

Xinhua Headlines: COVID-19 pandemic shatters perception of American exceptionalism

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WASHINGTON, July 2 (Xinhua) -- The United States has registered over 2.7 million confirmed COVID-19 cases and more than 128,000 deaths so far, ranking first on the global tally.

Many U.S. observers said such an epidemic situation has forced Americans to face a "brutal truth" -- the United States is not as exceptional as it thinks it is, and the world's sole superpower needs a little humility in face of modern-day challenges.

"STING OF DEFEAT, MISERY, EMBARRASSMENT"

"Like a lot of Americans, I sometimes find myself assuming American exceptionalism -- the idea that America's founding ideals make us morally superior to 'ordinary' nations and confer on us special credibility and insight when dealing with global crises," New York Times opinion columnist Farhad Manjoo wrote Wednesday.

"The last few months should stick a fork in the absurd proposition that the United States enjoys some kind of monopoly on brilliance. Clearly, we do not," Manjoo wrote.

The immigrant from South Africa, who has lived in the United States for over 30 years, feels "the sting of defeat, misery and embarrassment" when he sees U.S. infections soaring while new cases in many other countries decreasing. "I can't think of any national failure as naked and complete as this one."

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported on Thursday a new daily record of confirmed cases across the country at 54,357.

According to a tally by the Times, case numbers were trending upward in 38 states as of Wednesday. The problem spots in the country's south and West were spreading north and east.

At least 23 states are pausing reopening plans to combat mounting infections, said a CNN report. U.S. top infectious-diseases expert Anthony Fauci said Tuesday the country is "not in total control" of the pandemic, giving a dire warning that confirmed cases could go up to 100,000 per day if the current trend "does not turn around."

Official tallies of COVID-19 deaths in the country underestimated the full increase in deaths associated with the pandemic in many states, said a study published Wednesday in JAMA Internal Medicine journal, adding the number of deaths due to any cause from March 1 to May 30 was 28 percent higher than the reported number of COVID-19 deaths.

The United States "has hamstrung itself" by "piecemeal, politicized approach" in handling the pandemic, said a report by U.S. news outlet Politico on June 22, citing public health experts.

"We're the only country in the world that has politicized the approach to a pandemic," Max Skidmore, a political scientist at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, was quoted as saying by The Washington Post on June 27.

Increasing gatherings and lack of social distancing amid reopenings nationwide have led to the deterioration, Zhang Zuofeng, a professor of epidemiology and associate dean for research with the School of Public Health at University of California, told Xinhua.

Whether the country will see increase of infections throughout the summer depends on adherence to quarantining, Stanley Perlman, a professor of microbiology and immunology at the University of Iowa, told Xinhua.

EXCEPTIONAL IN "WRONG WAYS"

American exceptionalism, a concept that was rooted in the 19th century and flourished in the 20th century, has become "an anachronism in the 21st century, even before COVID-19," Robert Lawrence Kuhn, chairman of the Kuhn foundation, told Xinhua in a recent interview.

In the past, one could find justification for American exceptionalism, but the proper and progressive development of all nations, particularly in technology, has created "a multipolar world in which many countries are 'exceptional,' each in its own way," said the famous public intellectual.

"Today, it (American exceptionalism) is nearly impossible to maintain. Faced with perhaps the most significant global crisis since the end of the Cold War, America has proven itself to be depressingly ordinary, even substandard," Zack Beauchamp wrote in a story posted by news website Vox on May 6.

"American exceptionalism hasn't died; it is very much alive. The problem is that America has been exceptional in all the wrong ways. And it has been exceptional in these wrong ways for the better part (in) the past 20 years, from its illegal wars in Iraq, Libya, to its abject failure and de facto surrender to global financial crisis," Sourabh Gupta, senior fellow at the Washington-based Institute for China-America Studies, told Xinhua.

"So why should we be surprised by the U.S. exceptionally abysmal response to the COVID-19 pandemic? In large part, the failures have been a product of its post-Cold War arrogance and hubris," Gupta said.

"It had an opportunity to restore the multilateral system to the vision laid out by the founders of the United Nations. Instead, it abused the 'unipolar moment' and chose the 'my-way-or-the-highway' path, instrumentally utilizing the framework of multilateralism only when it served its interests," he said.

It is of vital importance to strengthen global cooperation in the fight against COVID-19 at a critical moment when confirmed cases worldwide have surpassed 10 million, Xi Chen, a professor at Yale School of Public Health and president of the China Health Policy and Management Society, told Xinhua.

"We are experiencing globalization without global governance, which has exposed the vulnerability of human beings in the face of major infectious diseases like COVID-19," Chen said.

"A LITTLE HUMILITY" NEEDED

"American exceptionalism has been pronounced dead numerous times, from the Vietnam War through the global War on Terror, and nevertheless managed to stick around through those difficult periods," noted Uri Friedman, a contributing writer at The Atlantic, in an article posted on May 14.

"But the coronavirus crisis may pose the greatest threat yet to the belief that America has little to learn from the rest of the world," Friedman wrote.

The United States, of course, "still has tremendous capacity to teach. But it also may need to emerge from this crisis recognizing that it has equal capacity to learn," wrote Friedman.

"To learn is to admit room for improvement, and thus to improve, especially in dealing with modern-day threats such as pandemics, which America doesn't have much experience contending with as a superpower," he wrote.

"America's pandemic failure demolishes the notion that our country is better off without people and ideas from beyond our borders," wrote Manjoo.

"No doubt, the U.S. government reacted too slowly and with insufficient central authority to avert the enormity of the pandemic calamity," said Kuhn.

"But it would be a distortion to single out this unambiguous failure as the trigger of coming collapse or even abrogation of leadership," Kuhn said, adding other factors are at work undermining U.S. dominance, including internal political divisions and external dismantling of alliances.

Still, the United States is "resilient, buttressed," for example, with a majority of world-class research universities and a continuing attraction for the world's best and brightest, and as "future U.S. administrations may take a different approach to policy, domestic and international," he said.

Kuhn said he believes there is no reason to suppose that "the American economy will not return to its former strengths" in the post-pandemic era.

"For some politicians, with an outdated and simplistic sense of America's mission in the world, a little humility from the pandemic might not hurt. American ideals should be a beacon, not a club," he said. Enditem

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