

WHO IN THE MIDDLE

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: UNO and its various Agencies

As the record of the World Health Organisation in handling the [coronavirus](#) crisis becomes a bone of contention between the US and China, India should not lose sight of its significant interest in promoting long overdue change at the UN agency responsible for global public health. In his intervention at the G-20 meeting last month to coordinate global actions on the [COVID-19](#) crisis, Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) called for a reorientation of the WHO to make it more effective. Delhi must, however, caution the world against excessive politicisation of the debate on the WHO's role and performance in a crisis that has cost thousands of lives in China, from where the virus began to spread out, and in the rest of the world. The time for a post-mortem, Delhi should insist, begins only after the war against the virus ends.

With the US likely to become the biggest victim of coronavirus, the debate about its origin, spread and management has begun to acquire a sharp intensity in America. The number of dead in the US is now the second largest at about 15,000, behind Italy at nearly 18,000. In the next few days the count in the US might cross that of Italy. Twice in the last few days, Trump has criticised the WHO, for being too deferential to China during the crisis and underplaying the danger to the rest of the world. Trump is channeling the strong sentiment in the US that if the WHO had done its job, the world could have significantly reduced the casualties. The WHO, however, has rejected the criticism and insists that its actions have saved many lives. Beijing is standing firmly behind the UN agency. A battle royale is shaping up at the WHO between the US and China and this could well be the precursor to a broader struggle between the two for the future of the UN and other multilateral institutions.

Delhi, however, should not view the WHO's recent actions through the sole prism of US-China conflict. Many major countries, including India, were deeply wary of the WHO's policy guidance during the crisis. As this newspaper reported on Thursday, Delhi chose to rely on the Indian Council of Medical Research rather than the WHO in limiting the spread of the coronavirus. India is better off for Delhi's independent judgements. But that luxury is not available to most countries in the world, especially the developing nations that rely entirely on the WHO's wisdom. Delhi owes it to itself and its traditional constituency in the global South to help ensure that there is an objective international investigation into the WHO's performance in the war against the virus and identification of the correct lessons for dealing with future pandemics. That, in turn, should pave the way for a badly needed revitalisation of the WHO, the only collective framework the world has in dealing with challenges of global health.

The Indian Express is now on Telegram. Click [here to join our channel \(@indianexpress\)](#) and stay updated with the latest headlines

END

Downloaded from crackIAS.com

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com