



# **Shifting Dynamics: The International Order in a Post-Pandemic World**

1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> of December | 2020

# **The Disillusion of the American Dream: COVID-19 and the Politics of Healthcare**

**EXPERT ROUNDTABLES**

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# The Disillusion of the American Dream: COVID-19 and the Politics of Healthcare



- One of the most important impacts of the COVID-19 was its exposure of systematic racism and socioeconomic inequality in the United States as the pandemic disproportionately affected vulnerable people.
- One of the most significant dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic was that it has widened the cultural and social polarisation in the United States and exposed the fragile state of the society.
- Social and political polarisation in the United States is deeply entrenched and not easily overcome. Until a new kind of politics emerge, such polarisation will likely continue to paralyse America's effectiveness internally and internationally.
- The pandemic has also revealed the dysfunctionality in the United States in coordination between federal and state-level authorities.
- While the varied responses of national governments to the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated international institutions are not working, the speed of the process to develop COVID-19 vaccines demonstrated that it is possible to remain committed to the core institutional prerequisites such as the regulatory review process and the clinical design process for vaccines while being innovative in solving an agreed upon global problem.

## Summary of the Session

**T**he expert roundtable session, titled “The Disillusion of the American Dream: COVID-19 and the Politics of Healthcare”, discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fragilities of political governance within the health care system, systematic social and economic inequalities, existing political and cultural polarisation, and dysfunctionality of certain core institutions in the United States.

Dr. Halit Yerebakan highlighted that almost all countries across the world failed to effectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the failures have been most obvious in the United States because the Trump administration acted particularly slowly and failed to offer a detailed plan to prevent the spread of the virus. He compared the current pandemic to a war and argued that unlike some wars, in which we can declare victory, world leaders have two choices: either aggressively face the adversary or roll over and let approximately 3% of the population succumb to the disease.

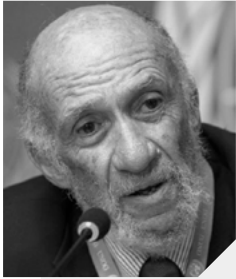
Kılıç Buğra Kanat argued out that the growing dysfunctionality and lack of coordination between federal and state authorities showcases a national crisis in the United States. He pointed out that the

US is still in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic and will continue to experience economic, social and political aftershocks for the foreseeable future.

Professor Richard Falk, discussed how the pandemic has exposed deep socioeconomic inequalities in the US. He contended that the Biden administration may lead the country towards another kind of Cold War engagement between a world where there is a Western-like commitment to civility and liberal ideals and a Chinese-like authoritarian model. He added that the only way out of this ‘Cold War’ is to articulate a new politics based on a new realism blended in moral globalism.

Noting that institutions are for people what water is for a fish, Professor Blair Sheppard emphasised the critical role that institutions play for facilitating the progress forward. Sheppard stated that international institutions failed to produce a concerted action from national governments against the COVID-19 pandemic. However, he also noted that the vaccine production process demonstrated the possibility of protecting core institutions while being innovative. On a related note, Sheppard stated that one of the critical lessons from the vaccine production is that if the world agrees on the centrality of the problem, fast and decisive steps can be taken.

# Richard A. Falk's Highlights



## Professor Emeritus of International Law, Princeton University

Richard Falk is the Albert G. Milbank Professor Emeritus of International Law at Princeton University and Chair of Global Law at Queen Mary University, London. Falk is the former UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Occupied Palestine (2008-2014). His book, *(Re) Imagining Humane Global Governance* (2014), proposes a value-oriented assessment of the world order and future trends. His most recent books include *Power Shift* (2016); *Revisiting the Vietnam War* (2017); *On Nuclear Weapons: Denuclearization, Demilitarization and Disarmament* (2019). Since 2009, Falk has been nominated annually for the Nobel Peace Prize.

- ” “The first and most obvious effect [of the COVID-19 pandemic] is the exposure of systematic racism in the United States as a consequence of a disease which has disproportionately harmed those who are people of colour, people who live in poor neighbourhoods, and generally people who are more vulnerable in this society. It has exposed the deep kind of socioeconomic inequality that accounts for many of the internal tensions that we experience within the United States.”
- ” “The US [still] suffers from the aftermath of the Cold War and it suffers from it in a manner relevant here by decades of over-investment in a military approach to international relations and an under-investment in diplomacy and peaceful means of problem solving. And this has expressed itself ideologically in a hostility to governmental control of health policy. [For example], you have Trump’s reaction to any kind of acknowledgment that the state has a positive role to play at a time of crisis like this. In other words, it is an ideological regression that disempowers the state to act responsibly under present conditions.”
- ” “The result of the recent US elections, which I think is positive in the sense of repudiating the kind of dysfunctional leadership provided by Donald Trump, has not removed the element of ‘Trumpism’ and autocratic repudiation of a science-based rational society. And therefore, it gives us back the flexibility and a re-entry into the world of global leadership, but without any assurance that the Biden presidency will not lead toward a new kind of geopolitical confrontation with China, a new Cold War in effect. So, we are ultimately challenged at this time and hopefully we can find some creative responses.”
- ” “As far as the social contract is concerned, there is not a live option that looks to the positive potentiality of a moral globalisation that emphasised the promotion of the global public good as part of realising that national public good. There is not that sense of what used to be called ‘idealism’ in the current world. Context is really the new realism. The new realism is to become a moral globalist.”
- ” “I am pessimistic in the short run essentially because the polarisation in the US is real and not easily reconcilable. And until a new kind of politics emerges — which I was identifying as a [kind of] new realism— this polarisation will continue to paralyse the American internal and international effectiveness and contribution.”
- ” “[For the United States] there is a complete mismatch between the over-investment in the military and its outcome. It [the US] lost war after war since Vietnam against weaker opponents because wars are not won and lost anymore on the military battlefield. They are as often lost on the political battlefield by supremacy in what people call ‘soft power’.”
- ” “I do feel that a new realism is possible, but it will have to come as a kind of progressive populism with demilitarisation and reallocation of resources, redesign of institutions, the restoration of trust, and many of other things.”

# Blair Sheppard's Highlights



**Director of the Global Leader, Strategy and Leadership, PwC & Professor, Duke University**

Blair Sheppard joined PwC in 2012 as Global Leader for Strategy and Leadership. He is also Professor Emeritus and Dean Emeritus of Duke University's Fuqua School of Business. Blair spent the majority of his career as a Professor at the Fuqua School of Business. He has served as Associate Dean for Executive Education, Senior Associate Dean, and Dean. He is also the founding CEO and Chairman of Duke Corporate Education. Professor Blair has advised more than 100 companies and governments and has published more than 50 books and articles. His most recent publications include "Adapting to a New World" and "The Urgent Need for Sophisticated Leadership". His latest book *Ten Years to Midnight* was also published this year.

- ” “I think the important point when you think about multilateralism [is that] there is a kind of a prima facie case it is not working. Think about it in terms of the global issues such as disparity, which is growing at an accelerated pace, not just between individuals, but between regions, and actually in places within nation states and across generations.”
- ” “There is declining trust in institutions at a scary accelerated rate, both within countries and between countries. And it is not clear [if] we have the leaders we need to actually address it. You can sort of see [this in the] very varied response to the COVID-19 pandemic and that crisis as an illustration that the institutions are not working.”
- ” “I think institutions are for people what water is for a fish. So, if we do not trust the legal system, we do not trust the education system, we do not trust political system, and we do not trust multilateralism, we actually just can not get on in life. And the result is that it is hard to progress forward.”
- ” “We actually have a mismatch between kind of the ideal characteristic of an institution, which is to adapt slowly, and the needs we have in a world, which are massively disruptive. Many of our institutions were designed for a world that was sort of single minded but the world is increasingly fractured.”
- ” “I think we need to design institutions for a fractured world. You cannot build a thriving global world without thriving local economies, and we need as many economies as we can to thrive. [One] way to think of this is that we need geographic inclusiveness in the design consideration for the institutions we are building. That means we have to connect to the local institutional and local community [as part of governance structure of international institutions] because they have very different issues, very different challenges.”
- ” “I would call on all of us to acknowledge one critical lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic, which is [that] the world can do things massively and fast if we agree on the problem. I think what we already knew but reminded ourselves [with the production of the COVID-19 vaccine] is that actually we can do things massively and quickly when we agree on a central problem, and we organize our resources around it.”
- ” “There is a real lesson from the difference between what happened with COVID-19 and what happened with the [COVID-19] vaccine. We protected the core institution, which is the regulatory review process and the clinical design process. But then we had massive ideas about how to change it around, which is [to] run five or six trials simultaneously, manufacture before the drug is produced, actually try different strategies concurrently rather than sequentially. But we never gave up the regulatory regime that ensured that it was actually a good product when it was finished. That is a great example of remembering your core mission and innovating around it.”
- ” “The market-based system is actually ahead of the political system [in the United States]. Shareholders are beginning to demand a very different way of thinking about our political organisations. And they are pushing very different things about these organisations; they are saying build us a sustainable forward-looking future.”
- ” “I think in a way, the pragmatism of the market may actually force us to invent something well before the political debates get resolved, because I just do not see how they resolve themselves very easily.”

# Halit Yerebakan's Highlights



**Associate Professor, Yeditepe University Speciality Hospital, Cardiovascular Surgery**

Dr. Yerebakan is Medical Director and an Associate Professor of Cardiac Surgery at Yeditepe University Hospital. His interests include heart replacement surgery, minimally invasive surgery, peripheral arterial diseases, integrative medicine and healthcare policy. He has authored over 100 original publications. Dr. Yerebakan was a featured health expert on "Good Opinion" at TRT1 television for 3 seasons, spanning over 100 episodes. Currently, Dr. Yerebakan hosts "Rhythm Of Life" health show, which is named after his authored book for the 3rd season, spanning over 250 episodes. His show was awarded as "The Best Medical Show" in 2019 by Medical Sciences University of Ministry of Health.

- ” “By the time President Donald Trump strode into the White House briefing room on the evening of February 26, the virus had already killed more than 2,500 people in China and forced the lockdown of 11 million residents in Wuhan, and infections in Italy were rising by an astonishing 40% every single day. That night, Trump assured Americans; “We are ready”, he said. But in fact, as we see right now clearly, no country in the world was clearly ready for such kind of an outbreak.”
- ” “The White House predicts that the total number of deaths related to COVID-19 infection [will] be 500,000 by the spring of 2021. This is massive, and it is close enough to the mortality rate of the 1918 Spanish Influenza, which was about 2.5%.”
- ” “A string of failures at the White House, CDC and FDA have led to intractable delays in making diagnostic tests for COVID-19 widely available in the United States. [Consequently,] widespread testing has been disastrously slow to come online in the United States, while the President repeatedly assured the country that they would do so. But when calendars showed March, they declared a state of emergency. Unfortunately, [by then] the spread of COVID-19 was out of control.”
- ” “By mid-May, they did something good, and the [American] federal government launched Operation Warp Speed, a critical joint effort by the CDC, FDA and federal agencies to accelerate the development, testing and approval of a vaccine — a process [that] often takes 10 to 15 years [to complete].”
- ” “Unfortunately, politics surpassed science at various times since launching Operation Warp Speed: Trump forecast that the vaccine could be ready by October, before the presidential election date, by the end of the year, and so on. But experts in public health said that these were unrealistic [predictions]. The government invested heavily in vaccine development, but this rhetoric politicised the development process and unfortunately led to a growing public distrust.”
- ” “Recent evidence suggests that the majority of [COVID-19] cases could have been avoidable. I mean, our families, mothers, grandmothers or loved ones could be saved, if countries had been [better] prepared for the health crisis. But now that we are getting closer to having lifesaving vaccines available, no one should manage vaccine distribution and administration the way they have managed testing and treatment. No one should allow for unnecessary deaths.”
- ” “While most Americans support common sense disease fighting measures like masks, staying at home orders and so on, a substantial minority refuses. But the problem is less the actions of individual people than the federal leaders and in conjunction with science. So, they have to listen to the scientists or [take account of] their evidence to take steps.”
- ” “Make no mistake, this is a war. It is a war for all of us. But unlike some wars in which we can declare victory and get out, we have only two choices for this war: aggressively face the adversary or roll over and let approximately 3% of our population face a fight with death.”



# Kılıç Buğra Kanat's Highlights



**Assistant Professor, University of Pennsylvania & Research Director, SETA Washington DC**

Kılıç Buğra Kanat is the Research Director at the SETA Foundation, Washington, DC and a Professor of Political Science at Penn State University, Erie, Pennsylvania. He was previously a Senior Fellow at TRT World Research Centre. Kılıç Buğra Kanat was awarded the Outstanding Research Award and Council of Fellows Faculty Research Award at Penn State. He is the author of *A Tale of Four Augusts: Obama's Syria Policy* (2015). He is co-editor of the edited volumes *History, Politics and Foreign Policy in Turkey* (2011) and is a columnist.

- ” “The idea of the ‘American Dream’ was specially offered in 1930s. [The American writer] James T. Adams described the American dream as [being that] life should be better, richer and fuller for everyone with the same opportunities. [However,] if James T. Adams lived in 2020, probably he would call it an American nightmare, not an American dream.”
- ” “I think one of the most significant dimensions of [the COVID-19 pandemic] was the cultural and social polarisation that has been widened in the United States. We already knew that polarisation was taking place, but we never thought that an issue like a pandemic could be an aspect of the cultural war between left and right, Democrats and Republicans. We have seen the fragile state of society in the United States.”
- ” “[The 2020 Presidential] election actually demonstrated it one more time that although Biden won by 80 million, [which is an] all-time high, Trump became the presidential candidate to win the second most votes ever.”
- ” “We see the dysfunctionality in the United States, especially when it is about coordination between federal and state-level authorities. The world basically watched [for] almost two months the President of the United States, the superpower of the world, and the [Governor of New York], one of the biggest states in the United States, discussing who should provide masks [...] The President was complaining about the New York Governor, the New York Governor was complaining about the President and they were complaining about who should provide N95 masks.”
- ” “In this pandemic — more than SARS, more than Ebola, more than Zika — for the first time, we have seen that viruses, bacteria, microbes can be really globalised.”
- ” “International institutions, at least at the beginning, failed the test [with regards to] the pandemic. The World Health Organisation statements in January, the European Union’s inability to help countries in Europe, especially Italy and Spain, the US’ failure to basically come up with a solution [all] demonstrated that there are grounds for serious reform within these institutions.”
- ” “There is this paradoxical idea about American leadership. People are upset when America shows too much leadership, [but] people become even more upset when there is a lack of leadership. We see that in the absence of the US intervention in this pandemic, there was not anybody else who was willing to [take on this role].”
- ” “Can America do the right thing after it did everything wrong? If the Biden administration [can] achieve [a way out from the crisis], I think then the American dream would be, yes, we can do everything wrong, but at the end, maybe we can also be the fixer of all of those things that we did wrong.”
- ” “Biden says that America is back. I am not sure which America is he talking about. Is he talking about 1990s America? Is he talking about Obama’s America, or is he talking about the 1950s? He is definitely not talking about the 1930s that we know, but we are not sure which America will President-elect Biden pick and which [one] Americans will prefer to follow at this point.”



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