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Final Essay America in the World

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Given the current global pandemic as an effect of globalization, how best could the US play a role in responding to it?

It seems everything these days from media coverage, education, thoughts, and day to day life, in general, has been completely consumed with talk of the recent pandemic coronavirus. Living in such a time where most of the world is urban as opposed to rural for the first time in history, there is no doubt that many people and countries have significantly benefited from globalization. However, the unexpected, deadly, highly contagious coronavirus serves as evidence of the major downsides of globalization and an increasingly connected world. The United States (US) has been a world-renowned global hegemon for decades, but this title may have been threatened after the country's controversial response to the virus, as a result of failing to meet the high expectations that so many had for the US. Looking closer at the factors of speed, collaboration, and preparation and prevention that the US enabled as a reaction to the virus, I hope to answer the question, "given the current global pandemic as an effect of globalization, how best could the US play a role in responding to it?"

When word of the coronavirus first hit the US, the order of operations that followed should have happened quickly, in order to minimize casualties in the future. Rather than reacting to the virus in a speedy way, the US fell short in its, "efforts to develop a diagnostic test that

could be mass-produced and distributed across the US, enabling agencies to map early outbreaks of the disease and impose quarantine measures to contain them,” (Abutaleb). As far as efficiency and speed go, “It took 70 days from that initial notification for Trump to treat the coronavirus, not as a distant threat... but as a lethal force that... was poised to kill tens of thousands of citizens,” (Abutaleb). Once the severity of the virus was recognized, broad communication should have gone out to the public to ensure all large social gatherings and spaces, from sporting events to shopping malls, were closed to prevent the masses from integrating with potentially infected people. To make certain that people stay at home and isolate themselves, “pandemic policies, or guidelines for how employers [should] proceed in the face of potentially catastrophic outbreaks of disease, should [have] [been] a priority for corporate America” (Silcox). Creation of such policies and executing communicative efforts to the public should have been carried out more rapidly by the US to generate discussion of the severity of the virus and encourage people to socially isolate.

Organizations such as the Center for Disease Control (CDC) could create such policies based upon their expertise however people such as Thomas Frieden, Obama’s former director of the center, noticed a lack of authority from the CDC and proposed, “[he’ll] feel much safer if and when it becomes clear that [CDC] is playing a key role in developing policy options based on science and communicating the reasons for those policy decisions to the public,” (HeidtApr). Another source critiques the testing strategies of the CDC, claiming, “[they] had strict criteria for who could be tested, meaning that mild COVID-19 cases, as well as those not somehow linked to travel to an affected region, were overlooked, even though those people could still infect others,” insinuating that the virus was able to spread so quickly due to inadequate accuracy of testing,

resulting in the the inability to reach a larger host of people with the virus. Hence, it can be stated that the US would have been able to better mitigate the spread of the virus had it been for a quicker reaction by the US Federal Government in the communication to people residing in the US in order to educate the public, timely creation of pandemic policies to promote health and safety in the most efficient ways, as well as the speedy incorporation of more accurate testing strategies for the virus to mitigate its ability to spread so rapidly.

One may assume that with, “more expertise, resources, plans, and epidemiological experience than dozens of countries that ultimately fared far better in fending off the virus,” the US would have ample opportunities to react accordingly to the virus and lead by example for other countries to follow. (Abutaleb). The evidence above proves otherwise, and a closer look at Hong Kong’s initiative and reaction to the virus displays the benefits of utilizing speed in a response to a pandemic outbreak. Staggeringly, there are only four reported deaths in a sea of 7.5 million people living in Hong Kong. Within the month of the first confirmed case, “The government began intense surveillance for infections, not only for incoming travelers but also in the local community. Extensive efforts were also made to track down and quarantine all close contacts an infected person had seen two days before becoming ill... By early March, the government was giving hundreds of tests every day,” (Keegan). A side by side comparison of Hong Kong’s speedy and efficient testing regime as a reaction to the virus vis-a-vis the US’ slow beginning to implement efficient testing and policies, highlights speed as a crucial strategy to deal with such a virus. While it may seem questionable to compare the city of Hong Kong’s reaction, to the country of the US’s reaction, the underlying significance regards the strategies

enabled by each place. This highlights speed as a valuable and effective strategy to combat the pandemic.

The whole world has been affected by this pandemic and without a clear time of when or if a cure will be found, collaborating on a global scale, especially regarding allies of the US, is a crucial part of responding to this virus. In order to obtain the latest information, analyze and share information on strategies, collaboration on a global level will lead to the safest outcomes for residents of the US and world population as a whole. Ultimately, matters directly regarding the health and safety of people in the US are first priority, nevertheless, “[coronaviruses] geopolitical implications...may, in the long term, prove just as consequential—especially when it comes to the US’ global position,” (Campbell). As documented over several decades, the US has earned status as a global leader based upon, “legitimacy that flows from the US’ domestic governance, provision of global public goods, and ability and willingness to muster and coordinate a global response to crises,” (Campbell). Contrary to the US’ so-called, “legitimacy,” it seems the hegemon has not made a continuous effort to set exemplar domestic governance in response to the coronavirus, not only through a lack of global collaboration but a lack of speed as presented earlier. Proposed locations for relations with the US include Beijing, a connection that many believe have the potential to, “coordinat[e] vaccine research and clinical trials as well as a fiscal stimulus; sharing information; cooperating on industrial mobilization; and offering joint assistance to others,” (Campbell). International cooperation can extend deeper than country to country collaboration but involve US interactions with international organizations and may present itself in the form of funding. For instance, the World Health Organization, (WHO) which agrees with an increase in international cooperation as they describe their goal as, “extensive

cooperation with other relevant international organizations through its ‘reaching out strategy’, as a means to attack health problems more effectively and with greater institutional energy,” pertaining to, “relations to key actors like the US and the EU,” (Andresen). To the dismay of many, tensions have risen in trans-Atlantic affairs regarding the unequal burden-sharing of security obligations of allies. Despite the turmoil that has risen in Trans-Atlantic affairs recently, the US has a “historic duty to rise to the occasion as a pacifier, unifier, and a builder of a frightened and fragmented trans-Atlantic community when he meets with his NATO allies,” (Ivanovitch).

As a secondary strategy to the virus after increasing the speed of operations, the US can take action concerning international cooperation, by effectively utilizing global supply chains. The process by which coronavirus swab tests are sent, collected, and turned in for results, occurs in Copan in Northern Italy, and a transnational German company located in many areas on global supply chains. Not to mention, of all the ventilators used in the US, roughly half come from Europe. With such critical tests and relief kits necessary to combat the virus stationed all around the world, “increase[d] cooperation in production and distribution, using global supply chains as effectively as possible, and pooling resources and equipment so that they can be allocated as the need for them shifts from one country to another,” is an available and effective role that the masses would benefit from (Woods).

Weaved throughout this essay is commentary on the best options for the US as a response to the virus, which do not coincide with what has already been or is currently being done. Lack of authority from the federal government in terms of a slow response to the virus and an individualized approach as a country to the pandemic, has triggered an uprising from US states

claiming that there is, “wide disparity between the federal government's distribution and the states' requests [which] underscores the jaw-dropping amount of equipment states think they need,” (Herb). In the unprecedented events that have followed the virus outbreak, the questions that many are grappling with asks whose responsibility it is to supply US states with necessary supplies: federal government or the states themselves. Laura Kelly, the governor of Kansas believes, “It really is the federal government's responsibility to build those stockpiles, and distribute those during the time of crisis,” (Beavers) and judging by the significance of what is at risk, “not hav[ing] enough ventilators to keep people alive who could live through this crisis and could be saved,” (Herb) it would be in the best interest for all if the federal government supplied sufficient materials to states in need. If the federal government is unable to provide safety materials such as gloves, masks, or ventilators, “there clearly could have been testing kits available much more early than there were,” which means now “the entire country is” catching up,” (White).

In the absence of federal government aid of materials, states like Maryland have taken matters into their own hands. Through the strategy of speed and international collaboration, Maryland Governor Hogan worked with South Korea, utilizing global supply chains and received 500,000 coronavirus tests. This action was referred to as “an exponential, game-changing, step forward,” in increased testing capacity, and stands as an exemplar for other US states to take matters into their own hands if their desired materials are not supplied by the federal government which has proven to be true thus far (Witte).

With no exact time indicating the possible return of the virus, an aspect in the appropriate response to such an unpredictable matter is to prepare for the future and prevent it from

happening again. Prior to the virus, “Trump shut down [the pandemic] office without explanation in May 2018. Without that resource, information about a potential pandemic likely cycled through the White House, day after day, with no natural home and few advocates for action,” (Rhodes) Evident now, the severity of the virus called for such a focused, attentive group to monitor, research, and help everyone better understand the extent of the contagiousness of the virus. To prepare for a mutated version of this virus and to ensure a safer future, the US government must “Permanently elevate disaster preparedness and response to a footing similar to that given to more traditional bastions of U.S. security such as diplomacy, intelligence collection and the military, experts say.” (Oswald) This duty should be carried into action by the US government through the provision of sufficient amounts of working ventilators in all hospitals, to secure a prepared response to this virus, or another such pandemic, if or when it occurs in the future.

The coronavirus has taken the world by surprise and consumed the lives of millions of people globally. The US, being a hegemon, an incredibly wealthy and powerful country, has an advantage in terms of what options they have to respond to the virus. Through analysis of the US response thus far, we can acknowledge that there is room for improvement and have identified three overarching strategies to move forward: speed of operations, collaboration on a global scale including communication, trading of resources, and building stronger relationships with allies, as well as the preparation and prevention tactics to benefit hospitals and states through efficient supply of ventilators, masks, gloves, and other life changing supplies.

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