Coronavirus and International Affairs
Roundtable

Sponsored by the Coalition for Peace & Ethics, the Research Forum for Law and International Affairs, Penn State School of International Affairs, and Penn State Law

20 March 2020 | 10.00 a.m. - Noon
Pennsylvania State University
Lewis Katz Building Room 012
University Park, PA

Conference website: **QR Code** or

https://www.thecpe.org/projects/education-projects/roundtable-coronavirus-and-international-affairs/

Roundtable Description:

The emergence of a new strain of coronavirus, COVID-19, one of a more lethal strain of a class of virus that cause disease in humans, has had a profound effect on virtually all aspects of human activity. As of 28 February 2020, 2,868 deaths have been reported of 83,905 confirmed cases in 57 countries (*Worldometer, Coronavirus Death Toll* (28 Feb 2020)). While the medical and health implications of COVID-19 are profound, the effects of the disease on governance, law, and international affairs will likely be even more significant and long lasting. The COVID-19 epidemic has brought out both the best and worst of individuals and human societies. Those best and worst impulses may eventually embed themselves into the patterns of behavior and expressed as law, policy or cultural bias. This Roundtable brings together experts in law and international affairs from Asia, Europe, North America and the Caribbean to discuss the collateral effects of CORVID-19 in those terms. More specifically participants will speak to (1) misperceptions about the situation in China; (2) the use of coronavirus as a veil for racism; (3) national responses to perceptions of crisis; (4) effects of coronavirus on the movement of people, investment and capital across borders; (5) consequences of coronavirus for the state of international affairs and legal structures (e.g., quarantines, education, supply and production chains, human rights versus collective responsibilities, etc.); (6) repercussions for big global trade projects, with specific reference to the Belt and Road and America First initiatives; and (7) effects on education and other service industries. Inputs are welcome and will be posted to the conference website; participants will respond to questions delivered before the roundtable date. The Roundtable will be recorded and live streamed. Send questions and inputs to VirusConfPSU@gmail.com.

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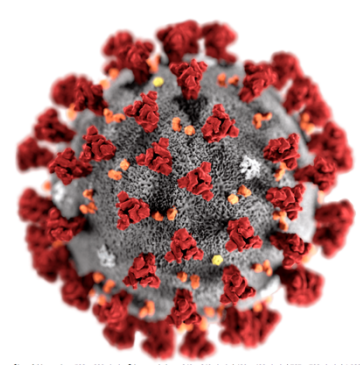
The emergence of a new strain of coronavirus, COVID-19, one of a more lethal strain of a class of virus that cause disease in humans, has had a profound effect on virtually all aspects of human activity. A February 2020 Report published in *JAMA* reported that of the 72,314 cases of COVID-19 studied (as of 11 February 2020), about 81% of the cases were classified as mild, but that mortality rates varied from about 15% for patients over 80 years of age, 8% for patients 70-79 years of age, and 49% among the critically ill. The average mortality for all people in the study was about 2.3% (*Study of 72,000 COVID-19 patients finds 2.3% death rate* (24 Feb. 2020)). Of these, male mortality (2.8%) exceeded female mortality (1.7%) (*Age, Sex, Existing Conditions of COVID-19 Cases and Deaths* (23 February 2020)). As of 28 February 2020, 2,868 deaths have been reported of 83,905 confirmed cases in 57 countries (*Worldometer, Coronavirus Death Toll* (28 Feb 2020)). By 27 February, the World Health Organization announced that the COVID-19 outbreak "has reached a 'decisive point' and has 'pandemic potential'" (*Coronavirus: Outbreak at 'decisive point' as WHO urges action*).

While the medical and health implications of COVID-19 are profound, the effects of the disease on governance, law, and international affairs will likely be even more significant and long lasting. China has been particularly hard hit, as the original epicenter of infection. Core provinces have been effectively quarantined, and the state has had to undertake significant measures to slow down and more quickly reduce the effects of infection. Chinese officials have been dealing with issues of administrative integrity in the response to the epidemic, as well as the traumatic responsibility to ensure the health and safety of its populations, and the need to rapidly expand its medical facilities to meet the needs of the sick. At the same time, China has seen a substantial collective response by people on the ground who have sacrificed livelihood, convenience and sometimes their lives to meet the threat posed by COVID-19 to the people, the state and society.

The effects of the COVID-19 infection in China has also had profound effects on supply and production chains running through China. For example, Alcoa Corp. recently noted supply chain bottlenecks in China for critical resources; Apple, Inc. announced that it would not meet its 2nd quarter financial guidance; Boston Scientific expected revenues from sales to China to be significantly affected; Best Buy expected difficulty in product availability from goods sources in China for much of 2020; and luxury brands seller Capri Holdings expected the sale of its goods worldwide to be negatively affected (*What Apple, Microsoft, Nike and other U.S. companies are saying about the coronavirus outbreak*).

The effects have been particularly notable in global financial markets. By the end of February 2020, for example, U.S. market indexes had lost about 4% of their value from pre-COVID-19 trading (*Dow Jones Plunges As Coronavirus Stock Market Correction Intensifies*). Yet, even in this context there were economic winners. Cisco Systems reported that its "Webex division, which develops and sells online meeting and video conferencing applications, has seen an expanded user base in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak. Traffic on some of Webex's routes in China has increased 22 times, while the company has seen between four and five times as many users in Japan, South Korea and Singapore" (*Here's how the 30 Dow industrials companies are prepping for the impact of the coronavirus*).

But the effects have not been limited to China. Neighboring Asian states, particularly South Korea and Japan, have been affected. On 28 February, authorities in Hokkaido declared a state of emergency; "The situation has become more serious. I'd like people to refrain from going outside over the weekend to protect your lives and health," Hokkaido Gov. Naomichi Suzuki said in the declaration" (*Hokkaido declares state of emergency over coronavirus*). Korea faces both a challenge in the protection of life and in the health of its economy (*South Korea Spends Billions to Blunt Coronavirus's Economic Impact*). European states have begun to experience substantial potential disruption of life and states have begun to take extraordinary measures in Italy and other European States (*Coronavirus: Quarantined inside Italy's red zone*; *France sees second coronavirus death; Greece confirms first case*). In the United States, President Trump recently appointed Vice President Pence to head a task force on federal responses to COVID-19 (*New coronavirus case may be 1st sign of "community spread" in U.S.*). By the end of February Brazil reported its first COV-19 case and the disease has made its way to sub-Saharan Africa (*Coronavirus latest: first infection reported in sub-Saharan Africa*) where "The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control reported the case on 27 February and said it was working to trace the infected person's contact." Israel has also reported its first case, with a suspected transmission from Italy (*Third Israeli Tests Positive for Coronavirus in Israel*). In many countries schools, from primary schools to universities, to have been closed and instructors are moving quickly to develop delivery of education remotely (*Coronavirus: Japan to close all schools to halt spread*). Much of Chinese education has now gone online (*100 Million Kids Have Gone Back to School Online*). At the same time universities have begun to ban overseas travel to designated states and to bring students home who are studying abroad.

The COVID-19 epidemic has brought out both the best and worst of individuals and human societies. Perhaps emblematic of these actions was the situation around the quarantining of cruise ships (*Coronavirus-contaminated cruise ships mirror the global crisis* ("The new coronavirus breaks down the promise of the cruise ship as a bubble of independent banality of the open ocean. As the virus — and fears of the virus — spread, the problems balloon, and the bubble bursts. And it shows how that environment reflects the medical, political, and cultural effects of epidemic disease."). Especially notable was the now well-known challenges for passengers in Japan (*Updates on Diamond Princess*) and Italy (*Costa Cruises says passenger has common flu, after 6,000 tourists were held amid coronavirus fears*). For example, while the actions of the Cambodian state in permitting passengers to disembark from a cruise ship was hailed as a positive humanitarian gesture , the discovery after disembarkation that at least one passenger was infected (*Coronavirus: How did Cambodia's cruise ship welcome go wrong?)* suggested the challenges that even the simplest action might produce (*Coronavirus Infection Found After Cruise Ship Passengers Disperse*). But the speed with which states closed their borders also indicated the fragility of globalization and its encouragement of free movement of people in the wake of fear of infection and the need to protect local populations (*Turkey and Pakistan close borders with Iran after eight deaths, while in northern Italy towns are on lockdown after jump in cases*).

Those best and worst impulses may eventually embed themselves into the patterns of behavior and expressed as law, policy or cultural bias. The outer boundaries of these worst impulses van border on the absurd. On 28 February 2020, for example, it was reported that a survey indicated that about 38% of beer drinkers are boycotting the Mexican beer Corona. "'There is no question that Corona beer is suffering because of the coronavirus,' said Ronn Torossian, the founder of 5WPR, the public relations firm which conducted the survey. 'Could one imagine walking into a bar and saying, "Hey, can I have a Corona?" or "Pass me a Corona",' he said" (*Coronavirus fear sparks boycott of Corona BEER as survey finds 38% of Americans say they now won't drink the lager*).

Outside of China there have been indications of mistrust of Chinese efforts (*China Spins Coronavirus Crisis, Hailing Itself as a Global Leader*). Insinuations of the connection between COVID-19 and bio-warfare activity have been made (*Coronavirus may have originated in lab linked to China's biowarfare program*). Inside China there has been a sense that the epidemic might be used strategically to weaken China. The equation of COVID-19 with China has produced episodes of anti-Chinese behaviors outside of China *('No Chinese allowed': Racism and fear are now spreading along with the coronavirus*). And it has provided an opportunity to express race and cultural prejudice (*Coronavirus outbreak leading to racism against Asians*) from eating habits to social organization to business (*Wave of racist attacks against Asian Americans in wake of coronavirus outbreak*). At the same time, people have flouted quarantine rules, potentially imperiling others, and increasing the likelihood of more severe steps taken in response by state authorities. Israeli researchers recently reported coming closer to a COV-19 vaccine (*Israeli scientists claim to be weeks away from coronavirus vaccine*). In South Korea "app developers there knew exactly how to react: They started coding. Mobile apps that help track the disease in South Korea ranked as six of the top 15 downloads on the country's Google Play app store on Thursday. Developers of some apps – which source their data from public government information – told CNN Business that they have been getting a surge in downloads since launching their products earlier this month" (*Coronavirus mobile apps are surging in popularity in South Korea*). At the same time, devices used to monitor and track individuals may become more commonplace, providing challenges in the context of data protection, markets for data and data use by private and public organs. At the same time, the transparency by state officials has been subject to criticism, and not just in China (*White House GAGS government health experts from speaking about coronavirus saying they must have Mike Pence's approval for EVERYTHING they say about mounting crisis - despite VP having zero medical qualifications*). While there may be perfectly good reasons for these decisions (among them the need to preserve social order and reduce likelihood of irrational panics), it is becoming clearer that, in either liberal democratic or Marxist-Leninist Systems, the failure to justify the modalities of transparency can subject the government and its officials to some sometimes substantial costs.

This Roundtable brings together experts in law and international affairs from Asia, Europe, North America and the Caribbean to discuss the collateral effects of CORVID-19 in those terms. Participants include Sun Ping (East China University of Political Science and Law); Flora Sapio (Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale); Keren Wang (Penn State Dept of Communication Arts and Sciences); Miaoqiang Dai (SIA MIA 2019): Alice Hong (SIA, RNLIA); and Larry Catá Backer (Penn State). In addition, interventions will be made with a focus on Africa and the Caribbean region. These may be delivered in written or oral form.

Participants will speak to seven broad issue areas:

(1) misperceptions about the situation in China;

(2) the use of coronavirus as a veil for racism;

(3) national responses to perceptions of crisis;

(4) effects of coronavirus on the movement of people, investment and capital across borders;

(5) consequences of coronavirus for the state of international affairs and legal structures (e.g., quarantines, education, supply and production chains, human rights versus collective responsibilities, etc.);

(6) repercussions for big global trade projects, with specific reference to the Belt and Road and America First initiatives; and

(7) effects on education and other service industries.

The Roundtable will be organized as follows: Each participant will be permitted a very short initial intervention (about 5 minutes), which can be supplemented by additional written materials posted to the Roundtable Website). Additional interventions may be added. After these initial statements, the Roundtable will be open to questions. The Roundtable will be developed in two forms. All interested individuals and organizations are encouraged to submit questions before 20 March 2020. Questions should be submitted via e-mail to VirusConfPSU@gmail.com with the subject line "Roundtable Questions."

Questions will be posted to the Conference Website to encourage further dialogue. These questions will be answered either during the Roundtable or thereafter. Questions submitted during the course of the Roundtable should be sent to the same address and will be answered on the Roundtable Website.

In addition, Inputs are welcome and will be posted to the conference website; participants will respond to questions delivered before the roundtable date. Individuals or organizations interested in submitting inputs should be guided by the theme of this Concept Note and more specifically by the focus of the seven discussion issue areas described above. Please identify yourselves and your organization if any that is submitting the Input and indicate whether you wish to include contact information. All inputs should be submitted to VirusConfPSU@gmail.com with the Subject heading "Roundtable Inputs."

The Roundtable will be recorded and live streamed.