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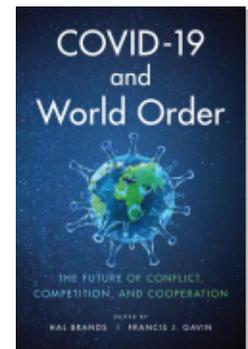
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# COVID-19 and World Order

Hal Brands and Francis J. Gavin

**T**he coronavirus crisis was a shock, but should not have been a surprise. Public health experts had been warning about the dangers of viral pandemics for years. SARS, H1N1, Ebola, and MERS had highlighted the risks of diseases that raced across borders and the need for effective national and global responses. Not long before the first reported cases of COVID-19 in Wuhan, China, both the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security and the Kissinger Center for Global Affairs Senior Fellow Dr. Kathleen Hicks had organized separate exercises that highlighted how profoundly a fast-moving virus could endanger the international system and US national security.<sup>1</sup>

Yet these warnings went largely unheeded and the world was not prepared to react effectively when the crisis began. COVID-19 overwhelmed national and international efforts to contain the pandemic while exposing deep flaws in the global public health infrastructure. The institutions most responsible for public health—the World Health Organization (WHO) for the world, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for the United States—have not performed well. As we write, the world has seen more than 18 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 and rising. The United States has been especially hard hit, with over

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5 million confirmed cases and the spread still not under control.<sup>2</sup> The science and epidemiological knowledge surrounding the virus is evolving, new therapies are being developed, and intensive efforts to create an effective vaccine all provide some hope. Until then, COVID-19 will dominate the international landscape.

Even after the virus is contained, the consequences will be with us for some time. This is because the pandemic arrived at an especially troubling moment for the world. In the past few years, many have commented on the fraying of international arrangements to provide for a stable, peaceful, and prosperous world order.<sup>3</sup> What had been feared for some time was now seen as a stark reality: many of the norms, institutions, and practices that upheld the liberal international order and marked American leadership since the end of the Cold War and, in some cases, the end of the Second World War, were under enormous stress. The causes are many and interconnected: the reemergence of great-power political rivalry, marked by the worsening and increasingly toxic relationship between the two largest powers, the United States and China; the increase in populism and nationalism, as well as a seeming loss of faith in democracy as authoritarianism increases its grip on many parts of the world; the dizzying and disorienting effects of new technology; and numerous other causes. These challenges have manifested as a polarized United States grows increasingly uncertain about its role in the world, as many around the world lose faith in the benefits of globalization and interdependence, and as a raft of new transnational concerns, ranging from climate change to disinformation, reveal the shortcomings of existing international institutions.

The crisis does provide an opportunity, however. This volume is a multidisciplinary effort to assess the current state of world order, analyze the effects of the COVID crisis, and offer insights and ideas for the future. The crisis has made clear that much work needs to be done to improve our national and global public health capabilities and institutions and to elevate the threat of disease and pandemic to a higher priority in our national and international security frameworks. This book, however, is premised on something more: the idea that the crisis highlights a number of other pressing national and global challenges, in areas ranging from climate change to relations with China. We believe this crisis is potentially a crucial pivot point, providing an opportunity to rethink—and perhaps revitalize—our current international system. This book begins a much-needed conversation about how to shape international relations in a post-COVID world.

## World Orders, Old and New

Historically, efforts to construct effective international arrangements emerge after periods of war, crisis, and turmoil.<sup>4</sup> The Peace of Westphalia ended the vicious wars of religion that had plagued Europe and constructed a comparatively stable system based on the balance of power among nation-states. The 1814–1815 Congress of Vienna was marked by the masterful diplomacy of Count Metternich of Austria and Lord Castlereagh of Great Britain, who worked with other European leaders to tame the wars and ideological fervor unleashed by the French Revolution.<sup>5</sup> These efforts arguably kept the peace in Europe until the Crimean War and prevented any one European power from dominating the continent until the start of the 20th century.

What was left of the Concert system collapsed with World War I, leading to a series of efforts over the succeeding decades to rebuild world order. The Versailles conference after the First World War was inspired by American President Woodrow Wilson's desire to build a peace based on national self-determination, open diplomacy, the ends of arms races, and collective security through a League of Nations—the cures, he believed, to the pathologies of imperialism, militarism, and cutthroat diplomacy that had brought on the conflict. This vision failed as the United States retreated from the system Wilson proposed while lingering and unresolved grievances from the war poisoned the international climate. A global depression, the rise of violent, revolutionary regimes, and the onset of the Second World War destroyed the system created at Versailles and revealed the desperate need for effective mechanisms to generate world order.<sup>6</sup>

Learning from this failure, American planners worked with their allies to start constructing the postwar order before the war even ended. Conferences between the three major players—the United States, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain—at Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam mixed plans to win the war with efforts to coordinate the postwar peace. International meetings at Bretton Woods and Dumbarton Oaks designed global institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the United Nations.<sup>7</sup> American officials hoped for a seamless, integrated world order that would bring the leading nations together in avoiding war and maintaining a secure, prosperous peace.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the Cold War spoiled this vision of “One World,” and what emerged in the years and decades that followed was not one order but several. In the economic realm, the so-called Bretton Woods order, which was focused on the capitalist world, created a system that encouraged revitalized global trade but prioritized

domestic reconstruction, regional integration, and stability. This system frayed in the 1960s and 1970s, and after a time marked by some disorder, was replaced by the more open, globalized system we have now, based on flexible and market-determined currencies, large-scale global investment and trade, and the dominance of dollar-denominated banking and finance.<sup>9</sup> International security evolved in unexpected directions as well. The United Nations system, premised on state sovereignty and universal principles, was overshadowed by a bipolar system that saw intense ideological and geopolitical rivalry between two rival superpower blocs led by the Soviet Union and the United States.<sup>10</sup> The United States ended up leading a secure, prosperous international order—but one that was limited to the “free world” rather than the entire world.

The superpowers nonetheless cooperated to create a third order: a very successful nuclear order, based upon their shared interest in limiting the dangers posed by the “absolute weapon.” This order was built around a series of bilateral and global arms control treaties—including the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty, the 1968 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, and the 1972 Antiballistic Missile and Strategic Arms Limitation Treaties—as well as less formalized norms and practices, from tolerance of satellite overflights by the enemy (necessary to reduce the danger of surprise attack) and an implicit understanding, which evolved over time, that nuclear weapons were not merely powerful bombs but were in a category all their own.<sup>11</sup> Though it came under constant pressure, this element of order—rivals working to manage and limit the dangers of new technologies—was more successful than anyone expected and perhaps provides a model for contemporary challenges.

The unexpected end of the Cold War and the rapid demise of the Soviet Union highlighted both the success of these postwar arrangements and the need to rethink world order for a new era. It was also a time of great intellectual creativity, as scholars such as John Mearsheimer, Francis Fukuyama, John Ikenberry, Charles Krauthammer, and Samuel Huntington offered innovative conceptual frames to understand a rapidly changing world.<sup>12</sup> Events moved quickly. Germany was peacefully reunified and the European Union project flourished; democracies emerged around the world, and some long-simmering conflicts and civil wars were resolved peacefully.<sup>13</sup> The United States, working through the United Nations, built an impressive coalition to enforce collective security and expel Iraq from Kuwait. To the surprise of many, some elements of the postwar era, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, were not only maintained but expanded. Other institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, were reimagined. Over time, still other institutions, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and Group of

Twenty (G20) were inaugurated. The post–Cold War era was marked by a combination of multilateralism and American ideals and power, as the United States found itself in a commanding position in world affairs. To the extent that there was a single world order, it was largely an expansion and modification of the liberal system that had taken root in the non-communist world after World War II.<sup>14</sup> As this system took on increasingly global dimensions, it was a time of hope and promise.

That period of optimism now seems like a distant memory. The 9/11 attacks on the United States, followed by difficult, controversial wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, exposed new sources of insecurity. The war in Iraq, in particular, drained US energies and shook international support for American power. The 2007–9 financial crisis pummeled the global economy and undermined faith in the market. Populism rose and the movement toward democracy weakened.<sup>15</sup> As China’s economy boomed, that country did not, as many had hoped, embrace liberal principles, but instead challenged both regional and global norms and institutions while descending deeper into authoritarianism. Information technology, once seen as a liberating force, showed its darker side through cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns; climate change loomed as a potentially existential challenge. Both the vote of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union (Brexit) and the unexpected election of Donald J. Trump as US president on a campaign of “America First” made 2016 the year when it was clear the existing world order was imperiled. The principles and values that many believed were the cornerstone of this order—openness and innovation, democratic practice and tolerance, interdependence and globalization—were viewed with suspicion by large swaths of America and the world.

As the chapters in this volume demonstrate, COVID-19 highlighted and exacerbated many of the strains that were already testing the post–Cold War system. The pandemic was so disruptive because it exploded in a world that was already increasingly disordered. The question of how to reconstruct world order after COVID involves dealing with not just the disease but also the underlying problems it revealed. How should we diagnose and understand these challenges to world order, and what principles and policies should shape our efforts moving forward?<sup>16</sup> Answering these questions is the purpose of this book.

### **World Order after COVID**

This volume is an undertaking of the Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). Inspired by its namesake, the renowned diplomat and scholar Henry Kissinger,

the Center is dedicated to better understanding and applying the lessons of history in order to make sense of an increasingly complex world. Since its inception in 2016, the Center and its scholars have engaged deeply with questions of world order. The COVID-19 crisis has offered an opportunity to convene global experts from Johns Hopkins University and other leading institutions to understand a landmark crisis and plot a course for the future.

This volume draws upon that expertise to address issues ranging from global public health and climate change to international institutions and great-power rivalry. The particular challenge of our moment is that it is impossible to grapple with questions of world order without considering “hard” and “soft” security issues, novel transnational challenges and timeless geopolitical contests, and politics within states as well as politics between them. As always, addressing any of these subjects requires a historical perspective as well as an eye to the future.

Part I of this book thus focuses on *Applied History and Future Scenarios*. It includes essays that use the past to highlight overlooked or misunderstood dynamics of the current crisis and that push us to think imaginatively about the future. These intellectual tasks are particularly important in times of radical uncertainty: in these moments, grounding ourselves in history, or systematically assessing the different paths the future might take, yields the greatest payoff.

Jeremy A. Greene and Dora Vargha employ a historical mindset to address the most basic question we confront today: When will we move from a “world of COVID” to a “world after COVID”? The answer they offer is that we are unlikely to see any single moment that marks the end of the pandemic. Rather, there will be a gradual recession of danger that never fully goes away and that probably will not match the easing of restrictions put in place to deal with that danger. Margaret MacMillan asks why we are so often surprised by catastrophes that might have been predicted, why some leaders and societies cope better than others, and how we can deal with the lasting consequences of great shocks—issues we can better understand by revisiting the trajectory of major upheavals in the past. Using history as a guide, Philip Bobbitt considers why many faddish predictions about the post-COVID world may be wrong and offers his own future scenario—that of a deepening crisis of constitutional order in major nation-states—as a way of pushing us to prepare for an uncertain future.

Part II deals with *Global Public Health and Mitigation Strategies*. These issues are now of incontestable importance to world order because of the horrific human toll pandemics can take and the way that epidemiological catastrophes can trigger economic and geopolitical ones. There is no guarantee, after all, that the end of

COVID will bring a respite from aggressive global disease. It might mark the beginning of a new era of even more catastrophic outbreaks.

In response to this danger, Tom Inglesby offers a detailed program for making pandemics lose their power, and in doing so reminds us that the dichotomy between unilateral and multilateral responses is a false one. Lainie Rutkow argues that policy makers must not, in the aftermath of the crisis, lose the sense of urgency that a pandemic creates. Rather, they must raise the profile of public health measures that are often invisible until a crisis breaks, while cultivating new collaborations and networks within and between nations. Finally, Jeffrey P. Kahn, Anna C. Mastroianni, and Sridhar Venkatapuram consider the ethics of global health in a post-COVID world. In their view, the crisis reveals the limitations of bioethics as a field and underscores the need for a more holistic conception of what makes a global health system morally just. Without such a shift, we will be ill-equipped to address global health challenges that can wreak havoc on the entire world.

Part III moves to *Transnational Issues: Technology, Climate, and Food*. In each of these areas, purely national solutions to accelerating challenges are unworkable. And in each of these areas, COVID-19 has highlighted the urgency of action.

For Johannes Urpelainen, a pandemic is a terrible thing to waste. He contends that the crisis, by temporarily suppressing global emissions, has created an opportunity to invest heavily in green technologies and perhaps head off the worst impacts of climate change. Jessica Fanzo reminds us that COVID will dramatically worsen food insecurity around the world—a development likely to heighten political instability, geopolitical conflict, and other forms of strife. “Without food security,” she tells us, “there is no world order.” Finally, Christine Fox and Thayer Scott point out that COVID has intensified the technological rivalry between the United States and China and that Washington must deepen its collaboration with other democracies if it is to manage the consequences of a technological revolution that creates as many risks as opportunities.

Part IV covers *The Future of the Global Economy*. In hindsight, we are likely to remember COVID-19 as an economic crisis as much as an epidemiological one. For it not only brought the global economy to a standstill—triggering the most rapid, if perhaps temporary, de-globalization the world has ever seen—but also revealed the weaknesses of existing international institutions for managing the global economy and the dangerous dependencies globalization had created.

Benn Steil argues that the pre-COVID economic order is probably not coming back. But instead of reverting to isolationism or persisting in the search for a single,

integrated global economic order, the United States should consider the “two worlds” approach it took during the Cold War. This means limiting reliance on the authoritarian world while deepening American integration with other democracies. John Lipsky examines why institutions, such as the G20, worked relatively well in dealing with the fallout from the global financial crisis but have performed so poorly in handling the economic dimensions of the pandemic and what this tells us about the future of global economic governance.

Lipsky’s essay serves as a bridge to part V, which covers *Global Politics and Governance*. For those who believe in the virtues of the liberal international order, the most shocking aspect of the COVID crisis is surely the degree to which many of the order’s key institutions—from the WHO to the G7—underperformed or proved incapable of constructive action. Failures of governance at the domestic level were accompanied by failures of governance at the global level. Any post-COVID effort at world order will have to begin with an understanding of what went wrong.

Anne Applebaum points to a variety of factors—the abdication of American leadership, the determined Chinese effort to capture international institutions, and the fact that bodies created in the 20th century may lack the speed and agility the current moment requires. Fixing the system may require fundamentally rethinking what role we expect deeply entrenched, bureaucratic entities to play in global politics. Henry Farrell and Hahrie Han believe that the liberal institutional order was collapsing even before the crisis began because of a growing deficit of democratic accountability. They, too, argue for a fundamental reimagining that reconnects the international system with the publics it is meant to serve. Janice Gross Stein asserts that the world is becoming more contested and competitive after COVID and that consensus-based institutions are unlikely to perform well in such a world. If international governance is to work, it will have to go “off-site,” into informal networks and plurilateral coalitions working outside of existing bodies. Finally, James B. Steinberg argues that the best way of salvaging some order from potential chaos is by rebuilding a system that emphasizes arrangements for addressing shared challenges, sets rules and norms for emerging technologies, engages public and civil society, and safely manages a competitive US-China relationship.

Part VI is also about high politics, focusing on *Grand Strategy and American Statecraft*. World orders are, to a great extent, a reflection of the policies and values of the most powerful global actors. And if COVID has revealed significant weaknesses in the post-Cold War order, it has also raised profound questions

about what grand strategy the United States should pursue in the future—or whether it even wishes to lead that order.

Interestingly, the authors in this section mostly offer glass-half-full interpretations, while contending that American grand strategy should adapt but not change fundamentally. Hal Brands, Peter Feaver, and William Inboden argue that the pandemic need not make the world far more menacing for the United States. It could, rather, create opportunities to pursue a smarter, more geopolitically savvy globalization, to reinvest in partnerships with liberal democracies, and to forge a stronger counterbalancing coalition against a neo-totalitarian China. That will, of course, require more enlightened American leadership than is currently in evidence; it will also require that the United States address dangers from pandemics and other “soft” security threats without hollowing out its capability to meet “hard” security challenges. Similarly, Thomas Wright calls for the United States to resist the understandable urge to fundamentally reorient its grand strategy toward transnational issues. The better option would be a “free world” strategy focused on improving the resilience and solidarity of the world’s democracies against great-power revisionism and resurgent authoritarianism.

Kori Schake also offers a moderately optimistic take, arguing that the pandemic could ultimately result in a renaissance of American global engagement, the strengthening of the domestic foundations of US power, and stronger efforts by free societies to deal with China’s rise. Finally, Kathleen H. Hicks sees the crisis as an opportunity to revisit core elements of American grand strategy and improve the mix of tools the United States uses to protect and pursue its interests in the world. Hicks is also relatively bullish on the long-term strength of democracies, seeing the protests for racial justice as a sign that political will and even consensus is emerging for much-needed change.

Looming over so many of these issues is the topic covered in part VII: *Sino-American Rivalry*. If before the crisis China and America already seemed headed for a deep and prolonged competition—a new Cold War, as some have termed it—that trajectory seems all the more pronounced since the pandemic struck.<sup>17</sup> Positions have hardened on both sides of the Pacific; the hostility has become palpable, even as the reality of interdependence has never been clearer.

Elizabeth Economy offers a stark assessment of the challenge that Xi Jinping’s China poses to the existing world order. She argues that while the United States has increasingly embraced a strategy of competing with, and even containing, Beijing, that strategy is unlikely to succeed unless Washington also reinvests in a broader concept of a world order centered on democratic values and solidarity

among the liberal democracies. Graham Allison calls instead for America to seek a “rivalry partnership” with Beijing, in which the two competitors seek to make a world “safe for diversity” and find common ground in areas where their interests overlap. Eric Schmidt contends that technology has become the central axis of great-power rivalry and outlines an agenda meant to allow the United States to win this new “great game” without forgoing all the advantages of interchange and interdependence. Finally, Niall Ferguson rounds out the volume by arguing that a new cold war is very much under way. He believes that the Trump administration has actually done fairly well in positioning the United States to win it, yet he reminds us that the choices of lesser powers ultimately did much to determine the outcome of the US-Soviet Cold War. Ferguson warns that many of America’s allies are contemplating nonalignment in the present rivalry. If that happens, America will find it nearly impossible to prevail in a long competition with China—or sustain its concept of world order.

### **Themes and Insights**

The authors cut across disciplinary lines and deal with subjects that inevitably overlap; they offer both complementary and contrasting viewpoints. The chapters cluster around a variety of themes and debates that bring together the volume as a whole. Here, we highlight a few issues of particular importance.

#### **WILL COVID-19 REMAKE WORLD ORDER?**

It is undeniable that COVID-19 is shaking up the world and laying bare the weaknesses of existing arrangements and institutions. But will COVID mark the end of one world order and the emergence of another? The answer, we believe, is not so simple.

It is not a coincidence that the biggest, most epochal shifts in world order often occur in the wake of major wars. Such cataclysms fatally rupture existing relationships and institutions; they reset the global distribution of power. By leveling the architecture of one world order, they create new possibilities for construction.

That COVID will have a similarly transformative effect seems unlikely. The pandemic has been monumentally traumatic, of course, and all bets are off if the world faces multiple, increasingly lethal outbreaks before a vaccine is developed. But short of that happening, COVID will probably not dramatically change the distribution of material power. To be sure, the United States has fared poorly from a public health perspective and has suffered a severe diminution—in the near

term, at least—of its credibility and reputation for competence. Yet several aspects of the crisis—the role of the US Federal Reserve in stabilizing the world economy, the flight to the dollar, and others—actually testify to America’s immense structural power. Moreover, it is far from clear that America’s foremost challenger—China—will see its own long-term position enhanced, in part because of the way that the crisis has underscored that country’s authoritarian pathologies and in part because one result of the pandemic may be a more concerted counterbalancing effort from the world’s democracies.

When it comes to institutions, the pandemic has undoubtedly revealed deep-seated weaknesses within many prominent international bodies, from the WHO and WTO to the G7. The need for reform has become clear to all; so has the absence of well-developed institutional structures to deal with a variety of emerging challenges. This should not surprise us: much of our global governance architecture was created at a different time, in a different world, to deal with different challenges. Some of it is now out of date or ill-fitted for new global threats.

Those with long memories understand that there have been previous periods of institutional underperformance, failure, and adaptation within the context of particular orders. The roles and responsibilities of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank have shifted considerably since their creation; the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade gave way to the World Trade Organization after the Cold War; ad hoc arrangements have often emerged to complement, rather than replace, existing bodies on issues such as nuclear proliferation. Viewed against this precedent, COVID may simply spur a period of much-needed institutional reform and evolution rather than a new start. Indeed, in several chapters in this volume, the authors indicate that, far from destroying the existing order, COVID could spur its reform and renewal. Perhaps that order will be somewhat narrower than it was after the Cold War: a number of contributors argue that the key is to lessen dependence on China while deepening cooperation among the democracies, a reversion to something like the “two worlds” approach of the post-war era. Although that change would be a significant departure from the post-Cold War era of global integration, it would actually take the United States back to its order-building roots, so to speak.

Could the crisis nonetheless force a significant change in our approach to world order by fundamentally altering how the United States and other countries perceive and prioritize key international threats? If COVID ends up killing, just within the United States, a number of people that is orders of magnitude higher than the number that died on 9/11, then surely “soft” security threats will rise in importance

relative to “hard” security challenges such as terrorism and geopolitical rivalry. Perhaps the military balance of power is becoming passé—perhaps it simply is not that relevant in a world where small states have often done better than large states in suppressing the pandemic and where grave threats to human prosperity and flourishing do not respect geopolitical divides.<sup>18</sup>

Here too, though, the story is not so simple. COVID-19 may have elevated the threat posed by pandemics and other nontraditional threats. But the threat posed by more traditional dangers remains. COVID has created new temptations for authoritarian actors to undermine the politics and cohesion of democratic societies; it could well exacerbate state failure and instability in fragile regions throughout the world, including the always volatile greater Middle East. And the pandemic was accompanied by a marked increase in Chinese assertiveness, from Hong Kong to the South China Sea to South Asia and beyond, using tools from “wolf warrior” public diplomacy to outright military coercion.<sup>19</sup>

The real takeaway from COVID may be that hard and soft threats often work in tandem, potentially mixing and combining in powerful ways. Geopolitical rivalry may make transnational threats harder to combat; transnational threats can sharpen geopolitical rivalries and instability. America and other countries will not be able to ignore hard or soft threats in a post-COVID world because those challenges are so deeply interrelated.

#### BALANCING COMPETITION AND COOPERATION

This relates to a second theme: the uncertain balance of competition and cooperation. We may look back on COVID as the crisis that crystallized a protracted, high-stakes competition between the world’s greatest powers—much as crises in Greece and Turkey in 1946–47 crystallized an emerging Cold War. The pandemic underscored that the world is fracturing rather than converging; great-power politics are taking on an increasingly zero-sum logic.<sup>20</sup> Yet we may also look back on COVID as the event that threw into relief the mutual vulnerability of even bitter rivals and the need for positive-sum cooperation between them. How—and whether—this balance between competition and cooperation gets struck will be a defining challenge of world order in the 21st century. It will pertain not just to pandemics, but to climate change, food security, migration, information and biotechnology, and other issues with the potential to fundamentally upset the human experience.

There are contrasting perspectives on how to address this dilemma. Some analysts argue that the world’s democratic states should first focus on waging and

winning the competition with China, because a favorable balance of power is the best guarantee of securing cooperation with rivals on favorable terms. It would be unwise, in this view, to mute Sino-American rivalry in hopes of gaining Chinese cooperation on pandemics or climate change. Rather, America and its allies should compete vigorously, confident that cooperation on shared interests can be compartmentalized, just as the superpowers managed to cooperate on arms control and smallpox eradication during the Cold War.<sup>21</sup>

Or perhaps this first view is too sanguine. US-Soviet cooperation on arms control and global disease emerged only after two decades of Cold War and early moves toward a superpower *détente*. Perhaps it will be necessary to limit Sino-American rivalry before positive-sum behaviors can take root. If this is the case, a determined effort to seize the geopolitical and ideological high ground could simply ensure that *all* issues come to be seen in zero-sum terms—as happened in the early stages of the COVID crisis.<sup>22</sup> And while the threat that China poses is very real, it remains somewhat more abstract than the human and economic carnage COVID has been wreaking on both countries and around the world. For some, the changed nature of the international system means that a failure by the great powers to subsume their differences to work on shared and potentially catastrophic global challenges will lead the world to ruin.

This book will not fully resolve which approach is best.<sup>23</sup> But the debate reminds us that the challenges of sustaining a peaceful, flourishing world in this century are particularly daunting, because the world is increasingly dividing along geopolitical and ideological lines even as it requires cooperation across them. And it shows that a form of American statecraft that is purely competitive in nature—one that does not feature a leading US role in catalyzing action on transnational challenges—will not meet the demands of global leadership.

#### THE FUTURE OF GLOBALIZATION AND INNOVATION

COVID-19 is not simply a crisis of public health. It is an economic crisis—a self-induced coma, as it has been termed—unparalleled in modern history. Quarantines, shelter-in-place orders, and other restrictions caused growth to collapse and unemployment to surge. These measures also raised sharp questions about how long the resulting damage would last, which industries and countries would emerge with a competitive advantage, and what prospects there are for vibrant equitable economies—at the national and global levels—in the years to come.

Complicating matters is the fact that COVID occurred amid a growing dissatisfaction with the effects of globalization and interdependence. In the years after

the Cold War, globalization had intensified and deepened. The process connected the world as never before, generated massive wealth, and pulled individuals around the world out of poverty. Yet domestically, offshoring also exacerbated de-industrialization and the loss of manufacturing jobs in the United States. Globally, massive increases in trade and financial flows generated turbulence and occasional crises, and left countries vulnerable to powerful global forces outside of their control. It was hoped that globalization would bring along with it liberal democracy, transparency, tolerance, and openness, but authoritarian governments—China’s being the clearest example—cleverly found ways to capture economic benefits without making political or social sacrifices.

Anxiety about openness went hand-in-hand with anxiety about technological innovation. Much growth and even more interconnectedness have been driven by profound changes in technology, especially in the information sector. Only a decade ago, this technological revolution was viewed as almost entirely beneficial to humanity, but since then, we have seen some of its dark sides. Disinformation campaigns have deepened polarization within democracies while new technologies, such as facial recognition tools, empower authoritarian governments.<sup>24</sup> Artificial intelligence, robotics, machine learning, and biotechnology promise extraordinary benefits for humanity while also raising the threat of potentially vast dangers.<sup>25</sup>

We can take some comfort in the fact that we have been here before. Technological innovation has always been a source of danger as well as opportunity. The postwar economic order was never as smooth or seamless as we sometimes believe. The vaunted Bretton Woods system was prone to crises and collapsed altogether in the early 1970s, leading to years of ad hoc efforts to stabilize a turbulent system. When the Cold War ended, many countries around the world reduced trade barriers, liberalized their economies, and allowed foreign investment; the decades that followed witnessed impressive growth but also debilitating crises. The story of the post–World War II global economy is one of fantastic prosperity and severe, recurring challenges.

In this crisis, there is bad news and good news. The bad news is that globalization proved surprisingly fragile in the face of a raging pandemic—even countries within the European Union barred exports of critical goods and shut their borders. The good news is that certain aspects of the system have worked fairly well. Similar to the 2007–9 global financial crisis, the US Federal Reserve acted as the banker to the world during the pandemic, providing much-needed liquidity to avoid a depression (albeit with less global coordination). National governments,

including the United States, initiated massive stimulus programs; the results were mixed but the outcome was surely better than it would have been absent these injections. There are also certain indications that governments may still respond to the crisis in mostly constructive ways. If the outcome of the pandemic is a reduction of specific dependencies on authoritarian regimes, an emphasis on economic resilience that nonetheless encourages deep integration between democracies, a greater pooling of resources among like-minded nations to develop and master the technologies of the future, and enhanced efforts to address inequalities both within and between countries—all possibilities to which authors in this volume point—then the crisis could be a source of renewal rather than a harbinger of a dark new age.

#### POLITICS, AT HOME AND ABROAD

One reason the COVID-19 crisis has been so jarring is that it seemed to worsen the deepening global crisis of governance. Fraying democratic norms, increased populism and nationalism, overmatched and ineffective government bureaucracies, and the growing reach of autocratic leaders have menaced the global order for several years.<sup>26</sup> The pandemic has, at least in the short term, accelerated many of these worrisome trends. American statecraft has long held that world order should be based on liberal ideas and democratic values. If so, reinvigorating and rethinking democratic politics at home may be a prerequisite to sustaining the influence of those values on the global stage.

While there are different views in the book on how the battle between democratic forms of governance and authoritarianism will play out, the future may not be as foreboding as some of the early indicators make it seem. As some contributors note, democracies such as New Zealand, Taiwan, Iceland, and Germany implemented especially effective measures to limit the coronavirus's spread. Countries with illiberal populists or authoritarian leaders in charge—Brazil, Iran, Russia, North Korea, Belarus—saw cases, hospitalizations, and deaths surge. Unfortunately, the world's leading democracy—the United States—fared poorly, due to the erratic presidency of Donald Trump as well as the disappointing performance of the federal bureaucracy. The contrast to the autocratic efficiency of China seems, at first glance, quite striking.

But the story is not all bad. The extent to which China's system has truly done better against COVID is hard to confirm with any precision, given the regime's systematic suppression of reliable information. Whatever progress Beijing has made has come at a high cost in violations of human rights and basic liberties, and

failing to honestly communicate the severity of the virus's spread to other states and global authorities.<sup>27</sup> In the United States, the absence of national oversight has allowed certain state and local governments to demonstrate competence and vision. Elements of the nonprofit and private sector have exhibited qualities of nimbleness and adaptation. The extraordinary effort, ongoing as we write this, to develop both effective therapies and a mass-produced vaccine in record time is breathtaking.<sup>28</sup> America's deep, diverse, and innovative civil society provides a degree of resiliency, even in the face of federal underperformance, that autocracies find hard to mimic.

A number of contributors to this volume also point out that COVID-19 may force democracies to confront their limitations, as crises often do. COVID will equip democratic governments around the world with a greater understanding of the dangers of authoritarian disinformation campaigns. The pandemic has highlighted lingering issues of inequality and racial injustice in the United States and other democratic societies. Not least, it has revealed how deep political polarization and tribalism has too often gotten in the way of wise, coordinated policies.<sup>29</sup> It is clear that the United States and other democratic societies face a crisis of politics and governance. We must escape a terrible cycle: the worse our institutions and politics perform, the more people lose faith in governance and the more our politics becomes poisoned. If we are looking for something that will provide an impetus to the slow, messy, incremental process of reform needed to avert such an outcome, a global pandemic seems as good a candidate as any.

#### CRISIS AS OPPORTUNITY

We are living through a dark time. The world confronts overlapping national and global crises. Governments and international institutions often seem inadequate to the task. Aggressive authoritarianism and illiberalism often seem to be on the ascent. Aspects of the postwar and post-Cold War orders appear worn and outdated.

Here history can provide both consolation and inspiration. The world has seen other periods of great disorder and turbulence—even since World War II—that were arguably worse than our own. The current crisis has even revealed underlying strengths of the current world order. For example, the unprecedented sharing of scientific information and the drive for therapies and a vaccine remind us of the breathtaking economic, intellectual, and scientific advances that have occurred in recent decades.<sup>30</sup> Finally, history reminds us that times of crisis provide opportunities for creativity and reform. Innovation and technical breakthroughs often emerge from economic depressions (the bicycle was invented in Germany

during an epidemic among horses in 1815!). Moments of crisis break inertia and create a fluidity that can be put to good purpose; they can foster the political will needed to confront entrenched pathologies. The extraordinary protests over racial injustice in June 2020, which rapidly spread around the world, reflect a collective national and global desire to bring real change. Proposals to reform global governance, enhance the solidarity of democratic nations, and invest in new efforts to confront looming threats reflect a similar impulse.

Can we make the most of the moment? The starting point is to think creatively about how we arrived at our current juncture and how we can make our way out of the accompanying uncertainty. Our hope is that this volume can guide decision makers in this endeavor.

#### NOTES

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