COVID Crisis and National Security

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Abstract

National security has been the top most concern of the nation-states, since their formal inception in 1648, through the treaty of Westphalia. For a long time international relations remained Euro-centric as the European nations had direct control over most parts of the world in the form of colonial rule. After the Second World War the process of decolonization gained momentum and a large number of new nation-states emerged on the international stage. Threats to territorial integrity and internal stability were regarded as the only matters of concern related to national security, but in recent decades non-conventional security threats are increasingly becoming a matter of concern for the nation-states. Manjari Singh writes: "National security has been the buzzword in International Relations since the times of the formation of nation-states. Territorial security in pre-colonial and colonial times got merely translated into national security when nation-states were carved out of the protectorates and colonies. The concept drew majorly from Hans Morgenthau's understanding of securing national interest by the preservation of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and internal stability from external forces. It did not change much until the 1980s when the non-traditional security aspect was felt to be equally affecting national security if not directly." (Singh: 2020). The South Korean President Moon Jae-in observes: "The concept of security today has expanded from conventional military security to human security that deals with all factors threatening safety such as disasters, diseases and environmental issues. We can cope with these only when all countries pull together through solidarity and cooperation."(Jae-in: 2020)

Keywords- COVID Crisis, Nation-states, Territorial security and National Security.

Introduction

The most recent and intense non-conventional threat to national security has been posed by the ongoing COVID crisis. Segun Oshewolo and Agaptus Nwozor write: "National security—in its traditional sense—is associated with the protection of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of a state, as well as its critical interests abroad. However, the lethal nature of pandemics is increasingly raising scientific awareness about their national security dimensions. To this end, National Academies Press observes that 'national security is not just about protection from state and non-state actors, but also encompasses protection from emerging infectious diseases and other health outcomes that can threaten a nation's economic vitality and its very way of life'. As Evans would want us to accept, 'emerging diseases and their pandemic potential pose perhaps an even greater national security threat, particularly in this era of globalization when disease can spread more rapidly than in previous eras'. The 'frontliners' here, as might be expected, are the human security experts and practitioners who view catastrophic infectious diseases as security concerns because of their destructive and disruptive ability…Diseases threaten national security in different ways. First, they are responsible for

considerable morbidity and mortality in human populations. Second, lack of pandemic preparedness could increase the vulnerability of a state to bioterrorism and the associated consequences/emergencies. Third, infectious diseases could limit the ability of the armed forces to respond adequately to internal and external security threats." (Oshewolo: 2020).

The COVID crisis has given birth to the new concept of 'vaccine nationalism'. Research shows that vaccination is the best way available to stop the spread of coronavirus, and it's continuously emerging new variants. Nations are in competition to develop, produce and export coronavirus vaccines. The first such vaccine was developed by Russia, named Sputnik-V. The United States and China have also developed vaccines indigenously. India has also developed its indigenous Cowaxin. A lot of lobbying and other tactics are being adopted by nations to push forward their indigenously developed vaccines for international approval and use. Nations are toiling hard to tap the strategic and economic benefits of vaccines and thereby effectively boost their power and prestige at the global stage. The related concept of 'vaccine exclusion' has also emerged at the international stage. Vaccine developer nations are trying to gain an upper hand by excluding the approval and use of vaccines developed by other nations. The above scenarios suggest that amidst the reigning voice of globalisation, nationalism is regaining its lost importance with the call to deglobalise. Kiran Karnik writes: "COVID has thrown up an interesting dilemma facing each nation and the global community. On the one hand, there is the rapid global spread of the pandemic pointing to the close trade and tourism linkages between countries: in less than a year from the first cases in China, the virus had infected over 60 million people in 190 countries, and resulted in more than 1.4 million deaths. The development of a vaccine and the testing of possible cures requires cooperation of researchers across national boundaries if these are to be done in the shortest possible time. Also, cross-national exchange of data and experiences in handling the outbreak would immensely benefit all countries. These factors emphasize the need for global coordination and cooperation. On the other hand, contrary to these positive reasons and benefits of global cooperation, there is nationalistic pressure within each country to safeguard its own narrow interests. Thus, if—for example—the US view is that it is ahead in vaccine development, it may be tempted to not join a cooperative international effort. Instead, developing its own vaccine will give it huge commercial and strategic advantage. The companies which produce the vaccine will make a lot of money, and the country can export the vaccine selectively, providing it to allies and friends, while withholding it from enemies. There are already many indications of such 'vaccine nationalism'. This will be a further step to protectionism that such a pandemic engenders. To protect their citizens, countries had closed their borders (many, like India, barred any incoming passenger flights or vehicles). Even as these are slowly reopened, the protectionist sentiment is unlikely to go away. Meanwhile, the disruption in global supply chains—partly due to lack of production because of lockdowns in various countries and partly because of difficulties in logistics—has ignited action to move manufacturing back 'home', rather than contract it to companies in other countries. Therefore, as a result of COVID, one is likely to see de-globalization gather momentum." (Karnik: 2021)

The COVID crisis has surfaced the weak links of globalisation, especially the disruption of supply chains deeply rooted in the People's Republic of China. China has increasingly established itself as the 'workshop of the world', taking timely advantage of developed countries becoming post industrial societies, shifting manufacturing to the Third World. The present unequal distribution of manufacturing units have seriously disrupted the supply chains all over the world during the ongoing

COVID crisis. Martin Bradely writes: "The People's Republic of China (PRC) is deeply embedded in multiple supply chains, becoming the largest trading nation and 'the world's workshop,' including provision of medical supplies and equipment. Its ability to manipulate supply chains could allow it to use influence against the vulnerabilities that the COVID-19 response demonstrated." (Bradley: 2021) "Not knowing where all the things for a product are made is not a problem for most users. If supplies move freely and production moves toward the places where these parts can be made at least expense, for the most part this is simply accepted as an efficient relationship. However, whether a crisis is man-made or externally imposed, not knowing the origins of materials can become a serious problem when normal flows cease." (Bradley: 2021) "The many shortages that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States and elsewhere provide a clear warning. Serious vulnerabilities exist, but the full dimensions of that vulnerability were not known prior to the pandemic in some key sectors, and are not known today in many others. Much more needs to be known about this potential threat to national security." (Bradley: 2021)

The lacklustre role of WHO, in tackling the COVID crisis, has also been increasingly questioned by national leaders. The very ideology of Liberal Internationalism, which believes in the central role of international organizations in securing peace and well being of the world, is at stake. Shoba Suri and Kriti Kapur write: "During health crises, the world looks to the primary global health agency, the World Health Organization (WHO), for guidance. Surprisingly, the WHO's response to COVID-19 was lacking. Although the body had once warned that caution and vigilance were necessary against any future Sudden Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)-like disease, it ignored this advice in late 2019 when managing the mysterious pneumonia in Wuhan, China. For months, it failed to recommend travel restrictions or bans. This lackluster response meant that the window of opportunity to tackle the pandemic was missed, raising questions about the WHO's credibility." (Suri: 2020) "The world needs an unbiased and strict monitoring mechanism to protect people's rights and health. The WHO seems caught in the crossfire of a political battle among global powers, which has limited its ability to act effectively. Prudent and proactive emergency responses are needed to tackle any health emergency that may emerge. An appropriate and active auditing system to ensure that multilateral agencies as well as countries and policymakers are held accountable for their actions is essential." (Suri: 2020) The loss and gain of states on the international stage depends on numerous factors. The same topsy-turvy effect can be seen during the ongoing COVID crisis, as well. Already vulnerable nations of the world have become more vulnerable to the shocks arising out of the COVID crisis. Joseph V Micallef writes: "If viral disease outbreaks have a high propensity to become global pandemics, then they also present a national security issue. Even a global pandemic does not strike the entire world simultaneously. Where a country and, by extension, its military forces fall in the timeline of a pandemic cycle will have a bearing on its military readiness. That conveys a significant advantage or disadvantage to a party in a potential conflict. Equally relevant is a nation's ability to craft a response -- politically, economically and medically -- that will be supported by its citizens." (Micallef: 2020) "But if pandemics pose national security issues, then the state of a nation's health is equally relevant. It has been clear throughout the COVID-19 pandemic that preexisting conditions were a major contributor to the mortality rate. That means issues such as diabetes, obesity and hypertension are more than just health issues. To the extent their prevalence makes a nation more vulnerable to a pandemic, or makes it harder or more expensive to craft a response, then the state of a nation's health can also

have broad national security implications. Rapidly aging populations in Europe and North America will only aggravate these risks." (Micallef: 2020) "Moreover, it is not just disease outbreaks that are a global issue. The precursors to those outbreaks, in particular human-animal interactions, are also relevant. That means issues such as deforestation in the jungles of central Africa or the Amazon; the wild animal trade, both for pets and meat, like the Asian wet markets or the bushmeat markets in Africa and elsewhere; and the uncontrolled urban sprawl encroaching on rural and wild areas in many third-world countries, have a public health dimension that potentially affects everyone." (Micallef: 2020) Gray L Geipel writes: "Of course, COVID-19 demonstrates that a virus can do devastating human and economic damage on a large scale—on a par with other Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). However, the current pandemic also makes clear that highly contagious pathogens of the sort required to disrupt societies are almost impossible to contain within political boundaries. An "attacking" power deliberately deploying a virus almost certainly would become a victim itself, giving biological weapons a built-in deterrence feature. Even if a government such as the CCP were willing to accept a certain level of human casualties, COVID-19 demonstrates that economic effects are equally impossible to contain within target boundaries." (Geipel: 2020)

The above discussion clearly shows that the non-conventional threats to national security have become a matter of grave concern, especially after the emergence of the unprecedented COVID crisis. C Albert, A Baez and J Rutland write: "The spread of infectious disease (ID) in catastrophic proportions, such as in endemics and pandemics, is a threat to national and international security. In fact, the threat to human security and biosecurity should be included along with other perceived security threats such as conventional warfare and terrorism. Unlike ISIS, al-Qaeda, and the Taliban, ID has no natural enemy; it cannot be stopped by policy, borders, or alliances. Yet it gets less treatment in the literature and by policy wonks than do more traditional security threats." (Albert: 2021) Allan Behm writes: "People around the world no longer feel safe. Nor are they confident that their governments can keep them safe. For the individual citizen, security now has more to do with managing a global pandemic, mitigating and adapting to climate change, preserving clean water, maintaining reliable food supplies and protecting individual and community wellbeing than with supporting the ability of the state to protect its sovereignty against threats from other states." (Behm: 2020)

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