

THE CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE POST-COVID ERA

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly transformed international relations, exposing critical vulnerabilities in global cooperation frameworks. This paper explores the multifaceted challenges that have emerged in the post-Covid era, focusing on political, economic, security, and socio-cultural dimensions. The initial global response was marked by a surge in nationalism and isolationism, disrupting established multilateral systems and exacerbating geopolitical tensions, particularly between major powers such as the United States and China. Trust in international institutions, including the WHO and the UN, has declined, highlighting the urgent need for reform and stronger global coordination mechanisms. Economically, the pandemic caused widespread supply chain disruptions, increased unemployment, and widened inequality, compelling nations to reconsider their dependency on global networks. In terms of security, the crisis emphasized the importance of cybersecurity and health systems as integral components of national and global stability. Moreover, the pandemic catalyzed social and cultural shifts, with digitalization redefining communication, work, and education, while mental health and local resilience emerged as key priorities.

The research underscores the necessity of revitalizing multilateralism and developing adaptive strategies for future crises. By analyzing the pandemic's long-term impact on international relations, this paper advocates for stronger international solidarity, inclusive governance, and sustainable global policies. The findings aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of the post-Covid international order and provide strategic insights for building a more resilient and cooperative global community.

Key words: *diplomacy, multilateralism, geopolitical tensions*

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has been an unprecedented event that has dramatically changed the way international relations function. Through its devastating impact on health, economy and security, the pandemic has highlighted the vulnerabilities and challenges that countries face in a globalized world. Since the beginning of the crisis in 2020, states have been forced to turn to national interests and take self-defense measures, leading to the disruption of long-standing multilateral relations and cooperation. With the outbreak of the pandemic, the world has witnessed a rise in nationalism and isolationism, while cooperation between states in the areas of health, economy and technology has faced serious challenges. Sharing resources, access to vaccines and supporting international initiatives, rather than being collaborative efforts, have often been subject to political and economic influences, thus deteriorating trust between nations. In the post-Covid era, these challenges continue to have a significant impact on international relations.

This paper aims to analyze the most important challenges facing countries today, including political, economic, health and security aspects. The research will also consider new geopolitical tensions, the need for health coordination and the renewed importance of multilateral institutions, with a particular emphasis on the role of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN. International relations, as a discipline and practice, is a fundamental part of the stability and prosperity of the global world. Historically, cooperation between nations,

multilateral organizations, and various diplomatic initiatives have played a key role in resolving conflicts, promoting trade, and preserving peace. In the years before Covid-19, the international community strived to develop a globalized world in which resources and information were shared in order to foster economic growth, technological innovation, and social stability. However, at the beginning of 2020, the world faced a global pandemic that not only tested the health systems of each country, but also put the entire structure of international relations to the test.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought devastating economic and health consequences to the world, leading to heightened political tensions and a breakdown in trust between countries. Initially, the global response has been focused on national protection measures, with many countries introducing restrictive measures such as border closures, trade restrictions and global supply chains. These decisions, while necessary from a public health perspective, have led to significant disruptions to the global economy and increased instability, particularly in countries that depend on international trade and supply. In addition to the economic effects, the pandemic has also had a significant impact on global solidarity. The issue of equitable vaccine distribution has created new geopolitical tensions and highlighted the need for global health coordination. Despite the existence of mechanisms for global cooperation, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the COVAX vaccine distribution initiative, the reality has been that many high-income countries have gained first access to vaccines, while many low-income countries have been left without the necessary doses. This situation has shown that even in the greatest moments of crisis, economic and political interests often take precedence over global solidarity. In the post-Covid era, international relations face serious and diverse challenges. On the one hand, there is the need to revise global health and security mechanisms to enable more effective preparedness and response to future health crises. On the other hand, the pandemic has increased mistrust between global superpowers, especially the United States and China, which has raised new geopolitical issues and trade conflicts. In addition, restrictions on the movement of people and goods have created new economic challenges, with profound consequences for the global market and the development of supply chains. This paper will examine the main challenges in international relations that have emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic and that remain relevant in the post-Covid period. The analysis will cover the following aspects: political tensions and increased nationalism, economic disruptions and the need for new economic models, global health solidarity and its importance for preventing future pandemics, as well as security risks that have emerged from the digitalization and globalization of communication. The aim of this research is to identify and analyze key aspects affecting international relations in the post-Covid era, as well as to offer suggestions for improving international cooperation, especially in the areas of health, security and economics. The conclusions of this work will be of importance not only for analyzing current global trends, but also for proposing long-term strategies for maintaining stability and cooperation in the world. The purpose of this research is to offer a detailed analysis of the state of international relations in the post-Covid world and to highlight potential directions for improving global cooperation.

POLITICAL CHALLENGES AND GEOPOLITICAL CHANGES

The Covid-19 pandemic has triggered profound and complex changes in the global political landscape. From economic disruptions and closed borders to heightened tensions between major powers, events related to Covid-19 have highlighted the weaknesses of the existing multilateral system and led to significant political challenges that are still shaping the world. These changes have created new geopolitical relationships, increased mistrust between nations, and new forms of political nationalism, and have necessitated a revision of international organizations and mechanisms for cooperation.

The pandemic has reinforced political nationalism and isolationism in many countries. In an attempt to protect their own populations, many governments have taken unilateral decisions that have limited contact and cooperation with other nations. This has been expressed in particular through the closure of borders, restrictions on the export of medical supplies and vaccines, and the strengthening of local supply chains to reduce dependence on external resources. Examples of this behavior have been observed in several countries that have decided to put national interest above international solidarity. This trend has led to serious challenges in multilateral relations, undermining the principle of global cooperation and leading to increased tensions between states.

The initial response of most states to the crisis was based on the principle of protecting national interests, which manifested itself through border closures, restrictions on the export of medical supplies and vaccines, and a significant reduction in the movement of people and goods. This isolationism undermined the global values of cooperation and multilateralism, which are the pillars of the international community. These policies not only reduced global mobility, but also created tensions between states competing for resources, thereby deteriorating global solidarity. Nationalism, especially noticeable in times of crisis, has highlighted political differences between countries. Many governments have promoted policies to increase self-reliance, even economic independence from foreign resources, in order to reduce dependence on global supply chains. This new wave of nationalism has led to a change in the strategies of many countries, which have begun to focus on their own development rather than on global cooperation.

One of the most significant political changes brought about by the pandemic has been the strained relations between the United States and China, which have been in a competitive relationship for years. The pandemic has intensified this rivalry, especially in the context of different approaches to crisis management and accusations about the origin of the virus. The United States and other Western countries have accused China of incomplete transparency and lack of cooperation in the early stages of the pandemic, which has resulted in growing distrust and the opening of new political conflicts. These tensions have divided the international community and created new geopolitical dividing lines. The pandemic has also heightened the rivalry between the United States and China, two of the world's largest powers with opposing ideological and economic models. The crisis has brought new conflicts, particularly over differing approaches to dealing with the pandemic, accusations about the origin of the virus, and questions about transparency in communication. The United States has repeatedly publicly accused China of a lack of transparency and of allegedly hiding key information in the early stages of the pandemic, which has caused global tensions and further soured relations between the two superpowers.

In addition to political accusations, economic and technological competition between the United States and China has also intensified. The United States and Western countries have imposed sanctions and restrictions on Chinese companies, especially in the areas of technology and 5G infrastructure, due to fears of possible cyber espionage and violation of national security. This geopolitical tension has divided the world into two competing blocs, creating new dividing lines in the international community.

The pandemic has tested the capacity of international institutions, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations (UN). Despite these organizations' attempts to mount a coordinated and comprehensive global response, their lack of influence and effectiveness has led to criticism from many states and the public. The WHO has been particularly criticized for its alleged bias towards China and its inadequate management of the health crisis, resulting in diminished trust in the organization and in multilateral systems in general (Krastev,2020) The United States, under the administration of Donald Trump, temporarily withdrew from the WHO, accusing the organization of bias and inefficiency, which was another indication of the increasing tensions and divisions in the international system. This decline in trust in international institutions has highlighted their structural weaknesses and underscored the need for reform and strengthening their role in future crises.

Given the uncertainty and increasing global mistrust, many countries have turned to regional alliances and cooperation with close neighbors to create more effective mechanisms to deal with the crisis. The European Union (EU) has been one example of such regional cooperation, where member states have adopted joint measures for the procurement and distribution of vaccines and the establishment of joint funds for economic recovery. These measures have highlighted the importance of regional cooperation and raised questions about the revitalization of economic blocs in other parts of the world, such as ASEAN and the African Union. Regional alliances have proven to be a more effective way to address problems, as they have enabled faster reactions and adaptation to the specific needs of countries in the same region. This trend has shown that regional cooperation can be a key factor in dealing with future crises, while also reducing dependence on global institutions (Chatam House, 2021).

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES AND THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

The economic challenges caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have deeply shaken the global economy, leading to disruptions in supply chains, rising unemployment and significant fiscal deficits in many countries. Although some economies have started to recover, the consequences of the crisis are still being felt, with several ongoing economic challenges requiring significant changes and adaptation at a global level. Supply chains have been one of the most affected segments of the economy due to the pandemic. Border closures and quarantine measures in various parts of the world have led to shortages of raw materials and products, paralyzing numerous industries, especially the automotive and electronics industries. Many companies have been forced to adapt their production methods and seek local sources, which in some cases has led to increased costs and longer product delivery times.

In order to prevent future disruptions, many countries and companies have begun to reorganize their supply chains, increasing the focus on regional trade and local production. This process of “reshoring,” or bringing production back to home turf, has created new economic opportunities, but also risks of increased protectionism. The pandemic has caused significant job losses, especially in sectors such as tourism, hospitality and transport, which were most affected by the lockdown measures. Many small and medium-sized enterprises have faced serious financial difficulties, leading to an increase in unemployment (Bordo, 2024). At the same time, the crisis has highlighted economic inequality, as those who were already in a vulnerable economic situation have been most affected by the effects of the pandemic. In many countries, governments have introduced programs to support the economy and help the unemployed, but these measures have led to large budget deficits.

Economic inequality continues to be a challenge, as many workers in low-paid sectors have been left without a livelihood, while high-paid jobs, especially those that can be done from home, have remained relatively stable. Fiscal measures to support the economy, such as wage subsidies, tax breaks and other stimulus measures, have led to a significant increase in public debt in a number of countries. Many governments, especially in low- and middle-income countries, have found themselves in difficult financial situations, which have limited their capacity to invest in development projects and infrastructure. In some cases, high levels of public debt have threatened macroeconomic stability, forcing countries to consider long-term fiscal reforms. Going forward, these countries will have to implement strict budget consolidation measures, which could lead to a reduction in public spending and potentially economic stagnation (Baldwin & Weder Di Mauro, 2020).

POLITICAL CHALLENGES AND GLOBAL SECURITY IN THE POST-COVID ERA

The post-Covid era has brought significant changes to the political and security landscape at the global level. The pandemic has shaken the world, exposing the weaknesses

of states and their institutions, and highlighted the need for new strategies and mechanisms for global security. In a world where security is more than military power and includes cybersecurity, economic stability and health care, global actors face increased political challenges and new forms of risks that require adaptation and proactivity. One of the most significant consequences of the pandemic is the intensification of political divisions and nationalism. During the pandemic, many states prioritized their own interests over global solidarity.

An example of this was the restrictions on the export of medical equipment and vaccines, which further disrupted international dialogue and reduced trust in global institutions. This focus on national interests has called into question multilateralism, which has been a long-standing basis for global stability. Political challenges also arise at the level of trust in institutions that are key to global security. The United Nations, the World Health Organization (WHO), and other international bodies have come under pressure for their lack of preparedness and capacity to deal with the health crisis. This has led to a crisis of trust among members and citizens, which has increased the need for reforms and new methods of governance in global security systems (GHSI,2021).

GLOBAL SECURITY AND NEW THREATS

The post-Covid era has also introduced new security challenges, with some of the biggest threats emerging from the digital sphere. Given the growth of digitalization, the number of cyberattacks has increased significantly, and cybersecurity has become a priority for many countries. Digital attacks, especially on critical infrastructures such as health, energy and financial systems, threaten national and global stability. Cybersecurity requires new policies and international cooperation to limit the possibility of unilateral or state-sponsored attacks that can have devastating consequences. In addition to digital risks, Covid-19 has also highlighted the importance of health security. Health systems are crucial to national security, as the pandemic has shown that health crises can cause global economic and political upheaval. World leaders are aware that health security requires cooperation and information sharing, as individual efforts by states are not enough to prevent future pandemics and other health threats. Despite this, increased competition and lack of trust in international health institutions create additional challenges in terms of ensuring global health coordination (UNESCO,2020).

THE ROLE OF GREAT POWERS IN THE POST-COVID E

Rivalry between major powers, particularly the United States and China, has intensified since the pandemic. This tension has exacerbated existing geopolitical divisions and created instability in various regions, particularly in the Indo-Pacific and the Middle East. The United States and China have engaged in conflicts over trade, technology, and health diplomacy, which have intensified their strategic interests and heightened tensions in international relations. Military rivalry has deepened with the creation of new alliances and pacts, such as the AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, and United States), aimed at containing Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific. These pacts have simultaneously created new security structures but also a potentially unstable geopolitical situation, with major powers seeking new ways to maintain their own power and influence. The United States has introduced measures to limit Chinese access to technology, particularly in the semiconductor and telecommunications sectors.

This has been accompanied by increased tariffs and sanctions on Chinese companies, as well as attempts to reduce dependence on Chinese manufacturing capacities. The Indo-Pacific has become one of the hottest geopolitical regions. The United States has strengthened military cooperation with countries such as Japan, India and Australia, in order to counter Chinese influence in the region. By creating military pacts such as AUKUS

(Australia, United Kingdom and United States), the United States and its allies have signaled a willingness to curb Chinese influence, especially in the South China Sea. Both countries are investing enormous resources in the development of advanced technology, such as artificial intelligence and quantum computers. Cybersecurity has become a central theme in their competition, with accusations of cyber espionage and attacks on infrastructure. The United States has introduced measures to protect critical technologies and placed restrictions on Chinese technology giants (Nye,2020; Bremmer,2021).

THE NEED FOR MULTILATERALISM AND GLOBAL COORDINATION

Despite growing divisions, the Covid-19 crisis has reminded the international community of the importance of multilateralism and global coordination. Confronting future health threats, cyberattacks and climate change requires more intensive cooperation and strengthening of international institutions. Many analysts advocate for reform of the United Nations and the introduction of new, more modern policies to deal with instability and crises on a global scale. In the post-Covid era, states need new mechanisms for cooperation that take into account not only traditional forms of security, but also health and digital threats. States must develop policies that prioritize partnership, economic stability and security through trust and transparency. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown the weaknesses of unilateral approaches and highlighted the urgent need for multilateralism and global coordination. Since the virus does not recognize national borders, addressing the problems caused by the pandemic required a global response, which can only be effective through cooperation and joint action. Multilateralism – where multiple countries work together through international organizations and agreements – has become a fundamental pillar for addressing health, economic and security crises. Multilateralism, which involves active cooperation between different countries, particularly through international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), is essential in addressing global problems such as health crises, climate change, cybersecurity and economic inequalities. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown the world that health challenges cannot be solved in isolation (Bordo,2024). The different approaches taken by countries to deal with the virus, from restrictions and limitations to mass vaccination programmes, have highlighted the problems arising from the lack of a coordinated approach. The need for rapid exchange of information, medical resources and joint research requires a solid basis for cooperation between countries. The World Health Organization (WHO) has played a key role in this coordination, but has been criticized for its slow response at the beginning of the crisis. This has highlighted the need to reform and improve WHO's resources and mechanisms to better address future global health threats. At the same time, the pandemic has shown that multilateralism in health is not only possible, but also necessary for survival. Covid-19 has caused enormous economic disruption, from disruption of supply chains to rising national debt and a decline in global trade.

The global economy is closely interconnected, and economic difficulties in one country can have repercussions for the entire world. In this context, International institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have a key role in providing financial support and technical assistance to countries struggling to cope with the economic consequences of the pandemic. Multilateralism, through these organizations, allows for the coordination of economic policies and the development of global standards and programs to strengthen economic stability. Revitalizing the multilateral approach to economics can help overcome economic inequalities and stabilize vulnerable economies that are particularly affected by the crisis (IMF,2021)

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGES IN THE POST-COVID ERA

The Covid-19 pandemic has left deep scars on the way we live, work, learn and communicate. Changes in the social and cultural sphere have not only been inevitable, but also drastic, driven by the need to adapt and survive in times of uncertainty. Even after the crisis has subsided, the social and cultural changes that have occurred continue to shape our reality, and with it the challenges and opportunities that come with these new conditions. Covid-19 has drastically changed our ways of social interaction. Physical distancing and quarantine have imposed digital communication as the main channel for connecting with family, friends and colleagues. Due to the pandemic, video conferencing and virtual collaboration platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Slack have become commonplace, changing the way we communicate and work (Keohane,2005).

This digital social connectivity has transformed the way we interact and brought new opportunities for establishing connections, but at the same time has created a lack of physical closeness, which has negatively affected the mental health of many. Isolation, uncertainty, and fear of illness have led to a significant increase in anxiety, depression, and other mental disorders. As a result, mental health has emerged as a significant social topic, resulting in increased awareness and support for coping with mental health issues. An increasing number of organizations and government institutions are investing in mental health programs, and therapy and counseling have become more accessible through online platforms.

This shift has opened up discussions and reduced the stigmatization of mental health issues, creating a cultural space where psychological well-being is a priority. The pandemic has forced companies to rethink their work models, leading to the popularization of working from home and hybrid forms of work. This trend has allowed many employees greater flexibility and balance between private and professional life, which is an important cultural shift in the corporate world. While working from home has brought many benefits, it has also led to certain challenges, such as the reduction of interpersonal relationships at work, disruption of work dynamics, and the emergence of so-called "burnout" or excessive exhaustion (Richard Haass,2020) In the field of education, online teaching has become a necessity, which has resulted in the rapid development of digital educational platforms. Despite the benefits, such as flexibility and the ability to access educational materials from anywhere, online learning has also brought negative sides, especially among children and young people. Many students have faced a lack of motivation, a sense of isolation and limited interactions with their peers. The pandemic has prompted people to reflect on their values and priorities. The crisis has led to an increased interest in issues related to well-being, ecology and local community.

Facing the unpredictability of the pandemic has led many to reevaluate their life goals and prioritize personal health, relationships, and happiness over professional and financial goals. In addition, interest in environmental awareness and sustainability has increased as people have become aware of the importance of protecting the environment and reducing consumption. The cultural trend towards locality and support for small businesses has intensified, especially in cities where people have come to value local products and services. This awareness of the local, coupled with global connectivity, has expanded the idea of global solidarity and support between people. The pandemic has also affected the art and cultural scene, especially due to restrictions on public events and gatherings. Museums, theaters, concert halls and galleries have been closed, and artists have been forced to find new ways of expressing themselves (Schwab & Marlet, 2020). This has led to an increased digitalization of culture and the arts, with many events taking place online and artists using social networks and digital platforms to reach their audiences. This digital transformation has made cultural content more accessible and allowed for greater interaction between artists and audiences.

However, the digitalization of art has also raised questions about the authenticity and value of the physical experience of art, especially in terms of collective experience and emotional connection with the artwork. Cultural institutions in the post-Covid world face the challenge of finding a balance between digital and physical presence, in order to maintain the

interest of the audience and maintain cultural dynamics. The social and cultural changes in the post-Covid era are profound and affect various aspects of our lives. The digitalization of social interactions, new work and education models, changing cultural values, and new forms of artistic expression are just part of the broad transformation that has occurred during this period. These changes reflect our adaptations to the new reality, but at the same time they also raise new questions about the future of society and culture. Given the global nature of the pandemic, post-Covid changes emphasize the need for flexibility, empathy, and collaboration in building a more resilient and conscious society (Zizek,2020).

CONCLUSION

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented changes to international relations and exposed existing weaknesses and challenges in the world order. From health to economic, from security to social, the global challenges that have emerged from the pandemic require new ways of cooperation and joint efforts. These challenges have increased the pressure on international institutions, requiring them to respond to urgent needs for global coordination and solidarity, while at the same time facing questions about their own effectiveness and credibility. The pandemic has also exposed the weaknesses of unilateral approaches and highlighted the need for multilateral diplomacy to successfully address global challenges. The need for coordination in the health sector, ensuring equitable economic development, and addressing climate change now more than ever requires the strengthening of global institutions. This process also entails deeper reforms and the introduction of new, flexible mechanisms that will encourage countries to cooperate in a way that addresses both common interests and specific needs.

However, the pandemic has also fueled nationalism and protectionism, creating additional tensions in international relations. Great powers, rather than fully uniting, have often pursued their own interests, leading to deepening geopolitical divisions. This further complicates the response to the pandemic and underscores the need to reform the global order in a way that ensures stability and sustainable development for all states. In the post-Covid era, successfully addressing the challenges of international relations will depend on the ability of states to overcome their own interests and build an effective and inclusive multilateral system. Only by establishing stronger ties, reforming international institutions, and creating policies based on trust and shared values can the world face future global challenges and build a more secure and stable international order.

The post-Covid era calls for new approaches to cooperation and greater preparedness to address global challenges. The pandemic has shown that no country is strong enough to deal with threats of this kind on its own, thus highlighting the importance of mutual understanding and coordination. International organizations, such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and the World Trade Organization, must face demands for reforms that will make them more prepared and flexible to respond to emergencies. These institutions need to increase their efficiency and transparency to restore the trust of member states and serve as platforms for true global solidarity. In terms of economic and social issues, the pandemic has exacerbated inequalities, not only between countries, but also within societies. A rapid economic recovery requires a focus on sustainable development strategies that also take into account the needs of vulnerable groups. Countries must create policies that strengthen economic stability through cooperation and resource sharing, as well as ensure that the workforce adapts to the new realities of digitalization and technological innovation. The world also faces the growing threat of climate change, which complicates global security issues and requires integrated responses. In this regard, the pandemic has shown that it is possible to achieve rapid change in human behavior and economic activities when the situation requires it. This can serve as a model for addressing environmental challenges through globally coordinated measures and policies that unite developed and developing countries. In conclusion, the pandemic has highlighted the need to

adapt and modernize the international order. Although the challenges are complex, the post-Covid world can achieve greater stability and progress through a commitment to inclusive, transparent, and coordinated global policies. Establishing stronger, interconnected mechanisms of cooperation can be a key step towards addressing current and future global challenges.

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