The Impacts of COVID-19 Diplomacy on the Future of the New Multilateral Diplomacy in the Digital World

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a part of research on the Post COVID-19 Diplomacy and the Future of Multilateral Diplomacy that applied a documentary qualitative research. All documentary data and information concerned was collected from related academic books, papers, and research reports, as well as official documents of national and international organizations concerned that were studied by content analysis and logical analysis. The results of this study found out the impact of the COVID-19 diplomacy on the future of the new multilateral diplomacy that formulate the challenges and opportunities it presents for the future of multilateralism and globalization in the digital world into four aspects: the converge of Covid-19 pandemic in public health diplomacy, the process of Covid-19 diplomacy and multilateral negotiations, the impact of the COVID-19 on multilateral diplomacy and international negotiations, and the future of multilateral diplomacy in the post COVID-19 digital world.

Keywords: Impacts, COVID-19 Diplomacy, New Multilateral Diplomacy, Digital World.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 has exacerbated global geopolitical trends, including the struggle to uphold multilateralism in a climate of growing nationalism, protectionism and rising great power competition. At the same time, it has demonstrated the need for multilateral cooperation for the effective mitigation of cross-border threats, including health crises (Lazarou, September 2020). Global multilateral cooperation and solidarity are central to responding to and mitigating the health diplomacy and socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper analyzes a practical aspect at the lessons learned from the period spanning the World Health Organization's first declaration of a public health emergency of international concern in January 2020, to the commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations in October 2020 (Hana Alhashimi and Others, 2021). This timespan covers a critical period of multilateral diplomacy, covering a range of tools and legal instruments of global health cooperation: peace and security, economics and financing, digital governance, the rule of law and sustainable development. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought all nations, besides human vulnerability, another painful story of global

mismanagement. If we want to achieve peace, sustainable development and respect for human rights, we have to work together in new normal multilateral diplomacy and make use of international negotiation tools available to all UN member states in the United Nations Charter, enlightening ways and means for a better world of post Covid-19 era. The entire 75th UN anniversary calls for a recommitment to multilateralism in an era of Covid-19 pandemic crisis, what is needed is exactly mechanism of actionable multilateral diplomacy, drawn from real experience and pragmatic negotiations. We can learn the wealth of experience by UN diplomatic practitioners to the effects of COVID-19 global governance in our common humanity for better future generations. This study analyzes the current COVID-19 pandemic situation and lessons learned from the pandemic's impacts on multilateral diplomacy in order to make key recommendations for the future of multilateral diplomacy and future trends are an important study of diplomatic pragmatism and guidance that will facilitate a building back better in COVID-19 responses, while creating mechanism of new normal multilateral diplomacy for continued global health governance and the future of UN sustainable development goals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multilateral diplomacy is defined as the practice of international negotiations involving more than two states or parties in achieving diplomatic solutions to various supranational problems. (Cooper,2013). Many forms and functions performed by multilateral diplomacy are depended on the mechanism and process of international negotiations. The negotiators have to develop their arts and skills in diplomatic negotiation practices and to cope with constant political stresses and tensions that run through multilateral diplomacy in order to achieve successful solutions (Aviel, 2005). After the end of Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), the beginning of multilateral diplomacy can be traced back to the 1815 Congress of Vienna's Peace Treaty and went on to proliferation after the First and Second World War with the formation of the League of Nations in 1920 and the United Nations in 1945 (Adegbite, 2009). For weak developing countries, the multilateral diplomacy will be more advantageous since they will be able to push for their national interests. Notably, global health issues and Covid-19 Pandemic crisis are handled better at multilateral negotiations than at bilateral negotiations. Multilateral diplomacy guarantees in general a leveled playground to all participating states that may have different economic and political strengths (Cooper, 2013). As opposed to bilateral diplomacy where powerful states can make decisions that favor their selfish interests, multilateral diplomacy will work towards keeping checks and balances on the powerful states, hence forming a leveled negotiation field for all members.

The rise of multilateral diplomacy was developed in the nineteenth century when the Concert of Europe sat around the table together at the 1815 Congress of Vienna to establish the system of nation-states and new European order after the Napoleonic Wars. This diplomacy was simply an international conference, not an international organization, developed in its full form in the twentieth century with the creation of the League of Nations in the aftermath of the First World War and with the United Nations, embodiment of multilateral diplomacy, born after the Second World War (Moore, 2012:1). The UN today has a worldwide membership and global landscape is peppered with economic and regional institutions that are multilateral in nature, such as World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the European Union and the G20 (Boisard & Chossudovsky, 1997). However the unilateral diplomacy of the US President Trump strategy of "American's First" that faces the world necessitates the need for multiple relations among different nations during the decline

of multilateralism (Ikenberry, 2003, September). Some of the challenges in the 21st century digital world include democracy, human rights, human migration, humanitarian assistance, COVID-19 pandemic, global warming and other environmental issues. The current global COVID-19 pandemic crisis needs multilateral diplomacy in order to give opportunities to all nations as have been seen in the leadership of UN global health diplomacy. Ban Ki Moon, UN Secretary General and South Korean former foreign minister, opened up the region to the outside world for economic developments with continuous multilateral diplomacy.

When states are confronted with diplomatic negotiations or in the conduct of their foreign policy, international negotiators shall make use of several types of foreign policy implementation: multilateral, bilateral and unilateral mechanism. The multilateral and bilateral diplomacy are sometimes seen as twines from the same destiny, for example the European Union constitutes an emerging diplomatic regional order in which multilateralism and bilateralism are intertwined and bilateralism, whilst constituting a significant component of this multilateral order, is at the same time being re-situated within it and policy areas re-located from predominantly bilateral to the multilateral framework or a mixed bi-multilateral set of processes (UKEssays, November 2018). First of all, multilateral diplomacy is a process of international relations linked with norms and ideals about greater international justice, legal equality, non-discrimination, and legitimacy. It is not solely about the number of participating states (Johnson, 2009:56; Diplomats, 2009:1). Moreover, it is defined as the management of diplomacy and international relations among three or more states through diplomatic or representatives without the services of a specialized secretariat of international organizations. Lastly, it can be an ad hoc multilateral conference for solving any specific regional or international conflicts for peaceful resolutions. According to Moore (2012:1), multilateral diplomacy is academically defined as diplomacy conducted via conferences attended by three or more states on the basis of generalized rules of conduct, while a UN envoy has defined it in simpler terms, depicting the diplomatic form as a bunch of countries pushing their own barrows but in the one room. Multilateral diplomacy is the preferred path for larger states. As the world becomes smaller through advances in technology and communications, and the more independent the digital world becomes no frontier, the further multilateral diplomacy will develop as a vehicle for international cooperation on major global issues. Regional diplomacy is beginning to develop further with the creation, in the last decades of organizations such as the African Union, the continued enlargement and integration of the European Union after 9/11, and established organizations such as NATO and the Arab League remaining prevalent.

The management of international relations in the multilateral diplomacy shall be operated by international negotiations among three or more states through diplomatic or governmental representatives, but it can also be engaged in by representatives of non-state actors. Multilateral negotiations are characterized by multi-parties, multi-issues, multi-roles, and multi-values. (Berridge, 2005). The level of complexity is far greater than in bilateral diplomacy as is the level of skill needed to manage that complexity. It can be based on multilateralism, or have multilateralism as a goal, but it can also be pursued by those who do not. Multilateralism can be defined as global governance of the many, and a major principle is the opposition to bilateral discriminatory arrangements (Muldoon and Aviel, 2018). Classic diplomatic relations focused on bilateral diplomacy and concentration of bilateral negotiations between two states concerned. However, the growth of international organizations and multilateral negotiations in the 20th century increased interest in multilateral diplomacy, which has developed since its origins in 1648. Increasing attention has been paid to the role of non-state actors and new forms of diplomacy affected by

globalization and the digitization of information. In the 21st century, multilateral diplomacy faces unique challenges and calls for the reform of international organizations and global governance.

The advantages of multilateral diplomacy to increase bargaining power efforts and diplomatic momentum to achieve in negotiations of effective bilateral diplomacy. It is argued that successful international negotiations must focus on bilateral diplomacy and this initiates and supports multilateral negotiations. It is suggested that bilateral negotiations should preempt multilateral structures and as such the concept of "multi-bilateral" negotiations provide the best platform and foundation for lasting success. It becomes evident that it is possible to continuously take advantage of the benefits of a multilateral approach based on the bilateral process used (Acharya, 1999). The position adopted is "Thinking Multilaterally but Acting Bilaterally" which has been suggested as the ASEAN way diplomacy (Acharya, 1999). The ASEAN member countries are examples of nations that have been able to use the regional body to navigate through the economies that economic giants like China and India have dominated (Dhanapala and Rydell 35). Others like Organization of the Islamic Conference (57 members), Non-Aligned Movement (118 members), and Group of 77 (130 members) care for issues that affect a member state even if the member state is less concerned with the situation.

Putting in place a multilateral diplomacy promotes formation of beneficial regional groups, such as the European Union (EU), ASEAN Community, African Union (AU) and Latin Americans. These coalitions are formed from the United Nations regional grouping based on the geopolitical and regional factors. With universal understanding, UN member countries that have the same geo-economic backgrounds can closely cooperate to promote their own interests with little or no influence from the powerful states. Regional organizations are helpful in developing the economies of nations that would have remained underdeveloped without multilateral diplomacy (Moore, 2012). For economic development, multilateral diplomacy provides a better ground for economically weaker nations to forge regional groupings that can aid their development. Multilateral diplomacy provides forums that can help in addressing transnational issues and harmonizing policies of nations (Cooper, 2013). In this aspect, member countries come up with internationally accepted foreign policies that address issues of climate change, global security, human rights, and international trade.

In European region, the European Union (EU), a multilateral entity in itself, has illustrated the relevance of multilateral diplomacy for regional integration and international cooperation. Beyond its internal strengthening, the EU has set the defense and reform of multilateralism as one of its key priorities under the current European Commission (Lazarou, September 2020). This will require a more coordinated and autonomous EU common foreign policy, a smart European strategy towards the escalating US and India vs. China and Russia rivalry, reinvigorated cooperation with major democracies, and mobilization of the EU's foreign policy tools, widely defined. As the COVID-19 pandemic leaves parts of the world more fragile and vulnerable, it also precipitates the need for a reformed multilateral system "fit for purpose" and able to address the challenges of the future. Thinking through new practices to enrich multilateralism will be important for the further development of European integration and international cooperation.

In Southeast Asian region, the origins and patterns of China's involvement in ASEAN regional multilateral institutions, as well as its characteristics and implications for China's ASEAN policy in the post-Cold War era. China's participation in three ASEAN-initiated and

-driven multilateral institutions, namely the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN-China cooperation, and the ASEAN plus Three (APT) process. China's perceptions and policies toward multilateral institutions have been going through significant changes, from caution and suspicion to optimism and enthusiasm. Instead of perceiving multilateral institutions as malign arrangements that might be used by other states to challenge China's national sovereignty and to limit its strategic choices, Beijing now views multilateral institutions as useful diplomatic platforms that can be utilized to advance its own foreign policy objectives. Such perceptual changes have slowly but significantly led to a greater emphasis on multilateral diplomacy in China's ASEAN policy (Cheng-Chwee, 2005). Multilateral diplomacy now plays a complementary, rather than a supplementary role to bilateralism in the conduct of Chinese foreign policy towards ASEAN in the new digital era.

In African region, multilateral diplomacy played an important role in building and operating the African Union (AU). It is likely to continue to consolidate more the Union with Africa's socio-economic and political renewal. The role of multilateral diplomacy already utilized and the future prospects for AU diplomacy to entrench the Union's organs and programs. (Krause, 2002). As most of the primary organs of the AU were established during the period 2000-2004, the diplomatic substance and process, which was predominantly multilateral in form during that period, is examined. With the institutional infrastructure in place, the need for multilateral diplomacy to be geared towards implementation of AU commitments is emphasized. Multilateral diplomacy is likely to prevail in AU diplomatic practices both in terms of substance and procedure and will need to focus on addressing the enormous challenges faced by the continent including eradicating poverty and underdevelopment, ensuring peace, security and stability as well as combating HIV and AIDS, amongst others. The AU needs to use multilateral diplomacy, not exclusively but in conjunction with other forms of diplomacy, to effectively and efficiently implement its commitments and programs for the tangible benefit of the ordinary African citizen. Only then will the AU be deemed credible in the eyes of its people and the rest of the world.

Within the international context, the AU has enhanced multilateral diplomatic relations aimed at promoting issues of peace and security, power and survival of the state, as well as ideas related to political economy, international cooperation and the environment, and international institution building. Multilateral diplomacy already utilized in the creation of the AU's primary organs was predominantly focused on procedural issues, conducted by means of African multilateralism such as regional bloc diplomacy and personal diplomacy by African Heads of State and Government. The necessity to include other, non-state actors in the AU consolidation process is also evident. Prioritizing the Union's policy objectives under economic development and integration; continental good governance; and the popularization of the AU, the study postulates that the future of African diplomacy will probably continue to be regionally driven, economic and public in nature and focused on making tangible progress.

METHODOLOGY

This study applied a qualitative research by using a documentary research method. All documentary data was collected from related research reports, academic books and papers, as well as official documents and information of the United Nations and other international organizations concerned. All collected documentary data were studied by content analysis, critical analysis and logical analysis throughout the data triangulation process in order to achieve comprehensive research results and discussion, conclusion and recommendations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Converge of Covid-19 Pandemic in Public Health Diplomacy

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to claim lives around the world. To some extent, it reflects the failure of multilateral cooperation in public health diplomacy. Global health diplomacy (GHD) can be a bridge for multilateral cooperation for tackling this public health crisis, strengthening health systems through emphasizing universal health coverage for equitable and sustainable development. It can be a catalyst for future global health initiatives for rebuilding multilateral diplomacy in global and regional organizations. Public health should not be used as a political tool at the cost of people's lives, nor should it become a proxy for geopolitics but can be used to diffuse tensions and create a positive environment for political dialogue. GHD's focus should be to mitigate inequality by making available diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines as a global public good (Javed and Chattu, 2020). The implications for the lack of international cooperation will lead to increased global disparities and inequities as the countries that cannot procure vaccines will find their population more vulnerable to the pandemic's repercussion. Though the international cooperation on trade has suffered the impact of geopolitical shifts and competition, through engaging in GHD, the governments can align the trade and health policies. Amid this global health crisis, the World Health Organization (WHO) has faced an increase in International Health Regulations violations, limiting its influence and response during this COVID-19 pandemic. All the nations need to develop a sense of global health cooperation that serves as the basis for a mutual strategic trust for international health development. The priorities of all the nations should be to find the areas of common interest, common operational overlap on development issues, and resource allocation for this global fight against COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the vital importance of global solidarity to confront shared public health threats that need strengthened multilateralism of public health diplomacy. Conversely, the pandemic has also shown that when suspicion and recriminations replace solidarity and diplomacy, the virus can gain a foothold and people suffer. Health is a political choice that can and must transcend geopolitics. It is one area where nations can work together across ideological divides to find common solutions to common pandemic treats. That is why we need to build public health diplomacy capacity of both diplomats and health experts. Modern health diplomacy actually started in 1839, when the Sultan of Constantinople declared quarantine throughout the Ottoman Empire to combat the plague. When European powers disagreed with these measures being applied to their ships, health diplomacy negotiations were needed. This led to the creation of the Superior Health Council of Constantinople, and four years later the Egyptian quarantine board in Alexandria (Ghebreyesus, 2021). Perhaps the most outstanding example of public health diplomacy was when the Soviet Union and the United States worked together at the height of the Cold War to eradicate smallpox, which had killed an estimated 300 million people during the 20st century. When we work in solidarity in a multilateral approach, we can achieve miracles.

In 2015, the world came together to adopt the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on finance for sustainable development. It was a moment of great convergence; all nations in the world uniting for a common purpose, and a common future. Since then, the creeping tides of misguided

nationalism and isolationism have eroded that sense of common purpose. Geopolitical tensions have sometimes overshadowed health diplomatic efforts to stand together. Short-term thinking is the undoing of international cooperation. An approach that considers enlightened self-interest allows for long-term planning and coherent international efforts (Alhashimi and Others, editors, 2021). We need to build on mutual trust and mutual accountability – to end the pandemic and address the fundamental inequalities that lie at the root of so many of the world's problems. Solidarity and equity will keep us all safer. The Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator is health diplomacy in action – an unprecedented collaboration between countries, international agencies, the private sector and other partners to ensure vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics are shared equitably, as global public goods. Vaccine equity is a litmus test for solidarity and global health diplomacy. Every life that is lost now is all the more tragic as vaccines are beginning to be rolled out (Ghebreyesus, 2021). All nations of the world must contribute more public health diplomacy efforts to achieve UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the future.

Working together with traditional public health measures, how quickly we can collectively expand vaccine manufacturing and roll out vaccines to all countries will determine how soon we control the COVID-19 pandemic. Going forward, we have to put vaccine diplomacy in place a strengthened multilateral global health system to be better prepared for the next challenges of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), from climate change to another pandemic crisis. There has never been therefore a greater need for accomplished public health diplomacy in the United Nations system, at summits of G20 and G7 or with regional groupings like European Union, ASEAN, BRICS, African Union, and all daily interactions with political, economic and societal leaders. The mechanism of public health diplomacy will be a valuable and practical tool for public health diplomats to be both professional and effective in their diplomatic career.

2. The Process of Covid-19 Diplomacy and Multilateral Negotiations

Multilateral diplomacy is a complex process of international negotiations. Its success depends on interpersonal relationships of diplomats that are forged during numerous formal and informal gatherings, including multilateral conferences, corridor lobbying, lunches and receptions. During difficult negotiations, the most sensitive sticking points are often ironed out informally, in corridors or lounges. For example, during talks to create a European common market in February 1957, French Prime Minister Guy Mollet and German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer made important progress during a walk they took in the gardens of the Hotel Matignon in Paris, where the talks were being held. Their informal discussions paved the way for the signing of the Treaty of Rome, officially creating the European Economic Community (Liechtenstein, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has made such breakthroughs impossible. Face-to-face meetings have become rare, as multilateral diplomacy is almost exclusively conducted through online teleconferences. But what are the consequences of this new form of virtual diplomacy? Could world peace and security be at risk as a result of the interruptions by COVID-19 pandemic crisis?

The United Nations has recommended that all meetings remain virtual conferences at least until the end of June 2021. This is a huge logistical challenge given that, before the pandemic, up to 10,000 people used to walk in and out of U.N. headquarters in New York on an average day (Ghebreyesus, 2021). Conventional multilateral diplomacy has been therefore put on pause, and all diplomatic communication is taking place online teleconferences in

multilateral negotiations, not face-to-face and in-person interaction negotiations. Social distancing requirements and restrictions on movement also have dramatic consequences for the functioning of the 15-member Security Council and the 193-member General Assembly, the two most important principal organs of the U.N. multilateral diplomacy system (Muldoon, 1999). The Security Council has been working via videoconference since the end of March 2021, after an initial two-week period of paralysis. The shift to telework has not prevented the council from making a number of important procedural decisions, such as the prolongation of mandates for peacekeeping missions. But the procedure for remotely casting and verifying votes is much more complicated than in-person voting. During in-person meetings, voting is a matter of just a few minutes, as it takes place by a show of hands (Liechtenstein, 2020). Currently, the remote voting process in the United Nations teleconference takes up to three days.

Meanwhile, the General Assembly has yet to implement a formal electronic voting system because some members still resist it. This means the body cannot adopt resolutions through its usual voting procedure, and can only pass resolutions that have the consensus of all member states, meaning only minimal compromises are possible. Powerful members like China and Russia - but also some Western states, including the U.S. - seem comfortable with a situation where they don't need to confront General Assembly resolutions that go against their interests (Alhashimi and Others, editors, 2021). The absence of face-to-face meetings has led some states, such as China and Russia, to exploit the COVID-19 crisis in order to weaken key U.N. bodies. For example, they have tried to argue that because the online meetings are informal, the Security Council's sanctions committees cannot make important decisions anymore, such as examining or taking action on alleged violations of sanctions. Under this system of unanimity with the veto rights of the five permanent members, reacting to certain world events quickly is not possible. The longer this situation persists, the greater the risk for peace and security. Historically, the UNGA has always voted to express the international community's views on important global crises in places like Ukraine and Syria. While we can still have an exchange of views online teleconferences, it is not the same as meeting face-to-face multilateral negotiations. One of the main values of the UNGA is the opportunity for having a short encounter in one of the U.N.'s corridors and many bilateral meetings on the sidelines between leaders of long-time adversaries that don't maintain official diplomatic relations.

Another key U.N. Specialized Agency that has been affected by lockdown measures is the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The agency, which is in charge of monitoring implementation of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, held its last Board of Governors meetings in mid-March 2020, just before Austria's lockdown took effect the week after. At the meeting, Rafael Grossi, IAEA Director-General, sounded the alarm over Iran's lack of cooperation with the agency and demanded clarification about the agency's suspicion that Iran maintains undeclared nuclear material at a number of sites in the country. The IAEA has found it difficult to make progress on this issue since Iran has not yet provided access to these locations. The issue will be taken up, together with a range of other pressing topics, at the next Board of Governors meeting set to take place in June 2021 (Liechtenstein, 2020). However, it is often difficult to resolve sensitive issues without an in-person meeting. Multilateral diplomacy is always about in-person interaction of international negotiations, about finding a common interests and understanding on controversial issues. The issue is further mores complicated by the fact that diplomats have to be careful about discussing sensitive topics over phone or in a videoconference in the United Nations and other international organizations.

Stay-at-home measures have also affected the European Union (EU). The EU headquarters in Brussels is usually teeming with politicians, diplomats, journalists and lobbyists from all over the world. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck in Europe, the EU at first seemed totally paralyzed. Eventually some meetings were moved online, and other key meetings among diplomats continued to be held in person in Brussels. Videoconferences among European ministers are not as efficient as face-to-face meetings in Brussels. During in-person meetings, representatives of the EU member states sit around a table and are able to get up and make progress on other issues while statements are made that do not concern them directly. Most of the EU negotiators usually make use of their time during EU meetings to gather with colleagues in small settings to redraft declarations (Alhashimi and Others, editors, 2021). This simultaneous and informal work does not function as efficiently via teleconference and online tools, because the issues are often too complex and more delicate that there will certainly be less output by the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

The situation is similar at the Vienna-based Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) in Europe, which runs a monitoring mission in Ukraine. Urgent decisions are pending before the organization's leadership, like term extensions for four top positions, including the secretary-general. These types of negotiations are always complicated, but now that they have been moved online teleconferences, they are taking place at a much slower pace. The reason for the slow pace is that diplomats are pushed into taking more official stances in videoconferences. (Ghebreyesus, 2021). The room for maneuver that exists during an informal face-to-face meeting is simply not there. While these challenges will continue to make multilateral negotiations difficult, diplomats also concede that it is necessary to adopt and even retain some online tools in a post-pandemic environment (Muldoon, 1999). Videoconferences in any global and regional international organizations may not be ideal for negotiating delicate or complicate topics, but they are very efficient for debating routine issues or just exchanging views between long distance participants, not face-to-face negotiations.

3. The Impact of the COVID-19 on Multilateral Diplomacy and Negotiations

Multilateral diplomacy is generally considered a practice that relies on direct human contact, on face-to-face encounters and negotiations, on being in the same meeting room, and on having space to develop interpersonal relationships. Firstly, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic forced a change in diplomatic practices and international negotiations. The rules of procedure with the UN system had to be creatively interpreted or adapted. Switching to online and video conferencing and other means of electronic communication also raised some questions around protocol. Decisions and questions around online video conferencing platforms became more prominent. The switch to online and video conferencing raised profound questions for decision-making and voting procedures and challenged organizations to adapt (Höne, 2020). In many multilateral diplomatic hubs in New York, Geneva, Vienna, and Brussels, the lockdown put an abrupt end to these venues. Video conferences have replaced face-to-face personal meetings. Some informal meeting spaces no longer exist in multilateral diplomacy in order to coordinate responses to COVID-19, negotiate the policies and actions of various international organizations. However, video conferences shall not be efficiently replaced for face-to-face meetings or drafting agreements in the informal spaces of corridors.

Secondly, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on multilateral diplomacy and international negotiations is bountiful. The viruses overlook national borders, and the pandemic in our interconnected world has generated unprecedented worldwide disturbance that has impaired one-third of the world economy and caused the biggest economic collapse following the Great Depression in 1930. The global pandemic has further hit regional integration, free movement and trade as new rules have gradually come into action creating an increasing threat to global peace and security. Interpersonal interaction has been the "lifeline" of diplomacy that diminishes the boundaries and builds trust among the countries. (Amaresh, 2021). Multilateral diplomacy has mostly been a complicated process of international negotiations. The post-COVID pandemic it has become more complicated because multilateral diplomacy has moved to "virtual diplomacy" through teleconferences that have become the new means for multilateral diplomacy where face-to-face meetings have become rare. As a result, the COVID-19 pandemic has distorted the diplomatic setting of informal talks and interpersonal interactions, which are indispensable process of multilateral diplomacy and negotiations.

Lastly, the impact of COVID-19 pandemic can also be seen through the present state of multilateral organizations that have aggravated their decline. For example, the World Health Organization (WHO) has made the world to question its accountability and effectiveness (Ghebreyesus, 2021). The struggle for superpower in world politics has also taken a dominating edge in almost all the multilateral diplomatic discussions and negotiations on the resolution of pandemic crisis. The absence of face-to-face meetings has also made states like China to exploit the pandemic crisis in order to undermine the key United Nations bodies. The 20th-century multilateralism saw shuttle diplomacy, summit diplomacy and hotline diplomacy that became mainstream diplomatic means. The transformation of multilateral diplomacy has been characterized by combining to modify and renew diplomatic mode and practices to be correspondent with technological/social changes. The pandemic in the age of "Artificial Intelligence" and "Digital Diplomacy" has paved the way for new normal multilateral diplomacy in the 21st Century. Countries are now investing financial resources to develop infrastructure to support "video conference diplomacy" with task-specific adjustability, state control and security (Amaresh, 2021). However, challenges to inefficiency, cyber security, unevenness and debasement, leading to a disinclination to earmark resources to the transformation of multilateral diplomacy needs to be addressed in the future.

The pandemic has exacerbated global geopolitical trends, including the struggle to uphold multilateralism in a climate of growing nationalism, protectionism and rising great power competition. At the same time, it has demonstrated the need for multilateral cooperation for the effective mitigation of cross-border threats, including health crises (Lazarou, September 2020). The COVID crisis has made it clear how interconnected the world is and how important global health co-operation is to handle international challenges. Some developing countries already have weak health-care systems, without access to clean water for all, or functioning safety nets and COVID has made it more devastating. As per a recent World Bank report, COVID has set off the first recession in sub-Saharan Africa in 25 years. While the pandemic is simply out of control in the U.S, Europe, Japan and parts of Asia, the new strain that has devastated the U.K economy at present and brought life to a standstill with the new lockdown being imposed, has been gradually spreading to other countries.

The European Union (EU) however, is doing its part to mitigate and to overcome COVID by taking necessary measures to decrease the debt load of more affected nations. China is

surprisingly recovering from COVID gradually and India has recently administered the vaccine to battle the COVID cases (Amaresh, 2021). The pandemic has dived the world economy into a deep disorder where it has continued to claim millions of lives devastating the livelihoods globally. The deep impact of the COVID pandemic crisis is a wake call for multilateral cooperation of world powers and countries to strengthen an open world economy improve macroeconomic coordination, simultaneously manage global supply chains and industries. There is a need to further bolster the call to reshape multilateral diplomacy and international negotiation for global health cooperation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has imperiled the contemporary world order, with the rise of China as new world superpower. The increasing US-China geopolitical power race can likewise disturb the relative peace and security in the new global system. Thus, multilateralism is a necessity for a sustainable recovery of world economy today. The pandemic has reemphasized the significance of a multilateral path to the UN SDGs and sustainable growth along with coupling economic and environmental priorities. It is a test of our humanity and requires global cooperation, solidarity and multilateral solutions for establishing a new multilateral system. As future new world order will remain to make multilateral negotiation complex, the United Nations and others multilateral organizations should learn to adapt to virtual diplomacy. The new normal multilateral diplomacy in the post-pandemic era has to solve unprecedented international issues such as the protection of biodiversity and climate change. The maintaining of world health system also requires therefore need to reinforce adequate multilateral health diplomacy. Therefore, the multilateral world order needs to be modified and change to "recover better" the post-COVID global health system.

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis should be a chance to build the global health security system and improve pandemic readiness, prevention and response. The association with global actors, civil society organizations, the UN, WHO, EU, ASEAN and other regional organizations, is fundamental in battling the pandemic effectively. In the struggle against the COVID-19 pandemic, global multilateral cooperation will be the most beneficial weapon despite the national responses, which is indispensable. Reinforcing and reforming of the organizations and mechanisms will buttress cooperation against the coming global threats. Also, the post-COVID world will pave way for new global health multilateralism, where multilateral diplomacy can play a prime role to suit the present global setting of world health system. The world must therefore envision the mechanism of new multilateral health diplomacy to coordinate global efforts for bolstering the multilateral partnership in various sectors and moving ahead to sustained recovery in measures of global health performance.

4. The Future of Multilateral Diplomacy in the Post COVID-19 Digital World

The world today is now faced with responding to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, an unprecedented global challenge of new normal multilateral diplomacy at a critical juncture after the 75th anniversary of the United Nations in October 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the multilateral system's inability to live up to the expectations projected on it in the current geopolitical environment. The capacities of the United Nations system and the World Health Organization in the face of the pandemic crisis have led critics of internationalism to prematurely pronounce the failure of multilateralism and global governance. The inadequate multilateral response to the pandemic, particularly that of the UNSC, the G20 and G7, and even the WHO, is a result of the current dynamics between major powers, particularly the US and China. Already engulfed in a growing geopolitical and

ideological rivalry and a heated trade war, China and the US instrumentalised the health crisis to create allegiances and to engage in power games that delayed and watered down initiatives for a coordinated global response (Lazarou, September 2020). Looking ahead to the new world order of the post COVID-19 digital world, complexity and unpredictability will continue to be the norm of diplomacy and international relations. In a world of digital revolution, anticipatory global digital governance is the key to the survival and evolution of multilateral digital diplomacy.

The emergence of WhatsApp diplomacy as a crucial tool of diplomatic instruments in the practice of multilateral digital diplomacy has become of relevance to diplomats across the globe, especially in the light of the recent outbreak of the COVID – 19 pandemic which has greatly disrupted established global processes of multilateral negotiations, not least amongst them being those of the United Nations. WhatsApp diplomacy can be defined as the use of the WhatsApp Application to facilitate traditional communications-based diplomatic processes. It is a subset of digital diplomacy, which according to Rashica (2019), is the use of new information and communications technologies (ICTs), the internet and social media as a means of strengthening diplomatic relations between international actors. WhatsApp has become integral to the practice of multilateral diplomacy. The use and integration of WhatsApp in relation to UN elections, where it is employed as a tool and platform for campaigning. The emergence of "WhatsApp diplomacy" has recently become of relevance, given the increasing use of virtual communications technologies to facilitate the practice of multilateral diplomacy (Ashley, 2021). This is in the light of the constraints engendered by the global outbreak of the COVID – 19 pandemic and its variants, which have resulted in devastating economic and social disruptions at the national, regional and global levels.

WhatsApp is an American freeware, cross platform, centralized messaging and voice-over-IP (VoIP) service owned by Facebook. It was introduced in 2009, and engineered by computer programmers Brian Action and Jan Koum. Facebook acquired Whatsapp in 2014, with a total of 400 Million active users at that time. By 2017, WhatsApp had more than 1.5 billion users around the world, exchanging nearly 60 billion messages on a single day (Sandre, 2018). Users may send and receive electronic messages or other forms of media, including but not limited to videos, photographs, audio files and various forms of diplomatic documentation. Though there are many benefits of using WhatsApp as a tool to conduct multilateral diplomacy, arguments have been raised concerning the growing security concerns of the digital era. For diplomats, the safe transmission of communication is of extreme importance, given the sensitive nature of the information they access and convey. Lessons of espionage from World War II and the Cold War Era, and indeed, current high-profile cases of hacking and data leakage of sensitive information remind us of this fact, and prove the validity of these security concerns (Ashley, 2021). However, WhatsApp had begun to transform the conduct of multilateral diplomacy and international negotiations. The current changes to certain diplomatic practices including the transmission of information and the efficiency thereof have engendered a paradigm shift in this regard. To what extent, therefore, is the use of WhatsApp the conduit by which multilateral diplomacy and international negotiations will be conducted in future?

The development of WhatsApp diplomacy has rendered certain bureaucratic processes and procedures previously attached to the practice of multilateral diplomacy inefficient. The engagement of WhatsApp by diplomats in multilateral negotiations has allowed for the effective and efficient transmission of crucial information during international conferences. WhatsApp has become an essential tool for multilateral negotiations, where several players

must work in concert towards building and maintaining consensus on key issues of shared interest. The advancements proffered by WhatsApp diplomacy, however, can never replace traditional diplomatic practices and procedures. The responsibility of the envoy remains, inter alia, as dictated by article two (2) of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, to promote friendly relations between States. Diplomacy in all its forms will always require human interaction and engagement (Ashley, 2021). After all, the conventional established means of diplomatic communication such as the telegraph evolved into telephone conversations and emails and other digital media instruments. WhatsApp messages and other such diplomatic correspondence shall eventually be the next step in the evolution of acknowledged diplomatic communication in the Post COVID-19 digital World.

The greater use of digital communication of diplomatic correspondence and instruments in the conduct of digital multilateral diplomacy as a response to COVID-19 pandemic crisis did not necessarily lead to more transparency or better equal access for all diplomats, UN officers, civil society, the media, and other diplomatic actors concerned. Hybrid meetings will become a permanent feature of multilateral diplomatic practice. This raises questions about the equality between those attending face-to-face in person and those joining online remotely, procedures for dealing with connectivity issues, and the rights of those joining remotely vis-à-vis those physically present. In particular, there is a sense that video conferences will continue to play a bigger role than before, even after physical meetings are possible again without restrictions. A number of survey respondents suggested that they have experienced greater efficiency when meeting virtually and indicated that this practice could be continued for specific issues. Others see benefits in hybrid meetings, where some participants are present in one location while others join remotely (Höne, 2020). Hybrid meetings are a very likely candidate for a sustained post-COVID practice. One hope associated with this form of meeting is the greater inclusion of civil society and experts, especially in meetings of international organizations. Witnesses could be more easily included in meetings to give a better sense of the situation on the ground. Hybrid meetings might also save on travel costs, a reason that is of particular importance for small and developing states. Lastly, hybrid meetings can allow for supporting smaller delegations with experts and staff from the relevant ministries at home.

CONCLUSION

In brief, the multilateral diplomatic practice has had to make some substantial shifts during the COVID-19 pandemic. The digital diplomacy of video conferences will continue to play a bigger role than before, even after physical meetings are possible again without restrictions. Diplomats have experienced greater efficiency when meeting virtually could be continued for specific issues. Others see benefits in hybrid meetings, where some participants are present in one location while others join remotely. Key suggestions for the future of multilateral diplomacy: (1) Hybrid meetings are useful for post-COVID practices, (2) A virtual home for UN system and regional organizations shall be opened to all on an equal footing, and (3) Training and capacity building for diplomats need to adjust to the realities of new normal multilateral diplomacy.

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