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Comparative Government and Politics

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Current Events (June to August 2021)

### **Europe: Biden Aligns NATO Against China (June)**

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), originally established in 1949 to combat Soviet influence in Europe, held a NATO conference on June 14, 2021 (Holland et al.). This was the first time for President Biden to attend a NATO conference and the tone was different from the Trump Presidency. For the first time in NATO history, the European and American military alliance identified China as an aggressive country that threatens global security and international global order. China's human rights violations in Xinjiang and Hong Kong and continuous threats towards Taiwan concerns Western democracies. While NATO's statement is significant, European countries heavily rely on China regarding infrastructure and trade.

This event is important because it fundamentally shifts the purpose of NATO from an eurospecific organization to a global entity. While this shift was already occurring with the Iraq War, we can expect that **external forces** will pressure China not to take certain actions, e.g. invasion against Taiwan. Of course, NATO's realignment could also be simply symbolic, thus not resulting in actual decisions. This is common among international organizations because countries have **power and authority**, not international organizations. Without proper follow up from individual countries, NATO's realignment towards China will end up as useless.

Nonetheless, it is important to know that an eurospecific military alliance now has China on their list as well.

### **Middle East: Taliban's Takeover of Afghanistan (ongoing)**

America invaded Afghanistan in 2001 in order to pursue Osama bin Laden (leader of Al Qaeda), the terrorist behind 9/11. Because the Taliban refused to hand over Osama bin Laden, America and its allies decided to invade Afghanistan ("Timeline"). Unfortunately, America did not have a clear exit strategy and clear goal. Western countries tried to foster democracy and to create proper infrastructure, but nothing seemed to work. The Taliban, which seemed to have weekend over the years, continued to challenge America and its allies' work. Former President Trump announced a complete withdrawal from Afghanistan and President Biden will continue with a complete withdrawal by September 11, 2021. Experts predicted that the Taliban would easily tear down the government within a month, but no one expected the Taliban to control the country prior to America's official withdrawal. As many of us probably have seen on television or YouTube, many Afghans are trying to flee the country. The War in Afghanistan is America's longest war in history, which, ironically, ended in a similar way as America's second longest war, the Vietnam War.

The fall of Afghanistan is a good reminder that **democratization** is difficult to implement especially when the culture is unaware of different political systems. Additionally, Afghanistan had been ruled by regional warlords rather than an unified government. Afghanistan's early stages of democracy gave more **power** to local warlords rather than creating a legitimate democracy. A weak government can result in **instability and a lack of legitimacy**, which makes it easier for organizations like the Taliban to easily rise to power. Afghanistan's problems can also affect regional powerhouses such as China, India, and Iran. China will

welcome the Taliban as a legitimate government as long as the Taliban can maintain stability in Afghanistan. China is interested in **stability** as an **unstable** Afghanistan can threaten projects such as the One Belt One Road initiative.

### **Global: COVID Delta Variant (ongoing)**

The Delta variant is now the fastest and deadliest version of the COVID strain. While global vaccination had provided hope for a complete reopening of society, new reports show that the vaccinated individuals can still get COVID (Sanderson). This doesn't mean that vaccines are futile; vaccinated individuals are still likely to experience milder symptoms than unvaccinated individuals ("Delta Variant"). The rise of the Delta variant means that companies can continue to struggle and supply chains can continue to experience shortage (Helper and Soltas).

The coronavirus depressed the world economy and a lot of countries are printing more cash (quantitative easing or QE) to support those who are financially struggling. Government support of citizens is a great way to maintain **legitimacy**. Financial support is also needed in order to maintain **stability** within society; governments do not want to face public demonstrations. Unfortunately, government response towards the current crisis can result in inflation. For example, the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which is a benchmark for average prices for an average consumer, rose to 5.4% in America compared to July 2020 (Franck). While this was less than expected, this is an indicator that inflation is occurring. Higher inflation means less buying power for the regular consumer, which can further strain one's lifestyle. In order to combat inflation, Central Banks will need to increase interest rates, which discourages people from borrowing money as they will have to pay more in return. However, an increase in interest rates and rising prices can result in less spending, thus further slowing down the economy and

disrupting means of income. All governments around the world are faced with the responsibility to protect their citizens.

### **Global: 1.5 Celsius Prediction Moved from 2050 by 2040 (August 9, 2021)**

The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), an scientific organization established by the United Nations, reported that a rise in global temperature by 1.5 celsius will occur by 2040 instead of 2050 as previously predicted (Foundation). If little is done about climate change, a rise in global temperatures by 3 to 6 celsius could occur by 2100. The report also shared how sea levels have doubled since 2006 and will continue to increase for another 2000 years. The report also shares a pessimistic reality that no matter what countries do to cut carbon emissions, the effects of global warming - extreme weather, droughts, floods, heatwaves, etc. - will continue until mid century.

Countries like the United Kingdom, Indonesia, Australia and more have experienced extreme floods in 2021 (O'Driscoll). Japan also annually experiences heavy rain, which causes landslides and flooding (Jones). Researchers have also suggested that roughly 150 million people will be affected by rising sea levels by 2050 (Lu and Flavelle). Many cities, including Bangkok and Shanghai, are in danger of being underwater. If extreme weather continues to destroy places to live, people will be forced to migrate. Forced domestic migration can result in **internal and international conflict** due to possible conflicts over remaining shelter, food, land, etc. Small island or coastal countries are in danger of entirely sinking, which can cause a mass exodus of citizens and stress on neighboring countries. Mass internal migration can definitely challenge the **legitimacy and stability** of countries as governments are expected to mitigate damage and assert control.

### **Open Ended Questions**

1. Should countries intervene in other countries' domestic affairs? If yes, when is intervention allowed? What should be the rules of intervention? If not, why not? Should we let foreign citizens perish and flee in fear without hope of salvation?
2. While the authors do not support socialism and communism, the authors believe that the global adoption of socialism and communism is probably the only way to stop climate change. Do you agree or disagree? Is this suggestion plausible/realistic or unrealistic? If plausible and realistic, how can this be achieved? If unrealistic, why? What should happen instead? Explain your position.

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