Global Responses to COVID-19

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China's Public Health Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak

Huang Yanzhong (Council on Foreign Relations, USA)

This paper focuses on the pattern of China's public health response to the COVID-19 outbreak. While the government response suggests that important progress has been made in strengthening disease surveillance and response capacities in the post-SARS era, it also reveals a pattern of cover-up and inaction similar to what was found during the SARS outbreak. This time, however, local government leaders and health authorities appeared to have played a more prominent role in the making of the crisis. Once central leaders recognized severity of the crisis, they – like their counterparts in the SARS crisis – did not hesitate to turn to draconian measures to contain the outbreak. Compared to the reverse course during SARS crisis, though, the COVID-19 containment measures were carried out more aggressively and extensively, aided by high-tech means. The speed and scale of the containment effort and the government ability to rein in the spread of the virus show the presence of a highly resilient and powerful state. Still, the tremendous social-economic cost incurred by stringent disease control measures and the inability to completely break the transmission chain highlight the limits of the state reach. The paper concludes with a discussion on the replicability of the Chinese approach.

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COVID-19 and China's Belt and Road Diplomacy in Eurasia

Elizabeth Wishnick (Montclair University, USA)

This paper explores how the outbreak of COVID-19 affects China's relations with Belt and Road countries, especially Russia, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia. All were among the earliest to close their borders to China but later experienced outbreaks of the virus brought in by travelers from other parts of the world. After largely containing the virus in China, Xi Jinping has sought to enhance his country's soft power through "health silk road" aid. This has led to a mixed reaction in Eurasia, where there is both greater awareness of the risks of cross-border interactions with China as well as increased dependence on China due to the devastating economic consequences of the pandemic, coupled with a collapse of prices for oil and other resources produced in Eurasia. The paper examines how COVID-19 contributes to existing security and identity dilemmas in relations between China and its Eurasian Belt and Road neighbors.

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The Securitization of COVID-19 and The Myth of the Authoritarian Advantage in Infectious Disease Control

Catherine Yuk-ping Lo (University College Maastricht, Netherlands)

Are authoritarian regimes more capable of controlling emerging infectious diseases (EIDs) outbreaks than democracies? Comparing the securitization of COVID-19 in the three stages of the epidemic curve between China and Italy, the paper argues that China would be less effective than its Italian counterpart in responding to Phase I of the epidemic curve because of the indecisive local government responses and the absence of independent media. China would nevertheless be more capable to contain the community transmission of COVID-19 in Phase II of the epidemic curve because the general public is less sensitive to draconian measures that could infringe human rights and freedom of movement. Besides, it is easier for China to prolong emergency measures in Phase II to buy time for developing vaccines and identifying effective treatment protocols. The paper envisions that both China and Italy would de-securitize COVID-19 in Phase III of the epidemic curve; however, they differ in terms of the de-securitizing strategies: objectivist strategy in China and de-constructivist strategy in Italy. The paper concludes by arguing that a de-constructivist strategy that is usually adopted by democracies would be conducive to mitigate COVID-19 in the long run.

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COVID-19: A Lens into the Past and Future of Health Security in Africa

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Crisis create chaos and mess, but they can also act as a focal point from where we can see things more clearly. This paper takes COVID19 as a lens into the past and the future of health security in Africa. What does the pandemic reveal about the governance of health security as it has developed on the African continent over the last 20 years? How has the pandemic accelerated developments that have long been underway? The paper draws on two years of fieldwork on the emergence of a new player in the regional governance of health security in Africa, the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC). The COVID19 outbreak has catalysed the Africa CDC into the centre of the continent's emergency response. The paper takes the role of this new regional actor in the COVID19 response as a starting point to reflect on wider trends that have shaped the regional governance of health security in Africa and how it interfaces with the (changing) global health security regime.

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