COOPERATION OR COMPETITION DURING THE PANDEMIC OF COVID-19? A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF REALPOLITIC WORLDVIEW

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Abstract: The Covid-19 virus emerged firstly in the Wuhan city of China in late 2019 and quickly spread to the rest of the world. A few months later the states and World Health Organization securitized the virus, then it has become a severely full-scale health crisis at the global level. The Covid-19 pandemic has threatened all humanity irrespective of race, nation, religion, and ethnicity except socio-economic class, and has brought widespread insecurity, risk, and uncertainty around the world. Moreover, the pandemic has been a test for cooperative relations among states in the international system. The Covid-19 pandemic is a global problem but the response against the virus has been mostly national during the pandemic. In this context, the paper aims to evaluate the pandemic conditions critically and makes a comparison between the pre-pandemic era and the pandemic era of world politics. The paper concludes that although global problems ask for global solutions, concepts such as egocentrism, nationalism, and national security have increased their importance in the international system instead of cooperation and global solidarity during the pandemic.

Keywords: Realpolitik, Cooperation, Competition, Pandemic, Covid-19

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has been the greatest global challenge facing humanity since the World War Two, as German Chancellor Angela Merkel pointed out (Crowcroft, 2020). The virus emerged firstly in the Wuhan city of China in late 2019 and in a short time spread to the rest of the world. As of 20 May 2022, there are 521.920.560 confirmed cases of Covid-19 and 6.724.323 deaths at the global level (World Health Organization, 2021). These numbers are not just belonging to developing countries such as Argentina, Turkey, and Iraq but also to the most industrialized and prosperous countries like the USA, Britain, and France. Therefore, the Covid-19 pandemic has threatened all humanity irrespective of race, nation, religion, and ethnicity except socio-economic class. Many problems have become a high politics issue for not only states but also non-state actors including individuals and humanity due to the devastating effects of the pandemic. Accordingly, it is argued that the pandemic would lead to radical transformations and changes in the international system (Oğuzlu, 2020: 428). Indeed,

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some scholars declare the end of the globalization and so-called international liberal order (Zürn, 2020).

In the context of the pandemic, the main subject matter of this paper is to discuss how states react to such a non-traditional security issue that threatens all humanity. The paper aims to evaluate the pandemic and its conditions through a critical engagement with realpolitik worldview of International Relations (IR). The research question of the paper is whether the pandemic conditions could be explained by the realpolitik worldview or not. In this respect, pre-pandemic conditions of world politics and the aftermath of it will be critically analysed through considering the coherence and validity of the realpolitik assumptions.

Health and Security

The meaning of security has been widely contested since the 1980s. At the heart of the debate, there have been attempts to broaden and deepen the security conception beyond its traditional focus on states and military security (Krahmann, 2008: 9). While the broadening of security conception is required to consider a wider range of threats, ranging from economic and environmental issues to human rights and diseases, deepening of security conception emphasizes the need for moving either down to the level of individual or human security or up to the level of global security. The theoretical target of the debate is the state security paradigm based on the assumptions of traditional security conception. These efforts have become much more prominent with the end of the Cold War and the globalization process. Indeed, the state-centric and unilateral solutions and responses to non-military security issues are ineffective due to the impact of globalization.

Traditional security conception faces important challenges in terms of the transformation of the threat environment and the growing role of non-state actors following the end of the Cold War. Accordingly, the security concept is considered in a broader perspective, affecting social, economic, environmental, and political spheres, as well as in military ones. And, also, some security threats such as pandemics can/should only be addressed by using non-military means. Indeed, due to the limitations of traditional security conception in terms of grasping requirements of the new security environment, the concept of 'security governance' is introduced as one of the new conceptual perspectives in the post-Cold War era in order to emphasize the multi-level or multiple-actor setting of security which incorporate states and non-state organizations, as well as public and private actors. Therefore, it represents a shift from centralised, state-centric 'government' to fragmented and multilateral 'governance' (Kirchner, 2003: 275). Indeed, the state-centric conception of security seems not to be suited to deal with transnational threats effectively, and thus international institutions and transnational actors should play a more prominent role as security providers in a globalized world.

The post-Cold War world has been subject to the globalization process that is associated with the growth of international linkages, an erosion of the state sovereignty, and the creation of a new security environment. Although there is no agreement on the definition of the globalization concept, it can be broadly defined as the intensification of interactions between societies, institutions, cultures, and individuals on a worldwide basis. As a consequence, the world is perceived as a smaller place as issues of the environment, economics, politics and security intersect more deeply at more points than previously was the

case. While the distinction between internal and external security has been blurred as a result of globalization, traditional national border-setting type of security conception is not capable of recognizing and addressing new threats that transcend the territorial borders.

However, global public health has been viewed as a subject of development studies rather than IR discipline and Security Studies until the Covid-19 pandemic. For instance, health was considered as a part of human rights in the charter establishing the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1948 and this perspective reached its higher point during the 1970s with the WHO's 'Health for All' initiative (McInnes, 2008: 275). However, growing acceptance of broadened security agenda during the 1990s facilitated the emergence of health as a security issue. For instance, Gro Harlem Brundtland, as WHO's Director General, argued that global public health could not be divorced from broader social and political trends. Significantly it was during Brundtland's tenure that WHO coined the term 'global health security' (McInnes, 2008: 276-277). As another example, in 1999 the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) identified a number of risks to the security of the United States of America (USA) arising from infectious diseases that exacerbated by rapid globalization. However, the CIA went further than this, arguing that infectious disease could also pose a risk to international stability and economic growth (Central Intelligence Agency, 2000).

Although health is not traditionally viewed as a security issue, undoubtedly the Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically confirmed the vitality of health security not only for individuals but also for global security. The shift from risk to threat allowed the focus of security to shift from the idea of more probabilistic assessments of potential hazards to a clear and present danger. Therefore, under the current circumstances of the pandemic, it is the easiest thing to argue that the lives and livelihood of the majority of population of the world are at greater risk from disease than from war, terrorism, or other forms of violent conflict.

It is argued that there are three reasons that trigger concerns about health security within the epistemic community of Security Studies because of a pandemic. First, the spread of infectious diseases could pose a direct threat to the health and well-being of the very people. Second, a pandemic could cause social disruption and threaten the stability of a state. For example, confidence in the state may be reduced if it cannot provide a basic level of protection against disease; social inequalities may be highlighted as the rich or privileged people obtain access to better drugs, vaccine, or healthcare, potentially leading to public disorder. Third, a pandemic could also contribute to economic decline by forcing government spending on health and reducing productivity and investment due to a lack of business confidence (McInnes, 2008: 278-279).

Although an infectious disease can naturally pose an existential threat to the people, it is mostly perceived as a threat to the state. It is an implication of established state-centric security perspective on the minds of people. On the other hand, the process of globalization has raised awareness that transboundary nature of health security issues has become more important and that the ability of national health-care services to protect the populations is partial helpful in the face of such a change. Health is therefore increasingly globalized (McInnes, 2008: 284). Indeed, growing complexity requires more sophisticated forms of governance as well as a move from a state-centric perspective to a supranational level of global public health governance in order to address what health issues that transcend national borders are (O'Manique and Fourie, 2012: 246).

The Pre-Pandemic Era

According to normative expectations of the post-Cold War era, new order in international politics would be based on cooperation, international law, diplomacy, international institutions, and multilateralism instead of self-help principle and exclusive power relations among states (Heywood, 2013: 608). Therefore, international relations would no longer be explained by just power relations as realists argue. The proponents of this perspective are the western liberal democracies which declared as victorious states of the ideological competition of the Cold War by Francis Fukuyama's influential article, "The End of the History" (Fukuyama, 1992). Liberal normative expectations of the 1990s have been supported by the globalization process, and the development of communication, information, and transportation technologies. The world has thus become more integrated, borders have become more permeable and transparent, and non-state actors have taken more decisive roles in the international system. International organizations have gradually played important roles in issues such as climate change, disarmament, human rights, and peace-building activities. Moreover, the steps taken by the European Union (EU) towards becoming a supranational organization have been quite remarkable in terms of sharing, even delivering, some sovereign rights with supranational organs. In addition to growing emphasis on the importance of international cooperation and multilateralism, crucial steps have been taken to improve the sense of international law. For instance, a permanent international criminal court was established with the signing of the Rome Statute in 1998.

Simultaneously, technological developments in transportation and telecommunication systems and economic liberalization have led erosion of the sovereignty of states through reducing their control capacities. Accordingly, it is argued that the sovereign capacities of states are eroded, their control capacities are reduced and even their existence might disappear in the future due to the integrative tendencies of globalized world politics. Besides, the explanatory power of the realpolitik worldview has been extensively questioned due to its inability to predict the end of the Cold War. It is argued that the transformation of the international system with globalization and democratization can no longer be understood by considering solely the concept of power and power relations in the system. Moreover, it is alleged that global security would override national security due to the broadening and deepening conceptions of security. Therefore, the normative liberal conception of international relations seemed to become the prevailing perspective during the 1990s and created a different world from the pandemic period with its emphasis on multilateralism, cooperation, and prominence of international organizations.

On the other hand, the terrorist attacks against the USA on September 11, 2001, and the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq have transformed international politics into an insecure and uncertain environment. While multilateralist conception of international relations is replaced by unilateralist policies and actions of Bush Administration, the 9/11 has been used to show that terrorism is a globalized security threat to all civilized world. Thus, while states have taken steps to bring their societies and national borders under strict control, as an implication of such a political tendency 'wall metaphor' of international politics returns as a reality through the building of walls on the borders of US-Mexico and Israel-West Bank.

Although increased economic liberalization has strengthened multinational companies and financial institutions, the economic crises of the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s have affected the whole world as a result of economic interdependence and caused great damage to the global economy. Many people have become unemployed and significantly impoverished. While states have undertaken important initiatives to save national economies and companies, at the same time they have chosen to follow more interventionist policies in the economy as of the 2008 crisis. Thus, with the new millennium, nation-states came to the fore with their attempts to restore their eroded sovereignty by the 9/11 terrorist attacks and 2008 economic crisis. Additionally, the political authoritarianism is facilitated due to the socio-economic implications of the 2008 crisis on people in core countries of the world economy.

Second decade of 2000s have also witnessed serious security risks, geopolitical conflicts, power competition, democratic weakening, civil wars, and refugee problem. The world has entered into a turbulence at the national, regional, and global levels. The rise of feelings such as fear, anxiety and suspicion turned the world into a "high-risk society". Thus, it has forced states to become the dominant actor and accelerate the process of increasing control capacity that started gradually since 9/11. In the USA, the Trump Administration tried to transform the state and American society through following a self-centred policy in the context of the "America First" doctrine. Accordingly, President Trump questioned the role and importance of international organizations, stopped providing financial support to many international organizations, withdrew from international agreements, and finally trusted on unilateralism rather than multilateralism. In the respect of power struggle in the international system, fierce competition has occurred between China and the USA, and trade wars have started in order to reduce the interdependency and this process resulted in protectionist policies in terms of economy. Russia has taken steps to increase its power in geopolitical terms, become a determining factor in the Syrian Civil War, and annexed Crimea in 2014 without regarding the norms of international law. On the other hand, international organizations could not take any preventive action against these attempts.

In the face of the migration flow coming mostly from Third World countries, the EU has securitized the humanitarian problem and taken various measures to protect itself. Migration problem, 2008 global financial crisis and recent terrorist actions in many important cities of Europe have facilitated the strengthening of populist leaders and their more nationalist, right-wing, and authoritarian discourses in the continent. Leaders, or prominent political figures of various governments in Europe such as Hungary, Poland, and the United Kingdom are examples of this trend. For instance, the Boris Johnson government has broken new ground during this period and took his country out of EU membership through the Brexit process.

It can be concluded that a competitive culture prevailed in the international system in pre-pandemic period. States sought to improve their own power positions in geopolitical, political, and economic terms rather than encouraging cooperative relations. Therefore, during the 2000s, the liberal international system has started to erode seriously, and international organizations have functionally begun to lose power. In economic and political terms, states have resorted to protective policies, unilateralism has become more dominant than multilateralism. The rise of nationalism and populism has resulted in a democratic regression in the world (Lika, 2020: 7-12). Therefore, before the pandemic, the dynamics

of the international system changed in line with the realpolitik worldview and there was an environment in which each state searched for power and acted in accordance with the principle of self-help under conditions of international anarchy. The pandemic period, on the other hand, has reinforced a world drawn by realpolitik worldview by shaking global politics much more deeply with the uncertainty, fear, threat, and suspicion it brings.

Pandemic Era from the Lens of Realpolitik Worldview

The Covid-19 emerged firstly in the Wuhan city of China in late 2019 and spread to the rest of the world. A few months later the states and the WHO securitized the virus, then it has become a severely full-scale health crisis at the global level. Many measures have been taken in order to contain the virus through implementing a wide range of isolations and preventing the mobility of peoples in this period. However, these measures have failed to prevent the spread of the virus and this failure has led important implications on the behaviours of states. First of all, during the pandemic period, it is revealed that nation-states are still the most important actors of the international system as realists advocate, and international organizations are weak and limited actors that cannot act independently from states. Secondly, as realists claim, due to the anarchic structure of international system states have mostly tended to behave in accordance with the principle of self-help and prioritized their national security and survival. Third, states have focused on relative gains rather than absolute gains and approached cooperation as a zero-sum game due to power calculations. In this context, the behaviours of states have confirmed the arguments of the realpolitik worldview during the pandemic period from the beginning to the present date.

Although there are various debates on the erosion of state sovereignty as a result of the developments in the post-Cold War period, the most important discourse has become the "resurrecting of nation-states" during the pandemic period (Tamir, 2020). As Stephen Walt (2020a) points out, when a new threat arose and fear soared peoples looked firstly and foremost at their own nation-states for protecting them against the virus, not international organizations. Gian Gardini (2020: 17) says that nobody demands Coca-Cola, Apple, Amazon, or any other international organizations to protect themselves against the virus. People have demanded protection, financial support, vaccines, and health-care services from their governments at the expense of sacrificing their freedoms and rights. Even in liberal states where individuals tolerate a minimum level of state control, societies have clung to their own governments for protection in the face of a crisis. It has become more obvious that states are the only actors struggle against the virus effectively and the social contract between individuals and their states is still solid and strongly valid. Thomas Hobbes, one of the philosophical pioneers of realist theory of IR, explained the existence of the state by transferring people's rights and freedoms to "Leviathan" for security needs. As observed during the pandemic period, states have begun to regain their eroded sovereignty with their coercive powers and tight control by widespread isolations, travel barriers, compulsory tests, and punishments. States have also considered the conditions of pandemic as an opportunity for increasing their control capacity through taken measures against the virus, and thus they could expand their control activities and instruments on the society.

The emergency measures taken by states against the virus and the legitimacy they have gained from their people to use this authority have enabled the governments to easily

implement several practices such as monitoring, tracking, data collecting, and censorship. However, these powers have been used not only for struggling against the virus but also for silencing criticism and oppressing the oppositional voices. Moreover, it is claimed that even the pandemic is over, governments may not be able to give back the large-scale control power they have gained during the pandemic (Walt, 2020b). In fact, suspicions have arisen that there might be a shift towards authoritarianism even in Europe and the USA since peoples seem ready to accept the authoritarian model of government in exchange for order and economic security. (Lika, 2020: 16). As in times of crisis, the rise of nationalist movements in the world with the feeling of "secure first your own people" has further stimulated this authoritarian tendency and the governments are encouraged to gain more power by their peoples. Especially the trend of authoritarianism has strengthened in the world as authoritarian states such as Russia and China seemed more successful than liberal western democracies in combating the virus (Walt, 2020c). However, an objection should be expressed in terms of credibility of Russia and China in terms of their official statistics and policies regarding the pandemic.

The dominant position of state-centric perspective in both domestic and foreign policy through social, economic, and security mechanisms has revealed how fragile the liberal paradigm is in times of crisis. Because, according to liberals, the rising power of non-state actors, supra-national, non-governmental, or inter-governmental international organizations would make the concept of sovereignty meaningless and the role of states in global relations would get gradually narrow. However, the weakness and fragility of this argument have been confirmed with the pandemic. In this sense, it can be said that the pandemic period has been a pick point for states to expand and regain their control capacities since the 9/11 and 2008 financial crisis. Therefore, it can be argued that Leviathan is back stronger and more influential with the pandemic, as realists advocated.

On the other hand, as Benjamin Miller (2001: 15) described the anarchic international system as the absence of a "911" phone number that states can call urgently against any threats. Accordingly, states should rely on their own national power capacities in the face of any threats. However, in the respect of liberal thought, the Covid-19 is a global problem and constitutes a threat to all humanity, "logically" and "ideally" global solutions should be found against such a threat, and states should cooperate and work together with international organizations. But "reality of the pandemic" does not reflect a liberal point of view but rather reflects the view of the realist paradigm. As realists argued, states turn to self-help and zero-sum calculations instead of cooperation in the face of the crisis due to systemic trust deficit and shadow of future originated from anarchy (Basrur and Kliem 2021: 8).

As a response to the pandemic of Covid-19, the states have prioritized their national security rather than global security in the line with self-help principle. Firstly, states have considered the virus as a national security issue. For instance, President Trump described the Covid-19 as an invisible enemy and stated that the USA is at war against this virus. Moreover, President Trump evaluated the struggle against Covid-19 as a race and declared that "we will win faster than people think" (Cathey, 2020). Likewise, President Emmanuel Macron used the phrase "we are at war against the virus" in France (Financial Times, 2020). Also, Britain Prime Minister Boris Johnson said that "we must act like a war cabinet" and accordingly stated, "we have battle room and battle plan against the virus" (Cole, 2020). Horst Seehofer, Interior Minister of Germany, stated that "the coronavirus is no longer merely a health crisis, but a question of national security" (Vogel, 2020). Considering the rhetoric's, state leaders

take the Covid-19 with war terminology and evaluate it in terms of national security. In the struggle against the virus, the messages come to the fore mostly about "*their countries* will win the **race**" or that "they are the chief commander in this **war**" and that "they will protect *their **own** countries*" instead of international cooperation and collective action. In this respect, the measures taken against the virus have largely been within the scope of national security rather than being part of the global solution. "The problem is global but the solution is national" (Turkish Health Ministry, 2020) slogan used in Turkey against Covid-19 reflects the almost global attitude of states against the pandemic.

In this context when the pandemic broke out, due to the fear of contamination of the virus, isolationist policies have been raised among nations such as banning the export of health supplies ignoring the conditions of other nations, and closing borders to mitigate the risk. Member states of the EU, without any EU-consultation process, have closed their borders and restricted the export of medical equipment such as masks, glows, face shields, and gowns. While France has banned the export of medical equipment and drugs (Guarascio, 2020), Germany's prohibition on the export of protective equipment caused conflicts with its two neighbours, Austria, and Switzerland (Dahinten and Wabl, 2020). Moreover, while controls on the medical equipment are squeezed in the USA, President Trump tried to stop the sale of protective masks to Canada and Latin America by putting pressure on US manufacturer firms. Besides, states have blamed each other with populist rhetoric and looked for a scapegoat, rather than focusing on the solution of the problem. For instance, President Trump called the Covid-19 as "Chinese Virus" (Richardson, 2020) and claimed that this virus spread from a laboratory developing biological weapons in Wuhan (Atwood and Perez 2020). In response to such allegations, China argued that coronavirus brought by the US army who visited Wuhan in October 2019 (Myers, 2020).

Consequently, states have generally tended to ignore the predicaments of other nations. They have also sought to guarantee their own security rather than global security, and blamed each other. Instead of sharing the medical supplies, they have mostly stocked them in their countries with prohibitions. Due to the uncertainty of the future, states are forced to act in accordance with the worst-case scenario. Ultimately, stocks of medical equipment, health-care systems, supply chains, and emergency capacities have become national power capacities of states in order to survive during the pandemic era. Therefore, from the beginning of the pandemic, states have been in a race and competition to secure medical supply lines in order to ensure their national needs. To achieve this, they have eroded free trade, raised the walls of the custom, and imposed various restrictions against each other.

During the pandemic era, states have mostly focused on their relative gains rather than their absolute gains. In this context, states have sought to accumulate power to strengthen their positions in the international system and thus become one of the powerful states that shape the new world order that can be established in the post-pandemic period. For this purpose, they have aimed to overcome the crisis quickly and realize a rapid economic recovery. Apart from it, the competition for gaining power and influence can be most clearly observed in the process of vaccine development against the virus. In this sense, instead of cooperating to develop vaccines against the common threat, states have tried to develop their own "national" vaccines in order to gain prestige, economic income, and political influence. In other words, the production of the vaccine has been considered by the states as a zero-sum game, and competition has been mostly preferred instead of cooperation.

More than 15 vaccines have been developed by various countries. Sputnik V was developed by Russia, CoronaVac, Sinovac, and Sinopharm was developed by China, Moderna was developed by the USA, AstraZeneca was developed by Britain, Pfizer-BioNTech was developed German-USA, Novavax was developed by USA, Johnson and Johnson was developed by Netherlands and Covaxin was developed by India (Zimmer, Corum and Wee, 2021). States have competed with each other in order to develop the most effective vaccine and accumulate power instead of choosing collective action for developing a vaccine by combining their capacity and common knowledge against the virus. Moreover, apart from cooperation and sharing of knowledge in the vaccine development process, states even spied on each other in order to gain an advantage in developing vaccine first (Corera, 2020; Fox and Kelion, 2020). Besides, the Trump Administration attempted to lure the German company Curevac to develop the vaccine in the USA (Bennhold and Sanger, 2020). Such a struggle over vaccine development and production is about the making profit, quick recovery, and political benefit that states will obtain through firstly reaching the vaccine. Therefore, there is a fierce competition in the development and production process of vaccines.

The power struggle that revolves over vaccines can be interpreted as a war between authoritarianism and democracies during the pandemic era. In this sense, the vaccines have been turned into propaganda instruments just like in the Cold War mentality. If the West fails in this process, it is believed that actors such as China and Russia will rise. Accordingly, Heiko Mass stated that "our multilateral solutions must succeed if we do not want to lose our ground to those who argue that authoritarian regimes are better at dealing with a crisis like this". As a matter of fact, Russia and China have tried to infiltrate Europe by taking advantage of the lack of vaccines in the continent in the first phase of the pandemic. For instance, China sent some medical supplies, testing kits, and doctors for "help" to Italy (Kuo, 2020) as a part of pandemic diplomacy. Indeed, what China wants to do is to create the image of a global leader helping the world rather than being the state where the virus originated. Therefore, China's essential motivation is not just helping, but also gaining more soft power. Therefore, vaccines are not only a solution to the virus but also a diplomatic tool from which states can gain power and influence. For instance, Slovakia's foreign minister has defined the vaccine as a "hybrid warfare tool" (Korčok, 2021). In this context, it can be stated that self-help principle is still the dominant culture in international system in which states egoistically seek power and influence over other states.

On the other hand, as liberals argue, international organizations are actors that can facilitate cooperation, and accordingly, they can play an important role in international politics. However, during the pandemic period, international organizations remained quite weak for coordinating cooperative behaviours and actions among states. While organizations such as the UN, EU, WHO, G-7, or G-20 could not launch collective actions against the virus, they have not been able to establish a bridge for cooperation between states in terms of providing an effective platform for joint vaccine development.

When the Covid-19 was detected in November 2019, China did not allow the WHO to enter the country to conduct research and the WHO did not take any compelling steps that could change China's attitude. Only when China found it suitable and set a specific date, officials of WHO were able to enter the country (Campbell and Doshi, 2020). Because of the lack of sovereignty and coercive power, international organizations have become ineffective actors during the pandemic, as realists argued. In line with the self-help principle, the search

of states to protect their citizens foremost has put international organizations in a difficult situation (Cuddy, 2020).

The UN at least could ensure the COVAX (Vaccines Global Access) agreement for delivering vaccines to less-developed countries and to ensure fair distribution of them. However, important factors such as the USA, Russia, and China did not participate in COVAX. Also, developing countries with their limited economic power faced the danger of being deprived of vaccines since prosperous countries reserved almost all produced and to be produced vaccines **(Hegarty, 2020).** Thereupon, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of WHO, stated that at the beginning of 2021, vaccine nationalism has raised in the world, and the world faces a moral collapse. He also pointed out that while 39 million doses of vaccine were given in 49 high-income countries, it was quite wrong to give only 25 doses (not billion or million just 25) of vaccine to one of the low-income countries. He said that the 'self-first' approach puts the poorest and most vulnerable countries at risk, and COVAX could fail because of this **(CBS, 2021).** Moreover, even the countries that are parties to COVAX undermined the initiative by making direct agreements with pharmaceutical companies (Cuddy, 2020). Even France and Italy as component states of COVAX have blocked the exporting of vaccine to other countries (Zampano, 2021). As another example, the UN has made a "Global Ceasefire Call" during the pandemic, but only twelve countries in conflict have responded positively to the call (United Nations, 2020). Moreover, since the call, 21,347 persons have lost their lives (Save the Children, 2020). Additionally, while states need economic resources more than ever to combat the virus in the pandemic, states still implement the sanctions against each other which damage their resistance capacities against Covid-19. For instance, Russia's President Vladimir Putin demanded the suspension of sanctions in the G-20 meeting but this call has not been responded positively and the sanctions against North Korea, Iran, and Russia are still implemented **(Esfandiari, 2020).**

In the case of the EU, it has not been able to initiate a joint action against the virus. Member states of the EU have abandoned cooperation and resorted to measures at the nation-state level. In the event of the crisis, member states have put aside the common norms and ideals by putting forward national survival. Even Italy, which has one of the highest number of cases and deaths since the beginning of the pandemic, complained by emphasizing that the EU left Italians alone, although they insisted on asking for help from the member states and the EU (The Guardian, 2020). Also, the Union acted against the spirit of the single market, competition law, fiscal discipline, and freedom of movement by banning export and closing borders (Basrur and Kliem, 2021: 3). In addition to these measures, although the EU has repeatedly called on the member states to lift the bans on medical supplies, the members did not comply with this call and continued their national policies (Guarascio, 2020). These examples demonstrate that states act in accordance with the principle of self-help even in the sub-systems where anarchy has matured. While the level of cooperation among the member states was high before the pandemic, the member states have chosen to sacrifice their cooperative behaviours and the spirit of solidarity in the face of the pandemic. Such an integrated and unique organization has not been able to develop a cooperation and coordination among its members for developing and producing vaccine. Apart from that, some member states have used the pandemic in order to create certain opportunities for themselves. For example, Poland and Hungary have shown their veto card against EU Pandemic Recovery Package as a political opportunity (Sieradzka and Verseck, 2020).

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought widespread insecurity, risk, and uncertainty around the world. Integration of societies and states through the globalization process, the high level of human mobility, and a large level of interdependency between states have accelerated the spread of the virus, and also, led to great damage worldwide. The lack of coordination and weaknesses of international organizations against the pandemic have demonstrated that nation-states are still the most important actors in international politics. The pandemic has also been a pick point for states to increase their surveillance and control capacities. Because in times of crisis, people directly clung to their states in order to ensure their security. The self-help principle, conditions of anarchic structure of the international system, and the lack of trust among states have generated difficulties for cooperation in the respect of pandemic conditions. Therefore, it is argued that states can ignore global security by giving priority to their national security needs.

The Covid-19 has been a test for cooperation between states in the international system. Self-centred perspective of states during the pandemic has been determinant factor for the behaviours and choices of them as a confirmation of the realpolitik worldview. Cooperation between states such as providing vaccine and medical equipment during the pandemic can be seen as diplomatic and political investments for the future rather than instances of global solidarity. Because, some vital issues such as vaccination have been mostly considered as a means of power and influence in line with state interests. It seems that some type of social-Darwinism calls for survival of stronger ones during the pandemic. Economic resilience combined with the health-care system and the sustainability of medical production supply during the pandemic have made some states as "privileged" in the system. They have mostly chosen to prioritize their national requirements by focusing on national action plans. In this respect, protectionism, and self-sufficiency in terms of health-care services and equipment enforces states to favour their internal reality. While the number of death due to the Covid-19 is both individually and statistically tragic, unequal access to health-care survives, and vaccines due to the socio-economic reasons of the majority of people in the world has led to ethical considerations and political objections for the current order of international relations. This situation was previously described as "worldwide health apartheid" (O'Manique and Fourie, 2012: 245). Unfortunately, the humanity is still witnessing the apartheid even under dramatic Covid-19 pandemic conditions.

Therefore, it is not surprising to observe that discourses such as egocentrism, nationalism and national security have increased their importance in the international system instead of discourses of cooperation, international solidarity, or joint actions during the pandemic. However, it should be emphasized that global problems ask for global solutions. National efforts for addressing the pandemic should be complemented by a sense of global solidarity. Because a unilateralist perspective can only offer a temporary solution if the problem is global. Realpolitik assumptions can only satisfy the national honour, but they cannot provide a clear explanation for the well-being and safety of individuals.

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