

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

Earnest Talk vs “Earnest” Failure

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Ever since the end of WWII, the idea of international communication and cooperation through “multilateralism” dominated the efforts of leaders, philosophers, academics, and commentators throughout the Western world. Alliances, like NATO, appeared the full-proof instruments of “stability.” The United Nations, the intellectual child of the post-WWII urge to formalize permanent “peace for all,” grew by leaps and bounds.

Beginning in the 1970s, what is today the European Union (EU) grew exponentially to embrace almost the entire European continent. Other international organization, like the WTO and the OECD, left no stone unturned in their efforts to promote “interconnectedness,” “global spirit,” and “measuring progress toward poverty eradication.” All this rather agitated mobilization created the impression of aggressive action in pursuit of all that is Good and Proper—and, at the same time, spawned huge bureaucracies with all the attendant complexities and miscarriages of behemoth organizations.

Then, in March 2019, Covid-19 reared its ugly head and, suddenly, the world discovered that all this “interconnectedness” and “multilateral cooperation” were unable to meet effectively an unprecedented health challenge.

A telling example of how easily Covid-19 could choke hold “global society” was the utter confusion that struck the much-vaunted chosen child of the rich and powerful, born in the 1990s, called “globalization.”

With Covid-19 popping up at the remotest edges of the Earth with mysterious speed, paralyzing even the most advanced public health system, people in high places, let alone the terrified multitudes of “public opinion,” realized that decades of “multilateralism” and open doors to trading goods and services had produced little, if any, ***effective defenses against such a mass devastating attack by Nature itself.*** It was as if the Covid-19 onslaught violently shook the “international community” to go back re-learning how *to walk* before it can fly to the Moon and the space extremities beyond.

Fear of death is *the most powerful instinct of the human mind*, and Covid-19 is reminding us we are all equally exposed to this devious killer (the rich, of course, can ‘shelter in place’ with plenty greater chance of avoiding the plague, yet it is still a mystery how Covid-19 could develop attack modes capable of penetrating even the most sophisticated defenses). How do we then find workable ways and methods to improve, tweak, and adjust our “interdisciplinary, holistic, inclusive” manner of talking to each other in ways that could benefit all across boundaries and generations?

This is indeed a tall order, especially as it must be done on the double and under severe time pressures and demands for health solutions that might take a long time to develop. At a minimum then, a whole different *model of communicating, listening, absorbing, and utilizing information* must be first developed at all possible speed.

One of the first, rather new, terms that has gained prominence in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak is “science diplomacy.” At the simplest level, the term calls for the uninhibited discussion of medical facts and findings by the international medical and research community focusing on defeating the pandemic. This is much more easily said than done though. Finding a cure comes with enormous political, economic, and global influence corollaries.

A “miracle cure,” discovered by any given actor at this stage, won’t immediately percolate throughout the world. The first and foremost stumbling block would be the immense

economic benefits inherent in producing a vaccine, or pill, that would stop Covid-19 in its tracks. Even at this moment of utter peril, national authorities maneuver to conceal information, and manipulate the very process of “interdisciplinary, holistic, inclusive” methods of talking to each other. A telling example of how “science diplomacy” can break down fast is the recent US threat to permanently defund the World Health Organization over [“promoting disinformation from China about the outbreak.”](#)

China’s central role in this *blitzkrieg* crisis further complicates “honest” anti-Covid-19 emergency talks. The growing “communist-capitalist” global economic and trade giant enjoys precious little good will with the rest of the developed world. Beijing’s strained, to say the least, relations with Washington leaves little room for honest “science diplomacy” between the two powers best equipped to find a cure. It will take a near magical feat of prudence and responsibility for the two countries to come to an honest agreement of how to proceed with sharing laboratory discoveries and drug development. At present, and with the November 2020 US presidential election looming, chances of a positive outcome appear thin, at best.

Away from the Beijing-Washington conundrum, the European Union, now literally “a giant with clay feet,” trembles under the Covid-19 impact and jumps from one neuropathic “tactic” to the next. The UK, tangled as it is in its preposterous bangled “Brexit” effort, claims it is [advancing fast](#) toward a vaccine—although simultaneously warning that “an effective coronavirus vaccine may never be found.” This would be of no consolation to EU members like Italy and Spain, who have suffered dire pandemic consequences and look desperately for a life saver to rebuild their crushed economies and prevent the recurrence of the plague.

“Science diplomacy” in the case Rome and Madrid, but, also, in the case of other poorer nations everywhere, will need to jump through hoops to provide a workable formula of how the supposed vaccine may be distributed under terms that won’t destroy already critically damaged treasuries. Prospects of finding such a solution, with the speed imposed by the utter urgency of the global crisis, aren’t good. “Talking to each other” in the US, for example, produced poor and educational results when the US government began the distribution of the Covid-19

drug remdesivir attracting sharp criticism from hospitals and physicians over “the uneven and opaque way” the drug entered the system.

To date, and in our poor “globalized” and misfiring world, beset by unprecedented levels of violence and threats of dissolution, death, and destruction, talk of Covid-19 solutions floats aplenty, yet it took the pandemic’s apocalyptic punch **to demolish** our prevailing model of “holistic, all-round communication and negotiation.” States, leaders, large organizations, national communities, even private citizens now need to re-calibrate the methods of “understanding each other” so that all-round solutions can be reached. Otherwise, our future could deteriorate to a “scenario” that would put to shame all of Stephen King’s freaky novels.