

## Issue Summary

As of November 2020, the USA has recorded 10,903,890 COVID-19 cases, making it the country with the most COVID cases in the entire world. Due to this, the WHO has a vested interest in collaborating with the US if it means to effectively resolve the pandemic on a global scale. President Donald Trump has been notably uncooperative in addressing the pandemic. However, America's stance on COVID seems to be changing, marked by the recent election of Joe Biden as the 46th President-Elect of the United States. The Biden administration has made it clear that dealing with the COVID pandemic is a top priority. Biden has announced his intention for the USA to immediately rejoin the WHO and his campaign policies indicate ambitions for the USA to reclaim top leadership in global public health. Given this, Director-General Tedros Adhanom and the rest of the WHO should be prepared for the Biden administration to reach out in the coming months. As the US seeks to re-join the WHO, the organization must consider how it will negotiate American involvement in the COVID-19 fight and, to a larger extent, America's place in combating any future global health emergencies.

## Key Considerations & Issue Analysis

Firstly, Biden seemingly has a vision of the USA as *the* world leader in combating the pandemic. This includes collaboration between the US State Department and USAID "to ensure the U.S. plays a *major role* in *all global decisions* about the outbreak." Additionally, Biden has proposed the creation of a "Global Health Emergency Board" led by the US, which aims to unite scientific experts, the private sector, and the public sector from around the world in coordinating a health and economic response to COVID-19, notably in helping developing countries afford vaccines. It is unclear at this point as to how Biden plans for this to overlap or play out with the WHO's COVAX (Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility) program already in place, which has similar objectives of developing an affordable COVID vaccine as well as ensure that developing countries get access to a vaccine. As his administration progresses in implementing their COVID

policies, this is a situation that must be closely monitored by the WHO in order to ensure the most effective and *coordinated* global response to the pandemic.

Secondly, in the time that Trump's America withdrew from its traditional leading spot in global public health, other countries have filled the gap. Notably, Germany, France, and China are all part of COVAX and have donated millions of dollars to the effort. The disruptions caused by the USA's July withdrawal from the WHO under Trump's administration has created mistrust between America and other global powers and has made the international community's over-reliance on the US painfully apparent. While they undoubtedly cannot afford to hold grudges in the middle of a health crisis, other powers (e.g., the EU) may not be willing to step back and let the USA take the top spot in leading the management of the pandemic after such a long and hostile absence. Additionally, for a country that has been floundering with effectively managing the pandemic, the US is hardly the best role model for dealing with COVID. Overall, the WHO must be careful to not antagonize those countries who have stepped up in the USA's absence while also doing its best to welcome the US back into the fold and collaborate on resolving cases in the US and abroad.

Thirdly, the ways in which Biden's domestic political issues impact his international plans must also be considered. It has been noted that Biden's COVID-19 plan is rather costly, given the widespread COVID policies he plans to implement both at home and abroad. This will require money from Congress, but control of the Senate is still uncertain. Furthermore, President Trump has still refused to concede the election, and with less than 10 weeks before Biden is due to take office, crucial transition procedures have not occurred. This means that Biden's team is blocked from accessing COVID-19 pandemic data and collaborating with government agencies, critically hampering their ability to address the pandemic nationally, and the expected distribution of a vaccine. Another concerning domestic political obstacle facing Biden is a divided America. "Trumpism" has not disappeared with this election. The international community has no assurance that in four years' time, another anti-international governance president will not be elected. This is cause for the WHO to cautiously respond to Biden's ambitions for the USA to lead global public health once more. A more collaborative and multipolar approach to crisis management must be implemented.

Finally, there are economic and logistical domestic issues at play. Firstly, America is facing a shortage in critical personal protective equipment and Biden's goal of moving supply chains back into the USA through his "100-day supply chain review" is proving tricky. This could lead to international backlash as well as domestic firms protests over higher production costs. These issues will only further hamper the country's effectivity as a global health leader. Secondly, the current leader for a COVID vaccine is being produced by Pfizer/BioNTech out of Michigan, USA. The companies have already expressed interest in supplying the COVAX project. If the vaccine is to be distributed worldwide, the WHO will have to collaborate with both the companies and the US government on the logistics. Distribution has been noted as a key challenge with this vaccine due to its strict, -80 degrees Celsius storage requirements. Much of the Global South will be unduly impacted by this requirement due to its hot climate. The other leading vaccine, by Moderna, is also US-based and has similar storage requirements. Therefore, the WHO cannot simply rely on the USA to take the sole lead and provide a vaccine despite its recent breakthroughs. The organization must ensure full collaboration by other global leaders to develop and circulate a vaccine.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the WHO should certainly make all efforts to work with the USA in resolving the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it must be careful not to fully rely on the US, as the election of Joe Biden is not a magical reset for the country. Relying on the USA to be the leader in global COVID-19 management, vaccine production, and recovery would prove to be a short-sighted miscalculation with long-term consequences. Hampered by both domestic roadblocks and a cautious international reception, the US cannot reliably serve as the leader of international public health. Other global players, such as Germany, France, China, etc. must be given all due consideration when allocating responsibility for the global COVID initiative. A global crisis such as this requires a global solution with all nations working together, equitably, to resolve the issue. While the USA does indeed have an important role to play in addressing this pandemic, the WHO cannot rely on them as heavily as they have in the past to resolve this health crisis and others to come. Any international policies proposed by the USA must be subsumed into a wider global strategy led by the WHO.

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