



What World Post-COVID-19? Three Scenarios

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Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Rockets and Blue Lights (Close at Hand) to Warn Steamboats Of Shoal Water*. 1840, Oil on Canvas. Image courtesy Clark Art Institute. clarkart.edu.

In many of his late paintings, Turner used vigorous brushstrokes and loosely defined forms to explore dramatic struggles between human beings and the elements. This work shows a storm raging in an English harbor town. Flares explode in the sky to alert ships to the location of shallow (shoal) water. On the shore huddled spectators stare out to sea, perhaps anxiously hoping their loved ones will survive the storm and return safely home.

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic presents a substantial shock to the post-war order, established by the United States and its allies. For the past 75 years, the United States and its partners have led a rules-based system predicated on liberal democratic values, an open and thriving global economy, and formal institutional bodies backed by powerful democratic states. But this order has not gone unchallenged, and the current pandemic threatens the future of the system at large. A downturn in Western economies could boost a rising China, while a global depression could breed support for protectionism. International bodies designed to safeguard public health appear weak and unable to contain the crisis, and alliances with transatlantic partners are fraying as nations turn inward and close borders. Sustaining and revitalizing the rules-based order that has guaranteed freedom, prosperity, and peace for decades requires a decisive global and US-led response to the pandemic.

This paper is a preliminary look at the geopolitical implications of a crisis that is still unfolding. Three scenarios are sketched out for the possible direction of the global system post-COVID-19. The Scowcroft Center's Foresight, Strategy, and Risks Initiative will continue to follow the course of the coronavirus, paying close attention to its geopolitical, economic, and social implications. In a situation of intense crisis, scenarios help to reduce the scope of possibilities, decrease uncertainty, and make the different options more visible. In using scenarios as a tool to manage deep uncertainty in a complex, volatile environment, the United States and its allies and partners can be more strategically agile and make better long-term decisions that protect and advance common interests.

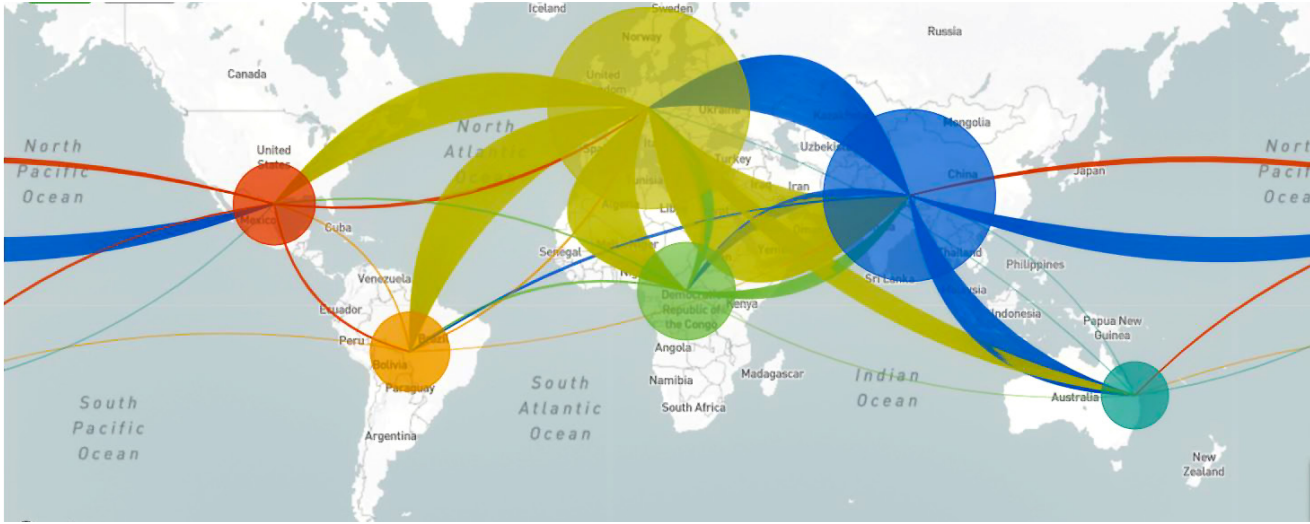


FIGURE 1. Main Known Genetic Variants of the SARS-Cov-2 Virus Causing COVID-19

This phylogeny map shows evolutionary relationships of SARS-CoV-2 viruses from the ongoing novel coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. This phylogeny shows an initial emergence in Wuhan, China, in Nov-Dec 2019, followed by sustained human-to-human transmission at a global level. The map shows clear genetic relationships, though the transmission patterns are inferred and specific transmission dates are still uncertain.

SOURCE: NEXTSTRAIN.ORG, MAY 26, 2020

CHAPTER 1

PROSPECTS FOR THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As of mid-May, there were 4.62 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 with more than 300,000 known deaths from the disease worldwide. The United States accounted for 30 percent of the average global daily deaths. In recent weeks, Latin America and the Caribbean accounted for 25 percent of all global daily deaths, fueled by the growing outbreak in Brazil.¹ Russia and India had also become COVID-19 hot spots in April and May, respectively. The number of global deaths from the coronavirus is almost certainly higher. In some countries, mortality has been as much as 50 percent higher than the historical average.

If the coronavirus infected half the world’s current population over the course of a year with a 1 percent fatality rate, the death toll would be 35 million. By comparison, the Spanish flu infected an estimated 500 million people and killed 50 million worldwide in 1918-19.

As the coronavirus spreads to the developing world, there is increased worry about higher death tolls because of the more fragile health systems in many of these countries. Hugo López-Gatell, Mexico's coronavirus tsar, "has admitted [in late April] that the true infection level is at least eight times higher."² As of mid-May, there were almost 50,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases in Mexico. India was leading Asia with almost 100,000 cases. There are confirmed reports of the virus spreading to a refugee camp in Bangladesh that houses nearly one million Rohingya.³ Refugees in the camp do not have access to enough soap and clean water to protect themselves against the contagion.⁴ In Pakistan, the public health system is ill-equipped to handle any crisis. In Karachi, for example, there are only 600 intensive care unit (ICU) beds for the city's population of 20 million.

As the coronavirus leaves a mounting death toll in its wake, we may not be in the clear until a vaccine is created and widely distributed. To avoid a reoccurrence, countries will need to keep their social distancing measures in place and lockdowns enforced where hot spots reappear. It will be important not to ease up too soon on all restrictions, given the still lingering strains of the virus. Testing will need to continue in order to discover who might be a carrier despite showing no symptoms. Based on the Vò Euganeo experiment—the small village in Veneto, Italy, where all 3,000 inhabitants were tested twice—up to 50 percent of those infected could be asymptomatic, which explains the larger spread than we would have seen from just the confirmed cases. Only when the public has been properly vaccinated will the virus be completely conquered.

We must expect that the coronavirus will continue to mutate, potentially making it harder to develop a vaccine. RNA-based viruses like the coronavirus tend to mutate about 100 times faster than DNA-based ones, although the coronavirus will not mutate as quickly as influenza viruses.⁵ Nevertheless, the general notion prevails: the more people are infected, the more of a chance for a mutation. In late April, a Los Alamos National Laboratory study found there were 14 strains of the coronavirus with some proving to be more infectious than others.⁶ We must be prepared for the coronavirus to become a "recurring fact of life," like the ordinary flu, but much deadlier.

Systemic Shock

The pandemic is not just a global health crisis. In its wake, the global economy lies in tatters, leaving open the question of how and when countries and regions will be able to start a real recovery if governments must maintain social distancing and other restrictions for some time. We all hope for a quick V-shaped return to the status quo ante, but here are disturbing signs that the recovery will be difficult and extended, causing substantial damage to the social and political fabric in many regions.

The United Nations' World Food Program has warned that "the number



A shift in demand, disruptions in supply chains, and consumer panic have led to empty shelves in stores worldwide.

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of people facing acute food insecurity could double in 2020 from the year before, to 265 million. The pandemic and lockdown measures combined with rising unemployment and limited access to food could lead to violence and conflict.⁷ Even in advanced economies, there are growing fears of malnutrition. In the United Kingdom, three million people have had someone in their household going without food, according to a Food Foundation survey.⁸ In the United States, food banks have seen long lines of people relying on free food to survive.

Without a swift global economic recovery, the gains we have seen in the expansion of a global middle class and poverty reduction could be sacrificed. In rich countries, where the middle class has already been under pressure, a return of high unemployment and income stagnation could bolster populism and widespread discontent.

The Spanish flu, which hugely added to the death toll from World War I, was a factor in ending the second phase of globalization and sparking conflict in the interwar period. From a dream of making the world safe for democracy, the post-World War I era ended up leading to the rise of fascism and communism in Europe. The United States turned its back on the world, electing not to join the League of Nations and passing draconian

legislation that largely ended immigration.

Will there be a repeat of history in the post-COVID-19 era? Even before the pandemic started, there were ample signs of deglobalization, rising anti-immigration sentiment, and great power competition. Will the coronavirus, therefore, tip the balance against global cooperation and multilateralism and instead strengthen the forces of nationalism, populism, and authoritarianism? As in the interwar period, a lack of global cooperation at this critical moment will worsen the ongoing health crisis and make a rapid economic recovery impossible.

The Homeland Under Threat

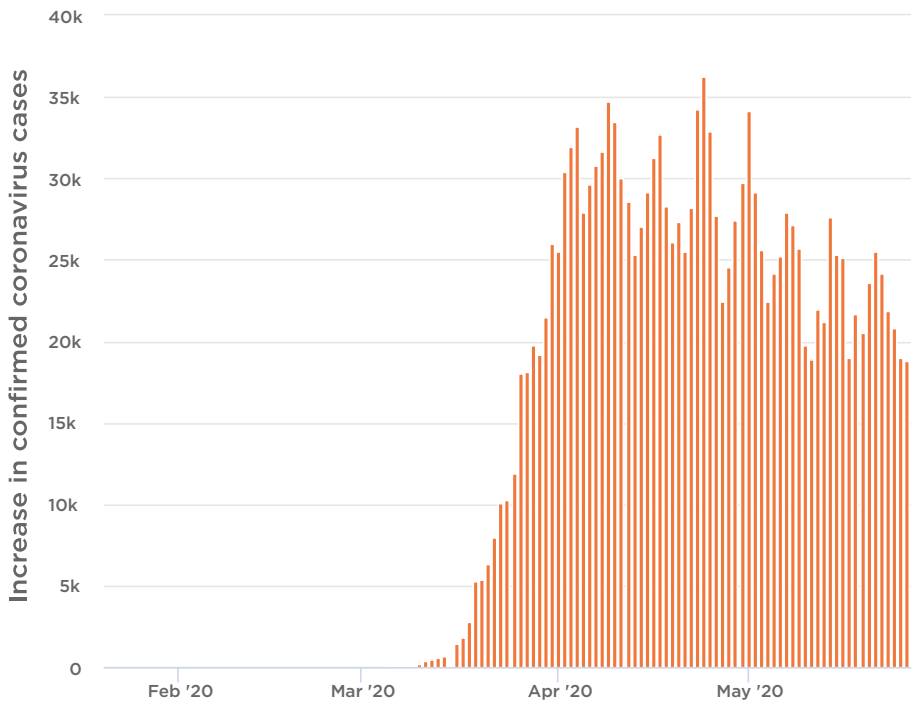
Since the beginning of May 2020, the US curve of new COVID-19 cases has been flattening. From a high of more than 36,000 new cases, it was trending downwards to between 21,000 to 27,000 new cases per day in late May.⁹ When the tri-state area around New York City is “excluded from the national case count,” the number of daily cases is rising, however.¹⁰ With more than 30 US states easing lockdowns, medical experts worry about a spike in new cases, particularly in rural and other areas lacking in health care access. “Large parts of the South and Appalachia are especially vulnerable,” according to a health-risk index identifying counties with high rates of underlying conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, heart disease, and chronic lung disease.^{11,12} These conditions have been known to increase the risk of anyone contracting the disease becoming severely ill.¹³

So far, the “most vulnerable and disadvantaged populations in the US” have been the hardest hit.¹⁴ While there is still only limited data, Johns Hopkins medical researchers have found that “black Americans and other historically disadvantaged groups are experiencing infection and death rates that are disproportionately high for their share of the total population.”¹⁵ Asian Americans and Latinx Americans also show elevated impacts in some regions.¹⁶ These groups are also overrepresented in the essential jobs in health care, food supply, and transportation where they are more likely to be exposed to the virus.¹⁷

Slow Recovery

Any economic recovery in the United States is projected to be staggered and slow. Restrictions will likely remain in place on some activities—large sporting and cultural events, restaurants, and other venues where social distancing cannot be assured. Many borders are likely to remain shut or highly controlled for some time to come. The lockdown will be eased in phases, with a total lifting dependent on the availability of a vaccine. US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell does not expect the US economy to be full recovered until the end of 2021. That assumes there will be no second wave which would prompt a reversion to lockdown

FIGURE 2. Daily Increase of Confirmed Coronavirus Cases in the United States as of May 26, 2020



Source: Johns Hopkins University and Medicine Coronavirus Resource Center

conditions. Powell also believes a vaccine is needed for the US economy to fully recover.¹⁸

China is perhaps farthest along the path to economic recovery with many conditions such as increased manufacturing and greater traffic congestion in Beijing and other cities reappearing. In early May, however, several provinces in northeast China were “reimposing lockdown measures in reaction to 34 new cases of the coronavirus,”¹⁹ affecting 25 million people. These measures were taken despite the fact that the number of new cases in China remains very low, not exceeding “100 per day since mid-April.” The fear remains, nevertheless, of a larger outbreak if lockdowns are not imposed in areas where new cases are reported.

Japan, Singapore, and South Korea have similar experiences of an increase in new cases, requiring the reimposition of restrictions. Many of the new cases resulted from returning nationals who brought the disease with them from Europe or the United States. There has been some easing of borders, for example, between China and the Koreas, but not a wholesale return to the admission of international visitors from other countries. If the experience of these countries is any guide, the lifting of lockdowns in the West will not be a smooth path. Restrictions will be reimposed where outbreaks occur. With increased testing, there will be the ability to localize the

lockdowns, sparing a reversion to another blanket lockdown as long as out-breaks are caught early. Germany, Italy, and Spain are nevertheless moving this summer towards accepting international visitors in order to help save their tourist and travel industries.

Only when “safe and effective tools for mitigating the risk of COVID-19 are available, including broad surveillance, therapeutics that can rescue patients with significant disease or prevent serious illness in those most at risk, or a safe and effective vaccine” can all the various restrictions, including social distancing, be completely lifted.²⁰

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) expects unemployment to average 15 percent in the latter half of 2020, gradually reducing to 8.6 percent by the fourth quarter of 2021, which is over five percentage points above the unemployment level in March 2020 before the lockdown in the United States.²¹ Others are forecasting an even higher unemployment rate, closer to the 20-25 percent rate of the Great Depression.

According to the CBO, “low-wage workers and low-income families have borne the brunt” of the downturn. “Workers who are younger, female, have less education, and are from certain racial or ethnic groups have seen disproportionately large job losses,” it said. For example, while “employment between February and April declined by 16 percent overall, it decreased by 31 percent for people ages 16 to 24, by 18 percent for women regardless of age, by 19 percent for people age 25 or older without a bachelor’s degree, and by 21 percent for Hispanic workers regardless of age. Among black workers, employment declined by 18 percent.”²²

Forecasts by the CBO and others see an approximate 6 percent drop in GDP for 2020. This assumes the second half of 2020 will see renewed economic activity. Should a second wave of the disease occur this fall with more lockdowns, the drop in GDP could be greater before a recovery in 2021 to 4.4 percent.²³ The International Monetary Fund (IMF) believes the eurozone could see an even bigger drop of 7.5 percent before a 2021 recovery.²⁴ With the exception of China and other emerging markets, the rest of the world also will drop into negative territory this year,²⁵ according to the IMF. The drop in China’s growth rate to barely 1 percent this year constitutes a shock, breaking a record of elevated growth in the country since 1993.²⁶

The United States’ stimulus package that passed in record time constitutes 11 percent of GDP, more than 5 percent above what was levied following the 2008 financial crisis to restore growth.²⁷ Because of the steep drop in economic activity, many experts believe further fiscal and monetary measures will be needed. Similar to the 2008 financial crisis, there is a growing risk that the middle class will suffer another drop in its standard of living, particularly if unemployment remains high for a long period.

The United States, like other countries, is facing a difficult choice that could have long-term implications. If it does not keep strict measures in place for long enough, the pandemic could flare up fueling a second wave, endangering more lives and undermining the economic recovery. If it does not ease up, however, the damage to the economy will be even greater, stalling a recovery.

CHAPTER 2

US GLOBAL LEADERSHIP AT RISK

The coronavirus pandemic has also put US global leadership at stake. Countries are waiting to see how quickly the United States moves past the crisis, whether it takes on the mantle of global leadership in response to the pandemic, and if authoritarian powers, particularly China, more effectively weather the storm. The global order could, therefore, be fundamentally reshaped by the virus, especially if the world's major economic powers—the United States, the European Union (EU), and China—suffer an extended economic depression and limit engagement beyond their borders. The United States also risks a severe decline in soft power if it is seen to be struggling to manage the virus or failing to provide help to partners abroad.

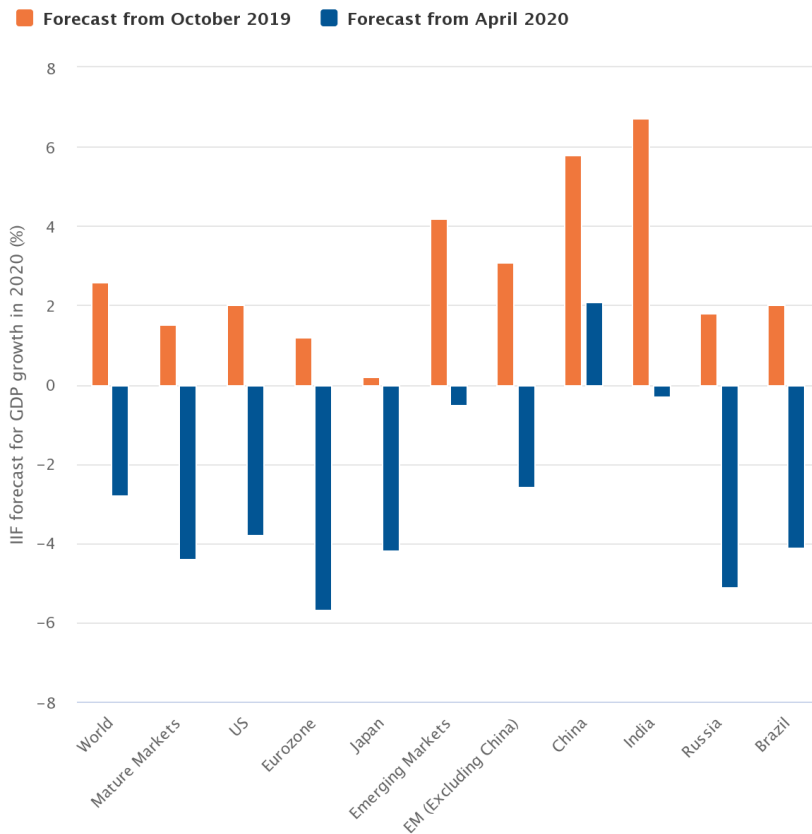
The US record is not encouraging so far at the high political level. Washington did not coordinate its decision to close its borders to most European nationals with their governments. Unlike after the 2008 financial crisis, the G7 and G20 meetings have been perfunctory, with every country looking after itself and taking measures to stop the spread of the virus domestically. At the institutional level, however, the Federal Reserve has been “unshackled,” working with its international counterparts to temper the dollar flight in the developing world and ensure there are enough dollars for foreign businesses.²⁸ If there were an international meltdown, such as happened in the 1930s, the US recovery would be that much harder.

The test of leadership will really come once the United States has started its recovery and others in the developing world are still struggling. Will Washington turn back to “America First” or position itself to help those in the developing world who will be hard hit, too? Very little of the \$2.2 trillion stimulus package, for example, is dedicated to the international recovery. As of mid-May, United States, along with some other countries such as Switzerland and the United Kingdom, were pushing against the World Health Organization's proposal for “open licensing of patents and know-how for drugs and vaccines”²⁹ to the dismay of many African leaders who remember having to fight for low-cost HIV/AIDS drugs to be provided to suffering Africans. On the other hand, the EU has taken a position in favor of open licensing while Chinese President Xi Jinping has said that any vaccine “will be treated as a public good.”³⁰ On May 29, US President Donald J. Trump announced that the United States will sever all ties with the World Health Organization (WHO).

A Step Change In Sino-American Relations?

The US foreign policy elite worries that the United States could lose the global leadership contest with China if Washington perseveres with its “America First” approach.³¹ There is bipartisan agreement that China is to blame for the coronavirus outbreak. Chinese wild animal markets

FIGURE 3. The West Taking a Hit



Source: Institute of International Finance, Capital Flows Report: Sudden Stop in Emerging Markets. ©2020 Institute of International Finance, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

have long been seen as a danger for pandemic outbreaks. Both Democrats and Republicans are incensed about the US dependence on China for pharmaceuticals and medical supplies. At a minimum, a decoupling in this and other realms seems in the offing. Never again should the United States find itself in such a disadvantageous position vis-à-vis China. Compounding the anger is the realization that China is pulling out of the crisis ahead of the United States and is already starting its economic recovery. All Western countries, including the United States, will lose GDP.

In the short term, both the United States and China may need each other to ensure a chance at a global recovery. In 2008, China reflatd its economy and, in doing so, helped the rest of the world recover. In late May, Chinese leaders announced a much smaller stimulus package. Beijing will issue bonds and raise the fiscal deficit by only a combined RMB 5.8 trillion (\$813 billion).³² China does not appear to have the same capacity or willingness for a large recovery package. China's total debt load amounts to about 310 percent, and some observers believe it does not have the appetite for a major economic stimulus initiative.³³ If the global recovery is long and halting, and does not deliver on jobs, both leaderships in the United States and China will face real tests and in this soured atmosphere, protectionism and Sino-American frictions will

become even stronger. The bottom line is, the COVID-19 pandemic may end up reinforcing Xi and the Communist Party of China's (CPC's) authoritarian tendencies on the one hand, and an "America First" reaction on the other.

Another Test For Europe

A lack of multilateral and bilateral European solidarity—the third time within the last decade (migration, the eurozone crisis, and now COVID-19)—*could* be the catalyst for further erosion of the EU. But crises have historically propelled the EU to greater heights of integration. The coronavirus has affected the Mediterranean South: Italy and Spain, for example, have complained about lack of support from Brussels.³⁴ However, we have seen the European Commission show flexibility on deficit spending. The European Central Bank (ECB) is promising to do “what it takes”³⁵ to protect the euro and help with the recovery of individual member states.

EU COVID-19 fiscal stimulus, including the recent Eurogroup package, brings the total to more than €3 trillion, which is the largest in the world. While Germany and the Netherlands continue to oppose even limited mutualization of debt, as represented by the “coronabonds,” in early May we saw France and Germany come together to propose a \$543 billion recovery fund providing grants, not loans, to the hardest-hit regions in Europe. This fund has still to be approved by other member states and is expected to face opposition from Austria, Finland, and the Netherlands. Without large-scale help, there is worry that a struggling post-COVID-19 Italy could spark the next eurozone crisis.

The chances of Europe alone saving the multilateralist framework for international relations are slim without help from the United States and acquiescence from China. An early and strong US recovery, combined with a change in leadership in Washington, could see the two sides of the Atlantic relaunch an effort to refurbish and reform international institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the WHO, Bretton Woods institutions, and others. But it will require the United States and the EU taking more responsibility for the developing world's predicaments, countering China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). A broader US and European coming together against China would also be needed to make it work and avert an East-West competition in which, just like during the Cold War, the developing world would not necessarily be a winner.

East Asian Allies Dismayed By America First Approach

The US foreign policy elite is concerned about three areas with respect to the pandemic's impact on US relationships with its allies in East Asia: first, the contrast between US, Chinese, and East Asian responses to the pandemic and longstanding impacts on legitimacy within the region; second, China's already apparent interest in reviving the East



Extensive lockdown measures meant to halt the spread of the coronavirus in New York City have left most city streets empty.

ALEC FAVALE ON UNSPLASH

Asian economy with itself at the center; third, the loss of US leadership in East Asia if Washington persists with its “America First” approach toward the region in the months and years to come.

The first and second concerns are linked. China already has moved from being at the pandemic’s global epicenter (and the heart of criticism for its response domestically) to touting its success in beating it back (assuming its data is to be believed). Its current position stands in stark contrast to that of the United States, which has become the epicenter of the pandemic. Since China, as well as Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan, have all apparently brought the pandemic under some modicum of control, this region of the world stands to get back to work sooner than either Europe or the United States. For the moment, Asians have been ruffled by China’s aggressive behavior in pushing back on accusations against its handling of the pandemic. After the Australian government’s call for an independent investigation into the origins of pandemic, China retaliated with stiff tariffs on Australia’s barley exports. Tensions between Taiwan and China have been on the rise ever since Tsai Ing-wen was elected Taiwan’s president, but the coronavirus has further strained the relationship after Beijing’s efforts to block Taiwan’s representation at WHO meetings. Beijing’s decision to impose a national security law on Hong Kong has also angered Asian countries.

Over time, despite China's soft power failures, the risk is that the United States' regional allies will become more dependent on China as they attempt to restart their economies. For the United States, the key question for the current period and the post-pandemic one is whether it can retain the vibrancy and strength of its alliances in East Asia. If the United States does not demonstrate both an interest and a commitment to leading through example and outreach, then the odds are that China will gain at the United States' expense within East Asia and elsewhere in 2020 and well beyond. Conversely, if the United States were to lead a G20-directed effort alongside Europe and China, if it leads and expands its financial cooperation within multilateral institutions (the IMF/World Bank, the Asian Development Bank), and, moreover, works closely with its Asian allies and partners, then it might emerge not only with its regional position intact, but perhaps with a stronger reputation regionally and globally.

Middle East In Turmoil Even Before Pandemic Hit

The pandemic struck a Middle East that was already laboring under overlapping political, economic, security, and humanitarian crises. There are deep concerns about how long stability can be maintained in the face of these multiple crises, considering the pandemic's turbulent effects on a region characterized by turbulence. Governments across the region have put social distancing and other measures into place, policies made urgent given that the virus arrived in the region early, via Iran, and with deadly impact. Yet perhaps more than anywhere else in the world, the region's governments are facing intense and often contradictory pressures resulting from the need to protect public health and promote economic recovery while ensuring political stability.

One significant dilemma is that the region's public health systems could be swamped if social distancing is lifted and the pandemic explodes. Iran, the region's early epicenter, began reopening in April only to see its cases surge in May, threatening not only to eliminate any fragile economic recovery but also reignite the pandemic.³⁶ Similar outbreaks occurred in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states after governments lifted restrictions over Ramadan, causing them to reinstate lockdowns and other measures.³⁷ In those countries hit hardest by conflict (Iraq, Syria, Yemen), weak or non-existent public health systems plus ongoing violence and mass displacement means that humanitarian worst-case scenarios are possible. (On-the-ground reporting from Yemen indicates that a pandemic-driven crisis already is underway; in contrast, evidence from the region's many Syrian refugee camps mercifully suggests that the camps thus far are spared the infection, if not the social and economic fallout.)³⁸

The pandemic's long-range impacts will add to the region's list of structural challenges. That list starts with economic reform. For the major oil- and gas-producing states (the GCC member states, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Algeria), the pandemic's impact is revealing, once again, the dangers of

being overly reliant on hydrocarbons for economic growth.³⁹ Driven by a collapse in global demand and a glut in supply, during the spring of 2020, global oil prices slid to rock-bottom levels. Although prices have stabilized, sustained lower oil prices are likely given the odds of an ongoing global recession. Moreover, the tourism industry, a major part of the economy of several countries (the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, and more), has also taken a substantial hit.⁴⁰ Impacts on employment and government revenues are already severe.

For the region's governments, the pandemic opens up yet another structural challenge: the legitimacy of their rule. Although governments the world over are facing their constituents' frustrations amidst the pandemic, nowhere is the legitimacy issue more acute than in the Middle East. Although temporarily stilled by COVID-19 lockdowns, simmering discontent with social, economic, and political conditions is never far from the surface across much of the region. Multiple governments have instituted measures designed to eliminate public criticism of their pandemic responses.⁴¹ Over the longer run, it is unclear whether governments will be able to prevent pandemic-driven mass dissent along the lines of the Arab Spring, now nearly a decade in arrears.

How the region's geopolitical reshuffling will be impacted is equally unclear. The regional powers all face their own internal (domestic) public health, economic, political, and security challenges related to the virus. Of these, both Saudi Arabia and Iran face the oil producers' dilemma as described above. Although neither will escape unscathed, Iran arguably is in a worse position owing to the double impact of ongoing US sanctions, which have affected its ability to sell its oil (even at a reduced price) and to repatriate revenues from sales abroad.⁴² For non-regional powers that historically are most active in the region, specifically the United States, Europe, and Russia, the pandemic raises two questions: how will the pandemic force them to reevaluate their interests in the region, and how much are they willing to invest in the region going forward? It is not a stretch to imagine that many allies fear a hard-hit and divided United States will be even less willing to engage than before.

Africa Left To Deal Alone With Pandemic?

Any assessment of Africa must begin with the caveat that generalizing about the continent is dangerous owing to its enormous size, dozens of countries, thousands of ethnic and linguistic groupings, diverse natural ecosystems, and divergent economies. Nonetheless, as elsewhere, the pandemic's short- and long-term impacts on Africa (here meaning sub-Saharan Africa) have touched every aspect of society.

Thus far, Africa has been spared the worst public health impacts. As of May 22, the entire continent had only just passed the 100,000-case mark, with even fewer deaths, around 3,100.⁴³ Much credit appears to go to the continent's governments, many of which have drawn on their experiences handling previous viral outbreaks such as Ebola to implement swift and

robust countermeasures. These countermeasures include the rapid scaling of testing, widespread contact tracing carried out by trained workers, travel bans and travel protocols, plus a variety of other tools to combat the disease's spread.⁴⁴ And although the continent's hotter weather may not, in the end, prove of much help in mitigating COVID-19 transmission (Brazil's current infection rate indicates that the virus transmits easily in warmer temperatures), the pandemic's eventual public health impact in Africa, in particular mortality, likely also will be checked by Africa's "youth dividend" (the continent is the youngest in the world).

Yet, as is true elsewhere in the world, African governments are facing the harsh tradeoffs between protecting public health through retaining their countermeasures versus striving for much-needed economic recovery. As an example, as of late May, South Africa had relatively few cases (around 22,000), the result of early nationwide restrictions. Yet the virus has been stubborn, showing signs of renewed momentum in parts of the country. Despite this evidence, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has been under severe pressure to get the economy moving again and has begun its gradual reopening.⁴⁵

A widespread fear is that if COVID-19 caseloads surge across Africa, public health systems will quickly be overwhelmed. African countries face critical shortages of hospital beds and respirators and do not have the means to manufacture their own domestic supplies of medical items. Much concern centers on African cities, which contain some of the highest concentrations of slum dwellers in the world (more than half of all African urbanites live in slums, constituting well over 200 million people).⁴⁶ For residents of densely packed slums, social distancing and other countermeasures (handwashing with soap multiple times a day) simply are not possible. Moreover, their high poverty levels (85 percent of Africans live on less than \$5.50 a day) mean that most people cannot withstand a lengthy economic standstill.⁴⁷

Regardless of the public health impacts, Africa's many fragile economies will be dealt a very difficult blow. In April, Rwandan President Paul Kagame suggested Africa might take "a generation or more" to recover economically, absent decisive and coordinated action from abroad.⁴⁸ As with other world regions, the long-term question involving the global powers looks at how they will reassess their interests in engaging Africa during and after the pandemic, and what resources they will be willing to offer a severely impacted continent. Given China's increased activity in Africa, how will the two biggest global powers game out their interests and presence on the continent during and after the pandemic? Another analogy is to the Middle East: given Europe's physical proximity to Africa plus its longstanding security and economic ties, will Europeans choose to deepen their engagement with Africa, or will Europe attempt to wall itself off from possible downside consequences of the pandemic emanating from the continent?

An Economic Test For Putin And Russia

As of June 4, there were more than 440,000 cases of COVID-19 in Russia, with only the United States and Brazil topping that number. The number of deaths was surprisingly low—just over 5,000—prompting experts to believe that many deaths from coronavirus have been incorrectly attributed to other causes.⁴⁹ The Russian government downplayed the seriousness of the coronavirus for many weeks before calling for a lockdown at the end of March. Russian President Vladimir Putin had to concede that a referendum on constitutional changes could not go ahead last April, and he also had to cancel the big May 9 Victory Day parade.⁵⁰

Before the crisis hit Russia, the Kremlin had been trying to score points, like China, against Western democracies with a public display of sending medical aid to Italy and New York. The real test for the regime is whether its standing takes a major long-term hit from the lack of preparation for the high number of cases.⁵¹ Putin's popularity dropped to 59 percent in an April survey by the independent Levada-Center, "the lowest point in more than two decades of his rule."⁵²

As Russia begins to ease its lockdown, medical experts say Putin is taking a gamble by reopening while the number of cases remains high although well below the daily peak of 10,000 or more. A rebound in the number of cases would add to the embarrassment for Putin who had hoped to convince the Russian public to keep him in power for another decade after his current term ends in 2024. Russia's GDP is expected to drop 4-6 percent this year as a result of the lockdown and low energy prices.

Latin America Vulnerable To Commodity Cycle

At the outset of the pandemic, a number of governments in Latin America took swift and aggressive action to curb the virus spread, including travel bans, border controls, quarantines, curfews, states of emergency, and more. Peru's government, for example, issued an early and well-enforced national lockdown, coupled with an aid package designed to help its citizens weather the resulting economic storm.⁵³ For a while, these and other measures taken by governments across much of Latin America appeared to spare the region from a full-scale public health crisis.

However, the region's initially promising situation soon reversed, and Latin America found itself on the global front lines of the pandemic for all the wrong reasons. By late May, new cases in the region had begun to surge past Europe and North America. Several countries faced rapidly mounting number of cases. Johns Hopkins University data showed Brazil leading the region in new cases and mortality, surpassing 584,000 cases and almost 33,000 dead, as of June 4. Brazil's rapidly increasing case count displaced Russia for second place on the global COVID-19 list. Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, and Peru also faced serious case and (often) mortality numbers.⁵⁴

Of the hardest-hit countries in the region, some did not benefit from their initially wise policies. Peru, for instance, fell victim to regional disparities in

social distancing behavior combined with high transmission rates in crowded urban slums.⁵⁵

Many governments were scrutinized for the accuracy of their case rates, even as they began to lay plans to lift economic restrictions. Mexico's government, to provide a notable example, was accused of seriously undercounting its sick and dead from COVID-19 owing to minimal testing, with the government coming under severe criticism as it began to lift restrictions.⁵⁶ No country faced a more serious test than did Brazil, owing largely to searing disputes between its populist president, Jair Bolsonaro, and its governors and mayors. Bolsonaro drew widespread criticism at home and abroad not only for his unwillingness to treat the disease as a serious public health threat, but also for his government's ineffectual and often chaotic response. Brazil's inability to come to grips with this pandemic contrasts with its often-innovative responses to previous public health scares, including HIV/AIDS and the Zika virus.⁵⁷

As a general proposition, Latin America's structural unpreparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic underlies these storylines. Public health authorities at national and sub-national levels often have limited capacities, state budgets are tight, and the region features many millions of low-income people. As a result, Latin America contains much tinder for pandemic hot spots, as is now being seen for instance in the slums of Lima or São Paulo or among indigenous communities in the Amazon basin, which straddle numerous countries. Added to this mix is a governance credibility gap, as is being shown in Brazil and to some extent in Mexico, and that very much includes Venezuela, which has been struggling with massive economic dislocation and dysfunctional governance, including a non-functioning public health system, for years.⁵⁸

For the region's governments and global powers, specifically the United States, the EU, and China, the major questions involve the region's economic recovery. As with the Middle East's oil producers, many of Latin America's economies remain overly reliant on the commodity cycle, which in turn means they are severely impacted by global recessions. All governments face massive pressure to return to normal, given the economic impacts that already are being felt; Argentina, for example, already has had to flirt with a default on its national debt.⁵⁹ Although Latin America is not yet a competitive battleground between China and the United States, the degree to which the United States or China helps the region's countries through their post-pandemic recoveries could determine whether China's influence increases at the expense of the United States'.

India And South Asia: Potential Humanitarian Disaster

In late May, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi pivoted from lockdown to reopening despite the continuing rise in cases of COVID-19, more than 140,000. Admitting that the virus will be part of Indian life, Modi called for Indians to get back to work. The government worries about the collapse of the economy and strained public finances.⁶⁰ Goldman Sachs has forecasted



A paramedic in Ahmedabad, India, uses an infrared thermometer to measure a police officer's temperature on April 9, 2020, during a nationwide lockdown to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

REUTERS/AMIT DAVE

India's GDP "will contract 45 per cent quarter-on-quarter from April to June."⁶¹ The lockdown in India in late March caused widespread confusion, interrupting the flow of essential supplies such as food and causing a migrant crisis.⁶² India, which is the world's largest producer of generic drugs, had banned in early March the export of the antimalarial drug hydroxychloroquine, which has been touted by some, including Trump, as being able to treat COVID-19. India later lifted the ban after apparent pressure from Trump.⁶³ There is, however, continuing controversy over the claims about hydroxychloroquine with Trump admitting in May that he was taking the drug. While some French tests have suggested chloroquine could be helpful, other small trials from China indicate that the drug has little impact. As of late May, France had banned the use of hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19 patients. Some US medical experts believe it has worsened the condition of patients. The WHO is undertaking further investigations.

In Pakistan, the civilian government has played down the threat of the virus. Over Ramadan, the number of COVID-19 cases quadrupled and there were more than 48,000 cases increasing by 30 percent in one week in mid-May.⁶⁴ Religious authorities want to do away with any restrictions on gatherings while Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, like Modi, worries about economic costs of any form of continued lockdown. The military had tried to enforce a lockdown in late March, but many of the restrictions had begun to ease by early May. Pakistan's public health system is extremely ill-equipped to handle any crisis—it only has, for example, 600 ICU beds for Karachi's population of 20 million.

CHAPTER 3

THREE SCENARIOS

SCENARIO 1

Great Accelerator Downwards

The United States, Europe, and China all struggle to recover despite major fiscal and monetary efforts. The recovery stretches well into the 2020s, aggravated by the fact that it takes much longer for a vaccine to be developed than hoped for. Initially, there is an effort to replicate the post-2008-09 financial crisis period with summits of G7 and G20 leaders to map out a global recovery. But those summits soon break down, and Washington and Beijing revert to the usual blame game. A newly reelected Trump administration seeks to exploit the crisis by trying to wring concessions out of China on ending states' subsidies to state-owned enterprises (SOEs), more market access for US firms, and guarantees against mandatory intellectual property/tech transfers for US firms doing business in China.

As long as China refuses, the United States maintains tariffs on Chinese exports and blocks new Chinese investments. Chinese leaders, for their part, will want to avoid adding to the debt burden with a huge stimulus package the way they did after the 2008 financial crisis. China's stimulus efforts are smaller in scale.

For the Europeans, there is a turn toward greater solidarity with a European Commission-administered rescue package that offers grants to hard-hit members. Nevertheless, the road back to growth stretches well into the 2020s. Despite the initial help from its fellow EU member states, Italy finds it difficult to stabilize after the devastating human and economic costs of the pandemic. Unstable politically and economically, Italians seek additional help that other EU member states are reluctant to provide without Italy undertaking major structural reforms. EU institutions are once again paralyzed as divisions deepen between north and south.

Europe is, furthermore, split over whether to back the United States in its "decoupling" threats against China. Many Europeans blame China for the pandemic, much like US public opinion, but an increasing number of countries in the south and east are grateful for Chinese help during the crisis and even afterwards, as new Chinese investments are made in those regions.

The developing world is even more hard hit economically despite the fact that the worst forecasts of large-scale deaths in Africa and Latin America never come true. Death tolls resemble those in the West. The virus weakened as it moved south and the youthful populations—many of whom suffered

minor symptoms— diminished the contagion. With the major economic powers hard hit, recovery is extremely difficult. Commodity prices remain low, hurting those developing countries that are dependent on the export of minerals, oil, etc. Chinese investments help, but CPC leaders are wary of providing much assistance largesse for fear the Chinese public is angered while conditions remain hard at home. Popular discontent against the CPC rises with China's faltering domestic economy.

As during the Great Depression, there are many false starts, giving the illusion that the corner is about to be turned, justifying governments' stubbornness in persevering with failing policies. Unlike in the 1930s, there is enough of a social safety net that discontent is contained despite slowly sinking standards of living in much of the world. The other is always to blame. Sino-American tensions escalate to an all-time high. The United States takes strong protectionist measures against China and Russia for their "disinformation," deciding finally to erect a firewall against the two. Observers think the United States is preparing for a cyber war against China and Russia.

By the mid-2020s, deglobalization is speeding up, yielding slow economic growth everywhere. Poverty levels are rising in the developing world and there is the potential for open conflict between the United States and a China-Russia alliance.

SCENARIO 2

China First

China has not fully recovered, but its leadership sees an opportunity to undermine Western liberal democracy's credibility by expanding assistance with increased soft loans and more infrastructure projects. "Belt and Road-type" deals are expanded to more states in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, giving Beijing ownership over critical infrastructure in more countries. At home, the CPC is successfully bolstering public support by portraying Western democracies as unable to deal effectively with the pandemic. Where this does not work, Xi ruthlessly suppresses any criticism of the regime.

In the run-up to the 2020 election in the United States, Trump whips up anti-Chinese fervor to cover up his administration's lack of preparation and the slow recovery. Asian-Americans are attacked. Populism gains hold, but there is a move towards socialism. Democratic US Sen. Bernie Sanders' ideas on better health care and free universities take hold as many in the middle class struggle to rebuild their lives from the Depression-like economic plunge. A large proportion of those let go by large firms at the height of the pandemic are not rehired by companies that are finding it difficult to



Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe speaks during the G20 summit in Osaka, Japan, on June 29, 2019.

KAZUHIRO NOGI/POOL VIA REUTERS

return to profitability without cutting their labor force. For some companies, it is an opportunity to expand automation, including the use of robots.

With the national debt ballooning, a reelected Trump tries hard to resist, but eventually acquiesces and agrees to a temporary “wealth tax” as well as higher income taxes on the rich. As a second-term president, Trump knows he will not have to face a rebellion from his conservative base. Europeans, too, institute stiff taxes on the wealthy.

With China expanding its influence, the United States and Europe draw closer on foreign policy. Despite some European states shying away from criticizing China, the United States, along with France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, moves to rethink NATO. Should NATO not be more active in countering China? US foreign policy experts worry that with Russia and China strengthening their bonds, we are facing a new Cold War. Washington thinks this fight will be harder because the United States is struggling economically.

In Asia, however, the United States' traditional allies reject a NATO-like alliance against China. Following the pandemic, they are ever more economically dependent on China. They secretly encourage the United States to step up its naval “freedom of commerce” patrols in the South China Sea,

while negotiating new free trade and investment agreements with Beijing.

With the continuing economic hard times and low energy prices, Saudi and other Gulf states' coffers are running dry. They drastically cut social welfare to save on budgetary outlays, increasing discontent. Other states in the Middle East have a harder time. A climate-related drought in the United States/Canada and Australia has raised food prices. Food riots break out in Cairo and other Middle Eastern and North African states. A Shia rebellion rocks Saudi Arabia's eastern province and Bahrain, worsening ties with Iran. Russia steps in to provide food aid financed by its close partner China to stem the discontent and support the authoritarian rulers. China negotiates deals with Saudi Arabia for lower future energy prices in return for immediate Chinese assistance.

On the bright side, the United Nations reverses its 2019 judgment that the world is not doing enough to curb its emissions. As long as current levels of lower emissions are sustained, the world will meet its target of keeping the global temperature rise to no more than 1.5-2.0°C. The United Nations calls on countries to introduce more renewables, which can ensure emissions do not rise during the slow global economic recovery.

For the many countries outside Europe, the United States appears in sharp decline. Despite China's responsibility for the outbreak, the pandemic has tilted the geopolitical balance in its favor.

SCENARIO 3

New Renaissance

As the global economy collapses, G7 and G20 leaders with a new US leader at the helm rise above nationalistic impulses and forge an agreement on a coordinated recovery plan, including the lifting of border closures and relaxation of tariffs and other trade barriers. After a slow start, the recovery gains traction and the major economies see renewed growth. The V-shaped recovery finally happens. However, it took several quarters before the takeoff occurred, helped by the discovery and rapid dissemination of a vaccine.

During that period, the G20, with renewed US backing, convened and set in motion a coordinated effort with drug companies to find and distribute a vaccine. The G20 made sure that everyone in the world would be vaccinated without charge, which increased market confidence.

Across the world, public sentiment insisted such a disaster should never happen again. Leaders saw what happened in the United States as Trump was swept out of office. There are widespread calls for all governments to reform. Never again should the warnings be ignored nor should governments be caught so flat-footed. G20 leaders call on the WHO and other UN agencies, the Bretton Woods institutions, and the WTO to establish a warning agency on disease, conflict, and climate. Some leaders want to go further and empower such an agency to levy sanctions against countries that defy warnings. The EU is the first to say it would agree to the plan for a superagency,

seeing it as a way to make sure China becomes a responsible global citizen, not just on disease control, but also on climate and avoiding conflict with its neighbors.

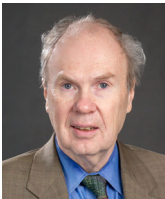
Forced by international pressure, China permanently closes its wild animal markets and starts enforcing new laws that prohibit livestock in dense urban areas. As long as the super warning agency is not packed with Western countries, but also includes substantial Chinese and developing world representation, Beijing is persuaded to back the initiative, seeing it as a good counter against the protectionist measures which the United States and Europe have threatened China with after the pandemic.

Even though the new US president is personally in favor, many Americans object to what they see as a big step towards “world government.” Just as the League of Nations split Americans, there are heated debates, but the recent memory of the pandemic and near-economic collapse sways just enough lawmakers in Washington that the vote passes by a slim margin.

No one thinks this will be the end of Sino-American differences, but it means that in several areas the United States and China will be working together. Trade negotiations will still be difficult, and Washington remains concerned about expanding Chinese influence with the BRI. US ties with Europe also improve, as for Europeans, Washington is back on a multilateralist path. Dealing with these global challenges brings the United States, the EU, China, and other states together. They can agree they all have a mutual interest in combatting climate change and future health crises. For the United States, China and Russia are still threats, but the efforts to counter them and their authoritarianism must be conducted carefully to avoid endangering the global fight against diseases, environmental destruction, and state failure. Increasingly now, the United States and the EU seek to convince China to wrap the BRI into a larger US-EU-China “Marshall Plan” for struggling countries in the developing world.

With the lowering of interstate tensions, economic growth resumes and, for the majority of the world’s population, the Sustainable Development Goals of eliminating poverty and spreading education are once again within reach.

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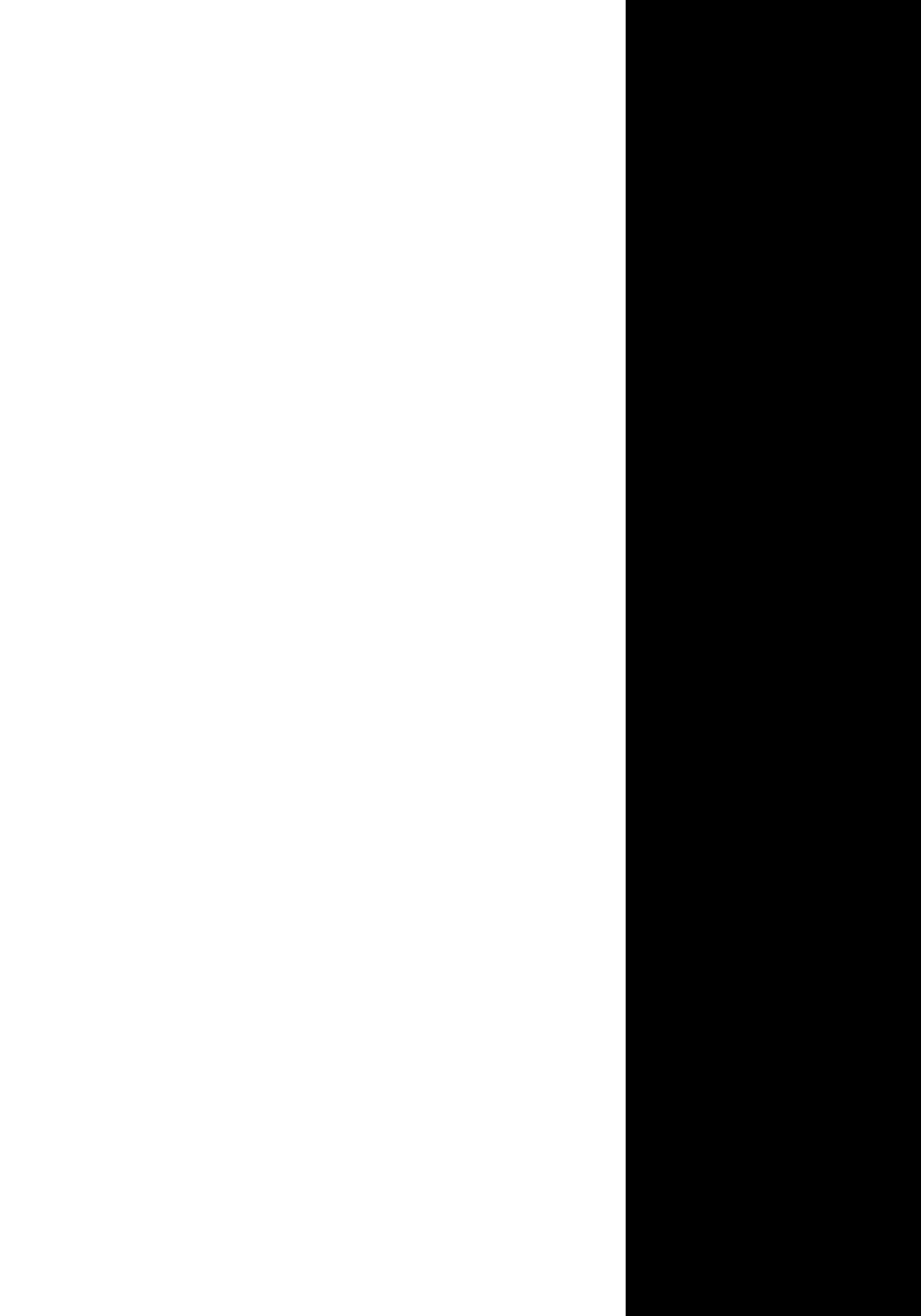
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