

DEEP DIVE:
THE WORLD
AFTER COVID-19

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The world has now entered the fifth month of the COVID-19 pandemic. What was a medical crisis has morphed into a multi-system game changer which will pose significant challenges for all governments. Lockdowns have seen economies shrink to Great Depression levels of the 1930s and the unfolding unemployment crisis has seen state intervention in unprecedented fashion with payroll support and stimulus packages. This deep dive assesses the emerging trends from the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the world.

First reports of a disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 were in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020 and a pandemic on 11 March 2020. As of 17 July 2020, more than 13.8 million cases of COVID-19 have been reported in over 188 countries, resulting in over 590,000 deaths.

Governments were slow to respond and when they did it was by implementing travel restrictions, lockdowns and facility closures. The pandemic and subsequent response has caused unprecedented global, social and economic disruption including the largest global recession since the Great Depression and global famines affecting 265 million people. Postponement and blanket cancellation of sporting, religious, political and cultural events. Schools, universities and colleges have also been closed either on a nationwide or local basis in 172 countries, affecting approximately 98% of the world's student population.

The pandemic and the response has caused shocks of seismic and global magnitude. Unprecedented not just due to its severity, depth and broad scale, but also because it is now just the latest crisis converging to a cacophony of issues demanding urgent and immediate attention. The world was already facing political, economic, environmental and leadership crisis before the dreaded virus broke out.

POLITICAL CRISIS

Democracy started as an experiment in Athens over two thousand years ago and eventually pervaded every continent and every land as the gold standard for governance. The US President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address in 1863 about a "Government of the people, by the people and for the people", claiming that the US system is where no-one was superior to another, where everyone was free and where decisions were made for the benefit of the many not for the few. The forward momentum of this core idea was supposed to be relegated into the dustbin of history the archaic tyrannical, monarchical systems that came before it.

This rhetoric often repeated as when the Berlin wall came down in 1989, but in practice it's been extremely difficult to implement.

Democracy is today drowning in its own theoretical foundations and the practicalities and pragmatism it throws up. Whilst all would agree that their leaders should be elected and be representative, the reality of democracy is that regular elections favour those with moneyed power and adversely impact tough long-term decision making. The frequency of elections has come to bias politicians against tackling long-term challenges and instead to focus on short-term popularity. The more elections there are the more national democracies have become poisoned with money and short-term thinking. Winston Churchill observed in 1947: "No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." [1]

In much of the developed world a select self-appointed elite group have come to dominate the political systems: it has become a system of the 1%, by the 1% and for the 1%. Democracy has today become a system which systematically rewards its elites through tax cuts, regulation and security at the expense of the majority who end up paying off the debts and deficits. This led to Nobel laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz to proclaim: "For 40 years, elites in rich and poor countries alike promised that neoliberal policies would lead to faster economic growth, and that the benefits would trickle down so that everyone, including the poorest, would be better off. Now that the evidence is in, is it any wonder that trust in elites and confidence in democracy have plummeted." [2]

Today politicians are more hated than debt collectors. Anger at political elites and economic dissatisfaction has fuelled political upheaval across the world. Many have turned to unconventional populist politicians and political parties in the hope that things would change. Anti-establishment leaders, parties and movements have emerged on both the right and left of the political spectrum, in some cases challenging fundamental norms and institutions of liberal democracy. Organisations that document democracy are reporting global declines in the health of democracy. What we are witnessing are people turning away from the futility of the ballot box (the previously agreed mechanism to solve societal problems) towards direct action measures such as the Yellow Jackets movement in France and occupy Wall Street in the US and Extinction Rebellion.

IDENTITY CRISIS

2020 will undoubtedly be remembered as the year that millions of people around the world united to denounce racism. The brutal murder of George Floyd at the hands of the police, shocked people of all backgrounds, and led to mass protests, in the US and around the world. Unfortunately, it is equally unlikely that it will be remembered as the year that the world stopped racism just like the previous attempts in prior decades.

The protestors fervently hope that they can eradicate the ugly stain of racism from their societies. But while capitalism remains dominant, it will build on the ideas of unregulated competition and competing supremacy among groups and people. Racism is a feature not a bug in the capitalism system, and it has a long track record of creating conflict between people in order to keep itself functioning.

In Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, a new model was developed that was supposed to prevent costly, bloody wars, and ensure political stability. This idea was that the nation state should be the basic unit from which all legitimate political power should flow.

Europeans expected that this idea would lead to universal peace and prosperity among nations, as empowered citizens would prevent their governments from plunging them into needless wars and hostilities. However, this confidence was misplaced. In actuality, the dark forces of nationalism ushered in the bloodiest period of human history. Millions died in the two world wars, and scores of regional conflicts, as ethnic groups fought over land and resources that they once shared, due to the false idea that political power must be tied to ethnicity and territorial boundaries.

The genocidal horrors visited on the world during those wars led to a lasting stigma for extreme nationalism for decades. As a result, many mainstream politicians in Europe, the US and elsewhere sought to carefully distance themselves from rhetoric that could be seen as stoking ethnic or racial tensions – while their societies were still marred by discrimination.

In recent years though, the very public failures of the political establishment in the West has discredited status quo politicians. This has provided a huge opportunity for populist politicians to fill the void, and feed on emotive resentments while playing the race and immigration cards to win support – and stoke hatred of vulnerable groups.

Much of the world is turning back to populism, fascism and naked racism: US President Trump labelled Mexicans as rapists and Muslims as national security threats. Europe, the epicentre for the holocaust, is home to far-right fanatics who are not just doing well in elections but are increasing their seats in national politics. The Brexit campaign brought hatred and fear of foreigners to the centre of political life in the UK. After a decade of austerity, people should have been turning on their politicians, civil servants and those who implemented these policies but instead many are turning on immigrants, foreigners and Muslims.

Repeating history has shown us such impulses only go in one direction, unfettered nationalism is the path to systematic violence and the massacre of minorities at the hands of the majority.



ECONOMIC CRISIS

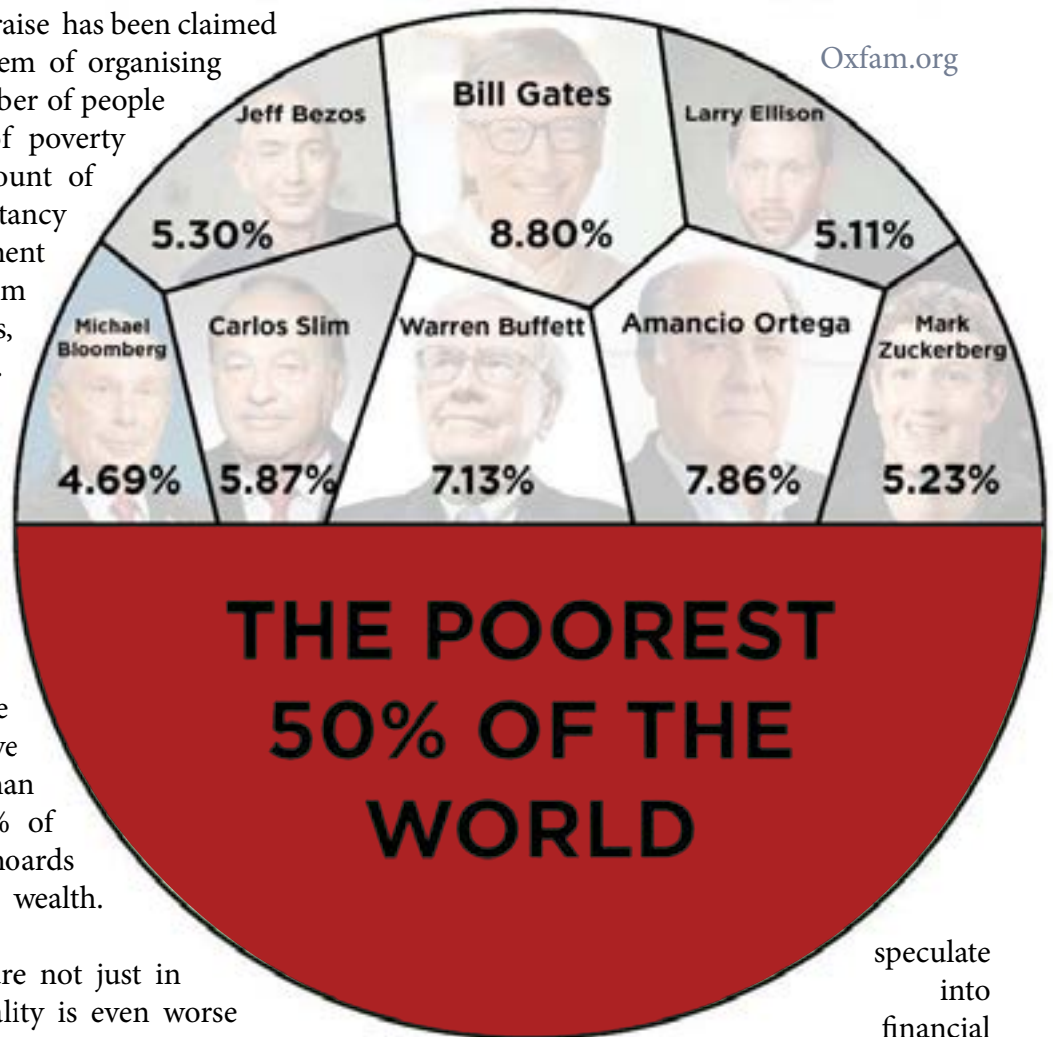
Capitalism in its hubristic self praise has been claimed to be the most successful system of organising the market in history. The number of people who have been moved out of poverty into prosperity, the sheer amount of wealth in the world, life expectancy and technological development have all been thanks to capitalism and its unfettered free markets, commodification and free trade.

But the world in which we live in today paints a very different picture of inequality and inescapable absolute poverty.

Tonight, half of the world, 3.8 billion people, will not be having dinner as they are too poor. More people have access to mobile phones than toilets. Shockingly, a mere 1% of the world's population now hoards and controls 82% of global wealth.

The problems globally today are not just in the third world, wealth inequality is even worse in the developed world. Thomas Piketty's book – *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (published in 2013), exposed how bad wealth inequality is in the US and Europe. Piketty's conclusions were stark in that inequality is not an accident but rather a feature of capitalism that can be reversed only through state intervention. Unless capitalism is reformed, the very democratic order will be threatened. Joseph Stiglitz confirmed: "Well, after 40 years, the numbers are in: growth has slowed, and the fruits of that growth went overwhelmingly to a very few at the top. As wages stagnated and the stock market soared, income and wealth flowed up, rather than trickling down." [3]

What has taken place since 'the end of history' in 1989 is that plunder has become a way of life for a tiny elite, who over the course of two decades have created for themselves a legal system that authorises it and a morality that glorifies it. For them the world is full of unprotected cheap labour and is to be used to make profit, irrespective of the consequences. These elites create products which pollute the air and seas. They



speculate into financial products which have no real existence but give them exorbitant profits, whilst the vast majority struggle to make ends meet. In 2008 this tiny elite brought the world to its knees. The truth is the free market is really a licence for a small elite to plunder the rest of humanity. Perpetual economic growth i.e. wealth creation has failed to distribute wealth in any equitable manner and created the inequality problem in the world.

Many can now see that national governments really work for the interests of the top 1% and manage the expectations of the rest. Many can now see they have been left behind as a few people, who could fit onto a bus, benefited immensely at the expense of the rest. When England's top football striker has to beg the Government to give food vouchers to children in the world's 5th richest economy, something has seriously gone wrong [4]. History is littered with examples of elites preferring their own short-term benefits over the rest and this inequality lies at the heart of nearly every popular revolution in mankind [5].

ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

The evidence on the environmental crisis cannot be understated, scientists believe with global temperatures rising fast, the ability to rescue the planet is fast diminishing. Yet despite these warnings, there are many from the neoliberal capitalist school of free markets that still dispute the science and continue to prioritise economic growth over environmental damage especially in areas such as fossil fuels.

In May 2019, the results of the most thorough planetary health check ever undertaken by the world's leading scientists concluded human society is in jeopardy from the accelerating decline of the Earth's natural life-support systems. From coral reefs flickering out beneath the oceans to rainforests desiccating into savannahs, nature is being destroyed at a rate tens to hundreds of times higher than the average over the past 10 million years, according to the UN global assessment report. The biomass of wild mammals has fallen by 82%, natural ecosystems have lost about half their area and a million species are at risk of extinction – all largely as a result of human actions, said the study, compiled over three years by more than 450 scientists and diplomats.

Perpetual economic growth was one of the reasons that led to the rapid industrialisation in the 18th century. The emissions from factories and then the rapid increase in the use of coal, then oil and eventually gas for energy led to global emissions to frantically increase. There is broadly an agreement that these fossil emissions i.e. human activity has led to a rise in global temperatures and is causing widespread climate problems. Capitalism placed perpetual economic growth as the overwhelming purpose of a liberal economy, cutting emissions,

though reducing production is taboo as this would halt economic growth. This is why emission reduction targets are voluntary and each meeting on climate change merely ends with discussions on when more efficient technology will be available that maintains current economic levels with less emissions. The need to perpetually grow, has contributed to global warming, a central tenet of liberal economic thought, solving it is impossible as it would entail contradicting this central value, this is why no solution has been reached.

We now reside on a planet in which the human footprint is so large it leaves little space for anything else. Three-quarters of all land has been turned into farm fields, covered by concrete, swallowed up by dam reservoirs or otherwise significantly altered. Two-thirds of the marine environment has also been changed by fish farms, shipping routes, subsea mines and other projects. Three-quarters of rivers and lakes are used for crop or livestock cultivation. As a result, more than 500,000 species have insufficient habitats for long-term survival. Many are on course to disappear within decades. The destruction and exploitation of natural habitats also increases the likelihood of new pandemics.

The developing world is facing the effects of the environmental problem as the developed world has been the main source of environmental damage since the industrial age. The cause of this destruction is clear – a world economy dominated by Capitalist economic principles. We are today cutting down our forests, overfishing our seas, polluting our rivers, degrading our soils and changing our climate. This poses an urgent threat to all life on Earth.



LEADERSHIP CRISIS

Leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Mao Zedong and Abraham Lincoln are still quoted today due to leading their people in times of crisis and where they were seen as sacrificing for the greater good. Islamic history is not short of great leaders, from our beloved Prophet Muhammad (SAW), to the Khulafah Rashidah, Salahuddin Ayyubi and Sultan Abdul Hamid who demonstrated exceptional leadership based on Islamic ideals and values. But today the world's most influential nations consistently have leaders who have complete disdain for the global good. They fiddle while the planet burns, while billions go hungry and while their own citizens don't have access to minimum standards of health, education and justice. Politicians have become further enslaved to corporate interests, lobbyists and historical elites, seeking to fund multimillion dollar campaigns, to get re-elected rather than solving the most pressing challenges of the 21st century. World leaders are running away from solving global issues.

Leadership is about being able to demonstrate the best of mankind and not its worst. Leadership is not about defaulting to people's worst impulses but convincing them of the bigger picture. The world has witnessed great leaders and great tyrants, those who lifted the world and those that tried to destroy it. Today many feel the world does not have charismatic titans, but repulsive lightweights, leaders who will be remembered for pursuing their own corrupt interests rather than those who sacrificed for the global good. History will remember that as we begin the third decade of the 21st century, with the world facing existential threats, that the leaders in power are some of the worst we have ever seen: leaders that constantly duck the tough issues, leaders that constantly pit one race against another and finally leaders who constantly favour the few over the many.

The COVID-19 pandemic is only magnifying and aggravating these problems.

PANDEMIC POLITICS

President Donald Trump was gearing up for elections in November 2020. Everything was going well for him. He hasn't gone to war; he renegotiated the country's trade deals and he was dealing with China. Trump was becoming very skilled at creating his own problems and then solving them. Mexicans were a threat to the USA and Trump's solution was to build a wall. Muslims are a threat; his solution was to impose a ban on a selection of Muslim majority nations.

But then COVID-19 broke and now everything has been turned upside down and Trump's re-election is not just in doubt, but the Republicans are coming out in numbers proclaiming Trump needs to step down and another candidate needs to be put forward if the Republicans have any chance of winning the November 2020 elections. "If Trump's numbers erode to 35 percentage points over the next two weeks, he's going to be facing realistically a 400-plus electoral vote loss and the president would need to strongly reconsider whether he wants to continue to run as the Republican presidential nominee," Trump political adviser Sam Nunberg told the Politico [6].

It seems finally everyone can see the emperor has no clothes as the COVID-19 pandemic exposed Donald Trump. The US has seen over 3 million cases of COVID-19 infections with the most deaths globally of 138,000 people and rising. The virus had been deadly for many, due the lack of action by the president when it was needed. Donald Trump was dead set from the outset to avoid responsibility and blame everyone else. The US president still blames China and according to him the only reason things are not worse is because of his quick action in banning travel from China. Throughout the pandemic, President Trump has repeatedly contradicted the advice of his public health officials, in a bid to control the messaging about the virus to Americans. Trump came under fire for using daily coronavirus press briefings to tout his own successes, rather than inform the public, and for spreading misinformation about the virus. Eventually the president walked out of a daily briefing and launched a series of attacks against the press on Twitter for asking "hostile questions" and for reporting on his handling of the virus.

Donald Trump, the leader of the free world has shown his incompetence by struggling to deal with a real issue, amongst his most ingenious solutions was people should somehow ingest disinfectant to deal with the virus.

In the UK we have seen a similar picture of political leaders avoiding tough decisions and delaying doing the right thing. With more than 41,000 COVID-19 deaths in the UK, Boris Johnson has presided over one of the worst records in the world after the US and Brazil. With a majority in the elections in December 2019 the Conservatives were in a strong position with Prime Minister Boris Johnson leading the country through Brexit. But six months on, all this is now a distant reality. Today all levels of the Government and much of the wider public fear that the premier and his team catastrophically lost their grip on the virus. Things are in such a bad state for the Government that Downing Street commissioned private polls in May to track the public mood through the coronavirus crisis [7].

In March 2020 when the virus was spreading globally the UK Government delayed taking any action to protect the population. On 5 March, Boris Johnson, appearing on This Morning, highlighted: "one of the theories is, that perhaps you could take it on the chin, take it all in one go and allow the disease, as it were, to move through the population, without taking as many draconian measures. I think we need to strike a balance."

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“...With politicians struggling domestically to deal with COVID-19, this has translated into a complete lack of leadership at the international level.”



The interview was widely circulated as it outlined the Government's position. A few days later the UK came to know what this meant. Dominic Cummings, Boris Johnson's chief of staff and his principal strategist since the days of Vote Leave in 2016, is credibly reported to have stated that the Government's strategy was “herd immunity, protect the economy and if that means that some pensioners die, too bad” [8]. Put more succinctly ‘Herd immunity and let the old people die’.

With Johnson's team turning on scientists, and the scientists speaking out to contradict Johnson, the prime minister has been finding it hard to argue the Government's actions and the timings of them. The prospects of a second wave will make the public even more sceptical.

Since the global economic crisis in 2008, many in the developed world turned to austerity to deal with the crisis. This involved massive cuts in social spending including healthcare. This took place as the banking industry was lavished with bailouts and stimulus spending.

Whilst the UK Government has gone to great lengths to praise the NHS and the response of doctors and nurses with the public being encouraged to show their support for them on Thursday evenings with a round of applause, the truth is successive governments for decades have been looking to privatise the UK's National Health Service. The Government's reliance on private contractors during the public health emergency comes after a decade of public sector reorganisation, marketisation and deep cuts to services and local government in England. The Guardian interviewed dozens of public health directors, politicians, experts in infectious disease control, government scientific and political advisers, NHS leaders and emergency planners about the years leading up to the pandemic. They described how an infrastructure that was once in place to respond to public health crises was fractured, and in some places demolished, by policies introduced by recent

Conservative governments, with some changes going as far back as Labour's years in power [9].

In May 2020, the Doctor's Association UK (DA) and the Good Law Project (GLP) issued a legal challenge demanding an immediate inquiry into the Government failure to provide adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) to frontline staff. The challenge they said was due to the “recurrent and systemic” failures in PPE procurement and supply. This is a damning indictment as doctors and nurses who are on the front lines against COVID-19 have been neglected by the Government.

In both cases whether the US or the UK the political leaders never had saving lives at the heart of their decision making but economics, approval ratings and re-election campaigns were the key considerations. They have confirmed what many have come to realise that political leaders are either taking care of the 1% or busy fulfilling their own political ambitions. This is why it is not surprising that faith in the politicians to deal with the most pressing issues, is at rock bottom.

With politicians struggling domestically to deal with COVID-19 this has translated into a complete lack of leadership at the international level. The US is washing its hands of a global response and no nation is even attempting to bring the world's nations together to come up with a global response, even though COVID-19 does not respect borders. We have seen some nations even turning towards national self-interest. US President Donald Trump halted the shipment of protective equipment which was an export of the US economy in order to look strong in front of the US public [10]. Furthermore, the US bought up the entire world's stockpile of the antiviral Remdesavir, thought to cut the recovery time of some severely ill COVID19 patients. Despite a crisis of such large proportion no one is looking to lead from the front and worryingly the draconian and intrusive policies of China are being held up as an effective model [11].



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The politics of pandemics

THE HERD IMMUNITY APPROACH

Let the disease burn through the population in order to develop immunity.

But this approach posed significant risk to the elderly and vulnerable and the overwhelming of health

THE LOCKDOWN METHOD

Severely restrict people's movements by confining them in their homes in order to halt the spread of the virus.

This method had massive implications on the economy the loss of income, businesses and devastation to people's lives



WIDESCALE TESTING

Testing suspected cases and isolating and contact-tracing all who may have been infected.

Implemented in South Korea, Singapore and Japan and allowed normal day to day businesses and lives to continue for the vast majority of healthy people within society. But requires good societal infrastructure.

THE POST-COVID WORLD

Extreme climatic, social, economic and political conditions have all converged to put Western civilisation under strain. It has become apparent that there is little or no clue on how to resolve the multitude of problems that stem from the interdependency of all these conditions.

Globalisation was for long the economic mantra. When the Berlin wall was torn down in 1989 the forward march of technology, telecommunications and global supply chains from Mexico to Malaysia was meant to break down barriers to global free trade. The collapse of communism ushered in a period of unprecedented globalisation which saw the dismantling of trade barriers and the forming of one global market, directed by the dominant Capitalist countries and trade bodies. Interconnectedness was touted as the economic utopia. This utopia is now the source of some of the biggest problems the world has faced in the 21st century.

The global economic crisis in 2008, had its origins in the financial industry and its practices around mortgages and debt. In the quest for more profitability, debt defaults increased leading to a financial crisis. The crisis began in the US and the economic contagion spread to other financial markets, then other nations until it engulfed the whole world. The economic contagion was a direct product of capitalist economic policies and financial products. The interconnectivity in the world due to globalisation caused supply chains to be global and is considered one of the reasons for the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Political leaders across the world struggled to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic because globalisation led to many industries being moved abroad where they were cheaper. China has been the main benefactor for this but the problem this created was basic items such as face masks were not available in the numbers needed as they were not produced locally. But globalisation was under stress even before the current pandemic as much of the world was already moving in the opposite direction of globalisation. Instead of nation states shrinking and markets getting bigger, the opposite was already in motion as it was failing to deliver beyond the 1% and state sponsored mercantilism was the election promise of many populist leaders.

As a result, many thinkers who once swore by globalisation and the free market have changed their minds. The end of history advocate, Francis Fukuyama, in an interview admitted: "At this juncture, it seems to me that certain things Karl Marx said are turning out to be true. He talked about the crisis of overproduction... that workers would be impoverished and there would be insufficient demand... The Chinese are arguing openly that it [economic model] is a superior one because they can guarantee stability and economic growth over the long run in a way that democracy can't...I would say they've got a real argument." [12] Francis Fukuyama now believes China's state driven economic model is a superior model.

Unilever is a corporation that benefited immensely from globalisation. Its former boss now calls capitalism a damaged ideology: "Capitalism, which has been responsible for the growth and prosperity that has done so much to enhance our lives, is a damaged ideology and needs to be reinvented for the 21st century." [13]

Globalisation is breaking down and the ideology it is based upon faces significant duress across the world. Capitalism as an ideology should have collapsed after the 2008 global economic crisis, but no state actor has established, presented or advocated an alternative, neither China nor Russia and as a result it has limped on.

GLOBAL ORDER



The global balance of power and the international situation is the interplay between the dominant global power and the nations that compete with it. The US has been the undisputed global hegemon for much of the 20th century and entered the 21st century looking to make the century another American one. Whilst America provided the leadership in WW2, the Cold War and into the 21st century, now its credibility, leadership and even reliability are all being questioned.

After the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, America found herself in a unique position—she was not only the world's leading state but also the world's lone superpower, the US possessed unprecedented global power and was able to shape almost every political landscape. But in the 21st century the US has had very few foreign policy successes and the American century now faces a multitude of systemic problems at home. In 2008, the US National Intelligence Council admitted for the first time that America's global power was indeed on a declining trajectory. In one of its periodic futuristic reports, *Global Trends 2025*, the Council cited “the transfer of global wealth and economic power now under way, roughly from West to East” and “without precedent in modern history,” as the primary factor in the decline of the “United States’ relative strength—even in the military realm” [14].

American exceptionalism rapidly evaporated soon after the fall of Baghdad in April 2003. America was embroiled in a protracted guerrilla war that has bled it and resulted in it becoming overstretched. America's military prowess, the bedrock of its global position, has been

undermined in the graveyard of empires by the Taliban, who on paper stood no chance against America's mighty force. The US has now been forced to negotiate after nearly two decades of war with the very same people they argued were terrorists. Just as America's political elite was mulling over the damage done by the Iraq and Afghan wars to America's global supremacy, the global financial crisis struck in the summer of 2008. The ferocity of the economic crisis further rattled America and shook the confidence of both its intelligentsia and its people.

The demonstrations by America's own citizens, both black and white, against the government and systemic racism has now undermined US domestic strength. The image of a nation of immigrants all living in a melting pot has been exposed as lies as the President, police and security services broke up protests. Many across the world are still shocked with the images that were beamed globally of America's own people asking for their rights.

Currently the world's richest nation is struggling to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, and this has destroyed what image of global leadership the US had. The American response to the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced doubts about American competence. A nation with more than 100,000 fatalities and millions of infections is not a nation many wish to follow.

US officials are now admitting that their country is overstretched having to deal with so many domestic issues and international commitments. Richard Haas, president of the Council on Foreign Relations and former Director of Policy Planning for the US Department of State makes this clear: “The turmoil in the United States, set before the eyes of the world, raises questions about American power. To distinguish between absolute power and available power is useful here. The country's absolute power, above all military and economic power, is still considerable. The bigger question concerns its available power. Is a country with 42 million people unemployed, a declining GDP, shuttered factories, widespread protest that at times turns violent, and deep internal divisions in a position to act internationally?” [15]

CHINA

With the US marred in so many issues both globally and domestically, China is potentially staring at an opportunity of a lifetime. It now has the opportunity to emerge as the global leader, especially as the US president is washing his hands of global issues. With the US tied up in so many issues, this will give China the bandwidth to expand in the South China Sea and beyond if it's prepared to do so.

What is stopping China from getting the world together in Beijing, coming up with a global solution to the pandemic and setting up a global fund for nations to dip into?

The only thing standing in China's way is itself. It has no intellectual solution for the global crises, no moral authority with the severe and brutal oppression of the Uighur Muslims. Ideology plays no role in China's foreign policy. China has no messianic ideology to export; no doctrine of "manifest destiny" to advance; no belief in Social Darwinism or imperative of territorial expansion to act upon; no cult of the warrior to animate militarism or glorify war; no exclusion from contemporary global governance to overcome; no satellite states to garrison; no overseas colonies or ideological dependencies to protect; no history of power projection or military intervention beyond its immediate frontiers and no entangling alliances. China believes its values are not universal, but unique to the Chinese people.



THE MUSLIM WORLD

The COVID-19 pandemic will severely test many of the Muslim nations and the rulers.

Many of our rulers were already facing protests prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Sudan, Algeria, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon and Egypt were places where growing demonstrations were forced to stop due to the lockdowns. But the underlying conditions which drove many to the streets remain in place and we are seeing in places such as Iran protests have re-started.

The Arab Spring that began in 2011 was driven by the dire economic conditions and the brutal rule of many of the autocratic rulers. As the uprisings began in Tunisia it quickly spread to the wider region. Yemen, Syria and Libya remain marred by chaos whilst Egypt has seen the regime turn even more brutal than the Mubarak regime. The Arab Spring was in reality the tremor before the real earthquake.

Many of the Muslim rulers are proxies for the West and they rely upon their supply lines to remain in power rather than a close affinity with their own people. As the health crisis turns into an economic crisis in the West this will impact the political plans the colonial nations have for the Muslim world. With the Western nations facing so many problems at home, the Muslim world may get some space with the colonial nation's attention elsewhere and even to potentially break free.

The US may struggle to keep agents in line or execute its plans in places such as Syria, the South China Sea or even in Palestine as its attention and resources are elsewhere.

We are likely entering a unique period in the post Khilafah era. From 1924 onwards, Britain constructed much of the Muslim world and placed monarchies in power and maintained a firm grip upon this architecture. After WW2 the US was able to replace Britain and used the Cold War, coups and agent rulers to maintain its influence and interests. But with the US having to be everywhere at the same time, as it's a unilateral power, and with growing problems at home it may struggle to keep its agents in power, if they are challenged, especially if a number of them are challenged simultaneously.

In Saudi Arabia, King Salman and his son removed many of their own family to come to power and change the line of succession. Many of King Salman's own brothers missed out on power due to this. The close relationship with Washington has been used to cement the power of King Salman and Muhammed bin Salman. But with America so preoccupied domestically this would be an ideal opportunity for someone else from the royal family to make their move.



POST-COVID WORLD



At the turn of the 21st century the US sat high and above everyone else. Just a decade after the collapse of communism there was no alternative to capitalism.

As we enter the third decade of the 21st century this is no longer the case. Dressed in slippers and shalwar kameez in the mountains of Afghanistan the Taliban have humbled the US.

South Korea, Japan and Georgia, question if they can rely on the US and the promises it has made to provide military support in the face of regional threats to these countries.

Whilst Germany and Japan were two creations of the US in the 20th century, South Sudan, Iraq and Afghanistan, are three of America's 21st century creations and they are in shambles. The leaders of the Philippines, North Korea and Venezuela regularly swear and openly ridicule the US. Today, China and Russia are nations the US is concerned about, a far cry from the 1990s.

At the turn of the 21st century it was all about more capitalism via globalisation, whilst today capitalism is damaged and poisonous.

Today, numerous crises are coming together; chief amongst them is the fragmentation of much of the world. The division, lack of cooperation and lack of unity mean the conditions are ripe for change. The key trend going forward today is who will fill this growing vacuum.

CAPITALISM ON LIFE SUPPORT

But before confining capitalism to the dustbin of history, the ideology that places individual liberty at its centre, it has shown that it has the propensity to adapt to new trends and survive. There are today two things that could halt the slide of capitalism into the abyss.

MONEY

Capitalist nations have a tool that has never existed in history and the only limits is the ink needed to print them. Among the numerous causes of decline for empires such as the British, Romans and Persians was the costs of empire and running out of money. They had extended to such an extent that they were spending more on the maintenance and the upkeep of their empires than making profits from imperial adventures. The world moved to fiat money in the last few decades and this has seen the removal of gold or silver as the backing to local currencies. Money literally is just the paper it's written on today or the digits created on a computer ledger, which has allowed governments to print limitless sums to repay debt, for bailouts and for other spending. Whilst this will lead to inflation, it is a strategy governments now use regularly to create growth and get out of economic crises.

SHIFT TO THE LEFT

Since the 1970s the neoliberal school of economic thought has dominated economic planning as thinkers such as Milton Friedman were able to win Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan to their ideas. Mass privatisation and government moving out of the way for private enterprises to operate the economy became the mantra of the West. But this caused mass wealth inequality which everyone can now see.

The Financial Times is the world's leading business daily and has always been an advocate of more free market and privatisation. It is read by the richest and most powerful players in global politics and finance. Every month, it puts out a magazine supplement titled "How To Spend It" about yachts and mansions and watches and cars. But in April, it published the following: "Radical reforms – reversing the prevailing policy direction of the last four decades – will need to be put on the table. Governments will have to accept a more active role in the economy. They must see public services as investments rather than liabilities and look for ways to make labour markets less insecure. Redistribution will again be on the agenda; the privileges of the elderly and wealthy in question. Policies until recently considered eccentric, such as basic income and wealth taxes, will have to be in the mix." [16] This is an outright renunciation of neoliberalism by the Financial Times, who was its biggest advocate. With neoliberal advocates staring at their glaring failures, moving to the left may well become fashionable for political leaders.

Capitalism has permanently damaged the environment, people's lives and made a few fantastically wealthy at the expense of the majority. One of the worst things that could happen is capitalism limps along because it reinvents itself via printing money or turning to the left.

CONCLUSIONS

The ideology of liberalism with its focus on individuals and their freedoms has been fantastic for the few but a misery for all the rest. Capitalism and democracy have failed miserably, time and time again. The system that its proponents argue works for the many, in reality only works for the few. The political ideas from liberalism are tailored for the rich and have the deepest disdain for the poor. Some continue to argue for capitalism, but many can see the emperor is wearing no clothes. Some commentators no longer articulate arguments for how great capitalism is but rather defend it as the best of what is out there.

The political context across the globe is that of apathy and despair, regardless of the type of regime people live under; whether Democratic, dictatorship or propped up rulers, the appetite for change is very much in the hearts of all peoples regardless of the race or religion. Despite capitalism spreading its hegemony across the globe, the frustration of people is growing faster than its hegemony.

Even before COVID-19, the appetite for change was being witnessed by the rejection of traditional establishment figures although they have been replaced with new establishment figures. The fragility of the normal operating of these systems is seen in the gilets jaunes (yellow vests) protests in France against tax rises, nationwide protests in Sudan and protests in Lebanon against systemic corruption. The appetite for change will only increase as the economic situation sets to worsen globally and the basic cost of living for many more becomes unachievable.

In this atmosphere of change, it is our duty as Muslims to seize this opportunity and offer an alternative vision to the peoples of the world. Allah ﷻ is the Creator of the Earth and its interconnected ecosystem. In His Infinite Mercy, He ﷻ gave us humans Islam which contains the deep and profound political, economic and environmental solutions which are harmonious with the rest of the planet. It is our responsibility as the Muslim Ummah to step forward and work towards establishing Islam's leadership on the earth with the Muslim World as the starting point via re-establishing the Second Khilafah Rashidah.

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ

“You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah.” [Surah Ali ‘Imran 3:110]



NOTES

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