

The COVID-19 Crisis in the U.S.: How Many More Innocent People Have to Die?

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The COVID-19 is sweeping the U.S. land leaving behind mountains of dead bodies. This is just incredible. Soon, millions of persons may be inflicted. God knows how many more lives will be sacrificed.

What is frightening is the disorderly easing of lockdown and social distancing in many states, which will surely bring another upsurge of infected people and deaths.

The U.S. is the richest country in the world. Its GDP in 2019 was \$21.4 trillion; its GDP per capita was \$ 65,000. Militarily, it is the most powerful country in the world and in human history.

It is therefore normal that the world was expecting Washington to show how to fight the global enemy, COVID-19.

The world is disappointed. It is worried. But it is hoping to see the Americans conquer the virus, with dignity, as citizens of the most powerful nation in the world.

This paper argues that the following factors are responsible for Washington's less than poor performance: China bashing, the counter-productive legacy of neo-liberalism and the doubtful quality of leadership of Washington.

To conclude, I will add a few words on the possible messages of COVID-19 to the American society.

China Bashing

Since Trump took over the power in Washington in 2016, China has been considered as a serious threat to Washington's global domination. Washington has deployed all possible means to discredit the Chinese regime, destabilize the Chinese economy and isolate China from international decision making.

In Trump's eyes, China bashing has very useful roles to play in the dynamics of the COVID-19 crisis in the U.S. Trump can make China the scapegoat, generate anti-China feeling and attribute Washington's poor anti-virus policy to China. China bashing can be a good tool of covering up the policy failure.

China bashing has taken two forms.

First, Washington argues that the spread of the virus in the U.S. is due to the lack of

cooperation of China in the sharing of information on the virus.

We must remember that it was December 31, 2019 when the corona -virus broke out in the city of Wuhan.

On January 3, 2020, Dr. Robert Redfield, director of the U.S. CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) was aware of the cases of pneumonia in Wuhan city.

On January 4, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported in social media the cases of the virus.

On January 6, the Chinese National Center Diseases Control and Prevention issued level-2 emergency warning.

On January 7, Xi Jinping recognized the danger of virus.

On January 8, the U.S. CDC issued a statement warning about the disease.

In the meantime, the urgent issue was whether the virus led to inter-human transmission. In fact, because of this issue, the adoption of proper measure was delayed.

This is understandable, because Chinese did not know the nature of the virus never seen before; it might have come from outside China. Finally on January 28, it was found out that the virus could be transmitted from person to person.

The U.S. was well informed about the virus directly or through the WHO.

The White House created Corona-virus Task Force on January 29 under the leadership of Alex Azar, Secretary of the HHS (Department of Health and Human Services.)

On January 30, WHO declared the Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC).

On January 31, U.S. HHS declared the Public Health Emergency.

This sequence of these events shows that China provided quickly the information on the corona virus. The U.S. could have taken more proactive actions based on this information.

The U.S. argues this. If China had provided more quickly the information concerning the corona-virus, it could have prevented the pandemic in the U.S. But, in a situation where China was dealing with a mysterious disease, it was, perhaps, normal to have taken some time to know it better.

In fact, Trump was very satisfied with China's cooperation.

On January 24, Trump said this:

"China has been working hard to control corona-virus. The United States appreciates their efforts and transparency. It will all work well. In particular, on behalf of American people, I want to thank President Xi Jinping."

Thus, the U.S. was well aware of the danger of the corona-virus. And, it had ample time to prepare for the onslaught of the virus. But, for two month, the U.S. and other countries in

Europe did not pro-act soon enough; this could have led to the huge backlog of infected people.

It is not clear why these countries have not pro-acted earlier. They might have thought that the virus would be confined in Asia or they might have had the over-confidence in the capacity of their public health systems to cope with the crisis.

Trump says that he cannot trust the Chinese statistical data on the number of the infected and the death. It is possible that the number of the infected and deaths looks small, given the population of China.

But, there is no way to judge the reliability of the data. For that matter, we may question the reliability of American data, too; there are reasons to suppose that the number of deaths in the U.S. is very much under estimated.

One wonders how the poor quality of Chinese data on the number of infections and deaths can prevent Washington from taking more effective anti-virus war.

Second, Trump has been trying to tell the world that the corona-virus was originated in China. Mike Pompeo, Secretary of State of the U.S. is repeating the expression " Wuhan virus", while Trump seems to love the expression " Chinese virus".

The U.S. pretends that the virus was originated in China. Trump argues with no proof that the virus was leaked from a lab near the city of Wuhan.

The argument of Trump and Pompeo implies that the virus was engineered or man-made. But the U.S. Intelligence people and scientists including Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of CDC, are denying the Trump-Pompeo argument.

Furthermore, there are important papers published by authors including Asian scientists and those of the Center for Research on Globalization which claim that the virus could have been brought to China from the U.S.

What is important to point out, here, is that Washington's argument that the virus was originated in the City of Wuhan has no proof. If there is any, it is about the time to produce it.

Of course, it is important to identify the origin of the virus. But, we should let the scientists to do the job of identifying the virus origin. The politicians should not intervene in the debate. Above all, they should not politicize and use the debate for political purpose. .

The China bashing has damaging effect on the anti-virus war. To begin with, policy makers in Washington may try to attribute their policy failure to China and this will certainly compromise the effectiveness of the anti-virus fight.

China bashing is already stirring up, in China, anti-Trump feeling; this would surely hamper the Washington-Beijing concerted efforts to fight the virus.

The U.S. needs China as much as China needs the U.S. for information, scientific research and production of medical equipments.

We are facing the common enemy of mankind; all nations should unite to kill the virus.

Without the close cooperation of the two most powerful nations, it will be difficult to win the present anti-virus war, let alone the future wars against the virus that are surely coming.

There is another danger in China bashing; it is generating anti-Chinese sentiment and even anti-Asian racial discrimination, which surely hurts the global concerted efforts to fight the virus.

In fact, In San Francisco, in two weeks, in April, there were, 141 incidences of racial discrimination against Asians. The discrimination against Asians is taking place in major cities throughout the world. This is very unfortunate, for it is the time for unified cooperation of every American.

Neo-liberalism and COVID-19

The neo-liberalism is one of the factors which make the anti-virus war unusually difficult to win. The negative impact of neo-liberalism is the privatisation of the public health system on the one hand, and, on the other, the creation of the huge army of alienated low-income people who have difficulty in participating in the anti-virus fight and who are the most vulnerable targets of virus infection.

In the U.S., the neo-liberalism is the gospel of the privatization of public sector establishments. The credo underlying this gospel is the superior efficiency of private firms compared to public corporations.

Here, the issue is the definition of efficiency. In the context of neo-liberalism, it is profit. But, the value of public goods is not profit; it is the value of people's welfare; it is the value of welfare per dollar spent.

The trouble is that once the public goods are privatized, they are no longer public goods; they don't care about people's welfare. One of the most important public goods in all countries is public health.

In the U.S. everything is privatized; even the prison is privatized. What is most frightening is the fact that the medical service system is privatized; there is no public health system. More than 30 million Americans have no medical insurance.

In the U.S., every medical service is profit motivated. The U.S. has the dishonour of being the nation of the most expensive medical service in the developed world.

The number of the American with no health insurance increased from 10.9% in 2016 to 13.7% in 2018.

Those who do have health insurance have to pay "co-pay" and burdensome "deductable" amounting to more than \$3,300 a year in average.

The absence of a public health system means chronic shortage of hospitals, medical staff and medical equipments. For instance, the number of hospitals decreases by 30 a year; there are fewer than 45,000 intensive care units (ICU), while 2.9 million are needed.

Only 160,000 ventilators are available in addition to the federal government stock of 8,900. But, the U.S. needs millions to cope with corona-virus crisis. The situation has been

improved a little lately, however.

Another credo of neo-liberalism is economic growth led by exports of goods and services. To export goods, one has to make profit. To make profit, one has to cut down the production cost. To cut down the production cost, one has to use high technology and save labour cost. To save further the labour cost, one has to develop the global value chain and exploit cheap labour and raw materials of developing countries.

The use of high technology creates unemployment or under-employment. The use of the global value chain allows the large multinational firms to make huge profit but the off-shoring of manufacturing leads to fewer jobs in developed countries. In short, one of the defects of neo-liberalism is the creation of the huge army of jobless and quasi-jobless.

The end result of neo-liberalism is the widening income gap. The popular index of the inequality of income distribution is the Gini coefficient. The higher the Gini, the wider is the income gap in favour of the higher income group. The Gini varies from zero to 100.

The present Gini of the U.S. is 50, which is level of Gini in developing countries.

This is just incredible! Remember, the U.S. is the richest country in the world, yet it is as poor as a developing country as far as the Gini is concerned.

In 2018, 1% top income group had 70% of household wealth. The bottom 50% of Americans had no income increase for thirty years. The minimum wage remains at \$7.25.

The unequal income distribution combined with the absence of a public health system makes the fight against the corona-virus terribly difficult.

As we saw above, everything is in grave shortage. There are not enough hospitals, let alone the intensive care units (ICU); the number of nurses and all other health-care related human resources are in great shortage. The State governments and cities are asking Washington's help in vain.

State governments, city governments and hospitals have to get, without much Washington's help, needed masks, ventilators, gloves, gowns and other equipments.

Even if all these equipments are available, the great number of Americans who are jobless with no savings cannot have tests, self-isolation or social distancing.

Being poor, testing is expensive; living in crowded housing environment, social distancing is difficult; having no savings, they have to go to work, quarantine is not easy.

Leadership of Washington

The global media seems to rightly suggest that Trump's administration's anti-COVID-19 fight has not been very successful, because Trump has lacked the following qualities.

- Respect for science and professionals of medical and public health
- Apolitical approach to the problem, transparency in handling data and the facility of government-people communication
- Ability to coordinate sectional and regional anti-corona-virus efforts
- Ability of mobilizing the general public's participation in the anti-virus fight

Respect for science and professionals of medical and public health

One of the key features of daily briefing of the White House is President Trump's lack of respect for the advice of medical science and public health experts; he often makes his personal views with no scientific or professional backing.

This attitude might have delayed the whole process of anti-virus war. As early as January-February, 2020, Trump was warned six times (January 8, 25, 30 and February 21, 23 and 25) by his close advisors about the propagation of the COVID-19.

However, Trump did not take the advice seriously for some reasons. He was quoted to have said that experts had told him that the virus would not touch the U.S. One wonders on what ground his advisors would have so advised.

Finally as late as March 13, Trump declared the National Emergency and timidly started to "re-act" not "pro-act".

In other words, Trump lost a whole month before reacting. In the case COVID-19, one month is terribly long period of time. Nobody knows how many people in the U.S. were already infected.

In the literature on epidemic diseases, there is the coefficient R_0 (reproduction ratio) which is the multiplier of virus propagation.

If triple-day coefficient R_0 is 3, it means that the number of the infected triples every three days. On the first day there is one person infected. On the third day, there will be 3 persons infected; on the sixth day, 9 persons; on the ninth day, 27 persons; on the twelfth day, there will be 81 persons infected.

If we have 100 persons infected on day one, in 12 days we will have 8,100 infected.

Thus R_0 is a very important indicator of the extent of the virus propagation. For instance, if R_0 is 5.7, no less than 82% of the population must be immunized. It is estimated that the multiplier for COVID-19 is about 3.

There is no doubt that a very large number of persons in the U.S. could have been infected due to the delayed reaction of the federal government.

Politicization of the Anti-Virus War

One thing a national leader should not do, during the urgent pandemic crisis, is the temptation to find a balance among various conflicting interests.

The big business may want to delay the knockdown because of the fear of losing profit caused by the lockdown.

Trump may want to maximize his political TV exposure in order to win the presidential election.

Religious leaders may ask Trump to let open the church during the crisis for religious and financial reasons.

The search for a balance among these different interests is the best way to speed up the propagation of the virus. In the fight against the virus, each minute counts. In the anti-virus war, the saving of lives should be given the top national priority.

It is understandable that the government wishes to ease lockdowns and social distancing to recover the shrinking economy and help skyrocketing jobless.

But, the timing is important. If it is too soon, there will another onslaught of the virus. On the other hand, if it is too late, the economy will be further destroyed.

Each country should choose the timing and the extent of easing in function of the cost acceptable by the people.

However, the saving of lives should have the priority, because the lost lives cannot be restored, while the broken economy can be recovered.

Another unpleasant picture of the briefing is the arrogant attitude of Trump toward reporters. He is reported to ask the reporters to praise his deeds before asking questions; this is surely politically motivated. When the reporters ask the data or proof of his claims, he shows even hostility toward the reporters. He is not transparent; he often contradicts himself.

Poor Coordination of Anti-Virus war Efforts

There are fifty states and a number of metropolitan cities in the U.S. The corona-virus ignores the state demarcation borders; it likes to travel from one place to another. Therefore, the only way to win over the virus is to have unified approach of all states and all cities.

So, we need one single central authority which should coordinate the anti-virus efforts of states and cities. Such authority is the federal government.

The federal government must coordinate the whole process of anti-virus war beginning from the identification of the infected to the stage of healing the infected.

The access to medical equipment can vary from state to state and from city to city depending upon the financial capacity of states and cities on the one hand, and, on the other, the condition of virus propagation.

Unfortunately, there is no real coordination by the federal government. At present time, there is no Washington's real coordination of testing, lockdown, hospitalization and the curing of the infected, the production and the distribution of medical equipments.

What is alarming is this. In the absence of a unified policy, in some states, golf clubs remain open. In some other states, there is no effective social distancing or lockdown.

The federal government's coordination is so bad that the governor of New York State, Andrew Cuomo is proposing a creation of regional inter-state coordination of anti-virus fight for the North-Eastern region. So is the governor of California, Gavin Newsom, for the South-Western Region. But, they still need the federal coordination of the inter-State efforts of coordination.

People's Voluntary Participation in the Anti-virus Fight

One of the qualities of the national leader in time of crisis is the mobilization of the people for the unified efforts to handle the crisis; this is the necessary condition for the success in the fight. To beat the virus, people should be united.

But, the U.S is perhaps one of the most divided countries in the world. The American culture is essentially based on the competition in all fields of human activities.

It is a country where the strong rules over the weak, where the rich is indifferent to the poor and where the skin colour determines the social hierarchy. In this situation, the marginalisation and the alienation of people become a challenging social problem.

The sad thing is that under the neo-liberalism, the marginal group has become more marginal; the alienated people have become more alienated.

Under such conditions, it is very difficult to expect to see the unified cooperation of the people for the fight against the virus. Indeed, there are signs that the people do not respect the guidelines put out by the federal government.

It is just unbelievable to see that so many people make a mockery of the government instruction on self-quarantine and social distancing. In some states, heavily armed crowds protest the government's guidelines. This shows how little the people do have confidence in the federal government.

Lessons of the Corona-virus Crisis to the American Society

One thing sure is that for all these reasons, it will be difficult to prevent further propagation of the virus in the U.S. Nonetheless, one day, it will be over. But what lesson can we learn from the corona-virus crisis?

If there is any lesson to learn from this crisis, it is the crying need for major investments for people's security. America has been investing heavily for military security and world supremacy. Regrettably, this policy has resulted in the negligence of other kinds of security, namely, income security, physical security and public health security.

The income security in the U.S. is in bad situation, in very bad situation. As we saw above, the U.S. is suffering from unjust income distribution. The lack of income security for the people is not only unjust but also it could lead to decades-long economic stagnation, as it has happened in Japan.

Another terrible phenomenon in America is poor physical security, let alone psychological security. In fact, the American society is the most dangerous society among the developed countries. The number of mass killings is 415 a year, or 1.13 a day. In 2019, as many as 39,052 were killed by gun violence; the number of guns per capita is 1.25.

The preparation of the public health security in the U.S. is urgent, because the next global pandemic of virus will surely come. As far as the public health is concerned, Americans should free themselves from the god of neo-liberalism which has destroyed public health.

These three kinds of security is something which even a poor country tries hard to assure. But, it is just incredible that a country where the per capita GDP is \$65,000 does not seem

trying hard to provide. So, we ask why?

The sad answer is the massive investments in military muscles. The annual national defence budget is more than \$ 738 billion in 2020 as against mere \$260 billion in China. No less than three quarter of the “discretionary budget” goes to the military.

Washington justifies heavy military investment and dozens of wars carried out since WWII in the name of the national defence security. But are these wars necessary? The wars are justified, if there are enemies which threaten the U.S.

Is there any country which can be a real threat to the U.S.? Even China cannot be a military threat, because China does not want war with the U.S.; its GDP is catching up, but, as far as the per capita GDP is concerned, it is still a near middle-income country. Besides, China wishes to live in a peaceful global order.

It is hoped that once this virus crisis is over, the Americans should persuade their government to cut down the military spending and heavily invest for the assurance of income security, physical security and public health security.

History shows us that any major changes in the society are not done by the politicians alone because of their interconnected political and financial interests; only the ordinary people can do it under a real leader. We have seen it in South Korea.

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