



## Questionable choices shaping the new world order

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When Donald Trump was elected the 45th president of the United States in 2016, many anti-war conservatives and realists, including myself, sincerely hoped that it would mark a change for a better – at least in terms of America’s foreign policy and never-ending wars of the past.

Defeating Hillary Clinton by riding the populist wave that demanded a more nation-focused and less world-oriented commander-in-chief was the ideal. Although many bought into Trump’s electoral promises, few have paid close attention to what in a broader sense his policies could mean not only for US citizens, but also rest of the world dependent on the American leadership firmly established after World War II.

Indeed, what we have experienced since Trump came to power is what we could describe as democratic authoritarianism, where by fulfilling populist demands the leader is gathering vast public support and exercising his presidential powers unchallenged.

Although a huge supporter of the idea of the nation-state – its unquestioned importance to the identity of the people who are living in its borders, their history, tradition and shared language – I do understand that the times of our forefathers are long gone.

The centuries-old human desire to travel to distant lands, trade with people other than our own, boosted by the developments brought with the blessings, as well as curses, of the Industrial Revolution, inevitably pushed our societies toward globalization, where, although our states play a crucial role in our lives, our intensified interaction with outside polities became indispensable for our survival. This has proved to be even more true during the Covid-19 outbreak.

“Enlightenment thinkers argued that the purpose of the legitimate state is to provide for the fundamental needs of the people: security, order, economic well-being, and justice.... The pandemic has prompted an anachronism, a revival of the walled city in an age when prosperity depends on global trade and movement of people,” wrote one of the greatest political thinkers of our times, Henry Kissinger, in a recent article for The Wall Street Journal titled “The coronavirus pandemic will forever alter the world order.”

This virtuoso of diplomacy, who stood, among his many other accomplishments, behind the rapprochement between the United States and the People’s Republic of China in the Richard Nixon era, rightly argues that “sustaining the public trust is crucial to social solidarity, to the relation of societies with each other, and to international peace and stability.”

Unfortunately, what we can observe with Trump is something entirely opposite.

As we well remember, it was Steve Bannon serving as White House chief strategist in the Trump administration who first planted the seeds of social distrust by stigmatizing Asians working in Silicon Valley, and pitted blacks and Latinos against them.

What preceded this event is the fact that Trump (with all his disregard for the European Union) applauding then-UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farage, and indirectly meddled in the internal affairs of what was then a European Union member state.

Furthermore, it was Trump who exported his version of conservatism to Europe, when he planted one of his "shallow ideologues" in Germany in order to empower far-right voices to destabilize what was unquestionably the strongest economy in Europe and, by default, the EU itself.

What the current pandemic also prove, and what Kissinger rightly observes, is that although "leaders are dealing with the crisis on a largely national basis ... the virus' society-dissolving effects do not recognize borders."

Shockingly, a former assistant and special consultant to then-president Richard Nixon, and staunch anti-globalist (perceived by many as the true MAGA precursor), Pat Buchanan, waged a vile attack against the 56th US secretary of state and eighth US national security adviser in an article titled "Kissinger still pushing the myth of a happy new world order."

"Observing governments thrashing about in the crisis," writes Buchanan, "the phrase that comes to mind is not 'public trust' as much as 'every nation for itself.'"

What this selfish stance is silently encouraging, alongside discrediting the US credibility as a trustworthy international partner, is behavior like that of President Trump, who used the Defense Production Act to prevent exports of N95 respirator masks to Canada and Latin America.

To discredit Kissinger's notion of trust further, Buchanan attacks China and asks the following question, which somehow resonates with Donald Trump's intentional "racializing of the coronavirus" and his administration's attempts at the Group of Seven meeting in March to call it the "Wuhan virus": "But how do we trust again our adversary China, after its criminal cover-up of the menace and magnitude of the virus unleashed in Wuhan?"

Interestingly, as we read in an eye-opening ABC News article, "As far back as late November, US intelligence officials were warning that a contagion was sweeping through China's Wuhan region." This information relates to a report produced by the US military's National Center for Medical Intelligence (NCMI), so it's rather naive to think that the president didn't have access to this information.

Sadly, Pat Buchanan is not alone in his views, as even former critics of Donald Trump in the conservative and pro-free-market National Review magazine are now pushing the anti-globalist propaganda, where Michael Brendan Dougherty in his article titled "The virus within globalization" argues that "in the same way that 'unilateralism' is a code word for American action apart from international institutions or against their good opinion, the word 'globalization' has, for the last two decades, mostly functioned as a code word for the rise of China and its integration into global markets and international institutions."

What the author adds (in quite worrying Sinophobic language) is that "the Covid-19 crisis tells us that as far as globalization in theory has meant Sinicization in practice, it must be reversed."

What we are experiencing at the moment, during this testing time for all humanity, is that dark and deeply flawed ideologies are trying to reshape the principles of the liberal world order by tearing apart the Enlightenment values, which, like Henry Kissinger believes, “will cause the social contract to disintegrate both domestically and internationally.”

By “othering the virus,” we are not only abandoning pragmatism and restraint in our dealing with the communist regime in China – which is neither Nazi Germany nor the Soviet Union, as Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute and former special assistant to the late president Ronald Reagan, argues – but playing into its hands by giving them excuses to attack our political systems and values in a cynical way.

Bearing in mind that Samuel Huntington is perceived as “a prophet for the Trump era,” by following his “clash of civilizations narrative” we are allowing ourselves to descent into the Mackinderesque and therefore “imperialist, racist, and environmentally determinist geopolitics of the 1940s,” at the same time leaving ourselves little room for maneuver.

What Henry Kissinger was telling us on several occasions in his 2011 book On China, in his 2014 book World Order and in a 2018 interview with the Financial Times, is that China wants to restore its historic role as the Middle Kingdom and be “the principal adviser to all humanity.”

What we have to remind China is that although we acknowledge the unquestioned civilizational importance of its contributions to humanity, we don’t need a “principal adviser.” What we need and require from the Chinese, and should require from ourselves as well, is inter-civilizational dialogue for the benefit of all humanity, which is based on mutual respect and trust. Something which both sides seem to be lacking at present moment, but what is crucial to “manage the current crisis while building a better future” for next generations.