed for any given year until 50 years later, an article in the British *The Guardian* mentioned that, this year, 318 nominees were known to be under consideration, 211 individuals and 107 organizations, among the latter being “*the World Health Organization for its role in addressing the coronavirus pandemic*”¹⁰⁶.

Strangely enough, on Thursday 8th October 2020, just one day before the official 2020 Nobel Peace Prize award, *Dr David Nabarro, a WHO Special Envoy on Covid-19*, made a rather strange assertion in a press interview (on *Spectator TV*): “*We really do appeal to all world leaders: stop using lockdown as your primary control method. We in the World Health Organization do not advocate lockdowns as the primary means of control of this virus ... Lockdowns just have one consequence that you must never ever belittle, and that is making poor people an awful lot poorer... It seems that we may well have a doubling of world poverty by next year. We may well have at least a doubling of child malnutrition*”¹⁰⁷.

Seemingly that was really “music for President Trump’s ears”, who used his privileged communication instrument and tweeted about the *Spectator TV* interview: “*The World Health Organization just admitted that I was right. Lockdowns are killing countries all over the world. The cure cannot be worse than the problem itself. Open up your states, Democrat governors. Open up New York. A long battle, but they finally did the right thing!*” (Oct. 13, 2020).

If probably *the WHO* will not escape completely from “*the untreatable disease*” of great power meddling and competition, it is hoped that the respective circumstances would not affect the integrity the organization’s capability to fulfil its critical tasks under *the program to back vaccines, treatments and diagnostics against COVID-19, a program formally called Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator*.

Launched in April 2020, *the (ACT) Accelerator is the only global initiative offering a solution to speed up the end of the COVID-19 pandemic*. With the largest portfolio of COVID-19 tools in the world, investing in the ACT-Accelerator increases the probability of being able to access the “winning candidate” and hedges the risk for countries that have already entered individual bilateral agreements end up with products that are not viable. It needs US\$35 billion to meet the goal of developing new tools and producing and delivering 2 billion vaccine doses, 245 million treatments and 500 million diagnostic tests over the

¹⁰⁶ https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/09/uns-world-food-programme-wins-nobel-peace-prize?utm_source=dailybrief&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=DailyBrief2020Oct9&utm_term=DailyNewsBri.

¹⁰⁷ *The incredible vanishing World Health Organization*, in *The Spectator*, October 12, 2020. https://spectator.us/lockdown-incredible-vanishing-world-health-organization/?utm_source=Spectator+USA+Email+Signup&utm_campaign=7d59da058c-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_8_31_2020_19_27_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_edf2ae2373-7d59da058c-.

next year. That's just 1% of what G20 governments have already committed to domestic economic stimulus packages¹⁰⁸.

By September 2020, it was noticed that financial support had lagged goals, as *nations or governments including the European Union, Britain, Japan and the United States reached bilateral vaccine deals*, so that, only some \$3 billion were contributed at the beginning, a kind of “seed funding” that was less than 10% of what the WHO wanted for the ACT Accelerator to go from ‘start up’ to ‘scale up and impact’ so that the ACT Accelerator gain traction with expected effects on health systems, in addition to vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics.

WHO and partners stressed that countries comprising more than 60% of the world's population had signed up to its international initiative to buy coronavirus vaccines, but said they still need billions of dollars to pay for the shots. Consequently, the UN Secretary-General and the WHO General-Director reiterated to nations the plea to contribute *for the World Health Organization's (WHO) “ACT Accelerator”* up to not less than \$35 billion more, including \$15 billion in the following three months.

Notably, it was the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen that pledged backing, having in August 2020 already promised 400 million euros (\$474 million) to the COVAX vaccine portion of the program. “*It is difficult to find a more compelling investment case. The European Commission will remain deeply and entirely committed to the success of the ACT Accelerator. The world needs it; we all need it*”¹⁰⁹.

Instead, the Trump administration, in its broader offensive against multilateralism, said it would have nothing to do with the COVAX project, compounding Russia and China's customary role as spoilers on concerted UN against disasters and atrocities, risks leaving permanent damage. Tedros said Covax was aiming to provide 2 billion doses of vaccine available by the end of next year, although rich countries have reserved more than half of the world's global capacity to produce such shots. “*This is not charity, it's in every country's best interest. We sink or swim together*”¹¹⁰.

As a conclusion to this section of our study, we can say that, on the background of the novel coronavirus Pandemic unfolding, the global health landscape and its participatory diplomatic structure remained extremely complex, making what we defined initially as the *Global Diplomacy Sui Generis (GDSG)*'s specific template just “a work in progress”, with contradictory evolutions and dynamics in the operational “alignment” of the three specific determinants: “a global problem”, “a global governance”, and “global institution(s)”.

Ultimately, “the lesson to be learned” was summarized in the chapter *What Went Wrong Globally* of the Report *Improving Pandemic Preparedness: Lessons From COVID-19*, released in October 2020 by the Council on Foreign Relations, New

¹⁰⁸ Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, *Never Too Late to Fight back against Pandemic*, ASHARQ AL-AWSAT, 29 September 2020.

<https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2535441/tedros-adhanom-ghebreyesus/exclusive-never-too-late-fight-back-against-pandemic>.

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-who-council/uns-guterres-calls-for-35-billion-more-for-who-covid-19-program-idUSKBN2611UT>.

¹¹⁰ https://www.euronews.com/2020/09/22/coronavirus-vaccines-us-china-france-and-germany-absent-from-who-s-equal-access-covax-coal?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=en&utm_content=coronavirus-vaccines-us-china-france-and-germany-absent-from-who-s-equal-access-covax-.

York¹¹¹: “*The ultimate source of the weakness of global governance in preventing, detecting, and responding to international health emergencies resides in sovereign states. National governments remain torn between their desire to have a functioning WHO and their disinclination to provide it with authorities and resources to respond aggressively to outbreaks if doing so were to intrude on national prerogatives and sovereignty. Disease outbreaks are complex events, and no established global mechanism coordinates the diplomatic, economic, health, scientific, security, and surveillance resources needed to mobilize an effective response. This pandemic has been characterized by a patchwork of inadequate domestic responses, a breakdown of compliance with IHR, and a disastrous lack of cooperation and coordination across nations in the multilateral settings where an effective response both to the disease and to its massive economic fallout could have materialized. Effective governance of global health security depends on sovereign states*”.

It remains as an open question why what looks now so critical, namely “*Effective governance of global health security*”, hadn’t been until these days a matter of unreserved priority for the agenda of those *sovereign states*.

Sustaining such a legitimate interrogation, in policy and operational terms, one can evoke not only the effective and serious medical needs, on the ground, for hundreds and hundreds of millions of persons, inhabitants of practically all areas of the Planet Earth, but also the seemingly weak impact, in time, on the decision-make processes, at political, legislative and government level, by that extensive specialized literature, from researches focused directly on the health topics, to studies drafted and released by numerous academia and think-tanks, including individual scholars, who, in the last ten to fifteen years, tackled practically all conceivable aspects of the subject-matter.

Maybe a relevant example, for “*the middle of the road*” within the respective ark of time, could be a book which happened to be published in Romania, in 2010, tackling *Managing Global Interdependencies*, with an ample chapter on *Global Public Health: Achievements, Challenges, and Opportunities*¹¹², where the author, Vasile Pușcaș, a Professor with Babeș-Bolyai University in the city of Cluj-Napoca, associated his own views on the subject with references from a dozens of other authors from various countries. Here is a quotation just from two of them who, already by the year 2007, rang on the bell on governments’ role vis-à-vis today’s “health risks”: “*Governments, today, must deal with health risks that spill across their borders. Domestic action is no longer sufficient for countries to ensure public health security. Collective action is crucial. The new global health context requires new rules, new actors, and innovative responses*”¹¹³.

Against this backdrop, we would try to see how, in the worldwide drive aimed at mitigating the impact of the present Pandemic, what is called “Global Diplomacy” could be complemented by Diplomacy’s other branches, implying of course a not less global mobilization of energies and dedication.

¹¹¹ https://www.cfr.org/report/pandemic-preparedness-lessons-COVID-19/?utm_source=academic&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=CFRAcademicBulletin20Oct2020&utm_term=AcademicBulletin.

¹¹² Vasile Pușcaș, *Managing Global Interdependencies* (Cluj-Napoca, Romania: Editura EIKON, 2010), pp. 238-254.

¹¹³ Nick Drager, Laura Sunderland, *Public Health in a Globalising World: The Perspective from the World Health Organization*, in Andrew Cooper, John J. Kirton, Ted Schrecker (eds.), *Governing global health: Challenge, Response, Innovation*, Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., London, 2007.

*No One Is Strong Alone: #Multilateralism Matters
As a The Legacy of Multilateral Organizations' Internal
Weaknesses Matters Also*

Mottos: “Today, we have a surplus of multilateral challenges and a deficit of multilateral solutions”¹¹⁴.

“The world has become more multipolar but multilateralism has weakened, as evidenced by the growing paralysis of the United Nations Security Council, the deep crisis of the World Trade Organization, or more recently that of the World Health Organization. And this precisely at a time when global problems, especially the climate crisis or health issues, are becoming more and more critical”¹¹⁵.

“To date, the UN Security Council has proved ill prepared to respond to a global challenge on the scale of COVID-19. COVID-19 demonstrated at least two significant weaknesses – concerning its policy tools and major power politics – in the Council’s capacity to deal with global health crises”¹¹⁶.

“Intergovernmental politics and multilateral institutions don’t look the same now that did in the 1990s. They’re increasingly about preserving regime autonomy and stability, rather than actually facilitating international cooperation”¹¹⁷.

“Covid-19 has drawn attention to the weakest links in the international system. The spotlight has fallen on refugee camps and war zones, climate disaster areas and failed states. More than that, the virus has exposed the deficiencies of a global order that lacks the powerful multilateral institutions needed to confront such worldwide crises”¹¹⁸.

“The EU is inherently multilateral. As a cooperative undertaking with 28-member states, multilateralism is in its institutional DNA”¹¹⁹.

Main takeaway: Given the pandemic’s continuation, it becomes legitimate to explore the capability and the directions and the scale of having “the multilateral diplomacy” taking the relay where “the global diplomacy” stopped/ blocked/ itself – as discussed in the previous section of the present paper – hopefully with more productive results than in the latter’s case. While embarking on such an endeavour, we should be aware of the still missing chemistry in transforming multilateral institutions from a “Force of Numbers” into real a “Geopolitical Power” to be reckoned with and further instrumentalized through multilateral & global Diplomacy.

At first glance, the pandemic would seem to be a tailor-made crisis for multilateral cooperation. Instead, with a few exceptions, the initial response was characterized by “medical nationalism” and “every country for itself” mentality. Since then, heightened tensions between the U.S. and China have impeded efforts

¹¹⁴ UN Secretary-General Speech at General Assembly’s Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Meeting, 21 September 2020.

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sgsm20264.doc.htm>.

¹¹⁵ EU HR/VP Josep Borrell, *Building Global Europe*, From the blog, 09/09/2020.

https://ec.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/84888/building-global-europe_en.

¹¹⁶ *Salvaging the Security Council’s Coronavirus Response*, COMMENTARY, The International Crisis Group, 4 August 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/salvaging-security-councils-coronavirus-response>.

¹¹⁷ *Beyond Hegemony*, Center on National Security at Fordham Law, August 6th, 2020.

<https://www.centeronnationalsecurity.org/vital-interests-issue-43-alexander-cooley>.

¹¹⁸ Jeremy Cliffe, *How the world is learning to live with Covid-19. Across continents, in every sort of society, the pandemic has exposed the weakest links*, in *The New Statesman*, 16 September 2020.

<https://www.newstatesman.com/world-learning-to-live-coronavirus-covid-second-wave-lockdown>.

¹¹⁹ Liselotte Odgaard, *The Many Sides of Multilateralism*, Project Echowall, 9 March 2020.

<https://www.echo-wall.eu/state-mind/many-sides-multilateralism>.

to formulate a collective response in multilateral institutions and forums like the United Nations and the G-20. But given the nature of a pandemic, in which the world's health is only as secure as that of its weakest member, international cooperation will eventually be necessary – to distribute a vaccine once it is available, for instance, as well as to mitigate the economic fallout and boost recoveries.

We were being fortunate enough in working on this section concurrently with the preparatory activities and then the effective unfolding of *the 75th anniversary of the United Nations*, connected immediately with *the 2020 annual UN General Assembly*. Even if such memorable and relevant events were held mostly virtually, they occasioned a comprehensive and a profound assessment and diagnostic of the global organization's past and present activities, intimately connected with a foresight on its future evolutions, at least on the short and medium term.

The views expressed by some such relevant actors are presented here in a summation – *Big Picture*, as the Project Syndicate put it¹²⁰, founded on one general assumption: *“The United Nations is marking its 75th Anniversary in muted fashion and that not only because of the COVID-19 pandemic. With rising nationalism and the return of great-power rivalry threatening to paralyze the organization at the heart of the multilateral system, many are asking whether global cooperation has a future; the rules-based international order established after World War II is sliding into dysfunction – just when cooperation to tackle multiple global threats is arguably more essential than ever”*:

– *Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged world leaders to remain true to the hopes of the organization's founding generation by recommitting to global cooperation.*

– *Josep Borrell, the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, pledged the bloc's continued support for the UN, arguing that a world without the body would endanger everyone.*

– *Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations thought that the UN is flawed beyond salvation, and argued that multilateralism and global governance will – for better or worse – have to take place largely outside the organization.*

– *Former NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana doubted that the UN can live up to its first headquarters' nickname and function as a true “peace factory” that effectively addresses future international threats.*

– *José Antonio Ocampo, a former UN under-secretary general, defended the organization, citing its historic contribution to social and economic development.*

– *More broadly, the Brookings Institution's Kemal Derviş and Sebastián Strauss called on internationalists to counter populist narratives that demonize the UN and other multilateral forums by clarifying what global solidarity really means.*

¹²⁰ *Will Multilateralism Survive?*, https://www.project-syndicate.org/bigpicture/will-multilateralism-survive?utm_source=Project%20Syndicate%20Newsletter&utm_campaign=53aae3b2bb-op_newsletter_2020_09_25&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_73bad5b7d8-53aae3b2bb-93853765&mc_.

– Former Spanish foreign minister Ana Palacio took a middle path, urging political leaders to keep the current flawed multilateral system alive in the hope that the US will soon resume global leadership.

Whatever the tortuous resultant at the confluence of all those assessments, plus numerous others, with enough unsettling ambivalence, the official commemoration of UN75, which took place at a socially-distanced UN Headquarters, with Heads of State and Government joining virtually, focused on the theme of “*The future we want, the United Nations we need: Reaffirming our collective commitment to multilateralism*”.

In spite of that theme generous’ message which fully permeated what the Heads of State and Government adopted as the “*Declaration on the Commemoration of the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the UN*” (A/75/L.1), Member States had to recognize “*that while there have been many achievements in the past 75 years, the world envisaged by the UN’s founders 75 years ago has not yet been realized: it is plagued by growing inequality, poverty, hunger, armed conflicts, terrorism, insecurity, climate change, and pandemics; people are forced to make dangerous journeys in search of refuge and safety; the LDCs are falling behind; and complete decolonization has not been achieved ... global challenges are interconnected and can only be addressed through reinvigorated multilateralism, as demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic ... multilateralism is not an option but a necessity, to build back better for a more equal, more resilient, and more sustainable world, with the UN at the centre of efforts*”.

Trying to foresee possible answers to such a “package” of interrogations will depend, in this case too, on the “lessons” (un)learned from how the multilateral system had passed and will further pass “*the Pandemic test*”.

Beyond Multilateralism: States and Governments’ Foreign Policy Practiced under the Brand Name of “Bilateral Diplomacy” in the Time of Pandemic

Motto: “*We live in a world where interdependence is becoming more and more conflictual, in particular with the growing strategic rivalry between the US and China. We also see a broader trend towards competition between countries and systems, especially with some of our neighbours such as Russia and Turkey who seem to want to return to a logic of empires. They consider they are entitled to control their surrounding neighbourhood in the name of alleged historical rights. They only recognize the sovereignty of states and not the sovereignty of the people. This is at the heart of our differences with Russia over Belarus or with China over Hong Kong. Democratic norms and our liberal-inspired vision of the world are challenged*”¹²¹.

“*President Donald Trump’s dangerous brand of diplomatic malpractice: a diplomacy of narcissism, bent on advancing private interests at the expense of our national interests*”¹²².

¹²¹ Josep Borrell, *Building Global Europe*, From the blog, 09/09/2020.

https://ec.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/84888/building-global-europe_en.

¹²² William J. Burns, *The Demolition of U.S. Diplomacy. Not Since Joe McCarthy Has the State Department Suffered Such a Devastating Blow*, in *Foreign Affairs*, October 14, 2019.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-10-14/demolition-us-diplomacy>.

Main takeaway: *Under the impact of the coronavirus Pandemic, the perennial bilateral Diplomacy had to be, as never before, synergistically dynamized along a functional triad “files” of relevance for Diplomacy too: “the file of the state’s citizens” who happened to be momentarily located outside the national boundaries and who had to be helped in various modes (returning home and so on), also essentially being protected from the virus’ perils; “the file of the flux of goods, materials, equipment and so on”, starting with those needed by the health sector and pharmaceutical industry, but also those merchandise critical for keeping at least partially operating the national economy; “the file of generally defending “state’s interests”, making effective use of an extensive range of diplomatic patterns and forms: public diplomacy, military diplomacy, sanctions diplomacy and so on, or the alternative of using a “blend” of aid, investment and diplomacy. All these directions for Diplomacy’s actions during the Pandemic time had been marked by a specific paradigm shift: the “Diplomatic Distancing” as a sui generis application in the geopolitical perspective of the “Social Distancing”, the defining paradigm in global efforts fighting the Covid-19 Pandemic. A “Diplomatic Distancing” with a variable size/ scale, from measuring it minimum possible or even having it completely “annulled” when the interests of two or more states would request it, up to a maximum dissociation, bordering on the “train” “cold war” – “hot war”. Whatever the dynamics of change of a sulphurous background, the Bilateral Diplomacy would continue to bring with through the ages its Perennial Resilience, even if not fully devoid of harmful flaws, especially when the political leaders’ role would exceedingly come into play, misleading what should had remained as the clear-cut foreign policy and diplomatic Mantra & Paradigm: National/ Vital interests vs. Personal/Group interests.*

Born centuries ago, the Bilateral Diplomacy (BD) has continued for the first two decades of the 21st century to be a pervasively and indomitably integrative structure of the day’s international relations’ fabric and that as long as the sovereign nation-states haven’t ceased to be (the) major players on the worldwide arena. Beyond the quantitative dimension, equally important is the functional aspect, namely *the Bilateral Diplomacy (BD) as a critical framework and conduit utilized by the nation-states in the pursuit of what they consider as being their (vital) national interests*. All along such a thread of continuity there come “nodes” of specificity given by the intersection of particular national junctures, of political and ideological nature, including subjective determinations induced by the particular personality on the nation-state’s leaders. And from this point of view, the recent years, including the coronavirus pandemic time, had provided interesting cases, undoubtedly starting with “the cases” of the United States and China.

The President of the New York Council on Foreign Relations, Richard N. Haass, noticed that, once COVID-19 emerged in China and quickly became “*a worldwide problem, responses, though, have been mostly along national lines. Some countries have fared relatively well, thanks to their existing public health systems and political leadership; with others, it has been just the opposite*”¹²³.

Noticeably against the backdrop of *the Pandemic*, one could observe on the screen of the global geopolitical radar that the *Bilateral Diplomacy* got entrusted by the world’s States with at least four categories of “*missions*”, each commanding specific degrees of “*(diplomatic) distancing*” between the countries involved.

¹²³ Richard N. Haass, *The Politics of a COVID-19 Vaccine. Governments must prepare now to avoid “catastrophic success” once a Covid-19 vaccine emerges*, July 14, 2020, https://www.cfr.org/article/politics-covid-19-vaccine?utm_source=twtw&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=TWWTW%202020July17&utm_content=B&utm_term=TWWTW%20and%20All%20Staff%20as%20of%207-9-20.

First category of Bilateral Diplomacy has been the one proper determined by the needs of the emerging Pandemic: the quasi-totality of the Governments for the 193 countries which are UN members found just normal, with the entrance into “*the Pandemic era*”, to fixing as immediate and urgent objectives for their national Diplomacies, with corresponding concrete instructions for their embassies and other types of diplomatic missions, *to identifying and helping procuring the medical and other materials requested in the process of COVID-19 Pandemic’s diagnosis and treatment.*

That against a world-wide nervousness and distress displayed by states and their institutions from the very first moment of Pandemic’s genesis, which showed that *the quasi-majority of the countries in the world used to be over-dependent on foreign nations for essential medicines, for medical supplies like masks, gloves, goggles and the like.* A reality intimately connected with the globalization so much-cherished by the liberals and neo-liberals political and economic elites, impervious to some of its negative consequence, especially those connected to the monopoly positions, long known and jealously guarded in the case of some producers/ manufactures. Eventually, one can see here a kind of *medical, scientific, technical, and commercial “distancing”* with a critical geopolitical impact, including on the areas of *Bilateral brand* of international relations and Diplomacy.

In times of pandemic, every nation will be competing for the same critical drugs and medical supplies at the same time, so it is entirely reasonable to expect that each will prioritize its own needs when distributing what it produces and controls. Later on, working on a vaccine and generally the scientific research on the field – “*modern medical research is inherently collaborative, but the constellation of efforts now under way around the world is unprecedented in scale and scope*” – should also had been on the priority agenda of nations’ diplomatic missions¹²⁴.

Beyond the commercial dimension implied by the procurement of essential anti-Covid-19 materials, the Bilateral Diplomacy came also into the play through a purely “*soft instrument*” – *the aid and assistance, in material, financial and human expertise terms.* That was possible through unfolding functions and operations both by a large spectrum of actors: governments and non-state actors (academia, research organizations) and multinationals. This had been a dimension of the Bilateral Diplomacy which continued effectively all along the year one of the Pandemic.

Just two relevant examples.

First, in support of the Government of Nepal’s effort to contain the spread of COVID-19, the Embassy of Israel in Kathmandu dispatched, by the end of July 2020, medical supplies to the Ministry of Social Development in Province 2, which has been worst hit by the pandemic. The goods included 400 units of

¹²⁴ Jerome Groopman, *The Long Game of Coronavirus Research*, in *The New Yorker*, July 23, 2020.

https://www.newyorker.com/science/medical-dispatch/the-long-game-of-coronavirus-research?utm_source=nl&utm_brand=tny&utm_mailing=TNY_Daily_072320&utm_campaign=aud-dev&utm_medium=email&bxid=5bd676e524c17c1048015332&cndid=39149971&hasha=897f19e8c3a5.

personal protective equipment, 1000 units of KN95 masks, 10,000 units of surgical masks, 5,000 pairs of surgical gloves and 500 litres of sanitiser. “This year marks the 60th year of the establishment of the diplomatic relationship of Nepal and Israel and we are indeed honoured to continue the great tradition of cooperation during both peaceful and challenging times” was the press-release of the Israeli Embassy¹²⁵. Given the considerable “distance” between the two countries in terms of Geography, Policies and Strategic Interests, the delivery of such aid could be perceived as valuable “strike of Bilateral Diplomacy”.

Second, by the beginning of September 2020, Germany’s Development Ministry announced that his country was significantly expanding its aid program in India, where coronavirus cases had been soaring rapidly, concretely providing India with “one of the largest coronavirus support measures in the world”: 330,000 testing kits and 600,000 pieces of personal protective equipment short-term loans worth €460 million¹²⁶.

If Germany’s Diplomatic gesture towards India was happening nine months into the Pandemic, it is worth reminding that in the early phase of the crisis, it was the Italian government which was in desperate need of masks and ventilators. The response by the traditional allies had been slow and unsatisfactory; neither the European institutions nor the US had yet come to assist Rome at that stage. Practically, “China was the first and most active country in delivering help to Italy. The images of the Chinese doctors arriving in Rome – at the beginning of March – with tones of medical equipment have travelled throughout the world. Beijing’s embassy conducted a successful campaign through social media to emphasize this act of solidarity and the Italian government publicly praised the initiative”¹²⁷.

It was in reaction to this campaign that the US decided to take the initiative. Trump announced the shipping of over \$100 million in medical supplies to Italy at the end of March. Then, the US President also signed the Memorandum on Providing COVID-19 Assistance to the Italian Republic. This document set an official channel through which Washington could support Italy’s needs for medical equipment, and it also established that all the American military personnel on the Italian territory had to be activated in the assistance operations. Most importantly, the document openly stated that the initiative was aimed at “*demonstrating United States leadership in the face of Chinese and Russian disinformation campaigns*”.

Overall, not only the US support has been consistent, but it has also been carried through the collaboration between the Defence apparatus of the two countries, which served as a reminder of the strong alliance between them.

Nevertheless, Beijing’s initiative proved to be more effective – at least in terms of public reception. As a survey by SWG demonstrated, the percentage of

¹²⁵ <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/israel-gifts-medical-supplies-to-province-2/>.

¹²⁶ https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-germany-gives-india-millions-in-aid-thousands-of-testing-kits/a-54828976?maca=en-newsletter_en_bulletin-2097-xml-newsletter&r=5716960689543725&lid=1608925&pm_ln=48804.

¹²⁷ Carlo Catapano, *COVID-19’s Reshaping of International Alignments: Insights from Italy*, E-International Relations, Apr. 25 2020, <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/04/25/covid-19s-reshaping-of-international-alignments-insights-from-italy/>.

Italians that considers China as a friendly country has jumped from 10% in January to over 50% in March; moreover, an average of 36% of the Italian public looks at China as the best international ally, while the percentage for the US is around 30%. *“These reactions are easily explained. During crises, timing is vital; and the Chinese response was rapid and highly mediatic, while the American (and European) one was slow and less spectacular – although quantitatively and qualitatively superior”*.

A significant case could be considered that of Romania which, despite the challenges faced internally in coping with the crisis, made efforts to extend concrete assistance to other European countries. This support had taken the form of deployed medical personnel teams to Italy and to the Republic of Moldova, as well as donations of medical equipment.

Thus, Romania responded promptly to Italy’s call for support with the coronavirus outbreak and deployed, through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, a team of 11 doctors and 4 nurses to Italy, for a period of 18 days. The Romanian team was dispatched to Lombardian region – one of the most affected regions in Europe by the pandemic – and worked side by side with the Italian medical staff to combat the coronavirus.

On April 30, a Romanian medical team – 52 persons, out of which 41 medical doctors and nurses – started their mission in the Republic of Moldova. In addition, a Romanian humanitarian donation of critical medical equipment, medicines and protective gear worth of 3.5 million EUR reached Chişinău on 7 May 2020. These measures were motivated by our strong support to the citizens of the Republic of Moldova.

“We also brought also her share in terms of European solidarity through the on-going work of the RescEU hub based in Romania, from which Italy, Spain, Montenegro and North Macedonia already benefitted, with cargo transportations of medicines and sanitary equipment from the EU’s strategic reserve, delivered by the Romanian General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations, on behalf of the EU, through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism”, declared Bogdan Aurescu, the Foreign Minister of Romania¹²⁸.

Second category, what had already been in process, as a sort of “work in progress”, until the Pandemic outbreak, namely “*Power Competition*” has been further intensifying, taking now the pattern of *extending the COVID-19 Pandemic’s Paradigm of the “(Social) Distancing”* to the relationships among some of the world and regional powers, with direct consequences for those involved, but also with an impact outside the bilateral realm, that especially when the United States and China are the “stars” of the brand-new “diplomatic show”.

We are of the view that *the COVID-19 Pandemic’s Critical Paradigm of the “Social Distancing”*, if translated to the geopolitical fold, i.e. “*Diplomatic Distancing*”, could bring to the fore, in addition to a *forcefully metaphorical added-value*, a necessary and insightful pattern of analysing and understanding with regard to the current state and the predictable future of the *Bilateral*

¹²⁸ The statement of foreign affairs minister Bogdan Aurescu at the Extraordinary Summit of the Central European Initiative, 05/15/20, Bucharest (video-conference), <http://www.mae.ro/en/node/52508>.

Diplomacy. The epitome for all these being the status of the US-China relationships throughout the entire first year of the Pandemic.

Third category, the world in the *Corona virus time* appear “littered” with flashpoints signalling varying forms of Bilateral Diplomacy, some as a continuation of previous endeavours, other as new ventures in the Diplomatic realm, unfolding practically on all continents of the Planet, proving that rarely the Pandemic acted as a restraint from this point of view, the overall result being an overstretch of the nations’ resources.

Fourth category regards the participation of the diplomatic channels to the collective – if not really global – endeavours aimed at clarifying the Corona virus “origin(s)” and that along the specialized institutions, on the one hand the scientific laboratories in the field, on the other hand the impervious intelligence structures and mechanisms.

A quite exhaustive inventory of the synergies accumulated until the end of July 2020 is reviewed by Lt. Col. (res.) Dr. Dany Shoham from *The Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies* (also known by its acronym, the BESA Center) in a paper entitled “*Where Did COVID-19 Really Come From?*”¹²⁹. With a notable quote from the Executive director of the WHO Health Emergencies Program, Mike Ryan: “*figuring out the true source of the virus requires detective work that will entail an integrated approach and a lot of hard work*”. Very much so given the fact that, “*The hunt for the origins of SARS-CoV-2 will look beyond China*”¹³⁰.

*A Nodal Point of Today’s International Relations
– The US-China Relationships
Their Present Destiny to Carry Along the Burden
of a Concept-Metaphor of Sad Memory*

Motto: “*Great power competition has cast a shadow over our global response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak should have been a chance for China and the United States to work together for a common cause. Instead, the pressures it has unleashed have inflamed tensions between the two countries*”¹³¹.

“*It wasn’t your fault that this happened, it was China’s fault, and China is going to pay a big price [for] what they’ve done to this country. China’s going to pay a big price, what they’ve done to the world. This was China’s fault*”¹³².

The *pre-Pandemic* “*Great Power Competition*”, epitomized by the already tensing US-China bilateral relationships, entered, with the Covid-19 Pandemic proper, a new stage, one we would call of an ever growing “*Diplomatic Distancing*”

¹²⁹ <https://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/covid19-origin/>.

¹³⁰ <https://www.economist.com/science-and-technology/2020/07/22/the-hunt-for-the-origins-of-sars-cov-2-will-look-beyond-china>.

¹³¹ *21st Century Diplomacy: Foreign Policy is Climate Policy*, Wilson Center and Adelphi Research GmbH, 2020, p. 7.

https://diplomacy21-adelphi.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/21st_century_diplomacy_report_spread.

¹³² President Donald Trump in a video posted to Twitter after returning to the White House from being treated in the hospital for Covid-19, Oct. 8, 2020.

between the two states, substantiated by the hazards of intersection and confluence between the age of ambivalence and incongruence in the American foreign policy's messages and actions, on the one hand, and the opportunistic assertiveness of the sino-centric view and lucrative approach of international relations of the time, on the other hand.

By the end of the first year of coronavirus Pandemic, the matrix of the US-China bilateral relations could be defined in both diplomatic and military terms: *"No one should make the mistake of believing that the ... competition with China is primarily a military contest. China has relied on financial coercion and economic statecraft to gain influence as it builds infrastructure around the world ... China was doubling its diplomacy budget and pouring untold billions into developing countries, now outstripping American aid. China today has more diplomatic posts around the world than the United States does. That said, the military challenge from China is real. The United States should not be lulled into a false sense of security by its continuing firepower advantage or the fact that its defence budget remains orders of magnitude larger than Beijing's. China's advances mean that the United States' air and sea superiority in the region is no longer ensured. This isn't competition from a military equal but a new kind of asymmetric threat. Americans learned in the sands of Afghanistan and Iraq that asymmetry can be deadly, and the same is true in the skies and seas of East Asia. (Meantime) A renewed commitment to diplomacy would strengthen the United States' military position. U.S. alliances are an asset that neither China nor Russia can match, allowing Washington to project force around the world ... Although it's appropriate to emphasize the need for burden sharing, it is more constructive to think of a division of labour"*¹³³.

Eventually, *"There is no bilateral diplomatic relationship more consequential than the one between the United States and China, which affects not only the two countries but all of humanity"*¹³⁴. And, practically, *of the many historical analogies applied to China-U.S. relations in the 21st century, it is the Cold War metaphor that has become most pervasive*¹³⁵.

*"We must do everything to avoid a new Cold War"*¹³⁶ was maybe an unexpected appeal included by the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in his *Address to the Opening of the General Debate of the 75th Session of the General Assembly* (22 September 2020).

¹³³ Hillary Clinton, *A National Security Reckoning. How Washington Should Think About Power*, in *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2020.

https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-10-09/hillary-clinton-national-security-reckoning?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=EBB%2010.09.20&utm_term=Editorial%20-

¹³⁴ https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/us-china-leadership-scenarios-in-future-by-yuen-yuen-ang-2020-08?utm_source=Project+Syndicate+Newsletter&utm_campaign=84fdc5db75-sunday_newsletter_30_08_2020&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_73bad5b7d8-84fdc5db75-7aac3cfc8e.

¹³⁵ https://diplomacy21-adelphi.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/21st_century_diplomacy_report_spread.

¹³⁶ <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2020-09-22/address-the-opening-of-the-general-debate-of-the-75th-session-of-the-general-assembly>.

Seemingly, this “appeal” had come too late if one consider a former US official’s assertion: *“Rising tensions between the U.S. and China – made worse by the coronavirus pandemic – is the start of a new Cold War. I know people get uncomfortable with the terminology but I do think we have to be honest and call this what it is and this is the start of a new Cold War and if we’re not careful, things could get much, much worse”*¹³⁷.

Notably, the trope in case could be frequently found in the statements made along 2020 by various Chinese official, from the Foreign Minister Wang Yi – *“The assertion that US policy of engagement with China has failed is just a rehash of the Cold War mentality... We reject any attempt to create a so-called “new Cold War”, because it contravenes the fundamental interests of the Chinese and American peoples and the global trend toward development and progress. The Cold War, which inflicted great sufferings to the world, should not be allowed to repeat itself. Peace and development are what all countries aspire to. Anyone who tries to start a new Cold War in the 21st century will be on the wrong side of history and will only be remembered as the one who has upended international cooperation...”*¹³⁸, to the Premier Li Keqiang – *“We (China) have all along rejected a Cold War mentality. Decoupling between the two economies will do neither side any good and will also be harmful to the world”*¹³⁹ and to President Xi Jinping who used his speech the General Debate of the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly as an opportunity to integrate his stand on the issue of the “Cold War” into a larger vision for the future of his country’s foreign policy main orientations and that mainly in contrast, be it implicitly, with American diplomacy: *“We have no intention to fight either a Cold War or a hot war with any country. We will continue to narrow differences and resolve disputes with others through dialogue and negotiation. We do not seek to develop only ourselves or engage in a zero-sum game. We will not pursue development behind closed doors. Rather, we aim to foster, over time, a new development paradigm with domestic circulation as the mainstay and domestic and international circulations reinforcing each other. This will create more space for China’s economic development and add impetus to global economic recovery and growth”*¹⁴⁰.

As for the American politicians and diplomats, they have been carefully avoiding, in official statements, as well as in informal considerations on the state of US-China relationships, the usage *expressis verbis/verbatim* of the concept/metaphor “New Cold War”.

¹³⁷ Former top White House trade negotiator Clete Willems, interview with CNBC, May 5th, 2020. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/05/coronavirus-ex-trump-trade-official-clete-willems-on-us-china-tensions.html>.

¹³⁸ “Interview on Current China-US Relations”, with the Chinese state news agency Xinhua, on August 6, 2020.

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/2461_663310/t1804328.shtml.

¹³⁹ Premier Li Says China Doesn’t Want Cold War; U.S. Decoupling, Bloomberg News, May 28 2020. <https://www.bloombergquint.com/onweb/premier-li-says-china-doesn-t-want-cold-war-u-s-decoupling>.

¹⁴⁰ <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-09-23/Full-text-Xi-Jinping-s-speech-at-General-Debate-of-UNGA-U07X2dn8Ag/index.html>.

Only that, the renowned “father” of the “soft power theory”, Joseph S. Nye Jr. came out with an original vision on the apparent “hidden connection” between the American officials and the trope in case: it is the “recent administration speeches that squeeze China into a Cold War ideological framework”¹⁴¹. Indeed, “In a series of speeches this (2020) summer, senior officials in the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump have cast the United States and China as antagonists in a new Cold War”¹⁴².

Anthony H. Cordesman, a scholar with the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, noticed that, “Top Administration officials have given five major speeches which assert that China can no longer be treated as a state evolving towards a more liberal power that will pursue security and economic objectives on terms the U.S. and other states can accept. These speeches assert that China has become an authoritarian state that is driven by a Communist ideology, is seeking to become the world’s dominant power, and is using methods of competition that are illegal and violate international norms”. As such, “over a period of a little more than a month (June-July 2020) the U.S. has gone from a mixture of competition and cooperation with China to direct confrontation, (a) confrontation (which) has also focused largely on the civil level – more specifically on ideology, economics, industrial espionage, cyberattacks on civil networks and databases, and disinformation campaigns”¹⁴³.

Given the very content of the “confrontation” in case, the respective term appears perfectly interchangeable with the trope *Cold War*.

Remaining within the political realm, even if keeping the issue in a subdued/subliminal mode, it remains the question if such an approach could be helpful in sustaining the national interests of a country or another for the present era. In the concrete case of the United States, it is Hillary Clinton who obliged with a firm answer: “Myopia about national security also manifests in the simplistic frames applied to complex challenges, such as insisting on seeing competition with China through the lens of the Cold War ... Dusting off the Cold War playbook will do little to prepare the United States for adversaries that use new tools to fight in the grey zone between war and peace, exploit its open Internet and economy to undermine American democracy, and expose the vulnerability of many of its legacy weapons systems. Nor will such an anachronistic approach build the global cooperation needed to take on shared challenges such as climate change and pandemics”¹⁴⁴.

¹⁴¹ Joseph S. Nye Jr., ‘Tough on China’ is not a strategy. Trump is scrapping tools that keep us safe and strong, *USA Today*, Aug 27, 2020. <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2020/08/27/trump-tough-china-but-abandons-soft-power-alliances-immigration-column/3432054001>.

¹⁴² Michael McFaul, *Xi Jinping Is Not Stalin. How a Lazy Historical Analogy Derailed Washington’s China Strategy*, in *Foreign Affairs*, August 10, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-08-10/xi-jinping-not-stalin>.

¹⁴³ Anthony H. Cordesman, *From Competition to Confrontation with China: The Major Shift in U.S. Policy*, CSIS, August 3, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/competition-confrontation-china-major-shift-us-policy>.

¹⁴⁴ Hillary Clinton, *op. cit.*

Against a complex and contradictory perception and usage of the concept/ (quasi)metaphor of a “*New Cold War*” at the level of the political realm, with the dual dimensions security & diplomacy, it is worth noting that the trope’s “treatment” within the academia circles is also far from being a cohesive one, and that starting from the very ... beginning: the article published by renowned commentator Niall Ferguson in the New York Times with the title “*The New Cold War? It’s with China, and It Has Already Begun*”, the date of publication being ... Dec. 2, 2019¹⁴⁵.

Practically, if the diversity in approaches is normal, even if it could easily lead to *the image of a geopolitical “loose cannon”*, it essentially remains everybody’s, politicians and analysts’ capacity to *prevent the risk of evolving toward the status of a “diplomatic virus”* contaminating the narrative on one of the most sensitive areas of the international relations in the Pandemic era. And that starting with the basic contentious aspect, the one which is mirroring the Hamlet-ian like-question: “*Between China and the US, there is or there is not a “New Cold War”, already, or at least in the offing*”?

And if someone would be interested to look for an answer along a labyrinthine approach would find out that:

– “*The US and China have entered the beginnings of a new Cold War in the coronavirus era, with grave consequences for the global economy; for the international system as a whole, a Cold War would be devastating, as it could force countries to choose a side... From its early days, a New Cold War could prolong the pandemic, exacerbate the economic devastation linked to the virus, and weaken the world’s ability to thwart common threats... The Cold War analogy is not perfect, but there are elements, including the hardening of system-type competition, ratcheting up of military competition, and pressure to delink economic, that were not as evident a few years ago... there are people uncomfortable with the terminology, but they have to be honest and call this what it is, and this is the start of a new Cold War... For the international system as a whole, a Cold War would be devastating. It would, for example, place all global challenges – from climate change to pandemics to terrorism – in the context of the relative power gain and loss for each side, making cooperation even more difficult... America’s relationship with China is vital to tackling future pandemics on top of the other most critical national security issues before us... There are big differences between the Cold War with the Soviet Union and today with China, among them the interconnectedness, economic and in trade terms between the US and China that just wasn’t there in the US-Soviet Cold War. Meanwhile, if the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union was characterized by an intrinsic distrust between Washington and Moscow and a hyper-nationalistic competition for economic, military, and technological hegemony, similar trends are playing out between the US and China... The roots of this new potential Cold War go back many years and predate Trump, but he’s also been a central player in the unravelling of relations between the US and China. There’s no doubt that some*

¹⁴⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/02/opinion/china-cold-war.html>.

of the actions the Trump administration has taken have contributed to this... But it's also undeniable that Beijing has been "the prime mover" in terms of driving a wedge between itself and Washington, having failed to rectify the problem of the myriad unlevel playing fields between the US and China before Trump came in"¹⁴⁶.

– "Invoking the (Old) Cold War ignores the Covid-19 pandemic and wider context. The deterioration of US-China relations has many fearful that conflict is inevitable as the two nations are increasingly entangled in a new cold war. However, these cold-war comparisons do more harm than good as they fail to consider critical differences between the two eras of competition ... China does not control an economic bloc as the Soviets did, at least for now, so its rivalry with the West isn't zero sum but it is competitive with a lower possibility of escalation to armed conflict. Covid-19 could ultimately force the US and China to return to a more cooperative ... Though the pandemic has become a foreign policy weapon used by each side, if the virus follows the example of the 1918 influenza, the world will face future waves with ever greater mortality rates. International cooperation would be vital to lessen their potentially devastating impact"¹⁴⁷.

– "Our (American) strategy toward China should aim to avoid either a hot or a cold war, while cooperating when possible and competing when necessary... Our strategy should regard our China relationship as a cooperative rivalry where we pay equal heed to both aspects of the term. If we avoid demonization and misleading Cold War analogies, we can succeed with such a strategy"¹⁴⁸.

– "If the U.S.-China trade war develops into a broader cold war, as some observers fear, it will be nothing like the actual Cold War... When Washington adopted a containment strategy that blocked most trade with the Soviets, including technology transfers, it had relatively little impact on either economy. The situation with China is different"¹⁴⁹.

– "China's relations with the US are at their lowest for 30 years, but don't call it a new cold war: it has become increasingly fashionable to refer to the Sino-US relationship as a "new cold war", but this term is neither accurate nor helpful; far-flung proxy wars and ideological competition that defined US-Soviet competition after World War II are missing in current landscape. This is not to be naive about China and its behaviour. China is the United States' most powerful rival. In its current guise, China seems intent on at least reforming if not overturning the current US-led post-war order to ensure it has a greater, preferably dominant role. The disputed waters in the South China Sea are a potential flash point between China and the United States, but it would be inaccurate to describe the tensions as a new cold war. But this is a far cry from

¹⁴⁶ John Haltiwanger, *The US and China are on the brink of a new Cold War that could devastate the global economy*, *Business Insider*, May 13, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/the-us-china-entering-new-cold-war-amid-coronavirus-2020-5>.

¹⁴⁷ Gregory Mitrovich, *US-China relations: invoking the Cold War ignores the Covid-19 pandemic and wider context*, *South China Morning Post*, 11 Aug. 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3096641/us-china-relations-invoking-cold-war-ignores-covid-19-pandemic-and>.

¹⁴⁸ Joseph S. Nye Jr., *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁹ *U.S.-China Rivalry in the Trump Era*, *WPR Report*, May 2020.

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/worldpoliticsreview/WPR-US-China-Rivalry-Trump-Era.pdf>.

*the Cold War, a geopolitical competition fought between two ideologically opposed superpowers. The United States is not yet in a cold war but rather a "hot peace". Trying to emulate the Cold War by drawing an iron curtain across the world will alienate potential allies, damage the US economy and make it harder to curry favour worldwide. Deterring where necessary and bolstering international institutions are preferable to drawing another iron curtain across the world"*¹⁵⁰.

– *"The United States is not now entering a cold war with China in the same ideological sense as with the Soviet Union, but the ongoing contest is epochal nonetheless. China's concepts of "civil-military fusion"; social metrics by which its citizens are to be judged; repression of the Uighurs (which should be noteworthy for Islamic countries); the crushing of the "one country, two-systems" concept in Hong Kong; China's aggressive nuclear build-up; development of blue-water naval capabilities; offensive cyberwar programs; territorial belligerence in the South China Sea, along the frontier with India and elsewhere; and more, demonstrate what China is up to. This is not the "peaceful rise" of a "responsible stakeholder", as China's advocates have long argued. The United States, along with Europe and the Middle East, can either respond to this now, or pay the price later"*¹⁵¹.

– *"A U.S.-China cold war would not be like the U.S.-Soviet one, which was largely military and ideological. A cold war would begin with radical decoupling and disengagement, which regrettably we are already seeing. It would descend and expand from there. It would fracture the international community on issues on which there should otherwise be widespread cooperation. It would build walls between economies, scientists, scholars, and ordinary people. It would likely foment ethnic stereotyping, discrimination, and hatred. It would prevent two great civilizations from benefiting from each other's strengths and contributions. It would exacerbate an arms race that would crowd out domestic priorities. Above all, it would increase the risk of military conflict, even if neither side desires it"*¹⁵².

– *The worsening relations between China and the US and the on-going brawl between Beijing and Washington is slowly pushing the two superpowers closer to a Cold War. Clearly, in the on-going "cold war" between China and the US, the former seems not pre-disposed to follow the path of Germany which led to World War I, or that of Germany and Japan leading to World War II. Also, China seems not inclined to follow the path of the great powers vying for global domination during the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union. However, given the rising tensions and continuous exchanges of provocation between the*

¹⁵⁰ Christian Le Miere, *China's relations with the US are at their lowest for 30 years, but don't call it a new cold war*, *South China Morning Post*, 3 Jun, 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3087015/chinas-relations-us-are-their-lowest-30-years-dont-call-it-new-cold>.

¹⁵¹ <https://mosaicmagazine.com/response/israel-zionism/2020/08/how-the-israel-uae-deal-demonstrates-the-need-for-american-leadership-in-the-middle-east/>.

¹⁵² Jeffrey A. Bader, *Avoiding a new Cold War between the US and China*, *Brookings Institution*, August 17, 2020.

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/08/17/avoiding-a-new-cold-war-between-the-us-and-china/>.

two superpowers, it remains to be seen the social and economic “complex interdependence” of the two countries, despite the worsening bilateral relations, will prevail and prevent an outright clash. Nonetheless, the two superpowers of the 21st century should not repeat the mistakes of their predecessors as wars between great powers, no matter how inadvertent, hardly end well for everyone... A cold war between the two superpowers will only lead to the progression of conflicts in the world at a time where cooperation is very much needed because of the novel coronavirus pandemic. In the era of COVID-19, cooperation between China and the US is indispensable and vital to global survival, stability, and peace”¹⁵³.

– The two countries now stand on the brink of what could be called a “new type of cold war” – a phrase that several analysts are beginning to use already by the start of the month of May. While this new era of geopolitical rivalry may differ in important respects from the US-Soviet Union tensions between 1947 and 1991, irreconcilable differences in political values and strategic ambitions are eviscerating trust. The level of trust between China and the US is at its lowest point since diplomatic ties were first established in 1979. American interests now diverge [from China’s] more than they converge on a broad set of issues and the areas where we could potentially co-operate are shrinking. The root cause [in deteriorating relations] is the fundamental difference in ideology between the US and China ... The US and China’s dangerous blame game will do no good and the relationship comes to resemble elements of the cold war. Only that, one could assist to a much less drastic division than during the days of the Soviet Union, pressure from American companies – particularly in industries such as semiconductors that depend on Chinese demand – not allowing anything close to a complete “decoupling” of supply chains. But even if this aspect of US-China ties can be stabilized, some observers predict continued tension, with nationalist sentiment and recession enabling hard-line positions in both countries... Strategic competition will remain the dominant paradigm. The question is whether it tilts toward permanent and all-out hostility”¹⁵⁴.

– The 3 Flashpoints That Could Turn a US-China ‘Cold War’ Hot. Beware the crisis hiding in plain sight: “Today, the deteriorating relationship between China and the United States is a major geopolitical risk. The relationship’s protective insulation has been stripped away, nerves are exposed, and the mechanisms for defusing tensions are defunct. Battles rage between Beijing and Washington over trade, technology, investment, supply chains, journalists, and COVID-19. Diplomats, from the U.S. secretary of state to China’s rabid “wolf warriors” are trading decidedly undiplomatic barbs. Public attitudes toward the other nation have taken a sharp turn for the worse. And China, often a bogeyman in U.S. presidential campaigns, is shaping up as a central issue in the escalating battle between the

¹⁵³ US-China Cold War & The South China Sea, *The Asean Post*, 16 August 2020.

<https://theaseanpost.com/article/us-china-cold-war-south-china-sea>.

¹⁵⁴ US and China: edging towards a new type of cold war? Trust between the countries has deteriorated during the pandemic and is close to its lowest point since 1979, in *Financial Times*, May 8, 2020.

<https://www.ft.com/content/fe59abf8-cbb8-4931-b224-56030586fb9a>.

2020 candidates. But the risk is all the more dangerous to the extent that, consciously or not, we have acclimated ourselves to the “new normal” of strategic rivalry. To grow accustomed to the intensifying struggle between the Washington and Beijing may serve to camouflage certain chronic geopolitical risks that are hiding in plain sight – risks that, like a novel virus, we are aware of but unprepared for. Among these risks are Hong Kong, the South China Sea, and above all, Taiwan... The often-uneasy equilibrium that has marked U.S.-China relations for decades should not inure us to the risk that we may now be dangerously close to a tipping point where even a small action would serve as a catalyst that lets slip the dogs of war”¹⁵⁵.

– “Two superpowers now stand off in geopolitical, military and ideological competition. They compete for allies and influence across multiple regions. Both wish to avoid the profound destructiveness of hot war, but neither is willing to acquiesce in the other’s preferences. Competition stretches across multiple domains, simultaneously and indefinitely. This all sounds familiar. But the U.S.-China confrontation is not another Cold War. It’s something new”¹⁵⁶.

– “Scholars have argued that to win the new Cold War allies are as much important to the US as in the case of the old Cold War. Realizing the importance of allies, the Trump administration has begun to project the Cold War rivalry with China in ideological terms. Ideology could serve as an external binding factor that could bring the US and its allies together. Thus, rather than being the root cause of the new Cold War, ideology has emerged as an afterthought for the US. Therefore, by projecting the new Cold War as a contest between liberal democracy and authoritarianism, the US is trying to convince its allies that their common interests are at stake. A success for the US in this endeavour would mean that it could earn the loyalty of allies in its contest with China”¹⁵⁷.

– “The EU, India and Russia may be very different, then, but there is a certain symmetry to how they see the coming US-China cold war. All are significant geopolitical powers: counting the EU’s (admittedly poorly coordinated) militaries together, they make up the world’s next three largest military spenders after the two giants. In all three there are forces for US affinity, China affinity and middle-way-ism, though they exist in different proportions in each. None really wants to choose. And eventually – amid a head-to-head US-China conflict over a proxy such as Taiwan, say; or outright cyber-warfare; or a runaway trade and technology war; or some form of ultimatum from one or both – they may well have to. The EU

¹⁵⁵ Daniel Russel, *The 3 Flashpoints That Could Turn a US-China ‘Cold War’ Hot. Beware the crisis hiding in plain sight*, in *The Diplomat*, June 03, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/the-3-flashpoints-that-could-turn-a-us-china-cold-war-hot/>.

¹⁵⁶ Richard Fontaine and Ely Ratner, *The U.S.-China confrontation is not another Cold War. It’s something new*, The Center for a New American Security (CNAS), July 02, 2020, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/commentary/the-u-s-china-confrontation-is-not-another-cold-war-its-something-new>; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/07/02/us-china-confrontation-is-not-another-cold-war-its-something-new/>.

¹⁵⁷ Ragul Palanisami, *Emerging Elements of a New US-China Cold War*, E-International Relations, Sep. 20, 2020.

https://www.e-ir.info/2020/09/20/opinion-emerging-elements-of-a-new-us-china-cold-war/?fbclid=IwAR3hHMtn440Zejbhq5Un111VXIQQv0XKJ3dUeYfmhSu_KPvpTfW3yDnZXw.

and India are leaning heavily towards the US. The biggest question mark is over which way Russia might go. Among the many questions this throws up, a big one stands out. It is widely assumed that the geographic focus of US-China power competition will be in the Pacific, where the two countries' spheres of influence meet. But could it be that it will actually play out to the west, in a large contested bow sweeping from south-east Europe through central Asia and out into the Indian Ocean? With so much turning on the "next three", it surely could"¹⁵⁸.

A shorter overall view is advanced by a former Deputy Director of Central Intelligence (2000 – 2004), John E. McLaughlin, now a fellow with Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS): "In sum, China presents a multi-dimensional challenge, unlike any the United States has ever seen – in a more complicated competitive environment than we have faced before ... managing the U.S. relationship with China is the challenge looming over all other aspects of foreign policy; it is sure to affect success or failure in all we do – and in many other economies around the world". Consequently, if the 2020 US presidential campaign, like nearly all its predecessors, features a lot of tough rhetoric on China and the various threats it poses it is expected that, once the campaign rhetoric fades, the victor will have to figure out what to actually do about China¹⁵⁹.

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¹⁵⁸ Jeremy Cliffe, *The EU, India and Russia do not want to pick sides in a US-China contest, but they may have to*, in *NewStatesman*, 24 June 2020, <https://www.newstatesman.com/2020/06/eu-india-and-russia-do-not-want-pick-sides-us-china-contest-they-may-have>.

¹⁵⁹ John McLaughlin, *China: Charting a Course Between Conflict and Accommodation*, in *The Cipher Brief*, October 14, 2020, https://www.thecipherbrief.com/column/cipher-brief-expert-view/china-charting-a-course-between-conflict-and-accommodation?mc_cid=501cbf2689&mc_eid=3def7a625d.

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