

**INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN
COMBATING THE EPIDEMIC: CONTRASTING
APPROACHES OF THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA**

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TIGA BRIEFING

April 2020/2



TIGA
TURKISH CENTER FOR
GLOBAL AND AREA STUDIES

◆ International Cooperation in Combating
the Epidemic: Contrasting Approaches of
the United States and China



Necmettin Erbakan University Press
TIGA Briefing Series/02

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e-ISBN

978-605-4988-54-9

Necmettin Erbakan University Press

Yaka Mah. Yeni Meram Cad. Hasım Halife

Sok. No: 11/1 Meram / Konya/ TURKEY

0332 221 0 575 - www.neuyayin.com

April, 2020

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The background features abstract geometric shapes in teal, green, and blue. A large teal shape is in the top left, a green shape is in the middle left, and a smaller teal shape is at the bottom left. A dark blue horizontal bar is at the very bottom.

International Cooperation
in Combating the Epidemic:
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International Cooperation in Combating the Epidemic: Contrasting Approaches of the United States and China

In the face of global challenges, countries often look to the great powers for leadership and support in global crises. The superpower nations are expected to actively provide assistance to nations heavily hit by the crises. The novel coronavirus disease as a recent global crisis has posed a formidable challenge to global public health security. The coronavirus-related death toll surpassed 17,000 with more than 390,000 cases confirmed worldwide. However,

Sharp differences between Beijing and Washington in their approaches to the epidemic has raised fundamental questions about global leadership in the face of pandemic uncertainty.

While Washington is now coming under fire for falling short of expectations, Beijing shows solidarity and joins hands with countries heavily impacted by the coronavirus in the battle against the coronavirus.

The United States along with other European countries fall short on solidarity with Italy, by far the hardest hit country in Europe so far. Italian officials have criticized other EU and NATO countries for being slow to help over the coronavirus epidemic. Maurizio Massari, Italian ambassador to the EU, complained of a lack of solidarity among EU members and demanded “emergency actions that are quick, concrete and effective”. The call for extra supplies of medical equipment has resulted in misery. Only one country around the globe



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responded to the call: China. Furthermore, the public praise by Italian officials for the Beijing government also aroused anger with the EU. Critics have accused the Italian leaders and even dubbed Luigi Di Maio, Italian Foreign Affairs Minister, as “the Chinese minister”.

“ The lack of solidarity and cooperation during the outbreak of the virus presents evidence for the divergence and chaos in Europe.

For instance, Michele Geraci, the former deputy minister of Economic Development of Italy, commented that the EU is essentially only a common market consisting of different countries. Except for the already unified area of trade policy, the EU’s political leadership is

almost exclusively on paper treaties. In this case, even if the EU countries sincerely put the whole European interest as top priority, it still takes a lot of time to put forward a satisfactory solution, probably missing the best time for epidemic resistance. At previous such times of division among the European countries, Washington who often used to find ways to create a community of joint efforts in Europe now has difficulties keeping the continent together. Above all, now

“ Trump’s “America First” stance is making Washington more isolated in a combat against the deadly virus.

In addition to Europe’s hardest-hit nation--Italy, Serbian politicians also condemned EU leaders for failing to step up to the plate over the epidemic. President Aleksandar Vučić lashed out at the European countries and argued that his country was snubbed by the so called European allies. Vučić accuses of European leaders of not being able to show solidarity, eventually calling European solidarity as a “fairy tale on paper”. In the same press conference, Vučić sent a special appeal to the Beijing government, addressing Chinese leader Xi Jinping as his “friend and brother”.

With the coronavirus spreading quickly around the globe, the traditional ally of European states--the U.S.--sought to pull away from solidarity and cooperation in the fight against COVID-19. One of the latest drastic attempts to curb the epidemic that has aroused outrage among European leaders was a sweeping travel ban for European countries by the U.S. without notifying European leaders in advance. In a joint statement last week,



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and the European Council President Charles Michel accused Washington of failing to consult with European leaders before making the decision. It is assumed that

the move will have a profoundly negative impact on US-EU relations and it is feared that the impact could actually be magnified against the backdrop of the epidemic.

Some scholars believe that the US betrayed its allies and pushed European countries into the corner, even resulting in a shaky US-Europe mutual trust.

In the meantime, the U.S. faces accusations over attempting to lure a German pharmaceutical company to move its research to the United States. It has turned into a tug-of-war between Germany and the United States. There is no doubt that the epidemic will be a litmus test of the West and EU's mutual defense, cohesiveness and credibility. Many European leaders accused other European leaders of failing to send the medical equipment needed. Countries such as France and Germany have imposed restrictions on exports of medical equipment. Against an unprecedented challenge faced by all countries, the US officials also have failed to take an upper hand in a fight against the epidemic. According to CNBC, what took place during the epidemic were "events that further underscored how divided the United States and its European partners are when they should be most united.". So,

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Washington is busy pointing fingers at China and international organizations; European countries cannot manage to act together. Meanwhile, amid questions over support for worst-hit European countries, China has been the superpower filling the void.

China's Emergence as Responsible Global Actor

Since the outbreak of the epidemic, China not only put the worst of the epidemic behind it but also showed solidarity and joined hands with countries heavily impacted by the coronavirus in the battle against the pandemic. China's solidarity and cooperation with countries across the globe and multilateral institutions including WHO pose to have far-reaching consequences in global politics. China's response to the pleas for help could reshape its place in the international order.

China decided to strengthen communication with countries hard-hit by the epidemic including Italy, Spain, Iran in order to safeguard global public health security. China has deployed soft power and has shown practical support for Italy in terms of plane loads of masks, ventilators, medical supplies and medical teams. China stood on the front lines establishing coordination not only with European countries but also with the Middle Eastern and African countries.

As international efforts to contain the epidemic have fallen short of expectations, the powerful Chinese propaganda apparatus has turned the epidemic into a tool for soft power policies by sending medical supplies and support around the globe.



Geng Shuang, Foreign Ministry spokesman of China, said that China is extending a helping hand worldwide, making efforts in four main areas: first, the Chinese central government has announced to 82 countries, the WHO and the AU that it will provide assistance within ability, including testing reagents, masks, protective clothing, etc. Many of the aid materials have been delivered to the recipients. Second, many experts from China and other countries hold video conferences to share treatment programs and China dispatches medical experts groups to Italy, Iran and Iraq. Third, local governments in China have donated medical materials to cities in South Korea, Japan, Italy and there will be more. Further, many Chinese enterprises and non-governmental organizations have begun to provide donations to relevant countries. That's to say, in addition to China's government, a lot of organizations have lent their helping hand to other countries suffering from the epidemic. Specifically, Fosun delivered 36,000 pieces of medical supplies to Tokyo on March 1, sent medical products to South Korea through its partners and deployed 5,000 masks through its Club Med, PAREF in Europe to support Italy. On March 2, Alibaba Foundation and Jack Ma Foundation

announced that they donated 1 million masks to Japan and on March 5, an additional donation of 1 million masks was provided for South Korea. On March 6, Jack Ma announced that he had raised 1 million masks for Iran and quickly sent them to Tehran. Aside from that, as reported in Spain, Alibaba's Damo Institute has shared an artificial intelligence diagnostic system that can quickly and accurately identify the differences between patients with new coronavirus and patients with ordinary pneumonia. According to Argentina's report, the epidemic detection system and automatic diagnosis system services on Huawei cloud platform has also been provided for them free of charge. This is a sample of how Beijing government and Chinese companies use "soft power" to reinforce its influence around the globe. The support from China, including funds, medical materials, epidemic prevention technology and even medical staff, helps China to portray itself as a leader and global benefactor.

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Xi's Portrayal As a Global Leader

Ever since China seems to have gotten a handle on the outbreak, the success of China in its ability to contain the spread is portrayed as a testimony to the success of the ruling Communist Party and Chinese president Xi Jinping. Eager to highlight China's success against the outbreak, numerous news agencies have portrayed China's governance and China's response to the epidemic as a model for the entire world. There is no doubt that China has drastically slowed the rate of new infections. The slow rate, therefore, is often reframed as a triumph for the Chinese officials and leaders. During this time period,

Xi Jinping's image has shifted from domestic crisis manager to responsible global actor. Xi now is portrayed as the global leader who can lead the international community in the battle against COVID-19.

Major media outlets including Xinhua News Agency, Global Times have published glowing articles boasting Chinese Leader Xi's leadership and praising Xi's efforts in the combat against the epidemic. Despite the initial criticism, there

are signs that President Xi will come out triumphant during the epidemic. As the global fights against the deadly virus intensifies, Xi has managed to extend more influence across many regions. According to MinXin Pei, a professor at Claremon McKenna College in the

Xi has world leaders exactly where he wants them. The West's response to the global pandemic has been ill-prepared and incompetent. It provided a global platform and a great opportunity for China to boost its reputation.

US, argues that Since the extent of the epidemic became clear, reports show how many countries including the Middle East governments have also been racing to China's side, converting Beijing to a top priority across the region.



China's Advantage of Epidemic Resistance

The speed and scale of China combating the pandemic is seen unparalleled, which is attributed to China's institutional advantage and industrial foundation. The key to taking the epidemic under control and responding to the virus comprehensively and promptly is often explained by the strength of Chinese communist party and the centralized leadership. Unremitting efforts in the prevention and control of the virus and the dramatic reduction in the amount of new cases is displayed as "the notable advantages of the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics." According to Carlos Barragan and Enrique Andres Pretel in an article published in *El Confidencial*

Beijing now wants to demonstrate to the world that the Chinese political system is much more robust than the West imagined.

The worse other developed countries' response to the virus, the more effective the Beijing narrative will be in the unfolding of the coronavirus health crisis.

Currently, the epidemic center has gradually shifted outside of China, so the focus of China's epidemic control has also shifted from concentrating on domestic control to giving more consideration to preventing internal proliferation and external import, and providing more assistance to international epidemic resistance. Many European countries and nations around the globe have asked China for help, which is not only limited to the experience of coronavirus resistance but also the experts, medical staff as well as the medical suppliers. It is widely acknowledged that the medical level in those developed countries is much more advanced and adequate compared to so-called third-world countries. Then, why do those developed countries have to seek help from China and why is China capable of supporting the need of medical equipment both domestically and abroad?

According to Cui Hongjian, director of the Institute of European Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, European countries and the USA have established three-stage medical system combined with public, private and personal. Despite a strong coverage capacity, it is found that there exists a less unified control operation in comparison with China. Although European countries and America have stronger capability in scientific research and high-end medical technology, they do not have

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sufficient basic medical materials and clinical experience compared to China. Apart from that, China has a higher production capacity of fundamental goods than the West, which can be attributed to its complete industry chain. As is reported in South China Morning post, China is now making 100 million masks a day to combat the coronavirus and it may export more masks to other countries in need. It is also said that Sinopec originally producing oil, Chengdu Aircraft Industry Group producing fighter jets as well as many other businesses have also opened up masks and raw material production lines. In the course of the epidemic that has affected many parts of the world, China has shown the advantages of its leading position in the manufacturing industry, especially when many countries fall short of medical suppliers. It highlights one of the weaknesses of American industry chains: America attaches much importance to high-end manufacturing sector and upstream of the industrial chain, while pays less attention to basic materials production, leading to the shortage of medical goods during the outbreak of the pandemic.

|| Diplomatic Rivalry Between the Superpowers

Washington used the global epidemic to point finger at the Communist Party and has shown lack of resilience to lead international cooperation. According to Colum Lynch and Robbie Gramer,

the Trump administration prefers to play the blame-Beijing game while Beijing is using the pandemic to boost its reputation for global cooperation.





The US President Trump and some Washington officials referred to the pandemic as the “Chinese Virus”. Chinese officials and leaders slammed the move and accused the United States of blatant discrimination against Chinese people. They argue that Washington ‘slanders’ China in order to deflect political blame for the outbreak and its devastating impact on the financial market.

China is held accountable by withholding sensitive data regarding COVID-19 and allowing the virus to take hold across the country and eventually the entire globe. Despite its initial late reaction and cover-ups, Beijing has now undoubtedly rebranded itself as the incontestable global leader in the fight against the pandemic. However, the US Government continues to exert pressure and deflect domestic criticism toward China. Some including national security advisor Robert O’Brien find the initial response by the Beijing government atrocious. O’Brien goes on to argue that China covered up coronavirus by silencing doctors or putting in isolation. Therefore it cost the world community two months.

In an article published by Global Times, the increased discrimination against China derives from geopolitical competition. The politicization of the virus is viewed as a method of toppling the economy of China which threatens the US’ economic and regional hegemony. As the epidemic sweeps across the globe, the big-power diplomatic rivalry could be the restart of escalated China-US tensions.

The Trump administration has raised questions about the U.S' historic leadership role. Many countries around the globe fear that the US can no longer be relied upon to lead on major global challenges,

says Kelly Magsamen, the vice president for national security and international policy at the left-leaning Center for American Progress. Much of the initial response by the U.S. was focused on domestic

precautions against the epidemic. The ongoing dissension between Republicans and Democrats has become fiercer this year. Lack of unity has considerably negative influence on the government's competence, authority and credibility in public. Instead of effectively fighting against the virus spreading, Washington officials decided to point fingers and put the blame on Chinese government. European leaders vented their frustration at each other and the US and made comparisons with China's willingness for solidarity. Inept response by Europe and the United States resulted in a failure to tackle the spread of the virus and counteract its economic impact.

In terms of US-China competition, the current epidemic is a decisive moment as the 2009 financial crisis was a decisive moment emboldening Beijing and altering global perceptions of relative power between the U.S. and China, says Ely Ratner, a former deputy national security advisor under Vice President Joe Biden. The struggle against the epidemic has pointed to a profound new direction in global politics as Washington under the Trump administration badly mishandles the current global crisis.

In a bid to lead international leadership, China has expanded its support to international organizations by donating 20 million US dollars to the World Health Organization (WHO) in support of international cooperation over battling the pandemic. Donation helps China to play a better coordinating role in the global combat against the deadly virus. However, earlier this year, the United States under the Trump leadership sought to have steep cuts, including half of its annual funding to the WHO in the belief that such global organizations are ineffective. Significant reductions in aid also prompted international concern and intense criticism.

In the face of a global crisis, what the world's two most powerful countries are going to do will be essential. Does the way the U.S. is

handling the global crisis show signs that Washington will retreat from a global leadership role under the Trump administration? Does Trump's stance in global issues make the United States more isolated? Secondly, does China position itself for global leadership? Does China steal the soft power mantle from the U.S.?

In the face of a global pandemic, the lack of strong solidarity and cooperation in Europe can be considered as a testimony to the loss of unilateral leadership in the Western world.

During the 2020 Munich Security Conference (MSC), European leaders came up with a new term that sheds light on the deep political, economic division and disintegration among Western nations: *Westlessness*. *Westlessness* is defined as a loss of cohesion, a loss of mission and a sense of direction among the Western powers. The inability to take decisive steps to lower the spread of the coronavirus as a collective shows the existential crisis the West now faces.



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The image features a minimalist design with several overlapping geometric shapes. A large teal shape is in the top-left corner. Below it is a light green trapezoidal shape. At the bottom-left, there is a smaller, darker teal parallelogram. The word "RESUME" is written in a bold, teal, sans-serif font, positioned to the right of the light green shape. A solid dark blue horizontal bar runs across the bottom of the page.

RESUME

Yusuf Ziya Karipek, the City University of New York Sosyoloji Bölümü'nden mezun oldu. Mezun olduktan sonra Türkiye Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi'nde araştırma görevlisi olarak çalıştı. Uluslararası göç, kamu diplomasisi, din üzerine yoğunlaşmaktadır. Halen Tsinghua Üniversitesi'nde Çin Siyaseti, Dış Politika ve Uluslararası İlişkiler alanında yüksek lisans derecesi üzerinde çalışmaya devam etmektedir.

Yusuf Ziya Karipek holds a bachelor's degree in Sociology from the City University of New York. Upon graduation, he worked as a full-time research assistance at Necmettin Erbakan University in Turkey. He concentrates in international migration, public diplomacy, religion. Currently, he is working on a Master's degree in Chinese Politics, Foreign Policy, and International Relations (CPFP) at Tsinghua University.

Wang Fangfang, Tsinghua üniversitesinde Ekonomi ve Yönetim Fakültesi'nde son sınıf lisans öğrencisidir. İlgi alanları arasında uluslararası ticaret, kurumsal finansman, Çin'in siyasi ve ekonomik tarihi yer almaktadır. Tsinghua'da eğitimi esnasında, Urbanspace ve Sogou'da gibi şirketlerde iş taahhüdü hukuk ve finansla alanlarında staj yapmıştır.

Wang Fangfang is a senior student in school of economics and management at Tsinghua university. Her research interests include international trade, corporate finance, political and economic history of China. During studying in Tsinghua, she did internship in Urbanspace and Sogou, and the work commitment was related to law and finance.

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