

GREAT DECISIONS

Spring 2020 Update

Climate Change • India and Pakistan • Latin America's Northern Triangle •
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Climate Change and the Global Order

On April 1, 2020, United Nations officials announced that they were delaying the 26th Conference of the Parties meeting. The meeting, known as COP26, was scheduled for November 9 through 19 in Glasgow, Scotland, but has been postponed until 2021 due to the ongoing COVID-19 virus. The conference was set to be one of the most ambitious climate conferences to date, bringing together more than 30,000 heads of state, climate experts and scientists to discuss plans to help meet the 2030 deadline. "We will continue working tirelessly with our partner to deliver the ambition needed to tackle the climate crisis and I look forward to agreeing on a new date for the conference," UK Business Secretary and COP26 President-Designate Alok Sharma said. The meeting was set to be held at the Scottish Events Campus in Glasgow; however, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the Scottish government to make the campus into a large temporary hospital to house patients affected by Coronavirus.

The 2030 deadline was set as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which created a new list of 17 goals that the United Nations had hoped to meet by 2030. Goal 13 of the agenda is to "take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts." Part of fulfilling Goal 13 involves countries ensuring that they follow the Paris agreement of 2015, which set the limit on the global rise in temperature to 2 degrees Celsius. The agreement also set a framework for global meetings every five years among the signatories to take stock and assess the path forward. The Intergovernmental Panel

on Climate Change also promotes the idea that any climate action must take effect before 2030.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused many governments to shift focus away from any ongoing or planned climate initiatives. "Postponing COP26 is the right thing to do," Laurence Tubiana, French economist and one of the architects for the Paris agreement, said "public health and safety must come first now." Ms. Tubiana has gone on to draw a parallel between the COVID-19 response and the global response to climate change. "This crisis has shown that international cooperation and solidarity are essential to protect global well-being and peace."

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India and Pakistan

As the effects of COVID-19 continue to spread across India, the country's commerce department restricted exports of certain pharmaceutical ingredients to ensure that there was a sufficient supply in the country during the pandemic. The restrictions included hydroxychloroquine, a drug that helps fight malaria and has been shown anecdotally to have a positive effect on fighting the coronavirus. This plan has been challenged by the White House and President Trump who has called the drug a "gamechanger" in the fight against COVID-19. While some experts doubt the President's claims about the effectiveness of the anti-malaria drug, Mr. Trump has called on Prime Minister Modi to lift the ban.

India has been on lockdown since late March, but the country has still seen a rise in cases with some 118 deaths in India as of April 6. India has been forced to convert some trains and the large Wockhardt hospital in Mumbai into containment zones to house some of the nearly 5,000 confirmed cases. Some experts fear that India's slow rollout of testing and identifying those with COVID-19 could lead to asymptomatic people spreading the disease. On April 5, Prime Minister Modi called on Indians to light candles for what he called "9 minutes for India," which was to show unity and solidarity among the Indian people in the face of the pandemic. The pandemic and subsequent lockdown has had a devastating impact on India. The government gave Indians only a four-hour notice before the lockdown, causing panic among the populace. When Indian states began to close their borders, many workers who had to travel were left stranded. The mass migration within India was mainly carried out on foot, as trains and other mass transportation had been shut down.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, Pakistan has struggled to curb the spread of the disease as Muslim worshippers, defying calls for "social distancing," participated in a massive religious gathering in Lahore in early April. Pakistan quarantined around 20,000 worshippers after over 150 of the group tested positive for COVID-19. Pakistan's government has taken a conservative estimate on projected cases, saying they anticipate 50,000 cases confirmed by the end of April. These projections are far from the global average, which has many countries seeing death tolls and

confirmed cases rise within the first month of the appearance of the virus in the country.

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Latin America's Northern Triangle

As the coronavirus spreads throughout the globe, Northern Triangle nations like El Salvador have been preparing for the virus "No one can guarantee that it is not going to hit us," Alexandra Hill, El Salvador's minister of foreign affairs, said in March. El Salvador has helped to minimize the economic damage of the virus by suspending payments on rent and electric and internet bills and expanding unemployment protections for the next three months. Similar programs have been launched in Colombia, which has been under quarantine since early March. While COVID-19 has not spread to Central America, there is a growing fear that migrants who are being deported from the U.S. to nations like Guatemala and Honduras may have contracted the virus.

The resulting border closures and halting of travel have led to a lull in the number of migrants coming to Mexico and the United States. The nations of the Northern Triangle all closed their borders in early March after the World Health Organization declared the virus to be a pandemic. While the borders for these nations are closed, they were still receiving migrants back from the United States. That changed when a migrant who had been deported from the United States to Guatemala tested positive for COVID-19, prompting the Guatemalan government to call on the U.S. to sus-

pend deportation flights. Organizations like the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have moved away from their primary duties to help U.S. citizens return from the Northern Triangle countries.

Many Central American nations have detained people who violate any curfews and rules set in place by governments to contain the spread of COVID-19. Since mid-March over 2,000 have been detained in Honduras, over 5,000 in Guatemala and another 700 in El Salvador. Installing any degree of social distancing rules is difficult in these nations, as the ability to work from home is limited and large groups of migrants who had already begun the journey to Mexico and the U.S. are now stuck in one of these countries.

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China In Latin America

During the COVID-19 pandemic, China quickly moved to strike deals with many of the nations of Latin America to provide medical supplies and other goods to help combat the spread of the virus on the continent. In addition to protective health gear for doctors, testing kits and ventilation masks, China has also promised large donations to these nations to ease some of the economic difficulties caused by the virus. China has sought to focus attention on its international response and recovery, rather than on Wuhan having been the initial epicenter of the virus. "It's remarkable and a credit, in a way, to China's own commanding control of information that it's been able to re-envision itself as a leader in the fight against coronavirus globally," Margaret Myers, author of "China in Latin America" in *Great Decisions 2020*, said.

COVID-19 has already had a drastic effect on life in Latin America, despite not having as many confirmed cases as Europe or the United States. Major slowdowns in trade, especially that of crude oil, have done a lot of damage to the economies of Latin America. Goldman Sachs recently adjusted its projections for the Latin America region saying that economic growth, which was projected at +1.1 percent, will drop to -1.2 percent due to COVID-19. In addition to the economic problems, political protests in Chile, ongoing since October of 2019 in the large Plaza Italia in Santiago, have been forbidden because all large gatherings now require permission from the government.

Not all relationships between China and Latin America remain strong. The relationship between China and Brazil has been fraught since the election of Jair Bolsonaro, who espoused several anti-Chinese views when he was running for office. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, Bolsonaro and members of his staff and inner circle have traded barbs with Chinese officials. Brazil's Education Minister Abraham Weintraub has suggested that China is using the COVID-19 outbreak and response to make a profit. Chinese officials have vehemently denied these rumors and have said that these actions have "caused negative influences in the healthy development of bilateral relations." Despite Jair Bolsonaro's plan to move away from Chinese influence, China remains Brazil's largest trading partner.

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The Philippines and the U.S.

Since mid-March, the Philippines' Luzon Island has remained under lockdown due to the ongoing spread of COVID-19. Luzon Island, located in the North of the Philippines, is home to the nation's most populous city, Quezon City, and the nation's capital, Manila. With Luzon under quarantine, the economy and society of the Philippines have come to a standstill. The quarantine had been set to end on April 12, until President Rodrigo Duterte announced that the lockdown will be extended until the end of April. Duterte also announced that he has been granted emergency powers by the Philippine Legislature to combat the virus.

As of early April, the Philippines had announced that it had nearly 3,700 total cases and 177 deaths since the virus first arrived on the island. To help counter the economic downturn that the shutdown has caused, the government plans to adopt a "social amelioration program" that provides minimum wage to low-income families or workers who are unable to go to their jobs. The Philippine government has said that it will provide funds to all families affected but will prioritize the ones that are most at risk.

China has been sending aid to the Philippines since late March. China has provided supplies like masks and ventilators as well as medical experts to fight the coronavirus. "Most team members have had frontline experience in Hubei province fighting the epidemic," China's ambassador to the Philippines, Huang Xilian, said. Wuhan, the "ground zero" of Covid-19, is the capital of Hubei province.

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In response to COVID-19 we have made our GDTV program available to stream on YouTube. Please visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mA1ZxzkUHNI&list=PLDHHJksdsrQFAfjQi4VehimWI_n3SnyGf to view.

or search for Foreign Policy Association in the YouTube search bar.

The UPDATES are a free supplement to Great Decisions and are available online at www.fpa.org/great_decisions.
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