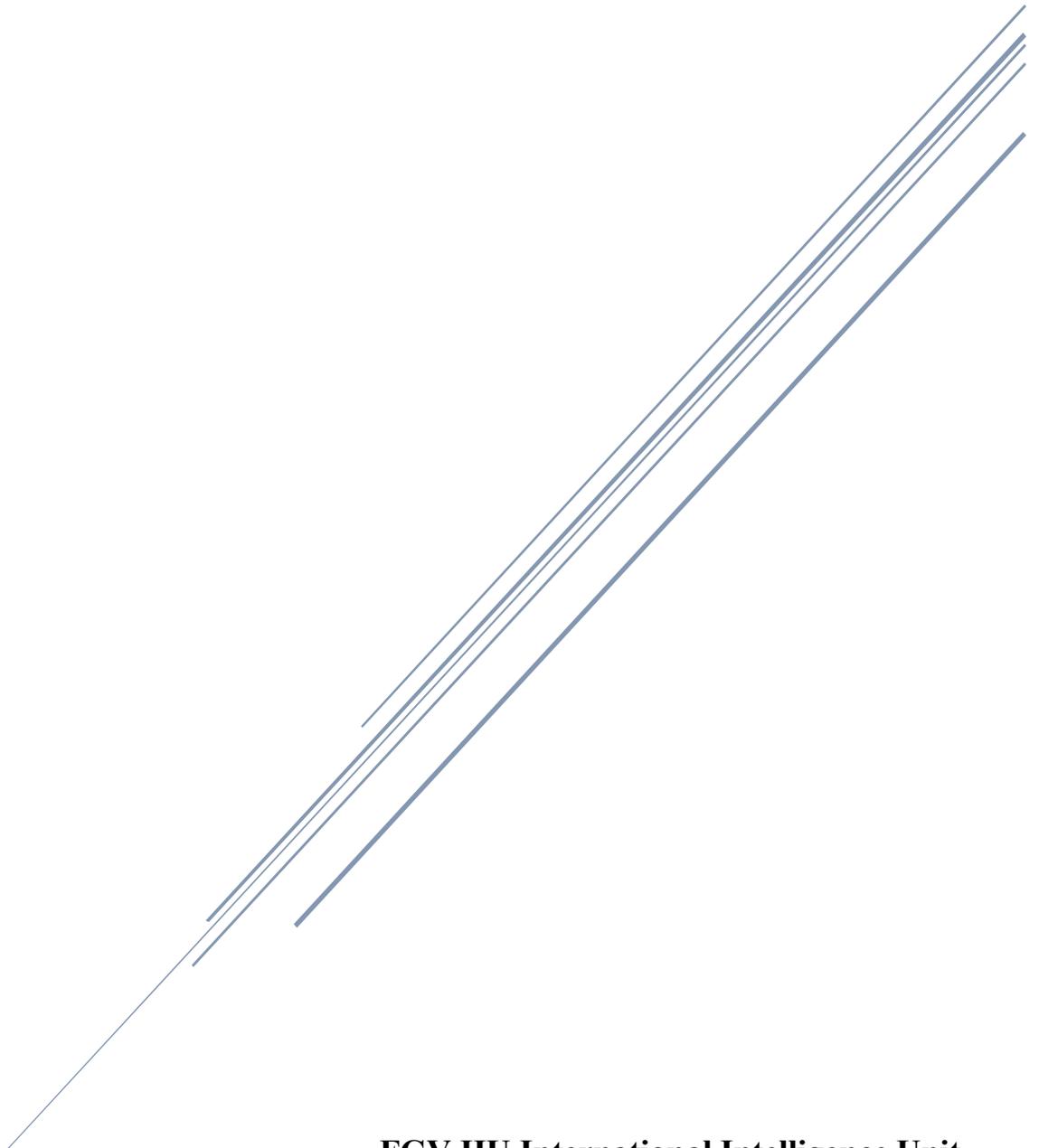


**FGV IIU Flash Notes**

**The World Corona Changed: Preliminary Thoughts on the Coming World Order**



**FGV IIU International Intelligence Unit**

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## **1. Introduction: a new normal?**

At present, covid-19 has provoked a significant change in the lives of nearly everybody in the Western Hemisphere, together with serious effects in China and many parts of Asia, and looming disruption and varied social problems in Africa. Besides the enormous difficulties that the dynamics of its pandemic poses and will provoke, a global recession being among the major ones, a key point is whether the whole episode can be considered as a huge catastrophe -like the natural ones, a tsunami or an earthquake- after which the goal is recovery and reconstruction in order to resume normal life as soon as possible or whether the extent of damage and probations inflicted in different societies, and the corresponding behaviour of the nations involved -and its leaders- will not displace for good the references, patterns, standards and behaviour that characterised and enveloped the world before the pandemic.

Signs of conflict, change, international tension and even disruption were already evident before the massive, overwhelming new reality brought by deaths, ignorance and fear installed itself. It is fair to suppose that the huge impact of the distortions may and shall accelerate processes that were latent, together with new ones, that will irrevocably lead the world order to new (dis)equilibria, perhaps far from the previous status quo, unstable as it were.

This Note draws a few lines of force that may indicate how, once the pandemic is moderately under control, world order and security will re-orient themselves.

Two important simplifications must be stated upfront.

No room is given to a discussion on the inevitable, coming economic recession<sup>1</sup>, a recession probably not seen since the 30's, in the past century. Its existence is taken for granted and will be used in the argument according to two degrees: a very hard one, with significant effects on the US and China, and various negative spill-overs on most parts of the world; or a tough but less encompassing and damaging one, naturally affecting the US and China, and many parts of the world, but leaving some countries with milder impacts, and giving room to local booms and recoveries around the end of the year. These two loosely defined possibilities will interact with the other components of a world scenario. Separation of the specific economic details from the remaining broad geopolitical aspects seems convenient in a first step of analysis, in order to give pre-eminence to main alliances and features that will shape the world order.

No discussion on specific security issues, notably the complex question of a likely increase in all sorts of weapons of mass destruction, in stark contrast to a situation when expenditures should be oriented to diminish the burden the pandemic placed on the poor and the economies in general, will be made. Though international tensions and conflicts will be partially addressed in section 3, this subject deserves a more specific consideration outside the scope of this preliminary overview.

Section 2 elaborates on the two general axes that will condition the order: the US-China relationship and whether a more co-operative or individualistic stance will prevail in the international stage. Section 3 briefly looks at different regions and other actors, posing hypotheses on how they will behave, taking into account the impact of the pandemic on them and the way the two previous axes align themselves. Section 4 includes international organisations and two main global problems judged as enlightening examples for composing a global picture. Section 5 puts all pieces together and sketches a few scenarios; most of them do indeed make for a new normal.

## **2. Two main axes of analysis.**

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<sup>1</sup> This will be the object of another Note.

## 2.1. The US – China relationship.

Since July 2018, when the US unilaterally imposed tariffs on specific Chinese goods, the two nations have been involved in a so-called trade war, originally motivated by complaints from the US Presidency about the “unfair” trade imbalance between both countries. Without entering into the merits of this claim, the process underwent ups and downs, and was still on before the start of the epidemic.

Many analysts agree that the trade issue is a façade for something deeper: a technology war triggered by the US perception that China’s manufactures and technology had arrived at a new level, becoming able to compete with several equivalent US options. The emblematic representative of both the perception and actual competition is Chinese 5G technology, spread worldwide through Huawei’s devices, which became a target of geopolitical disputes. More than a question on “who is going to buy which device from whom”, in reality, what is at stake is who is going to prevail as the rule-maker of the digital economy itself, its core architecture included.

The portfolio of conflicts is however, as well known, much bigger, ranging from the everlasting debate on several rocks and islands in the South China Sea, disputed with Japan and a few ASEAN countries -usually backed by the US in their queries- to China’s steadily increasing presence, beyond Eurasia and Southeast Asia, in Africa and Central and South America, not to mention the frequently (US-) criticised Belt and Road Initiative – BRI.

Since the arrival of covid-19 this extensive agenda has been relatively dormant, replaced by a conspiracy, hate or finger-pointing theory, usually blaming China -either bluntly or in an indirect way- for the pandemic. This will unavoidably contribute to further sour the dialogue on the previous items, once it is resumed.

In the US front, the epidemic arrived at a juncture of the presidential election campaign, when the odds were broadly in favour of the incumbent. The varied exposures obliged by the fight against the virus, the complex relationship with state governors, and the President’s several (in)decisions and statements, many of them questionable, may have changed the odds, being difficult today to predict who is going to be the winner. Too many, up to now, think his leadership has been inept and tumbling, reverting his previous favourable chances.

If either Mr. Trump or Mr. Biden is elected, changes in the foreign policy will take place, but in the following analyses it is assumed that, for the basic lines here outlined, this change - notably as regards China- will be more in form than in substance. China is a national US-problem and there are basic claims and anxieties that must be addressed independently of the party in the White House. Of course, and especially when dealing with the ticklish and sometimes elusive Chinese diplomacy, differences in treatment and form count, but in a broad analysis they can be left aside.

Despite goodwill gestures from China, to be continued well after the epidemic is under control, and the difficult economic situation both countries will endure, a sour relationship is forecast. With more or less emphasis and speed -depending on the new President- a retreat in the global US position towards China is expected.

Businesses will change address, leaving Chinese territory, the technology war will harden, putting several third countries in a difficult position, and the *contentieux* prior to the pandemic, briefly mentioned above, will resurface, adding disruption and attrition to the relationship. No violent conflict or military confrontation -but for very unlikely minor, low intensity episodes- is forecasted though.

While finger-pointing towards China -more or less aggressive, more or less frequent: depending again on the new president- will persist, China will answer with its pledge for world co-operation and multilateral solutions. A pledge in many ways sincere as, given that the financial system will be in reasonable shape, a conflictual situation or a generalised unilateral and aggressive

stand in the new reality is entirely against Chinese interests. Most lines of business, of all kinds, *must* go on as usual, for the sake of Chinese development, stability and internal peace. Though conscious that this is impossible, China will in principle mend fences and be nice, as often as possible, in order to prevent a disruptive behaviour that might trigger another, and now deeper crisis; particularly if coming from or clearly backed by the US.

The whole situation is however starkly novel, and bears no relationship with apparently similar periods, notably the Cold War. Interpenetration and oftentimes mutual dependence make for the name of the game, and each player will be forced to sleep with the (supposed) enemy, while struggling to conduct his/her own policy. Moreover, both will have a nuanced but also fairly blurred view of their objectives, being not clear up to which point they want to pursue each specific difference or disagreement.

Despite the impossibility to avoid deep if unwanted interrelationship, convergence is an idea, or ideal, of the past.

In this context it is important to understand how priorities will be set in each nation. If both opt for a too narrow view, the divergence will become larger and worrisome; if at least one of them, even out of self-interest, practices a reasonable broad view of its foreign interests -and China, at this moment, is the one more likely to adopt this- it will be easier to manage the ever more difficult relationship.

## **2.2. Will co-operation prevail?**

During the pandemics, a mixture of co-operative and selfish behaviour has been taking place, with the balance -despite moving pledges by some leaders and a lot of good-intentions rhetoric- oscillating perhaps to the negative side. A global risk was treated in an individual, country-based way.

What is going to eventually prevail? Can a more co-operative and even friendlier world be expected in the aftermath of the pandemic?

Tension between both options will persist, with none prevailing completely. Answers, though referring to the global context, must take into account important regional and country-related specificities. Notwithstanding, the present guess is that a more inner-looking, egoistic and less open to multiple exchanges world will come true.

Multilateral institutions, development banks and other international associations or organisations may campaign for greater co-operation during the coming times of trouble, without changing much the net effect.

The main reason for such outcome is that neither a bold gesture of generosity has taken place nor an uncontested leadership has convincingly emerged and raised the flag of solidarity during the pandemic. Statements, promises and broad commitments have been aired, but no country significantly shared resources in a way that would signal an effective and sustainable disposition to work together. Nobody has resolutely set forth a calling for nations to work together and bring forward constructive solutions, like setting up a fund to help countries with deficient health systems; or creating a joint effort as regards basic medicine and hospital material. Ironically, those at the margins of the mainstream nations, like Cuba, Russia and, again, China have displayed more global concern towards effective actions in countries in dire situations.

Co-operation will remain though, under varying degrees of transparency, in information sharing and joint research efforts in the medical and health fields, particularly on the search for vaccines and specific drugs and protocols. The same, and under the same provisos, in many scientific and technical domains. As mild realists know, competition or autarchic behaviour do not necessarily preclude co-operation, but this will not alter the reigning broadly segmented pattern.

The main bloc that could either lead a strong combined effort or display a model example of this kind of behaviour is the European Union – EU, which nonetheless provided a poor display of common policies, and oftentimes of uncoordinated and uncooperative behaviour, identical to that in previous crises, like the Greek crash, the unending debates within the Eurozone, the migration dilemma and even, though differently and less, Brexit.

Undoubtedly the nice rhetoric of the Union will be revived, some funds will be mobilised for the reconstruction, together with new, anecdotal examples of good behaviour, but the true reality will be that each member will concentrate all its energy and attention to rebuilding its own economy and social thread. Smaller countries will continue to stick to the Union, as a guarantor of reasonable visibility and scope, but no strong gestures of solidarity should be expected.

At the sides of the central system, Africa and the two Southern Americas will see no change and have limited influence. Some countries, notably in Africa, will have a clearer view of how little they effectively count for many world powers and will accordingly probe more independent policies. Adding to the group Southeast Asia and Eurasia only enhances the idea of isolation and lack of incentives for closer relations.

### **3. Which line, for which actor?**

If the previous conditioning lines are accepted, how will the different regions of the world position themselves strategically? As in the EU case, it is likely that the different major and second-level actors will try to position themselves strategically, even as a moderate ally, in relation to one of the big two -the US or China-, but this is not necessarily an optimal policy. Fuzzy relations, in a world opposing in a highly nuanced way, as discussed in section 2.1, the US and China, may set the tune.

Loyalties and alliances will be more diffuse, and attitudes similar to Nehru's India during the Cold War will be common, and perhaps optimal. Indeed, greater rewards will come if, ideally, one could maintain an equal distance from the US and China -something that may be impossible, though not moving entirely to full adherence to one of them seems feasible.

Countries like Russia or Turkey will perhaps become more crucial, as if siding with one of the big two, they can, at least regionally, turn definitely the balance to their side. This reminds of old balance of power games; something that in a less co-operative world, with the two super-powers caring to maintain a distance between themselves, looks unavoidable.

Other nations, like Pakistan, or Indonesia, half spared by the pandemic<sup>1</sup>, may try to perform more of a solo act, but the strength of attraction to one of the two poles will probably prevail. The same will probably apply to the Middle East and North Africa region.

The big unknown in Asia and nearby areas is India. If moderately hurt by the pandemic, as up to now it seems to be the case, two options are possible.

One is, relatively strengthened by a not too negative outcome of the pandemic, to pursue the line of grabbing ever more room and voice in the international high table, offering an alternative, either to China or to the US, to several problems and stances in the global scene. With its multiple acceptance in different power groupings -BRICS, developing countries, Indo-Pacific actor, Asian power, multi-cultures nation, Africa's friend, etc- it can, with a bit of luck, successfully play the role of an indispensable and reliable partner, with ever growing popularity and international clout.

The other would be, despite the opportunities outlined above, to more clearly position itself not as an undisputed US ally, but surely as a shield and, in principle, peaceful opposing force of

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<sup>1</sup> Up to the date of this Note.

containment to China. This does not preclude its role in multiple power groupings as described above, but obliges the country to be more explicit in a few key areas of interchange and interaction with China - the advantages of which it will surely and carefully weight.

The downside common to both options is the country's ever-lasting Achilles' heel: its unsatisfactory -to say the least- relation with Pakistan and the domestic socio-economic reality, that, despite the not-so-damaging impact of the epidemic, may worsen both due to it and the international recession.

The same applies, in a largely similar way though full of peculiar nuances, to the two key economies in the South China Sea: Japan and South Korea<sup>1</sup>. Despite their fast and clever policies to face the epidemic, both have suffered from it, Japan notably, with the postponement of the Tokyo Olympic Games. In a less friendly US-China relationship, with the US distancing itself from most countries and international initiatives, to the surprise of many, both may eventually tend to positions closer to China's. Adding the recent bitter exchanges between the two, which may persist in the new times, it may also turn China into a valuable go-between. Enhancing such a tendency is the strength and duration of the recession: the harder and longer it will be, the easier to increase ties with China.

Two large masses must still be addressed, Sub-Saharan Africa and Central and South America<sup>2</sup>.

The former may be less affected by the pandemic, according to a few studies<sup>3</sup>, largely due to its favourable -in this case- age pyramid, and the robustness of a population already immune to many health hazards they must daily face<sup>4</sup>. Even if this is hopefully the case, the troubled and debatable condition in which the World Health Organisation – WHO will be once control resumes will impose a side cost to Africa and the myriad of WHO programmes that help the continent. A recession -in any of the two levels that have been supposed here- will severely affect the economies in the region, quite a few dependent on fossil fuels' exports, Angola and Gabon standing as major examples. Interesting and game-changing initiatives, like the ambitious African Continent Free Trade area, will be stalled.

But the political and security aspects will also be at risk. About 12 countries had important elections scheduled for this period, many have been postponed. The economic difficulties brought about by the world recession may change a significant number of political scenarios, with social inequalities and injustices coming again to the fore. The unfortunate growing clout of former ISIS -nearly expelled, for all practical measures, from the Middle-East- will receive renewed support and instability and violence are doomed to increase.

Without international support it is hard to conceive how recovery will be achieved, but the generalised uncooperative mood of the developed world is likely to provide cosmetic aid to the huge problems to come. This will strengthen China's role in the continent, together with secondary players like Turkey and India, and perhaps, in rather limited and targeted actions, Russia.

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<sup>1</sup> We are omitting Taiwan and Hong Kong from the present analysis, not because they are found irrelevant, but of second order for the general discussion here conducted.

<sup>2</sup> No detailed attention will be given to Eurasian core nations, for reasons similar to those in the previous footnote.

<sup>3</sup> P. GT Walker, C. Whittaker, O. Watson et al. The Global Impact of COVID-19 and Strategies for Mitigation and Suppression, 2020. London: Imperial College, being one example.

<sup>4</sup> Given their poor sanitary and health conditions, many Africans are already survivors, having a better equipped and stronger immunological system, in comparison to that of an average European welfare-citizen. This contentious point has been raised by some as an additional explanatory variable for the incidence pattern of covid-19, up to now, in the continent: time will say if it really applies. Nevertheless, the argument by no means implies that sanitary and health conditions in Africa do not need to be greatly improved.

The much-expected African emergence, to occupy a role in the international scene compatible to its resources, size and prospective importance, will have to wait for a few more extra years.

This broad picture applies, with needed adaptations to the two Americas south of the Tropic of Cancer, Mexico included. Already in a state of flux before the pandemic, as the last CELAC - *Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños* meeting testified, all these countries will suffer from the recession and have its social inequalities heightened.

Key countries, like Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, were facing both economic hardships - in varying degrees- and politically sensitive contexts; negative factors only to be exacerbated by the pandemic and the ensuing recession.

Lack of a common or co-ordinating supranational authority, with the previously mentioned failure of CELAC, with Argentina driving apart from Mercosul and the old sick man of the Andes -the Andean Community- having missed a few years ago another opportunity for a revival, while Venezuela and Bolivia still cope with the remains of the Bolivarian attempt, make common endeavours extremely difficult, if not impossible. No diplomatic leadership is foreseeable either, with the national foreign offices having mostly adopted more inner-looking views,

The sad overall prospect is that this large part of the world map, extremely well endowed with natural resources, will become less relevant, and a clear prey to select interests by China and the US. The attractiveness of its resources and of several potential business and FDI opportunities will guarantee a minimal voice to its main economies, but their role as rule-setters, and not merely takers, in the order corona has changed will be quite modest.

#### **4. Additional elements: international organisations and two key issues, one new, another old.**

##### **4.1. Greater tension and controversy within international organisations.**

Multilateral institutions will continue in a state of corrosion by multiple agents, questions and unsolved issues. Ironically, the new, less co-operative covid-reality is a moment when they will be most demanded, joint actions being a necessary condition for coping or, at least, alleviate the borderless problems that will plague humanity as a whole. Advocates of the multiplicity of international organisations are already pledging for a new “Global Risks Organisation”, or similar constructs, for dealing with the new planetary difficulties.

Rather than looking for new creations, always costly in all dimensions, existing structures, if well transformed or adapted, seem able to cope with the new reality. Here, great tension and fierce debate is likely to take place between partisans of each approach. Two examples may be enlightening.

The first is the WHO, now under attack from several countries and experts, given its high exposure and sheer importance during the pandemic. Instead of cutting national contributions to it, and looking for other, perhaps regional solutions, the outstanding opportunity provided by the pandemic to make a thorough screening of the organisation should be seized, taking due care to maintain its several key projects, maybe giving it additional powers and, most needed, more rather than less funds.

The same applies to the United Nations – UN, whose lingering reform, as shown by the pandemic, became more urgent.

The second example refers to an organisation already under intensive care before the epidemic: the World Trade Organisation - WTO. Again, broad reform is a priority: the organisation

went out of tune with the new trade realities and to think that local remedies like changes in the Dispute Settlement Understanding will provide enough oxygen to it is illusory.

After too many years in the hands of bureaucrats and international civil servants -competent as they might have been- novel ideas and ways to cope with new “shapes & forms” in the traditional trade in goods and services must be put on the table to a full discussion. The WTO has an enormous cumulated value and knowledge of systems and procedures, embodied in its high-level staff, that should be preserved; accounting for all sides of the puzzle is feasible though challenging.

At the same time, demands and disputes will surge as trade patterns resume and change, again.

The great danger, in the covid-reality, is that debates like those above will take place -with each side having powerful supporters- while the institutions themselves will be dearly needed. How to reconcile the demands of the future with those of the present hard times may become a conundrum leading to more impasse, paralysis and the search for second to third-best solutions.

Less complicated environments will perhaps be met by the International Monetary Fund – IMF and the several development banks and international financial institutions, though pressures on them will heighten. A litmus test will be their capacity to generate joint efforts and funds to be specifically used for alleviating countries heavily hit by the combined epidemic-recession effect. Domestic macro-economic problems and the queries of their own nationals -with some groups and segments hardly hit by the strict lockdown policies and their aftermath- will make for good excuses to scale down or abort more generous and effective endeavours: a crucial testing field for the basic axis discussed in 2.2 above.

Briefly, the pre-covid state-of-flux will deepen, creating additional confusion to the world order and indirectly fuelling more power to the US and China. Regional and more independent arrangements, like BRICS or the Shanghai Co-operation Agreement may gain more prominence but they themselves will need adaptations. Some shall claim for more power to the G20, though its past record, particularly in recent times, raises doubts about its clout and effectiveness<sup>1</sup>.

## **4.2. Two big issues: one new the other not so.**

Once control is regained and global fear lowers, the myriad of past unresolved problems will re-emerge, together with new ones brought forth by the pandemic. Two are briefly tackled here -the new digital sphere and the climate-pollution issue- as examples of how possible disputes may progress.

### **4.2.1. A digital mess?**

Digital techniques have been widely used during the lockdown, be it for home office activities and meetings, be it for leisure options, or for intensive communication with several service providers, food and household goods delivery foremost. This significant increase has been accompanied by several, somehow newer, uses of the digital network in control, monitoring and data collection or tracking, like using cell-phone location data to gauge the extent of compliance to the lockdown, or tracking people under forced quarantine.

Two questions apply:

- i) how far will be the impact of this new, heavily digital-dependent way of life, in the sense of how many of the several usages will remain and replace old habits and procedures? what structural changes this may imply to society and the economy?

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<sup>1</sup> This line is strongly supported, with relevant ideas if maybe a trifle optimistic, by many people in the Canadian think-tank CIGI – Centre for International Governance Innovation.

ii) independently of how deep and encompassing are the answers to the question above, the unavoidable increase and higher penetration of the digital realm will make clearer than before the need for new, hopefully global regulations for the several aspects of ‘digital life’.

Answers to the first are the subject of much research already, that will certainly increase, and make for additional several texts. It may be guessed that societies will move closer to what has been experimented in China, where, in the big cities, the cell-phone has been fast replacing different means of social interaction, notably money transfer in all its modalities. This brings security and privacy questions to the fore, besides exponentially increasing communities’ dependence to energy supplies and technological expertise. Leaving aside the latter -a more technical subject-, consideration of the former naturally leads to the second question.

Regulation of the digital realm, already backwards in terms of the technical and social realities before the pandemic, will occupy the centre of many global discussions, raising once again questions on the need of new international institutions to tackle the different aspects of the problem.

A first and not new one, the fiscal issue involving the tax policies of the large commercial platforms will receive top priority by governments desperately in need of cash. The so-called “Irish-solution”, favoured by the likes of Google or Amazon in the EU space, is due to become unsustainable, and the related developments will not only affect but eventually involve the Chinese similar competitors, that may incur in significant losses if remaining out of the arrangements.

Data privacy issues will escalate, and it will be hard to avoid a multilateral compromise on them. This is one of the areas where the EU -if joint will, a minimum of cohesion and sensible policy design is restored- could play a major role, being a still important region with the best proposals and regulations in this area and not home of any member of the platforms oligopoly.

Security and deep-fake are equally crucial, actually nearly inseparable of the latter, and here the situation is more complex, given its interplay with military and top-secret coercion methods. Contrary to its sister problem, it is harder here to think of a general solution that could accommodate all the views of nations with advanced expertise in the area as China, North Korea, Russia, the US, and minor though potentially strategic players like Estonia, Singapore and India as well.

All this will receive high priority in the new order, and will be an extra trial of the remaining capacity of co-operation. Prospects are not very optimistic, and unfortunately, whatever the situation, the increased penetration of and dependence on the digital realm, given the amount of qualified human resources and technical knowledge it requires, will widen the divide between advanced and technologically backward economies.

#### **4.2.2. Climate again, or rather, pollution?**

The climate change narrative, in its multiple facets, will surely come back, supported by the myriads of photos and cartoons showing the improvements in air quality in the major cities and the re-appearance of even wild animals and birds, in the fringes of several conurbations, both thanks to a less polluted environment, with humans confined to their homes.

But will this debate, in a context of so many disputes and resilience to sensibly tackle global issues, in times of scarce money and higher social instability, prosper? Coming back to the two main axes, a more favourable China will confront a divided US in this issue, though the former will be highly dependent on its economic health and its evaluation of the evolution of other alliances it may be involved in.

Co-operation will be a scarcer good, already in huge demand in the debates on the international organisations’ architecture, the digital realm and joint humanitarian actions; reduced room will be left. Greater enforcement and deeper rule-making as regards the climate change issue would have to compete with all the previously mentioned dilemmas, and are unlikely to receive higher priority.

Nevertheless, pollution abatement -whose benefits or consequences became viral- may find more acceptance and targeted policies may find broad support.

Air quality measures -coupled with wiser control of transportation and displacement possibilities, better plastic and recycling handling policies, improved water quality and supply systems are some of the areas that could find nearly generalised goodwill, aided by their more or less direct impact on communities' health, and their role as a second best help to poorer and harder hit countries. Tying their funding and campaigning to the unavoidable discussion of better health systems would indeed be a plus, making for a modest win-win situation.

## **5. A Preliminary Synthesis.**

Combination of the two axes discussed in section 2, allowing two levels of intensity for each ("normal" and "too much") gives way to four background scenarios. The extreme ones, in terms of the less and more pessimistic ones, basically enhance or not the problems discussed above. The asymmetric ones -a lower decrease in co-operation coupled with much worse US-Chinese relations and the opposite combination- may provide more nuanced outcomes. In general, however, the main outcome in both is that Chinese relevance as a world protagonist will increase, much in the former combination and more challenged by the US in the latter, when co-operation will be harder.

A third qualification, the degree and geographic scope of the recession, if supposed also at two levels, would, in its worst version, diminish the role of the two main actors and, perhaps ironically, change to the better the co-operation stance of the other nations.

In any case, and assuming that no new and bold leaderships will pop up in the near future, a more inner-looking world will come up, lost in the several conflicts and conundrums outlined above. Immediate victims will be the already weak and unable international system and, as usual, the poorer nations. The extension of the damage will be conditioned on how many of the key conflicts like those outlined in section 4 could find a first, even if approximate, solution.

The more inner-looking stance may, in several cases, conduct to the improvement of the present domestic conditions, particularly as regards the day after of the pandemic, but may easily arrive at globally inefficient solutions and a waste of precious funds, energy and time, if systematically overlooking the international dimension.

Countries -once again the key actors of the international scene- will be searching for new, more productive and pragmatic alliances, broadly along the lines described in section 3. How out of focus their decisions will be depends on how they will value, in the difficult times ahead, longer term co-operative endeavours and a more careful redesign of the old order.

In some sectors, like the digital galaxy, politics, technology and strategy will become extremely enmeshed, creating, if joint efforts and an open-minded attitude towards other countries' good practices are disregarded, a serious confusion and multiple disputes on contradictory standards and norms.

Globalisation has not ended with the pandemic, but its ways and lines of force are changing, requiring much more diplomacy and careful planning to live in its new environment. The temporary brake on the unrestricted flow of goods, services and people will linger for some time; a varied and deep exchange of ideas, views and solutions must be increased.