

World order and international relations after COVID-19 pandemic

April 20, 2020

Speakers



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Coordinator of the United Nations and Regional Organizations working group at the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs (Egypt).



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Dr. Abdulazizbin Saqr
President of the Gulf Research Center (Saudi Arabia).



Dr. Fahad Al-Orabi Al-Harthy
Chairman of the Board of Directors of Asbar World Forum.

Moderator

The most prominent recommendations

Increasing investments in the health infrastructure and supporting government services provided in this regard. This will be based on the new situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic, including an active role of the health system in managing the crisis at the level of the Gulf countries in general and Saudi Arabia in particular.

Benefiting from COVID-19 pandemic as a turning point for emergency cases and for investment in building reliable public services during crises.

Taking the necessary precautions to deal with any US measures or sanctions against China after the breakout of COVID-19. This may reflect negatively on the Gulf region, considering that about 69% of the Gulf oil and gas exports go to East Asia, including China, India, Japan and South Korea.

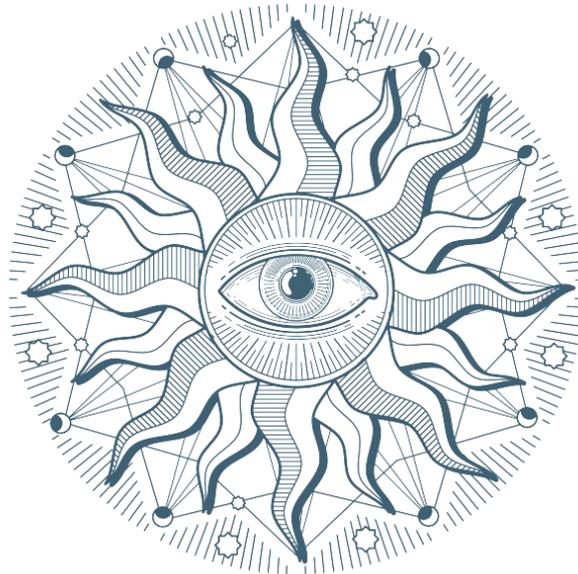
Developing foreign policies, taking into account the changes brought about by COVID-19 to the world order and establishing balanced international relations with all players in line with the national trends.

 The webinar is on the International Aspar Forum YouTube channel

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Webinar/ Asbar World Forum
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Themes:

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- **Third:** Indicators of international transformations resulting from COVID-19 pandemic.
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- Sources and references.

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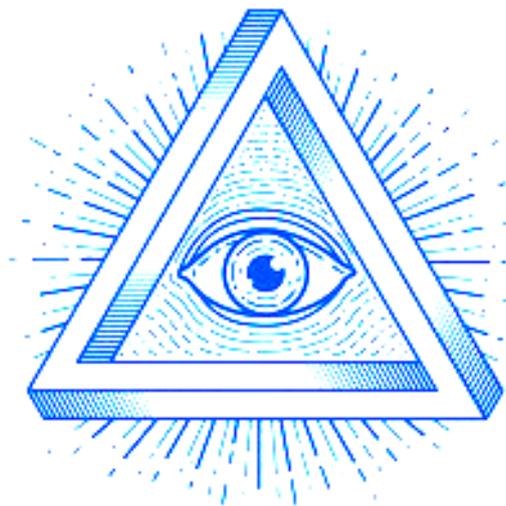


Dr. Fahad Al-Orabi Al-Harthy

Chairman of the Board of Directors of Asbar World Forum.

First: Recommendations.

- Increasing investments in the health infrastructure and supporting government services provided in this regard. This will be based on the new situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic, including an active role of the health system in managing the crisis at the level of the Gulf countries in general and Saudi Arabia in particular.
- Taking the necessary precautions to deal with any US measures or sanctions against China after the breakout of COVID-19. This may reflect negatively on the Gulf region, considering that about 69% of the Gulf oil and gas exports go to East Asia, including China, India, Japan and South Korea.
- Benefitting from COVID-19 pandemic as a turning point for emergency cases and for investment in building reliable public services during crises.
- Developing foreign policies, taking into account the changes brought about by COVID-19 to the world order and establishing balanced international relations with all players in line with the national trends.



Second: Will the COVID-19 pandemic become a turning point to the world order?

- Since the emergence of the national State and the formation of its "Westphalian" identity in 1648, the world order has experienced fundamental turning points. The structure of this order changed and a new order of power balance was subsequently established based on the type, number and nature of the rising and falling powers in the hierarchy of that system. The world before "Westphalia" is not the same after it.
- There were various landmarks that the world order experienced, going through the Industrial Revolution, the two world wars, the Cold War, 9/11 and the global war on terror. All of these events constituted major turning points in the world order, and charted a new pattern of international relations. What is certain is that the interconnected events and the continuous crises that struck and hit the world order are working to redraw the international policies and features of the post-Corona world order.



- Many pieces of evidence confirm that the COVID-19 pandemic will represent a pivotal turning point to the world order, including the following:
- **First:** Weak global reactions, despite the top priority that global governance gives to cooperation in combating infectious diseases. With the WHO being under scrutinization as the leading agency during the pandemic, international cooperation has abated rather than moving forward, as national governments grapple with the crisis largely individually. Even among the countries of the European Schengen region with visa exemptions, which have over the past few decades achieved a territorial unit, they also closed their borders. After a period of general progress towards regional integration and global governance in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, it appears that we are returning to a world in which certain countries are becoming dominant players.

- **Second:** COVID-19 had a significant negative impact on the global economy. Over the past few decades, national economies have been largely integrated into a network of global supply chains based on the division of international labor. There is no doubt that the pandemic has affected the movement of people more than the flow of goods. However, the restrictions on the movement of people and the reduced work hours of air transport have inevitably restricted the movement of goods as well. This marks a historic turning point to the decades of dominating policies.
- The economic impact of the Corona pandemic was evident, especially in sectors that depend on the movement of goods and individuals such as tourism, airlines, cruise operators and commercial shipping lines. It also led to the global supply chain for many important products being dependent on restrictions that limit the flexibility that enjoyed it in the past.
- **Third:** The COVID-19 pandemic revealed that governments are largely unable to address the social effects of the crisis, especially concerning social security and poor groups and those who have unstable jobs.
- The Corona pandemic has also underscored the irrational nature of the health-care systems that are centered around achieving more material gains at the expense of almost total overall spending on public hospital facilities and infrastructure. This includes intensive care beds and ventilators, shortage of public health reserves and the high cost of obtaining medical services in most countries, and how property rights to drug companies restricting rapid access to possible treatments and vaccines.

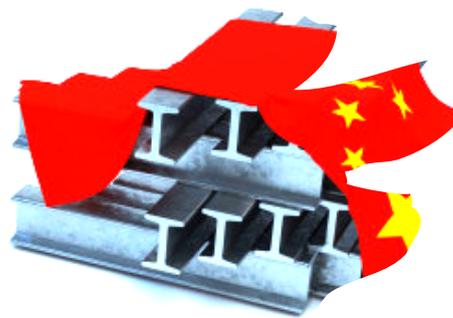
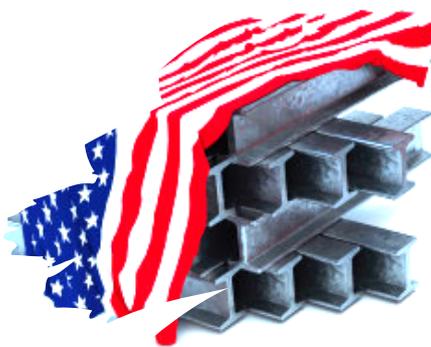


- **Fourth:** a contradiction has emerged at the global level concerning the most effective way to counter the COVID-19 pandemic. There have been calls for people to isolate themselves when the infection cases increased, or to impose long periods of compulsory quarantine. Although these calls are somewhat appropriate to sectors in Europe and America, they are economically difficult for many people in other countries of the world who cannot convert their work online, or for those who work in service sectors or for other temporary workers. Likewise, for countries where the majority of the workforce works in informal or day-to-day work - like many in the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and Asia - there is no practical way in which people can choose to stay in their homes or isolate themselves. Besides, workers with informal jobs often live in slums or overcrowded housing, which are ideal for the spread of COVID-19.
- **Fifth:** COVID-19 exposed globalization. After heralding universality and the one world, wild capitalism produced different worlds on the extremes: an economically and technologically advanced world, and another economically and technically backward world. Consequently, the Corona crisis exposed the unfavorable impacts of globalization, which will leave many new crises and conflicts that will arise in biological, cultural and ideological wars between the eastern camp led by China and the western camp led by the United States of America.
- **Sixth:** The repercussions of the catastrophic spread of COVID-19 pandemic in Europe raised questions that cannot be ignored about the fate of the European Union, and the viability, effectiveness and efficacy of its institutions after failing the test of solidarity to counter the pandemic, and the delay in providing bilateral assistance.



Third: Indicators of international transformations resulting from COVID-19 pandemic.

- The party that determines the future of the world and the shape of the new world order is the party that will win the war against the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The world order system will be experiencing a state of confusion, and internal instability at the level of international relations.
- There will be negative repercussions of the pandemic at all levels. In this context, there are indications of the international changes resulting from the COVID-19 including the following:
 - **First:** The decline in the role of the United States may be characteristic of the new world order during the post-COVID-19 era. There are indications that the new world order will be multipolar. With its rapidly growing and undeniable power, China will be Washington's main challenge. Since the end of the Cold War era, the world order has been unipolar dominated by the United States of America, with opposition from Russia and China to push towards the establishment of a multipolar order, the effects of which were evident in many areas.
 - Those attempts did not succeed in dissuading the United States from leading the world. The Corona crisis, however, will have an impact on the nature of that order, with consequences that may not appear in the near foreseeable term. Although the United States is the center of globalization, the irony is that it is withdrawing from its obligations in the world order that it founded, and this is not only during the time of the Donald Trump administration, but even during the previous administration of Barack Obama, but in two separate forms.



- **Second:** The massive transformations do not take place by surprise, nor will they do until some political, economic and military blocs are dismantled. The world order will not disintegrate easily, because the West will defend it. Therefore, the center of power, hegemony, and leadership will not be transferred to China or others easily. If this is going to happen, it will take longer than we think. What can be seen in the current crisis is that countries with good military power are good at dealing with the crisis. China's success in dealing with the crisis is not attributed to being an autocratic system, but it is attributed to having serious military arrangements. The opposite is true in countries where there are no strict military systems, and the ceiling of freedoms and democratic values is high. Generally, the COVID-19 pandemic formed an integral part of Beijing's relentless campaign to boost its international prestige and influence. This contributed to the emergence of China globally in an unprecedented manner. Nevertheless, doubts remain about China's readiness to take the lead in the world and clash with the United States.



- **Third:** The COVID-19 pandemic redefined the concept of power as not military force only. Indeed, multiple forces combine to form a comprehensive force. Such forces include medical and environmental readiness, good management, and others. It was striking that countries that preferred to give their people freedom of choice for isolation or not, such as Sweden and the Scandinavian countries, are the ones that incurred losses.

- **Fourth:** The social impact of COVID-19, along with economic impact, at the global level appears striking. Unlike the financial crisis of 2008, the solution will not be to inject capital into the financial sector alone. The crisis is not a banking crisis - rather, banks must be part of the solution. The crisis is not an ordinary shock in supply and demand. Rather, it is a shock to society as a whole. The liquidity of the financial system must be guaranteed, and banks must rely on their flexibility to provide support to their customers. The financial crisis of 2008 has proven that the countries that have strong social security systems were the least to suffer compared to others and that their recovery from the consequences of the crisis was the fastest ever. That said, the current pandemic may represent a turning point for health preparedness and for investment in establishing public services that are essential in the 21st century and in providing global public utilities effectively.
- **Fifth:** There is no doubt that COVID-19 reinstated the value of the national State. Accordingly, the national State has policies and social roles that consider education, health, employment, and security as the foundations for the progress, strength, and development of societies. For instance, countries like South Korea or Malaysia succeeded in dealing with the pandemic, while only having an educated citizen who has been raised on hygiene and behavioral values. Such states achieved harmony and integration according to internal nationalism and structure linked to strong public policies. Consequently, the political entities that will pass the test are those that possess advanced strategies, proactive measures, and a qualified citizen with sound social and moral education and upbringing. Those countries that establish the foundations of their intervention on the investment in people, health, education, and technology.



- **Sixth:** The global health systems have proven unable to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. It has become necessary to upgrade the health sector to more efficient and successful levels, based on the volume of spending on health facilities and research. This is in addition to supporting the health sector, building bridges for international cooperation, especially concerning epidemiological research and communicable diseases. This pandemic also showed that a group of profitable health companies, no matter how large they are, do not make a health system. They are competing companies that are doing business in human health and this situation will remain forever. We cannot combat this or any other pandemic, that may appear in the future, except by eliminating the commodification of human health.

Fourth: COVID-19 pandemic repercussions in the Gulf and the Middle East.

- The Gulf and the Middle East were affected by the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, which posed unprecedented challenges to countries of the region and the entire world. The GCC countries are facing the double shock of the Corona pandemic and the collapse of oil prices at the same time.
- As a result of the economic difficulties experienced around the world and the disruption of global value chains, the demand for goods and services produced by the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, especially oil, will decrease. Domestic demand will also decrease due to the sudden drop in businesses, and due to reduced travel, fearing of infections. Besides, uncertainty about the spread of the virus and the level of overall demand may lead to lower investment and consumption rates. The collapse of oil prices also leads to a decrease in demand in the Gulf Cooperation Council, where the oil and gas sector is the most important in many countries of the region. The potential fluctuations in the financial markets can further disrupt overall demand.



- The tension between the United States and China may be reflected in the Gulf states, as an integral part of this world. The Gulf-China relations have been good over the last ten years and the economic relationship has grown. It is worth noting that 30% of China's oil consumption comes from the Gulf region, where Saudi Arabia is the largest oil supplier to China, with exports more than 17% of its oil production. The Gulf states have not yet entered as an immediate party to the US-China conflict. There is a belief that the United States is more likely to be in power because its allies in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere still support and have great interests with it. China remains retrogressive and it should be taken into consideration that any punishment that America will inflict against China, the Gulf states will be affected because 69% of their oil and gas exports go to East Asia including China, India, Japan, and South Korea.

- In the same context, many countries in the Middle East face a large deficit in the balance of payments and the general budget. Also, many of them bear large insurance premiums for sovereign risks. For these countries, it will be difficult to continue foreign borrowing in private markets. Many other countries in the region will need a great deal of international support to help them overcome these difficult situations.
- Indeed, the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic to the Middle East region as a whole must be seen as an influential event adding to a series of shocks that have rocked the region over the past two decades. The American invasion of Iraq, the Arab uprisings, the civil wars in Syria, Yemen and Libya, and the rise and demise of ISIS, have left many countries in the Middle East in a difficult situation. Added to this are the regional conflicts and humanitarian disasters as is the case in the COVID-19 pandemic.



- This pandemic at the level of the Gulf region and the Middle East, as in many countries of the world has shown the importance of investing in the health infrastructure. It also has shown the importance of strengthening the health systems to develop responses to emerging needs and dealing with global epidemics. It demonstrated the importance of the State's social function represented by providing health security. It also highlighted the importance of the public health sector which has the privilege of easily having financial support compared with the private sector.
- Despite all the challenges mentioned, the Arab world has all the ingredients to find a real Arab program, and Saudi Arabia has great potential to play a leading role in this regard.



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