



SPC1: Special Conference on Global Health Threats

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Issue: Evaluating the effectiveness of global connectivity in response to global health threats

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## I. Introduction

For many centuries, significant barriers between societies over the globe have been lifted, and communities have set up closer contacts, drastically increasing the speed of global integration. Throughout history, humanity has always found a way to interact with each other and have stayed connected. With the help of developing technology, it is now much easier for societies and countries to interact with each other; allowing people, raw materials, money, and electronic devices to move ever more swiftly between the borders of countries. Not only products and finances, but also ideas, information, and cultures circulate around the globe easier, resulting in the formation of international laws, social movements, and economies.

Just as societies have always stayed in connection, global health threats have also been an issue since the beginning of time. The Black Death and The Spanish Flu pandemics are the most known historic global health threats. Pandemics are, in fact, a result of globalization. Because the whole world is connected, diseases are able to spread between countries. Global health threats are not necessarily limited to diseases. Environmental issues such as air pollution and human behaviour such as vaccine hesitancy are also threats to global health. Acknowledging that global health threats are, indeed, a result of globalization, it is also the whole world's responsibility to overcome such threats.

Global health threats do not seek borders, and, therefore, no nation is immune to them or their consequences. Member States are so intertwined and so dependent on each other that the sudden hampering of global functions even in a few countries, such as trade and transport, has affected every country in a way, and negatively. An outbreak of an infectious disease in a seemingly remote part of the world, COVID-19, has revealed the failings of globalization, and how almost every country was not ready for a crisis on this scale. With every country only thinking about what goes on inside their borders, as a result of individualism, it is obvious that the cooperation between the Member States is not effective.



## II. Involved Countries and Organizations

### World Health Organization (WHO)

“The World Health Organization (WHO), the UN’s health agency, has played a crucial role in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, ever since the first cases were identified.” (UN News). WHO can be considered as the primary organization concerned with global health. Its main vision is to ensure that every person has access to adequate healthcare. WHO’s Constitution initiated the WHO as the “premier global health leader”, stating that it should “act as the directing and coordinating authority on international health work while working in close collaboration with UN agencies, national health ministries, and professional organizations” (Article 2).

The WHO endorses international cooperation to overcome global health threats. It has issued a “Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan” which aimed to guide countries by “identifying the major actions countries needed to take, and the resources needed to carry them out.” WHO has also set significant crisis funds that remarkably assisted underdeveloped countries.

WHO is also the most credible organization on the news regarding recent events that concerns health in any form. However, the credibility of the WHO is also being questioned during the time of COVID-19. It is undeniable that the WHO has contributed significantly to informing the public, helping countries, and fighting against the virus on a global level. Yet, many of the earlier statements regarding the COVID-19 have turned out to be wrong and misleading. “Specifically, the WHO stated that asymptomatic spread is ‘very rare’, which was then reported by CNBC as ‘Coronavirus patients without symptoms aren’t driving the spread of the virus.’”(CNBC) Many news agencies criticized the WHO because it was “being manipulated” by specific countries, namely, China.

### The United States of America

Being the highest contributor to the WHO by 15%, the United States announced its withdrawal from the World Health Organization in June 2020. In his letter to the WHO, President Trump wrote, “This won't protect American lives or interests—it leaves Americans sick & America alone”. The United States is also the biggest contributor to politicization over global issues that threaten everyone. President Trump, in his remarks, also stated that “China has total control over the World Health Organization,” proving the unnecessary politicization, even the securitization in this case, by framing the COVID-19 as an existential threat to its sovereignty. However, the United States doesn’t frame the disease as a threat, yet once again, it frames China. This securitization, which leads to individualization, is one of the greatest obstacles in global cooperation. As the rivalry between China and the United States gains a new surface; health, the



unnecessary politicization of global health threats resurfaces. Even wearing a mask is politicized in the United States. Conservatives oppose wearing masks, saying that it's their body and their choice; which tells a lot about how people aren't even aware of the health threats and don't follow scientific guidelines.

Not only politicizing the issue, but the United States also fails to cooperate with other countries, as it always puts its domestic affairs first. Trump's reaction to COVID-19, including the usage of the term 'Chinese virus,' also plays to his domestic political base, even at the expense of collective international action. Furthermore, the United States' rejection of international cooperation has paralyzed the United Nations Security Council. As the US refuses any reference to the WHO, the Security Council has failed to pass a single resolution on COVID-19, leaving the UNSC in a state of paralysis. The "America First" mentality has led the United States to a state of isolation on a global scale. The United States' resignation from the Paris Climate Agreement also acts as an example.

Even though the United States puts its domestic affairs first, it should be noted that the US also has the highest COVID-19 cases and death tolls in the entire world, which shows that the United States' handling of the coronavirus also failed domestically.

## China

As the origin of the pandemic, China has received a lot of criticism for misinforming the public and manipulating the WHO. In fact, they were even criticized for spreading the disease around the globe. Although there is no evidence to support that, and Chinese officials deny the accusations, China stands in a dubious position. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that China has done an efficient job at eradicating the disease domestically.

Because of its rapid industrialization, China has contributed a lot to air pollution, droughts and famines. China is among one of the highest contributors to air pollution, and its overexploitation of resources has caused some of the resources to get depleted for other countries. Yet, China is making rapid efforts in converting the situation. An extensive research by Gerald Bloom has revealed that "China's engagement in global health is developing and diversifying rapidly in response to the central government's desire to see a greater role for China in global health."

## Doctors Without Borders

"Médecins Sans Frontières, sometimes rendered in English as Doctors Without Borders, is an international humanitarian medical non-governmental organisation of French origin best known for its projects in conflict zones and in countries affected by endemic diseases." (msf.org) The Doctors Without Borders is an important organization that helps countries and individuals without expecting anything in



return. Because of its actions, accessibility to healthcare has improved significantly in underdeveloped areas. The organization works to tackle global health threats.

### III. Focused Overview of the Issue

#### 1. Globalization

Globalization's motives are idealistic, as well as opportunistic; however, in the case of a global health threat, how effective globalization is used is an important question. Globalization is an undeniable part of today's world. It is, in fact, more than a social, cultural, political, and legal occurrence. In the light of recent events, mainly COVID-19, humanity has realized that health indeed does have an irrefragable part in both advancement and the continuity of globalization. Health includes both global health threats and the medical equipment that is necessary to overcome such threats. The fact that a virus that had appeared in China managed to spread the entire world, which then raised the demand for medical equipment, is the most significant proof of health's role in globalization.

In the case of a global crisis, globalization is the key that leads to **global connectivity**. Ever since the invention of trading, every country's motive had been to get richer and stronger. Regrettably, it is no different in the 21st century. In today's world, the motives behind globalization are the same; money, power, and information. Bearing this situation in mind, it is to be expected that countries would not share what they have, or what they know for the sake of humanity, but rather seek commercial goals.

This situation of **individualism** among the countries is one of the main obstacles that should be overcome. **Breaking the individualism** among the states is the first and the most essential step of establishing effective global connectivity in response to global health threats. That is not to say that globalization does not come with any disadvantages. The negative effects of globalization include escalating the situation via increasing dependence of some nations, leading to the inability to react to health crises and the spread of pandemics.

#### 2. International Cooperation

International cooperation is another key step in establishing effective global connectivity in response to global health threats. Firstly, cooperation between countries requires well-established global connectivity. The main requirement, however, is that countries to stop pursuing commercial or political motives and frankly work with each other with the **collective goal** of overcoming the health threat.



Such cooperation might include medical equipment such as test kits, personal protective equipment such as masks, funds, and humanitarian support. However, the cooperation does not need to be financial, as a piece of information could also be crucial, and states should communicate with each other.

A wonderful example of international cooperation in the European Union's efforts on "strengthening the preparedness and response capacities of countries with fragile healthcare systems."(europa.eu) Through this initiative, the European Union provided medical supplies and equipment, helped train public health workers, strengthened regional epidemiological surveillance and disease control institutions, and supported communication and awareness efforts on basic protective measures and hygiene advice to prevent the spread of such countries with fragile healthcare systems. This approach has been very successful in recent outbreaks of Ebola and Zika.

This example alone shows how much importance international cooperation has when dealing with global health threats. Such types of aids are indeed very helpful for underdeveloped countries.

The EU is not the only organization that is aware of the necessity of international cooperation. The United Nations also called for a meeting, in which the importance of global connectivity was discussed. The quote from the meeting, "COVID-19 is a preview of the global catastrophe we are marching headlong into if we don't find better ways to work together." (Cecilia Cannon, Academic Advisor, UN75 team), clearly shows the UN's stance on the importance of international cooperation.

### 3. Mechanisms of International Cooperation

There are two main mechanisms involved in international cooperation: **politicization** and **reciprocity**. The politicization of a global issue supplies the motive for cooperation but can also impede it. "Reciprocity is the catalyst for cooperation." (Michael McKenzie, 2020) The way distinct factors engage with these mechanisms determines the likelihood of a cooperative outcome. In other words, these two mechanisms determine whether or not cooperation is possible. As crucial as international cooperation is, the **political side** of cooperation during the time of a crisis cannot be overlooked.

#### a. Politicization

The effect of politicization on international cooperation is the most obvious at its extreme end. "The extreme form of politicization is **securitization**" (Michael McKenzie, 2020), which is the action of enframing an issue as an existential danger that requires an extraordinary response. When an issue is non-politicized, it means it is not a matter of concern for the state. As the issue moves from non-politicized to politicized (which means it becomes a part of public policy and prone to political debate), to securitized, the pressure to answer to the thread increases. In the case of securitization, the answer is usually much more immediate



and may include particular measures. In an international context, governments may be obliged to cooperate with different affected countries as a part of their response. To put it simply, the politicization of an international issue creates the **political necessity** to pursue international cooperation. When a transnational issue is securitized, coming to a cooperative solution with other countries becomes a political priority.

An amazing example of how politicization can also baffle international cooperation is global attempts to manage climate change. Climate change has advanced from non-politicized to politicized in many countries, and it is even securitized in some. Transnational cooperation against climate change has also increased during this period, but it has been decreasing drastically. One of many reasons for the hassle of finding a cooperative resolution has been the **uneven grades of politicization** across countries, with many enframing climate changes as a major security issue and the rest rejecting this characterization. Cooperative efforts have also been obstructed by politicians, which are exploiting and taking advantage of the issue for domestic political purposes. (Warner & Boas 2019) To give an example, during the announcement of the United States withdrawing from the 2015 Paris climate agreement, President Trump declared, “What we won’t do is punish the American people while enriching foreign polluters. I’m proud to say it, it’s called America First.” Trump was point-blank captivating his domestic political base, even at the expense of collective international action.

All in all, it can be said that politicization is a very dangerous water to swim in. Even though it can speed up international cooperation, there always lies the danger of a state exploiting the issue as a domestic political move.

#### b. Reciprocity

In a study of cooperation done by Robert Axelrod in 1984, the conditions of cooperation were questioned. The conclusion wasn’t very surprising. Keeping in mind that every country’s intentions are to get either a commercial or political advantage over other states, it was concluded that the only way where cooperation could be persisted was under the **condition of reciprocity**.

However, it was also noted that as the extent of **overlapping interests** became more prominent, one state’s ability to achieve a particular outcome became less important. That is to say, when the parties, or states share-alike interests, the expectancy of equality may be compromised.

#### c. The Analogy of the Mechanisms of International Cooperation

This part “draws the analysis together by likening the dynamics of international cooperation in driving a car.” (Michael Mackenzie) This analogy puts light on the complicated interaction of actors, states, and mechanisms that portrays cooperation between countries.



The politicization of an international issue is like an accelerator. It attracts the political desire needed to sustain international cooperation in response. The bigger the politicization gets, the bigger the **political desire** (which can be simplified as power) is going to get. “At the same time, politicization can **block** international cooperation. This way, politicization resembles the **brake** in a car. This is the paradox of politicization; it both compels and curtails cooperation between states. It is like the **accelerator and the brake.**” (Michael Mackenzie, 2020)

In this context, reciprocity is the transmission. “Just as the transmission propels a car by transferring the power generated by acceleration to the wheels, reciprocity propels international cooperation by translating the political will generated by politicization into cooperative action.” (Mathieu Deflem, 2002.)

## IV. Key Vocabulary

**Globalization:** Globalization can be defined as “the spread of products, technology, information, and jobs across national borders and cultures.” (Investopedia, 2020) To put it simply, globalization is the process that allows goods, information, people, and even ideas to move freely and easily across borders.

**Pandemic:** “A pandemic is defined as ‘an epidemic occurring worldwide, or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people.’” (WHO) Basically, it is the worldwide spread of a new disease.

**Global Connectivity:** Globalization is a broader term for global connectivity. Global connectivity is, in fact, a result of globalization. In this case, what is connectivity? Connectivity is a trait of a system and is a proportion of how well connected any one node or part is to every other part in the order. A node can be a person, a small or a large business, a town, or a country. Connectivity is a multi-layered idea, made out of various kinds of systems, including those that are physical and virtual. Connectivity can be studied at various scales, from the local to the regional and global scales. Thus, the reason why we are questioning the effectiveness of global connectivity is because of the fact that global health threats are, as the name suggests, on a global scale, and therefore require cooperation among the whole world in order to be solved.

**Individualism:** The opposite of collectivism. An individualist country is one that puts their individual needs over the needs of others. In this context, it is a country that deals with the issue only on a domestic level, refusing to cooperate with other countries.

**Politicization:** Politicization is the action of causing an activity or event to become political in character. In simpler terms, it is the act of involving political interest in an activity or making the activity about politics, even when it isn't necessarily about politics.



**Reciprocity:** Reciprocity is the act of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit. This especially applies to privileges granted by one country or organization to another.

**Securitization:** An extreme form of politicization, which is marking an issue as an existential threat to the state.

**Displacement:** A displaced person is an individual who: owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is forcibly removed from their present home and residence within their country and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return. These large groups of people end up in camps where environmental health measures are inadequate and basic health care is largely unavailable.

**Disease Prevention:** Disease prevention is a procedure through which individuals, particularly those with risk factors for a disease, are treated in order to prevent a disease from occurring. Treatment normally begins either before signs and symptoms of the disease occur, or shortly thereafter. Vaccination is an important example of how a disease might be prevented.

**Health Equity:** Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care.

## V. Important Events & Chronology

Date (Day/Month/Year)	Event
130 B.C.	The Han Dynasty in China officially opened the Silk Road, known as the first trade road. Accepted as the beginning of globalization by many.
15th-18th centuries	Age of Discovery, beginning of truly global trade, followed by the Scientific Revolution.
1346 – 1353	The Black Death, the first “global” pandemic. Caused between 30 to 50 million deaths.
1918 – 1920	The Spanish Flu, the first actual global pandemic, causing a hundred million deaths.



7 April 1948	The establishment of the World Health Organization, the first international organization that is “responsible for international public health.”
31 December 2019	The first identification of COVID-19, by the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission, China.
13 January 2020	A confirmed case in Thailand, making it the first recorded case of COVID-19 outside of China.
11 March 2020	The World Health Organization declared that “COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic.”
7 July 2020	The US formally announced its withdrawal from the WHO.

## VI. Past Resolutions and Treaties

- [A/RES/69/132: Global Health and Foreign Policy](#)

This is the resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 11 December 2014 regarding the construction of resilient national and international health systems. It also promoted cooperation between the Member States. The resolution basically functioned as a basis and a guideline regarding the international health systems. It was very successful in the advancement of the World Health Organization.

- [Final Document of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological \(Biological\) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction](#)

This is the final report of the convention that aimed to ban the development, production, stockpiling and use of biological weapons. The reason why this convention is significant is that it works as an amazing example of international cooperation. This convention was ratified by both the United States and the former Soviet Union. At the height of the Cold War, the US and the Soviet Union worked together to eradicate smallpox, a highly contagious and fatal disease. Not only banning the use of biological weapons, but the former two rivals also worked together in order to eradicate the disease. Needless to say, the unity was a huge success, and the smallpox was fully eradicated. During the time of COVID-19, the world needs exactly this type of cooperation, instead of the politicization of the disease.

## VII. Failed Solution Attempts

The world has revealed many failures in establishing global connectivity against the global health threat, COVID-19. One example of a failure is in the United Kingdom. Instead of listening to scientists and



announcing a lockdown in early March, the UK had a different approach to the coronavirus. Prime Minister Boris Johnson had declared that they were going to follow the “herd immunity” strategy that involved everyone contacting the virus so that everyone could become immune to the virus. Britain actually followed that strategy until early April when case numbers skyrocketed. While Italy and Spain were having strict lockdowns, Johnson was persistent in not announcing lockdowns. The UK also did not participate in the European Union’s coordination attempts, as they have just left the EU. Britain had one of the highest death tolls in the world for a long period of time, until they started listening to scientists and started coordinating.

Another example that can be given is China. At the beginning of the pandemic, China’s lack of communication with the rest of the world has raised uncertainties regarding the pandemic. The WHO also has a part in this, as they have repeatedly published misinformation. This example shows the importance of communication between countries and international organizations, and how it can prevent future deaths.

## VIII. Possible Solutions

While writing their resolutions, delegates should keep in mind that the content of their resolutions should focus on the international aspect of the issue, instead of focusing on the domestic aspect. The international aspect involves the interactions between countries, the global connectivity and individualism, the politicization, and the securitization of the disease.

Firstly, delegates should address the individualism between countries. Having international conventions where countries can express their concerns could help to melt the individualism, ultimately strengthening global connectivity. Furthermore, communication between states has a crucial role if international cooperation is to be achieved.

When addressing the issue, delegates should bear in mind that not all countries have the resources to deal with the issue. Incorporating the World Health Organization in their resolutions could help such underdeveloped countries both financially and human resources wise.

Recently, it has been announced that many different vaccines are in development, many countries have already ordered samples. While countries with resources will have access to the vaccine, not all countries will. Delegates should definitely consider this issue, and look for solutions that promote health equity.

Finally, Individuals also play a role in pandemics. Refusing to wear a mask, refusing to get vaccinated, refusing to stay in lockdown and many more individual behaviors are destructive and should be



addressed. Educating the public on such important issues is very important, and should be addressed by delegates.

## IX. Useful Links

### [Why Connectivity Matters: OECD](#)

- This is an article by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which talks about the significance of global connectivity. It also talks about the potential positive and negative consequences of connectivity.

### [Five reasons the world needs WHO, to fight the COVID-19 pandemic: UN News](#)

- This article by the UN News talks about the World Health Organization's significance. It is a very short and helpful article that delegates can refer to while writing their resolutions.

### [Between Politics and Policy: International Cooperation Beyond COVID-19:](#)

- This article by E-International Relations explains the actors in international affairs. It is a very extensive and informative article that I referred to a lot while writing the chair report. It gives very important information regarding the factors behind international affairs. If you are interested in politics or wish to have extensive knowledge of the topic, it is an excellent article.



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