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Post-COVID-19 Global System: Old Problems, New Trends



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UFUK ULUTAŞ, THE PRESIDENT OF THE Center for Strategic Research, is the editor and one of the contributors to “*Post-COVID-19 Global System: Old Problems New Trends*”, a book prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Center for Strategic Research. The book’s editorial board includes Yavuz Selim Kıran, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs; Ufuk Ulutaş, Sibel Erkan and Mehmet Zeki Günay from the Center for Strategic Research affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as Mesut Özcan from the Diplomacy Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Talha Köse from Ibn Haldun University. It is indicated that the views and opinions expressed in the book are not reflective of the position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However,

one could still grasp a general idea about the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ official position by merely reading the book, given that Minister of Foreign Affairs penned the foreword himself and a majority of the members of the Editorial Board and contributors work for the Ministry.

The International System After COVID-19

This book discusses the impact of COVID-19 on the neoliberal international system, which consolidated its position with the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Also discussed in the book are foresights about global political trends and potential sources of conflict in the post-COVID era. As such, it attempts to answer an important

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question: what will be the impact of COVID-19 on globalization and global competition? In doing so, it attempts to understand the possible transformation of the relationship between globalization, the international system and national governments. Moreover, the book presents foresights about the future of digital diplomacy, medical intelligence, economy, immigration, conflict resolution, the Middle East and international organizations, which are presented as issues of importance for global players such as Turkey.

The majority of the contributors agree on one crucial point: the COVID-19 is likely to cause a world-wide paradigm shift, as was experienced after the 9/11 Attacks and 2008/2009 Global Financial Crisis. Many contributors raise the question of who will lead the international system in the post-COVID-19 era. The predominant belief is that China is not fit to build its own system. In Chapter 2 and Chapter 19, drawing on Western sources representative of the Atlantic media and scholarship, most of the authors concur that China has tried to hide the outbreak of COVID-19 from the very beginning, delayed making a statement of early warning and shared unreliable data. Another point of agreement is that China will have to limit the scope of the Belt and Road Initiative and is likely to re-orient its focus more on itself and its surrounding region, considering that the global economy is projected to contract due to COVID-19. Interestingly enough, the book admits that China has been successful in stopping the pandemic within its borders thanks to the presence of a strong state mechanism. This being said, the strength of this mechanism is viewed as an important factor that will impede China's acceptance as a legitimate global leader due to its so-called "authoritarian" character. Chapter 1 adds that Germany, South Korea and Japan have also been successful thanks to the strong organizational capacity of their governments.

Where Will Be Turkey?

The book suggests that the US status as a global hegemon will not change in the medium term,

even though the USA lacks a global vision and the necessary leadership skills to help other countries suffering from the pandemic. In this context, M. Şükrü Hanioglu (author of chapter 3) argues that the USA should launch a new Marshall program, as was done after World War II. Quoting Henry Kissinger, he asserts that the USA can revive the Western Civilization by dropping its "USA First" discourse. This move can even be embraced by Russia and China, since their growth depends on foreign trade. Otherwise, the authors are concerned about China propagating its success by also giving a hand to the European Union (EU) and Africa. In Chapter 4, this concern goes hand in hand with the general conviction that Turkey should be part of a "modern and civilized" West rather than the Asian Civilization.

Chapter 22 remarks that supranational organizations such as the EU cannot become a powerful global player, since European countries will have to isolate themselves while dealing with their domestic affairs after the pandemic. Meanwhile, both the USA and the EU are likely to focus more on domestic production with the aim of minimizing their dependency on the Chinese economy in the post-COVID 19 era.

Is Globalization Over?

The contributors agree that the fight against COVID-19 constitutes a global battle. In Chapter 2, it is argued that independent and uncoordinated efforts are at best insufficient and costly. Moreover, Altay Atlı notes that in the past, some governments had used globalization for maximizing their individual gains, but that the very same governments have failed to effectively cooperate in the fight against global terrorism. He cautions that the same situation goes for the fight against COVID-19.

According to Altay Atlı (Chapter 9) and Birol Akgün (Chapter 14) COVID-19 has not marked the end of globalization. Yet, globaliza-

tion is likely to take a new shape after the pandemic. The United Nations (UN), the World Health Organization (WHO) and other relevant international institutions who are labeled as the representatives of globalization have proved to be too weak and fragile. Their existence and functioning heavily depend on funding by leading nation-states.

Nation States Will Be Stronger

Chapter 5 and Chapter 11 underline that COVID-19 has revealed the need for empowering nation-states, reviving a state-led economy and enhancing border protection. It is expected that nation states will further encourage domestic production for greater economic security, particularly in the areas of agriculture and the medical industry. Similarly, the book also observes that countries have recognized the importance of bio-medical power, –of similar importance to nuclear power– after the pandemic. In the meantime, Chapter 18 remarks that terrorist organizations are possibly aware of the growing relevance of bio-medical power, which requires governments to develop more efficient health systems, focus on biological studies and improve medical intelligence.

Talha Köse (Chapter 21) cautions that even though COVID-19 has led to a period of relative peace, this situation is only temporary. Mesut Özcan (Chapter 23) and Nurşin Ateşoğlu-Güney (Chapter 22) underline that the USA will not completely withdraw from the Middle East and key US rivals such as Russia and Iran will mainly preserve their regional influence despite several adversities associated with COVID-19.

US-China Competition and Turkey

Chapter 11, 14 and 24 foresee that the Sino-American conflict is likely to escalate in the post-COVID-19 era and Turkey will be better off if it can avoid taking sides. The best option for Turkey is to maximize its interests by pursuing a policy of balancing.

Mustafa Kibaroglu (Chapter 8) asserts that Turkey's medical aid to other countries will increase its global prestige in the post-COVID-19 era. Meanwhile, Turkey should not consider withdrawing from NATO. On the contrary, it must remain a member of the Western civilization, while cautiously improving its cooperation with the East by focusing on self-sufficiency in the areas of economic production and national defense. Birol Akgün adds that Turkey will be able to play a constructive role in the post-COVID-19 international system, if it can effectively pursue a policy of balancing between the East and the West.

In the final analysis, the resurgence of nation-states and statism is highly likely in the post-COVID-19 era. Economic production, health and national security present themselves as areas of high priority in this context. However, the book's overall negative approach to China clearly reflects the fact that the influence of Western, or Atlanticist perspectives on the official mindset in Turkey is still of a significant importance. Such a mindset would result in the failure of Turkish policy makers to fully acknowledge how COVID-19 has revealed the collapse of Western neoliberalism and the center of gravity of the global economy has already shifted to Asia (Gürcan 2019, 2019/2020; Gürcan & Kahraman, 2020). Overall, the book expresses a naïve belief that the USA will retain its hegemonic status after COVID-19, which can potentially hamper any attempts at formulating realistic policies that can serve Turkey's national interests. 🌸

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