

# THE FLETCHER FORUM of WORLD AFFAIRS

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## EDITORS' NOTE

2020 has not been a kind year, least of all in the realm of world affairs. In January, Iran and the United States nearly came to blows over the killing of the Quds Force's Qassem Solemani. In February, the *New York Times* retracted breaking news that a Russian airstrike had killed Turkish soldiers in favor of using language describing "pro-Syrian government forces." In March, lock-downs to stem the tide of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) infections were instituted across the United States and remain in varying forms even as this edition is released. The events surrounding the pandemic have totally upended "normality" in the United States and the rest of the world. Indeed, world affairs have begun to untether so convincingly from "business-as-usual" that it often seems they might never return to normal.

And during these uncertain times, global actors have seized the moment. China, eager to prove itself as a public health leader rather than negligent bystander to the pandemic's origin, has engaged in an aggressive, global propaganda campaign. In a similar vein, Russia—contraposing a now long-bygone era of security cooperation and rapprochement with the West—has engaged in its own campaign to discredit U.S. and European institutions.

Inside the United States—amidst a growing pandemic death toll—political and racial tensions have boiled over, leading to mass protest in cities across the country. The tensions underlying this unrest have produced an America incoherent in its aims abroad and unsure of how to put America first in an increasingly chaotic world. In the absence of willing hegemonic leadership, the global community searches for steady ground.

Enter the Summer 2020 edition of *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*. In our Winter counterpart, we explored the largely collapsing state of the international rule of law. However, if the above snapshot of current-year affairs and COVID-19 uncertainty is any portent of what is to follow, the global order this rule of law was built upon may look quite different from what we have grown accustomed to.

The first of our contributors, **SASCHA-DOMINIK DOV BACHMANN**, **DOOWAN LEE**, AND **ANDREW DOWSE** assess the virus directly in a Perspective which covers China and Russia's use of COVID-19 as a weapon in an increasingly convergent toolkit for information warfare. An interview with **CLINT WATTS** similarly explores the recent evolution of information warfare, explaining disinformation-as-statecraft from the perspective of his many years of government service.

In an assessment of soft power theaters, **DOUGLAS FARAH** and **CAITLYN YATES** write of the "new normal" that characterizes modern Great Power competition in Latin America, arguing that while the region is accustomed to incursions by Russia and the U.S., China's entry has benefited directly from clash-induced fatigue. **WENDY ROBINSON** assesses how China's "Trojan Dragon" Balkan strategy may find it must clash or reconcile in some way with the European Union's desire to pull the region more firmly into its orbit.

Finally, and turning partially to the United States, the illustrious Ambassador **THOMAS PICKERING** (ret.) unpacks the changing state of U.S.-Russia relations, explaining that while there are parallels between the Cold War and current affairs, there is still fertile ground for both mutual cooperation and diplomacy. An interview with Fletcher's own former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General **JOSEPH DUNFORD** (ret.), imparts characteristically different wisdom on the changing nature of military and technological competition from the American perspective. Finally, **ALI WYNE** resoundingly deconstructs the phrase itself, writing that Great Power competition may offer entirely unhelpful guidance to the United States as the tectonics of global politics shift ever further away from its shores.

In these troubled times, your readership of this edition quite literally means the world to *The Forum*, and we hope you enjoy this edition as much as we took solace in putting it together.

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