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The intersection of public health and International Relations^{1,2} (IR) has increasingly become a focal point of academic inquiry, driven by the recognition that global health outcomes are profoundly influenced by geopolitical dynamics. A recent article in this journal³ aptly underscores this nexus, particularly by highlighting how natural hazards and armed conflict intertwine to shape public health vulnerabilities. This discussion gains particular relevance when considering 'Reuters's' special report⁴ about Pentagon's campaign in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic, where geostrategic interests intersected with local health crises in complex ways. Accordingly, the U.S. military ran a secret campaign to counter China's influence in the Philippines by spreading misinformation about Chinese vaccines and aid. Using fake social media accounts, the campaign criticized Chinese face masks, test kits and the Sinovac vaccine. According to the 'Reuters' report, ~300 accounts were identified on X, formerly known as Twitter, that matched the descriptions given by former U.S. military officials regarding the Philippines operation. During summer 2020, numerous accounts were created, featuring #Chinaangvirus (meaning 'China is the virus' in Filipino). This campaign aimed to decrease China's influence in South-east Asia, despite U.S. diplomats' objections. The campaign also targeted Russian vaccines and continued after Biden ordered a halt to anti-vaccine messaging in 2021. It was uncovered through a Pentagon review and flagged by researchers. The Philippines, as a Mutual Defense Treaty ally of the US under President Rodrigo Duterte (2016–2022), shifted its foreign policy rhetoric towards anti-US and pro-China, which is remarkable for Washington DC amid the need to defend US interests in the Asia-Pacific due to the reemergence of China as a challenger power.^{5,6} The Pentagon's secret anti-vax campaign, which spreads false information about Chinese vaccines, reveals systemic hypocrisy⁷ in US foreign policy. This contradicts their public advocacy for global health and vaccine equity, undermining their efforts to combat misinformation and support international health initiatives.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the interconnectedness of global health, geopolitical contestations and long-term public policy decisions at various geographic scales. Countries with established healthcare infrastructures and

strong diplomatic ties with resource-endowed countries were better equipped to navigate the crisis, whereas those facing political and economic instabilities faced compounded challenges in managing public health emergencies. This underscores the importance of collaboration between IR and public health scholars. Fostering interdisciplinary partnerships and dialogue is crucial to addressing the complex challenges at the intersection of public health and IR. By bridging disciplinary divides, scholars can contribute to more nuanced policy frameworks that consider the geopolitical dimensions of public health crises. IR is a vital field of inquiry for public health scholars because it examines how power contestations could shape and relate to health outcomes. IR provides valuable insights into the geopolitical forces affecting resource allocation, healthcare access and health policy implementation, which can help public health scholars and professionals address global health disparities, advocate for equitable health interventions and develop governance strategies that effectively promote global well-being.

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