



*The Politics of Pandemics*

# **DIPLOMACY, SOCIETY AND THE COVID-19 CHALLENGE**

Edited by Erman Akıllı, Burak Güneş  
and Ahmet Gökbel



ROUTLEDGE

# Diplomacy, Society and the COVID-19 Challenge

*Diplomacy, Society and the COVID-19 Challenge* brings together authors from various disciplinary backgrounds to examine the impacts of the pandemic on world politics and international relations, focusing on diplomacy and national, regional, and global responses to COVID-19.

The authors adopt a critical perspective which questions the general assumption that security is only related to state security. The book's first part deals with diplomacy and COVID-19, exploring forms such as virtual, digital, and science diplomacy. The second part, on national and regional responses to COVID-19, provides a detailed evaluation of the foreign policies of states and regional actors and the national/regional impacts of the pandemic. The third part investigates the responses of international organisations, such as NATO and the OECD, to COVID-19's transformative and disruptive effects.

This book will be of interest to students, scholars, and researchers of international relations, diplomacy, security studies, global governance, political science, political economy, and global public health, especially those with a particular focus on COVID-19 and how it has changed the world.

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# **The Politics of Pandemics**

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## **Diplomacy, Society and the COVID-19 Challenge**

*Edited by Erman Akullı, Burak Güneş and Ahmet Gökbel*

# **Diplomacy, Society and the COVID-19 Challenge**

**Edited by Erman Akıllı, Burak Güneş  
and Ahmet Gökbel**

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# Foreword

The international system has failed its Covid test. The World Health Organization has estimated 15 million excess deaths occurred thus far during the pandemic. Given these grim statistics, should leaders of wealthy countries have done more to export vaccines and help vaccinate foreigners? When former President Donald Trump proclaimed “America First,” he was being consistent with democratic theory, according to which leaders are entrusted with defending and advancing the interests of the people who elected them. But as I argue in my book *Do Morals Matter?* the key question is how leaders define the national interest. There is a major moral difference between a myopic transactional definition, like that of Trump, and a broader, far-sighted definition.

Consider President Harry Truman’s espousal of the Marshall Plan after World War II. Rather than narrowly insisting that America’s European allies repay their war loans, as the US had demanded after World War I, Truman dedicated more than 2% of America’s GDP to aiding Europe’s economic recovery. The process allowed Europeans to share in planning the continent’s reconstruction and produced a result that was good for them, but that also served America’s national interest in preventing Soviet control of Western Europe.

Viruses do not care about the nationality of the humans they kill. They simply seek a host to allow them to reproduce, and large populations of unvaccinated humans allow them to mutate and evolve new variants which can evade the protections that our vaccines produce. Given modern travel, it is only a matter of time before variants cross national borders. When a new variant arises that is capable of bypassing our best vaccines, we then have to develop a booster targeted at the new variant and vaccinate again, which could lead to more fatalities and more strain on medical systems. Alternatively, we can try a zero Covid policy with frustrating lockdowns and grave economic damage.

Values provide the second reason that countries should take a broad view of their national interest when fighting Covid. Some foreign policy experts contrast values with interests, but that is a false dichotomy. Our values are among our most important interests because they tell us who we are as a people. It is true that most people care more about their co-nationals than foreigners, but that does not mean they are indifferent to the suffering of others. Few would ignore a cry for help from a drowning person because she calls out in a foreign language. And while leaders

are constrained by public opinion in a democracy, they often have considerable leeway to shape policy – and considerable resources to influence public sentiment.

A third reason to cooperate, related to the second, is soft power – the ability to influence others through attraction rather than coercion or payment. Values can be a source of soft power when others see a country’s policies as benign and legitimate. Most foreign policies combine hard and soft power. The Marshall Plan, for example, relied on hard economic resources and payments, but it also created a reputation for benignity and far-sightedness that attracted others. A policy of helping poor countries by providing vaccines, as well as aiding the development of their own healthcare systems’ capacities, would increase countries’ soft power.

China quickly recognized that its soft power suffered from the origin story of its mishandling of COVID-19 in Wuhan. Not only was there a lack of clarity about how the virus originated, but in the early stages of the crisis, Chinese censorship and denial made the crisis worse than necessary before its authoritarian lockdown proved initially successful. Since then, China has pursued COVID-19 diplomacy in many parts of the world. By donating medical equipment and vaccines to other countries, China has been working to change the international narrative from one of fault to one of attraction. The Biden administration has been playing catch-up, announcing ambitious plans to donate vaccines. In addition, it pledged \$4 billion in funding for the World Health Organization’s COVAX facility to help poor countries purchase vaccines and supports a temporary waiver of intellectual property to help poor countries develop capacity.

In short, there were good reasons in terms of values, and self-interest for rich countries to vaccinate the rest of the world now, even before the job is finished at home. Unfortunately, the world failed this Covid test. We must do better in the future. One hopes that a volume like this will educate us all so we do not fail our next pandemic test.

Joseph S. Nye Jr.  
Former Dean of Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, USA

# Preface

A growing body of literature recognises the importance of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic, which emerged in China at the end of 2019, is of interest globally because that is likely to be a candidate for being a turning point in world history. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on international politics. This pandemic has touched, influenced, and even transformed almost every field of human life, from politics to the economy, from social relations to daily life practices. International security, one of the leading research areas of international relations, has been affected by COVID-19 and has even mutated like the COVID-19 virus.

While COVID-19 has become a security issue, it has also changed how pre-existing security issues are addressed. The pandemic, during which international cooperation is insufficient, inter-state solidarity has decreased, and the virus is defined as the number one security problem by the UN Secretary-General, appeared to end today. However, it will keep us busy for a long time regarding its effects and results. During the epidemic, states adopted a self/help approach and tried to fight a global epidemic with local/national defence reflexes. Each state has accepted its national health infrastructure and capacity as a security reference point, and health-related issues have become an element of their basic security approaches.

This volume will consist of three parts focusing on the world in transformation during/post the COVID-19 era. The first part will deal with “Diplomacy and COVID-19” by touching upon various forms of diplomacy, such as humanitarian, digital, and virtual diplomacy. The second part, “National and Regional Responses to COVID-19”, is constructed to make a detailed evaluation of the foreign policies of states and regional actors and the national/regional impacts of COVID-19. The third part, “Global Responses to COVID-19”, is about global actors’ responses shaped by the pandemic, stretching from NATO to the OECD. This section is about international organisations and their response to COVID-19’s transformative effect, which caused unrest in their respective regions and globally.

We sincerely hope that this modest contribution, “*Diplomacy, Society and the COVID-19 Challenge*”, to the body of knowledge regarding the literature on International Relations for the pandemic and post-pandemic world order will be

beneficial to qualitative and quantitative researchers, academics, postgraduate and undergraduate students, as well as individuals who have an interest in understanding how the COVID-19 challenged the international system and state affairs are (re)shaped, and the pandemic redefined international relations.

*Editors,  
Erman Akıllı, Burak Güneş and Ahmet Gökbel,  
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Kırşehir  
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# 1 Introduction

## Pandemic, Security, and Other Broken Things

*Erman Akıllı, Burak Güneş, and Ahmet Gökbel*

As editors, when we first designed this book, “curfews” due to the pandemic were a common, mandatory, and unsettling “new normal” in many countries. Now, as we look back on those dark days from the vantage point of 2023, they seem to have faded from memory. Yet the ghost of the pandemic still looms over the world today and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. In this book, our aim is to shed light on the pandemic’s impact on the international system. By examining its effects on various aspects of society – from public health and the economy to politics, society, and diplomacy – we hope to provide a comprehensive picture of what the pandemic has meant for our world. While the worst of the pandemic may be behind us, its legacy remains. It has exposed the vulnerabilities of our societies and highlighted the need for greater cooperation and resilience in the face of global crises.

Many significant and lasting changes occurred after the interference of the COVID-19 pandemic in daily life. Considering the rapid and unpredictable conditions, academic circles adopted new frameworks for changing the *status quo*. Most analyses, academic papers, and courses taught in universities have been modified to conform to this inexperienced and unfamiliar state of affairs. Security, one of the main points in the study of the discipline of International Relations (IR), has faced profound challenges as COVID-19 became a permanent aspect of daily life.

Despite having less impact than the World Wars that occurred in the first half of the 20th century, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant and profound influence at the international system, state, interstate, and individual levels. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the world at large and expedited the ongoing trend of digitalisation in the international system. This caused several sectors, including education, trade, market shopping, and healthcare, to adjust to digital processes and heavily rely on the Internet. This shift, defined as rapidly transferring business processes and information to a digital environment with the extensive application of information technologies, has been experienced worldwide. For instance, the digitalisation process of states in the international system, fuelled by the pandemic, has created an environment in which new concepts, such as the Metaverse, have flourished. Research conducted by Strategy Analytics indicates that the global Metaverse market, which was worth \$6 billion in 2021, is predicted to grow to about \$42 billion by the year 2026 due to the rising fascination

with virtual spaces for both entertainment and business during the COVID-19 pandemic (Akilli, 2022).

On the other hand, communitarianism, the opposite of cosmopolitanism, is likely to receive more attention and enable states to strengthen their power and surveillance over people. Many states have elected conservative politicians who prioritise their national will over others. Italy's prime minister in 2022, Giorgia Meloni, who holds right-wing views, exemplifies the country's communitarianism. On the other hand, economic hardship worldwide has caused social inequality and discontent, leading to widespread protests. Regardless of whether a country is democratic or not, social unrest can occur. Protests related to COVID-19 have been witnessed in numerous countries across the globe, as demonstrated by examples such as Australia to Iran, Brazil to Germany, and South Africa to the United States (US). These demonstrations have manifested in diverse ways, ranging from protests against government measures in response to the pandemic, calls for improved healthcare and economic assistance, to opposition against curfews and other restrictions.

Globalisation had previously led to the breaking down of borders between nation-states, but the COVID-19 pandemic has abruptly halted this process. Although the situation is changing day by day, it remains unclear when and in what manner nation-states will resume the free movement of capital, goods, and labour that existed before the pandemic. Furthermore, illegal migration rates have increased significantly, and while there may be various reasons for this beyond the pandemic, it is clear that the pandemic has played a role. The pandemic has not only marked a significant point in history, dividing the world into pre- and post-pandemic eras, but also influenced current and future developments. Distance learning and working have become the norm in many business and education sectors, thanks to the pandemic. Additionally, the pandemic has highlighted that the world has been facing significant natural threats, such as climate change and global warming, leading to the emergence of new viruses and other dangers to humanity.

Moreover, the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic have caused significant humanitarian, institutional, and economic difficulties in many countries, leading to migration and refugee crises. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) notes that the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly reduced the possibilities of achieving lasting solutions (UNHCR, 2022). Even though the COVID-19 pandemic has loosened its tight grip, the global community is still grappling with a host of issues that arose and persisted during the pandemic, such as food insecurity, increasing poverty, and inflationary pressure that have hindered progress and prosperity, as well as security. The war between Russia and Ukraine is an example of how the pandemic has contributed to conflicts.

This book discusses two distinct yet interrelated time frames regarding how the pandemic has affected people's daily lives. The first one is from when COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic until the lifting of restrictions, while the second one refers to the "new normal" established due to the pandemic, which has no specific period. In various chapters, authors provide details of a specific period while also highlighting the profound changes brought about by the pandemic. Other authors focus on the inner effects of the pandemic, particularly its impact on social

relations and interstate relations. However, it's important to note that there is a lack of consensus and competing interpretations regarding these effects. To study the pandemic's impact, one must consider the global health perspective. It's clear that the coronavirus is still with us and will likely continue to be, whether or not it's officially classified as a pandemic (as noted in reports from the WHO in 2023). The transformative nature of the pandemic has caused long-lasting changes, particularly in the security field, which can be examined in more detail.

Traditional security studies, in which military capacity and state power were the focal points of analysis, were unequivocally dominant until the end of the Cold War. However, post-Cold War US primacy and the unipolar trend in international relations led to a rethinking of the definition of security (Buzan, 1998). In this context, critical security studies have developed new explanatory frameworks for understanding security by expanding the concept of security to issues beyond military and state-centric affairs, e.g. individual, national, regional, and international, and by using a deeper level of analysis of the referent objects, e.g. economic, environmental, societal, military, and political (Buzan, 1998). In this regard, critical security studies have become a field of research that draws attention to new approaches to thinking about and analysing security, including constructivist theories, critical theory, feminist theory, the framework of ontological security, aspects of post-colonial security, post-structuralism, and the ideas of the Copenhagen School, Paris School, and Aberystwyth School.

Nonetheless, external factors have long undermined state sovereignty, although interstate wars are still possible, as seen between Ukraine and Russia started on February 24, 2022. Yet, environmental factors (such as climate change, refugee crises, new viruses/epidemics/pandemics, and sea level rises) have forced decision-makers to adopt settlements that may be against their national interests. Therefore, security's inner meaning must extend beyond state security. COVID-19 has had some effect on both security studies and state systems. It is evident that things once labelled as "low politics" will occupy a great place in everyday life. Pandemics, as seen in the COVID-19 outbreak, have long been considered one of the so-called issues of low politics that have irreversibly altered the way of life and international order. So, this book critically investigates and questions the current situation and security understanding by considering the pandemic. Additionally, this book introduces new security challenges and new responses to these challenges. During the pandemic, most analyses, academic papers, and courses taught in universities have been modified to conform to this inexperienced and unfamiliar situation. We can trace this trend by focusing on recently published books. Numerous new publications regarding the diverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been published. For instance, in their collective work, Harper-Anderson et al. (2023) specifically investigate the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on health, justice, and the economy. Further, they shed light on the possible reflections of these problematic areas on racial equity in the US. Their theoretical standpoint comes from a school named after L. Douglas Wilder, the first elected African-American governor of Virginia, focusing on possible ways to fight against racial inequality.

Michie and Sheehan (2022) edited another volume, a collection of articles published in its 35th volume and 2nd issue of the *International Review of Applied Economics* in 2021. This volume focuses on the nature of the political economy, dealing with concrete results that peoples of the world (most notably developing and underdeveloped countries) have. Another essential publication by Koley and Dhole (2022) gives detailed insights into the COVID-19 pandemic, covering other pandemics as examples. In their work, Koley and Dhole led authors to understand, cover, and grasp the impact of COVID-19 in all aspects. Similar to Koley and Dhole, another volume, edited by Gunaratna and Aslam, also assesses the COVID-19 pandemic from different perspectives (2022a). One of the basic concerns of the book is to put forward responses in handling the pandemic. The book gives both country- and concept-based evaluations to reach the expected outcome. Gunaratna and Aslam edited another volume, specifically addressing threats to and responses of South Eastern countries. Accordingly, this book also claims that it collected essays from scholars who have field experience. In other words, this book claims to give factual data from the field (2022b).

Jakupec et al. critically approach the COVID-19 pandemic through the perspective of nationalism and global development (2022). According to them, the international world order is still in “flux,” depicting it as a Western-led global order pioneered by the US, which is internally and externally under threat. They proposed that “illiberal globalism, populism, nationalism” are those internal threats, whereas China, Russia, and India constitute one side of the external threats.

There are also books dealing with the pandemic’s origins and early stages of the emergence of the virus by taking South Eastern countries as cases. For instance, being the earliest book dealing with East Asia, the volume edited by Ganguly and Mistree uses South Eastern countries as samples to evaluate their efforts, struggles, and inadequacies in coping with the pandemic (2022). Additionally, the book asserts that the pandemic is the most influential and “serious tragedy” for those countries after British colonisation – this claim is worth examination.

As editors, we aim to bring together articles from various backgrounds in this book. Still, they all focus solely on the pandemic’s possible impacts on international politics and relations simultaneously giving significant insights that states (international organisations and others) had taken to tackle the pandemic between 2020 and 2023. This book aims to adopt a critical perspective, goes beyond the traditional state security perspective, and tries to grasp the implications of the pandemic at different levels. Because of environmental issues (viruses, climate change, environmental-induced migration, etc.), the world is heading towards a future with varying frameworks of inquiry. The United Nations Human Rights Council and the United Nations General Assembly adopted two new resolutions entitled “The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment” in 2021 and 2022, respectively. The UN General Assembly “recognises the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right,” which imposes responsibilities on states to act diligently. Since global warming is a reality, new viruses/pandemics are indispensable parts of our world. Therefore, this book focuses on diplomacy and national, regional, and global responses to COVID-19. For doing so, this book

adopts a critical perspective, which questions the general assumption that security is only related to state security. However, we did not want to restrict our contributors to sticking to only one perspective but rather to offer a critical approach. In all chapters, we aimed to give the reader the feeling that societies (peoples) are at the very core of all chapters, whether it deals with states' foreign policies, regional developments, or global responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the book's title is *Diplomacy, Society and the COVID-19 Challenge*: the diplomacy and society nexus is the heart of the book.

Some IR scholars have also suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerates existing trends in changes to the international order rather than signalling a clean break. So, where conceptually does the book stand? For sure, there has been an ongoing transformation in the international system. What role does the COVID-19 pandemic play in this transformation? Is the COVID-19 pandemic the creator of the shift or catalysing figure? These questions involve agent-structure relations in the social sciences. In his article entitled "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," Alexander Wendt tried to bridge agent and structure and surpassed this artificial dichotomy. Nonetheless, Wendt implies, "We cannot address these empirical issues, however, unless we have a framework for doing systemic research that makes state identity and interest issue for both theoretical and empirical inquiry" (Wendt, 1992: 423).

For the aspect of COVID-19 as a catalysing figure, one should consider the "soft power" concept. In 1990, Joseph S. Nye's book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* introduced the idea of soft power to the field of international relations (Nye, 1990). Nye defines the concept as "the ability to achieve what you want by attracting it rather than using orders/force or persuading it somehow (such as providing money)." In other words, exporting a country's positive image inspires other countries to reach foreign policy goals. In its broadest definition, soft power refers to the circumstance in which a state achieves its foreign policy objectives solely through its appeal to other nations, without any material, moral, indirect, or direct intervention. According to Nye, a country's soft power potential is its ability to attract people with its culture, political ideals, and policies. The soft power of a nation will expand or diminish depending on the legitimacy of its policies in the eyes of the public because Nye asserted that "soft power is needed to create peace" and that "making peace is tougher than winning the war." Some states have withdrawn into their shells within the nation-state framework during the COVID-19 pandemic. Others have provided serious assistance within the framework of humanitarian aid. In the context of their help, they have strengthened their soft power potential. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic has allowed such states to export their soft power potential and positive image. The legitimacy of these states in the international system has been strengthened thanks to soft power.

On the other hand, Karl Marx, in the "18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," also pointed out that "Men make their history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under the circumstances chosen by themselves, but under the circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past" (Marx, 2016). Therefore, we do not need to choose between agent and structure.



On the contrary, we can overcome this dichotomy by applying dialectic to our inquiry. *So, the pandemic has had emerging effects on the ongoing transformation of the international system while accelerating the change process.*

Furthermore, there are varying approaches to the COVID-19 pandemic, blaming it for giving governments a space to intervene in ordinary people's lives and seeing it as a transformative dynamic that profoundly affected global politics. Slavoj Žižek is fair to be critical while asking whether we are all in the same boat. The increasing trend in solidarity among states is because of the intention to protect the "me/we" from other's infections. In other words, if a state wants to save itself from the grasp of the pandemic, it needs to protect other states by keeping a distance (Žižek, 2020: 15). However, Žižek also points out, "The catch is that, even if life does eventually return to some semblance of normality, it will not be the same normal as the one we experienced before the outbreak" (Žižek, 2020: 78).

According to social contract theories, people build states to sustain their security. However, in Italy, Giorgio Agamben is more critical of the pandemic outbreak, accusing the state apparatus of enhancing its control and surveillance over populations, imposing a given lifestyle on people, and constructing power-knowledge relations taking the pandemic as a good opportunity. According to Agamben, "Therefore, in a vicious circle, the limitations of freedom imposed by governments are accepted in the name of a desire for safety created by the same governments that are now intervening to satisfy it" (Agamben, 2020).

Additionally, Agamben stresses the power of a pandemic to strengthen the resultant "state of exception" (Agamben, 2005). However, in addition to the power-knowledge relationship that imposes restrictions on people, there is a constant transformation in the human habitat caused by climate change. In other words, mutations are natural, and new variants of different viruses will exist. We cannot simply ignore that fact and only stick to the issue of power-knowledge relations. As George Ritzer and Paul Dean put it, there will be an increase in the number of health crises caused by global warming and climate change. According to Ritzer and Dean, "Diseases caused by animals and insects may increase" (Ritzer and Dean, 2015: 304). With the accelerating feature of global warming (along with globalisation), these diseases will increase sharply soon (Ritzer and Dean, 2015: 335). Therefore, we are on the brink of a choice; whether being critical of what we have experienced or strictly grasping the reality of pandemics is the deadlock. Alternatively, is there a middle path?

Relying upon the meta-theoretical assumptions of critical realism coined by Roy Bashkar, there can be epistemological pluralism in dealing with the social phenomenon (Bashkar, 2008). We do not need to choose between positivism and post-positivism in epistemology. For instance, there are power-knowledge relations that human beings cannot observe via their senses, but these relations exist and are independent of reason. Issues in the book will be approached by adopting different *epistemologies* and discovering the *ontological depth* of the real. In this perspective, for the book, as the editors, we did not plan to collect essays from one philosophy, i.e. post-positivism or positivism. On the contrary, we wanted to show various sides of the COVID-19 pandemic by gathering different perspectives. However, as said before, we sought contributors that are as critical as possible.

How can one define the COVID-19 era? In this book, the COVID-19 era refers to a period between the inception of the pandemic, governments' restriction enforcement, and the use of vaccines. However, we respectively address future implications of the pandemic as well. For instance, distance learning/home office working is an inseparable part of daily and business life. Students, business people, and even ordinary people have gotten used to the Internet and distance working/learning. These changes are enormous and deeply affect modern people's daily routines. However, in international politics, we have witnessed another inequality regarding vaccine allocations, which touches on "dependency theories/Marxist approaches/imperialism debates." Developed countries/states quickly access vaccines, whereas underdeveloped or developing countries have suffered from receiving such vaccines.

What about the post-pandemic era? In this book, we aim to identify the post-pandemic/COVID-19 era, beginning with the decline in the pandemic with the mass usage of mRNA vaccines, which ultimately allowed governments to remove restrictions. Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic has short and long-term impacts even after states get the pandemic under control. Moreover, unemployment figures have risen, and states still need help to figure out these economic problems (Jones et al., 2021). For instance, studies show that if unemployment rates reach 30%, the yearly poverty rate in the US will grow from 12.4% to 18.9%, making it the highest documented figure since at least 1967 (Parolin and Wimer, 2020).

Why is the COVID-19 pandemic considered a turning/breaking point in the development of the international system? During the pandemic, states, international organisations, and individuals were compelled to alter their order of importance to establish a new norm. Furthermore, a new period will start, the post-pandemic era, and authoritarian inclinations and the influence of public authority in politics will eventually grow, as can be seen in the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which was built upon irrational foreign policy choices and violation of generally accepted norms, as a reflection of the increased authoritarianism.

Apart from that, there are also specific problems in international cooperation. International organisations still need to manage the pandemic and enhance collaboration among member states. For instance, the World Health Organization (WHO), a specialised organisation of the United Nations (UN), has long been criticised for needing more effectiveness and trustworthiness. The WHO has learnt much from the pandemic. Another debate, which is still going on, is between communitarianism and cosmopolitanism. An excellent example of this dichotomy is Donald Trump's – the then President of the United States of America – famous slogan "America First." Many states are still confused about whether they should prioritise their national interests or enshrine international cooperation.

What exactly is distinctive about COVID-19? It is not an exaggeration to say that the COVID-19 pandemic has had profound and irreversible impacts, signifying 2020 as an essential year in world history. The world has witnessed numerous pandemics in the past, namely the Black Death (1346–1353), the Great Influenza (1918–1920), and H1N1/09 Virus/Swine Influenza (2009–2010). However, COVID-19 has a particular strain of the virus that humans have not encountered before and, thus, haven't developed immunity to. Henceforth, the widespread of

the virus around the globe caused governments to take harsh restrictions to protect themselves from the unknown and morbid pandemic. In our book, as mentioned above, the COVID-19 era is the exclamation of states' severe conditions and a test of their survival instincts.

The liberal world order, which envisages freedom of movement of goods, capital, individuals, and knowledge, has been challenged. Nation-states have gained more power and a central role in international politics. Yet, nation-states are aware that an external factor, i.e. environment, threatens their national interests.

Why does COVID-19 matter for international politics (and the book)? As Sara E. Davies and Clare Wenham put it, the answer is simple: "... politics is deciding how COVID-19 is spreading and whether people are living or dying" (Davies and Wenham, 2020: 1227). In other words, the various government responses to the outbreak itself, however, reveal political decisions about who should be trusted in the international arena, who should be consulted, who should offer advice, what policies should be implemented, how such policies should be enforced, and which models should be used (Davies and Wenham, 2020: 1251). The COVID-19 era raised the question of whether states' sovereign equality in the international system is an illusion, which ultimately leads – as Karl Marx implies in *Capital* Vol. I, "Between equal rights, force decides."

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the pre-existing power dynamics and structures? First and foremost, the global crisis affects conflict-affected countries the most. Thus, in nations impacted by armed conflict, the pandemic risks amplify disparities and place additional burdens on vulnerable groups. As a result, efforts to manage the crisis and promote peace need to be improved. Second, local and outside conflict parties quickly seize the chances presented by the crisis's policy responses. Third, the effects of the economic downturn seriously strain already weakened state institutions and jeopardise governance outcomes (thus increasing the risk of conflict). Of these three factors, the pandemic's governmental responses and diversionary effects have had the most impact on conflict dynamics, too frequently in a negative way (Mustasilta, 2020).

Back to the scope, "Diplomacy, Society and the COVID-19 Challenge" will consist of three parts focusing on the world in transformation during/post the COVID-19 era. The first part will deal with "Diplomacy and COVID-19" by touching upon various forms of diplomacy, such as humanitarian, digital, and virtual diplomacy. The second part, "National and Regional Responses to COVID-19," is designed to evaluate the foreign policies of states and regional actors and the national/regional impacts of COVID-19. The third part, "Global Responses to COVID-19," is about global actors' responses shaped by the pandemic, stretching from NATO to the OECD. This section is about international organisations and their response to COVID-19's transformative effect, which caused unrest in their respective regions and globally.

In their chapter titled "*Transformation of the International System and Security Conundrum During the COVID-19 Pandemic*," Ferhat Pirinçci and Tunç Demirbaş focused on the security conundrum in world politics. They asserted that states with more ambitious reform plans inevitably encounter more difficult obstacles.

However, the chapter also asserts that more resilient states will have an advantage over others in resolving such obstacles if they adopt flexible and adaptable policies.

Dolapo Fakuade, in her chapter entitled “*Far-Right Movements in the COVID-19 Era*,” explores the far-right movements and their intended goal, which often makes violence inevitable and a common occurrence in Europe. It further reviews far-right activities in the onset and immediate global response to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak with the aim to identify patterns, target groups, and impacts of the far-right activities in Europe.

Alessia Chiriatti claims that the role and practices of diplomacy have changed in her chapter titled “*Virtual Diplomacy as a New Frontier of International Dialogue*.” The chapter addresses the suggested topic by concentrating on a few problems: a dearth of scientific material, terminology appropriate for the reading and analysis levels, and the potential for a coronavirus pandemic. To achieve this, the chapter will examine the various definitions of diplomacy developed over the past 30 years, focusing on digital diplomacy and e-diplomacy and highlighting distinctions and practical applications.

In their chapter titled “*Diplomacy 3.0 in the Pandemic: Digital Diplomacy and Beyond*,” Erman Akıllı and Gülnihan Cihanoğlu Gülen discussed the development of digital diplomacy, including how it came about, how it was developed, and how it was used in the coronavirus pandemic. They also shed light on the advantages and disadvantages of digital diplomacy and its potential applications in the future, as highlighted by Diplomacy 4.0: AI in foreign policy.

Ebru Canan Sokullu and Atakan Yılmaz focused on the role of science diplomacy in COVID-19 global politics and provided a thorough assessment of whether or not Türkiye has a newfound interest in diplomacy, using the term “Science Diplomacy” as an empirical case study in their chapter titled “*Science in Diplomacy and the COVID-19 Politics*.”

In his chapter titled “*Global Health Diplomacy and Türkiye*,” İdris Demir investigated health diplomacy in the international relations discipline through a theoretical approach and examined Türkiye’s health diplomacy profile based on global health diplomacy practices. The chapter envisaged that Türkiye might boost its soft power even further by creating new partnerships across a wider geographic range, with the successful collaboration of the public and commercial sectors working in the health sector.

Çağrı Erhan and Efe Sıvış, in their chapter titled “*Government Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Comparative Health Policies in the US and Canada*,” addressed the geostrategic position of Canada and the political ramifications of COVID-19 in US domestic politics. They argued in their chapter that while the pandemic caused the largest election turnout in more than a century (2020), it also increased polarisation, politicisation, misinformation, and public mistrust of the government and damaged transparency and accountability in regional state operations.

In her chapter titled “*China’s Global Health Diplomacy in the COVID-19 Era: Implications for Southeast Asian Countries*,” Cemre Pekcan analysed how China’s use of global health diplomacy as a soft power strategy has affected China’s

relationships with Southeast Asian nations in the COVID-19 era as well as whether China's image as a leading power in the region has improved relative to the US.

Yunhee Kim and Erman Akıllı analysed how *Hallyu* fuelled South Korea's cultural and public diplomacy, its institutional roots in South Korea, and the function and impact of *Hallyu* in the COVID-19 age of international relations, as well as the origins and appraisal of *Hallyu* (from 1.0 to 4.0) in their chapter titled "*COVID-19 and South Korea: Focusing on Cultural Public Diplomacy with Hallyu.*"

As in the other regions of the world, besides the coronavirus pandemic, major regional issues have arisen, exerting additional pressure on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Hatice Çelik examined the struggle of ASEAN with the COVID-19 pandemic and explained the organisation's reactions as an actor in the region in her chapter titled "*ASEAN's COVID-19 Pandemic Response: Regional and Global Reflections.*"

The COVID-19 outbreak and the conflict in Ukraine have disturbed both internal and external affairs in Eurasia, causing nations to re-evaluate the region's geopolitical structure and reorganise the balance of power. Olga R. Gulina analysed the consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak and Russia's invasion of Ukraine concerning the future of Eurasian countries in her chapter titled "*Beyond Central Asia's Chessboard: Human Movement, Policies, and the COVID-19.*"

Since the start of the Arab Spring and revolutions, the Middle East has undergone enormous transformations. After the Arab Spring, the coronavirus was the second most significant event that affected Middle Eastern nations. The stability of the neighbouring countries is, nevertheless, under unusual threat. Muhittin Ataman and Mehmet Rakipoğlu analysed the overall impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the security architecture, economic sustainability, domestic politics, and foreign policies of the regional countries in their chapter titled "*The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Middle East: Changing Policies and the Mindset of Regional States.*"

Two challenging issues for UK foreign policy have been the COVID-19 outbreak and Brexit; dealing with both required concurrent, multifaceted, and long-term plans since they needed the government to address them simultaneously. Ayşe Gülce Uygun discussed the Global Britain vision and its implications for the post-Brexit and COVID-19 era in her chapter titled "*The UK's New Migration Policy: Post-Brexit and Post-COVID Implications.*"

Fırat Purtaş examined Russia's foreign policy during the COVID-19 pandemic in his "*Post-Pandemic World Order and Russia*" chapter. In the chapter, provisions, approaches, and dynamics of Russian foreign policy in critical areas and disputes, such as the annexation of Crimea, the war in Ukraine, relations with the US, the European Union, China, and former Soviet geography, are examined.

In the South Caucasus, multiple regional vulnerabilities and setbacks in health-care systems and economic capacity inherited from the Soviet era shaped the regional actors' response capacity during the pandemic outbreak. Fatma Didem Ekinci discussed the impact and implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in the South Caucasus in her chapter titled "*South Caucasus and COVID-19: Vulnerabilities, Setbacks, Responses.*"

After SARS, swine flu, and MERS, COVID-19 has been the fourth pandemic to affect the world since 2000. Although scientists had been issuing warnings about the threat presented by pandemics for the previous three decades, it has been the most damaging thus far, concentrating attention on it on a global scale. In her chapter titled “*Human Impact of the Environment and the Increased Likelihood of Pandemics*,” Ana-Belén SOAGE investigated the main factors of the pandemic through the disruption of the environment, urbanisation-globalisation, intensive animal farming, and climate change.

The WHO has faced significant obstacles in carrying out its role as the global public health authority due to the COVID-19. The pandemic has shown the WHO’s power dynamics and limitations in achieving its goals from a key legal standpoint. Haydar Karaman and Burak Güneş examined the major challenges and successes of the WHO in their chapter titled “*World Health Organization and the COVID-19 Pandemic*.”

Through using the concepts of international society and the international system, Arif Bağbaşıoğlu examined whether the COVID-19 epidemic has impacted cooperation among NATO countries, contributed to the resolution of ongoing issues within NATO, and discussed the pandemic’s impacts on NATO in his chapter titled “*The COVID-19 Pandemic as a Security Issue and Its Implications for NATO*.”

The pandemic has significantly impacted social, political, economic, and health outcomes. For countries that are members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the COVID-19 pandemic was an unforeseen and unanticipated calamity. In their chapter titled “*Post-Pandemic Effects on The Realisation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for OECD Countries*,” R. Arzu Kalemci and Mehmet Güray Ünsal employed data envelopment analysis (DEA) to discuss how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected OECD nations’ ability to realise their SDGs.

Due to its long-standing institutional commitment to regional public health, the African Union (AU) has shown notable proactivity in reacting to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the flaws in the public health systems of many African countries and the alarming financial shortfalls faced by their governments, the AU has pledged to trace, test, and track the pandemic, ensure that African states have access to a sufficient portion of the global vaccine supply, and solicit foreign aid to combat the pandemic. Bilge Sahin explored AU policies responding to COVID-19 and their challenges in her chapter titled “*The African Union and COVID-19: Regional Coordination and Solidarity*.”

In the chapter titled “*Europe in the Post-Pandemic World Order: A Human Rights Perspective*,” Ebru Demir focused on the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Europe and the responses of the Council of Europe member states. Nonetheless, she examined the effectiveness with which the European human rights procedures, particularly the European Court of Human Rights, can reassert the shared European ideals inside its legal framework. The chapter analyses several challenging legal and ethical concerns that the European Court of Human Rights may soon have to address while rendering decisions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Scholars of international relations are increasingly in agreement that the COVID-19 pandemic has expedited the restructuring of world politics and contributed to China's development as a rival to American hegemony. According to some academics, the collapse of the world order directly results from American leadership failures during this extraordinary pandemic. Others, meanwhile, pay more attention to the continuous global transition that was already underway before the COVID-19 crisis. Matti Izora İbrahim, Büşra Yılmaz, and Murat Çemrek discussed globalisation within the post-COVID-19 transition with regard to Organski and Kugler's (1980) power transition theory in their chapter titled "*Globalisation in the Era of Power Transition: Lessons Post-COVID-19 for China and the US.*"

Overall, this book questions the pandemic's possible impacts and potential responses to COVID-19 by states, international organisations, and societies. Under the framework of critical security studies, this book questions state exceptionalism in security studies by bringing the human perspective into the stage. Questions asked in this volume bring about the problem of where the world is heading: cooperation or rivalry. This book aims to give competing approaches to this fundamental question by touching upon various subject areas relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through this book, we hope to contribute to the ongoing conversation about the pandemic and its aftermath and to inspire new ideas and approaches for a more sustainable and equitable future.

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