

The Coronavirus Crisis: Implications and Crisis Management Mechanisms Pursued by Countries



By:

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Strategic summary and lessons learned for the Gulf states from the Corona crisis

- 1- In the absence of joint international mechanisms to deal with the coronavirus crisis, citizens have become primarily dependent on the actions of their governments, which has strengthened confidence in these governments. This is especially so in the Gulf States where proactive measures have been taken on all fronts, particularly medical, as well as the promotion of the concepts of patriotism and belonging, as reflected in voluntary initiatives in a number of Gulf states, and which has contributed to ending polarization within some countries.
- 2- As important as international alliances and partnerships are, their diversification remains a strategic necessity given the fluctuating international relations and power hubs, and which has been evident from the onset of the crisis.
- 3- The coronavirus crisis has tested the principle of solidarity on which international alliances and partnerships are based, leaving them susceptible to transformations in the wake of this crisis.
- 4- Whatever the nature of the international system that will result from the coronavirus crisis, the emerging winners in dealing with the crisis will undoubtedly shape the features of that system.

- 5- With the multiple impacts of the crisis on regional security, the most serious is the security vacuum that may form due to the withdrawal of international forces training Iraqi security forces to fight terrorist groups, which have already begun to adopt an extremist religious rhetoric to explain the pandemic. There is also an opportunity for Iran to fuel regional conflicts.
- 6- Gulf states, despite long being the target of organized campaigns by international human rights organizations, have provided a model for the respect of human rights since the beginning of the crisis. They evacuated their citizens from the Chinese city of Wuhan, for example, while citizens of many countries remain stuck at airports even to-date. In addition, they took immediate precautionary measures and focused on capacity to deal with infectious cases and those suspected of being infectious for citizen and expat residents alike; actions that should be noted in any future responses to dubious campaigns of these organizations towards the Gulf States.
- 7- The crisis has confirmed that there is a state of interdependence and common destiny among all countries, regardless of their varying interests and values, which implies that it is imperative to apply common work frames that have been employed in similar crises. In the absence of the international community's ability to collectively respond to this crisis, a common approach gives the opportunity to regional security organizations to undertake the management of such crises and disasters.
- 8- This crisis has re-emphasized the role of civil society and voluntary work during hardships in supporting the role of government agencies, as demonstrated by volunteering in the Gulf states.
- 9- Countries routinely discuss the utilization of the media during crises, especially security media, yet this crisis has shed light on the medical media; an area worth developing in the coming years.
- 10- The need for armies and security forces to formulate training programs to deal with similar global crises in the future.

Introduction

The coronavirus crisis has undoubtedly become the main and only headline in the global media, in an unprecedented challenge that led countries to declare a state of maximum emergency to meet this challenge, given that it is not linked to a specific sector but to the course of normal daily life, bringing global movement to a standstill. There are five factors that can explain why the challenge was unprecedented:

First, compared to the crises that the world has experienced before, that reached a peak during both World Wars, countries knew who the warring parties were and the extent and course of these wars, while in this epidemic, the whole world is fighting an unknown enemy that has stricken all walks of life without warning, forcing more than half of the world's population to stay home.

Second, countries are used to confronting security, political, economic, environmental and social crises; and were not expecting a health crisis that might surpass any country's single capacity to deal with it, including developed countries. Therefore, the element of surprise that distinguishes crises and disasters was strongly present.

Third, countries have varying degrees of being able to maintain a capable healthcare sector and this is included to annual budgets yet no one predicted that this sector would become the center stage for such a huge burden.

Fourth: countries are not all similar in their readiness and capability strategies to manage such global crises with regards to precautionary measures and preset scenarios.

Fifth, the international mechanisms for collective work are weak, despite the presence of dedicated organizations like the World Health Organization, tasked with presenting transparent information on the pandemic, but which has no higher authority to force countries to follow a specific path.

Based on the aforementioned, this strategic report aims to identify the implications of the crisis on global and regional security, and the mechanisms adopted by countries to manage it, in the following two parts:

Section 1: Implications of the Coronavirus Crisis

It should be emphasized that this is not a brief crisis, despite the current and significant temporary effects, such as the confusion that has engulfed the whole world, as well as the direct economic impacts on sectors affecting daily life. This crisis will affect the very system that manages international relations, as well as regional security, and is an event that will likely reshape the world, similar to previous major transformations such as World War II, the September 11 attacks, or the rise of ISIS in 2014. The most important implications of this crisis can be summarized in the following:

1- The Impact of the crisis on current international alliances and partnerships

The idea of international alliances and regional organizations is based on the concept of solidarity between states, not only during peace but also in wars and emergencies, which forms the basis for concepts like NATO and the European Union, as well as strategic partnerships between the United States and its European partners. Therefore, if regional alliances and organizations fail to achieve such solidarity, relationships become controversial. This has been demonstrated during the coronavirus crisis in two instances. **First**, the United States abandoning its European partners since the beginning of the epidemic, by closing its borders with European countries. Even though the pandemic was not the beginning of the US-European dispute, it revealed its magnitude. **Second** is the emergence of a kind of "European fragmentation" in the face of the crisis, whether through the closure of borders by European countries, competition for medical equipment from China, or the absence of an urgent plan to save Italy, the country most affected by the epidemic. Even though the European Union's founding charter states in one of its articles endorsing the sharing of experiences among member states, the crisis showed unprecedented behavior among them, for example, it was reported that Czech authorities confiscated masks being shipped from China to Italy, which was followed by clear resentment from Italian citizens about the way European countries dealt with Italy during the crisis, which makes their survival in the European Union after the end of the crisis questionable. This disappointment was noted in an article by Italy's Ambassador to the EU, in which he said, "The EU must take concrete, effective and urgent steps, not only meetings and exchanging views." Some media showed a number of Italian

cities and towns taking down the EU flag from masts and replacing it with the Chinese flag in recognition of its support for Italy and other affected European countries. Russia also provided urgent and timely aid to Italy. Therefore, European reactions will be reinforced by the far-right rhetoric, which sees the futility of collective cooperative frameworks, such as the European Union and NATO, and this explains the decision of some countries to postpone elections, including France's decision to postpone the municipal elections to hinder the rise of the far right. This crisis will cast a shadow over the US presidential elections, where President Trump's rivals might find better chances of winning if he fails to address the economic fall-out of the crisis on the US economy, since his plan to boost the US economy was a major reason behind his victory the first time.

Despite what the crisis has revealed in terms of frail regional organizations like the EU, as well as weak international partnerships and alliances, it is not necessarily the end of the EU **for three reasons**. **First**, the EU has developed overtime through an ideologically integrated and historical evolution. **Second**, the EU's continues to view Russia as a challenge to western interests, despite some of its countries enhancing their ties with it (e.g. Italy). **Third**, the crisis was more than a challenge to the EU; it was a challenge beyond the world's capabilities, yet the EU announced 300 billion Euros of corporate aid and a European fund to safeguard the economy and offset implications of the crisis.

2- The Impact of the Crisis on the Current International Order

Since the end of the Cold War era, the world has been dominated by a unipolar system led by the US, with Russia and China pushing for the establishment of a multi-polar system, the effects of which have been reflected by many indicators, yet these attempts failed to dissuade the US from exclusively leading the world. However, this pandemic will have an impact on the nature of this system, impacting its features in the long-term, with the following factors indicating important transformations:

First, the crisis has demonstrated a loss in confidence of European partners in the US remaining as the world's leading country, not for the lack of capabilities, but rather the behavior of the current US administration during the crisis, which isolated American territories and closed the borders to its

European partners, amid an internal crisis as severe as its foreign counterparts, with the US Department of Labor reporting a spike in applications for unemployment benefits by the end of March, exceeding 7 million applicants, the highest in history since reaching 695,000 in October 1982. Eleven states also laid off thousands of workers in the wake of the pandemic.

Second is China's attempt to use this crisis to reshape the world order, **whether by** creating uncertainty about the nature of the epidemic and how to deal with it, which ultimately resulted in the US administration's accepting talks with China to contain the epidemic, possibly affecting other issues, **or through** China's efforts to support US partners during the crisis, reflected in China's announcement to provide the EU with more than 2 million masks and 50,000 testing kits, as well as dispatching doctors and supplies to Italy, besides Chinese medical delegations that visited several Middle Eastern countries, including Iraq, Algeria and Iran.

Third, it is quite early to presume that the power balance has shifted from the West in favor of Asian countries. However, China definitely seeks to invest Asian excellence in managing this crisis, especially with other successes in South Korea and Singapore.

Fourth, the US will be forced to hold talks with China amid this impasse, to avoid a future clash, and enhance its abilities in global markets to help raise the US economy. The main theme for any future talks between both countries will be resources, and it will reflect on the whole world order.

Fifth, the impact of the crisis on formulating national security strategies of Western countries in general and the United States in particular, once considered under the most prominent threat by international competition, and therefore these strategies will be more important to the post-pandemic world.

Sixth, far from the current state of unipolarity, the world is witnessing a state of 'flexible polarity', where there will be a prominent Russian and EU role, amid the US' engagement in a new competition with China, in a way that prevents continuous unipolarity.

Seventh, a dispute around the dominance of a new type of communication-based globalization, in place of the current economic globalization.

3- Questioning the Performance of International Collective Action Organizations

While the corona crisis may not be the origin of the shortcomings in the work of the United Nations (UN) and specialized agencies, they have long been criticized for failing to solve current global crises, the main reason generally given being the lack of authority to enforce resolutions upon countries. With regard to the performance of the World Health Organization (WHO) during this global pandemic, a few factors were revealed:

First, the WHO was late in issuing any official statements regarding the widespread viral outbreak in Wuhan and beyond, echoing reports that China had pressured the organization to avoid announcing a global emergency.

Second, the organisation limited its role to issuing statements on the state of the virus outbreak and did not fully take on the global awareness role needed early enough, in order to rally joint efforts to combat the virus spread collectively. According to the organization's executive regulations, its tasks include "developing health awareness, maintaining world integrity, and serving the most vulnerable sectors."

Third, several WHO statements were viewed as somewhat alarmist noting comments such as the, "false hope for a vaccine" etc., at a time when millions were facing fear and uncertainty when they needed messages of hope and reassurance.

Fourth, the notable absence of the work of NGOs such as Médecins Sans Frontières, whose efforts were most effective in fighting the 2014 Ebola outbreak in Africa, especially given its presence in fighting diseases on the world scene since 1971 through its 42000 members.

4- The Impact of the Crisis on Regional Security

Regional security is crucial to global security and this was clear in the impact of the crisis on regional security in several aspects:

First, protests stopped in several Arab countries, namely Iraq, Lebanon and Algeria.

Second, Iranian regional interventions increased, as it promoted claims that US sanctions were the main reason behind its inability to manage the crisis, while escalating attacks on US forces in Iraq through its agents there, including targeting the Taji military base north of Baghdad with Katyusha rockets in March, resulting in the death of two American soldiers and one British soldier. This marked the 23rd attack against US interests in Iraq since the end of October 2019. Iran also continued fueling the conflict in Yemen, leading the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen to announce it had shot down a drone launched by Houthi militaries towards the Saudi provinces of Abha and Khamis Mushait.

Third, the emergence of new developments in the pattern of regional relations, including the UAE providing medical supplies to Iran, delivered by a military cargo plane that transported almost 7.5 tons of medical supplies. The UAE undertook further developments in regional relations such as with Syria, with Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince, Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, holding a phone call with Syrian President, Bashar Al-Assad, to discuss assisting Syria in facing the pandemic. Shaikh Mohammed was reported to have said, "Human solidarity in times of hardship transcends all considerations, and the brotherly Arab nation of Syria will not remain alone in these critical circumstances."

5- The Impact of the Crisis on the War on Terrorism

Several signs show how the crisis clearly is affecting the war on terrorism:

First, the US-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS withdrew its training forces, after suspending training of Iraqi security forces; a step that might offer ISIS a chance to reorganize once again. Similarly, the US

announced relocating its forces from a military base south of Mosul to another location in Iraq, in a redeployment process.

Second, ISIS, in an attempt to resume its activities while the world is busy confronting the pandemic, carried out attacks including two simultaneous attacks in March; the first on army sites in Mozambique with casualties and injuries, and the second targeted a Sikh temple in the Afghan capital Kabul.

Third, at a time when terrorist groups might become active, states that sponsor terrorism cannot continue their support at the same rate prior to the pandemic, as they will need resources to face the coronavirus outbreaks on a national scale.

Fourth, assuming that terrorist groups are unable to execute major attacks, that has not stopped them from extending a new extremist rhetoric, and they have already begun using the pandemic to spread 'faith advice' that the coronavirus is a 'soldier of God', and that dying from this virus can be considered 'martyrdom', etc.

6- The Impact of the Crisis on the Global Economy

There are many sources that mention the economic effects of the pandemic, including from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), that suggests that economic growth could witness a 50% drop if the virus continues to spread. According to OECD projections, global GDP will grow by only 1.5% in 2020, meaning that the world will experience an economic crisis unseen since 2008, with more profound impact in Japan and European countries. On the other hand, according to the International Labor Organization, workers worldwide are expected to lose up to \$3.4 trillion in income by the end of 2020. The ILO also predicted that 25 million people will lose their jobs, compared to 22 million during the 2008 economic crisis, in addition to a 30% decline in the global tourism sector, and the oil barrel has lost 60% of its value since the beginning of this year, reaching \$25. In general, the impact of the pandemic on oil prices is sharp and timely, with difficulty in estimating such effects with certainty due to the complexity of the crisis and uncertain forecasts of its

direction. Overall, oil demand in 2020 is expected to decline by 1 to 3 million barrels per day, accompanied by a sharp decline in global stock exchanges, and losses in aviation estimated by the International Transport Association (ITU) at about \$252 billion.

In general, the global economy is possibly on its way to deflation, with nearly all of the world's population practicing self-isolation, and production in many countries expected to come to a halt due to the coronavirus crisis.

Some sectors will suffer the most: tourism, aviation, retail, hospitality, and transportation. Economies of the Gulf countries will see a twofold impact for being dependent on these sectors. In Saudi Arabia, pilgrimage plays a considerable role in the economy, while Dubai's economy depends mainly on tourism, retail, hospitality, and aviation.

Section 2: Crisis Management Mechanisms in the World's Countries

First: Security Mechanisms

Although the crisis is linked to the health sector, it affects the life and existence of humans and is linked to the whole society, and therefore, protecting it rests with security and armed forces, even if matters require enforcing the law. This is evident in the multiple declarations of the state of emergency, keeping the police, border patrols and port security on guard, in addition to the medical corps of the armed forces. These agencies work under the governance of emergency laws and other legislation applicable in crises and wars. In some instances, police and armed forces in certain countries dealt with the viral outbreak as a state of war, leading to imposition of strict rules. The Kingdom of Bahrain saw a notable performance from police patrols that have spread out into streets and public areas, restricting public gatherings to a maximum of five people. Article 121 of the Public Health Act stipulates that, "Anyone who neglects preventative health measures to curb the outbreak shall be punished, with a prison term of not less than three months, and a fine of not less than 1,000 dinars and not exceeding 10,000 dinars, or one of these penalties."

Moreover, armed forces in other countries have had a tangible role in distributing foodstuff among the population during curfews, as seen in Jordan. Some countries even offered special training courses to qualify their security and armed forces to react to such crises. In Iraq, the army's security media unit announced it had formed 'crisis cells' led by governors, with military leaders as members, aiming to control security and uphold the law in all governorates.

Overall, security and armed forces – with varying roles in different countries – have played a pivotal role, especially in enforcing the law against violators to protect public health and safety. Armies demonstrated their ability to contribute in five general areas, according to General Sir Nicholas Carter, UK Chief of Defense Staff:

First, armies are organized to include human resources that are trained and disciplined to handle crises.

Second, medical support, whether through army medical capabilities or its capacity to quickly and efficiently distribute medical and livelihood supplies.

Third, providing fast and effective logistics.

Fourth, upholding the law and imposing security and order, in support of security forces in case they are overwhelmed.

Fifth, assuring national preparedness to citizens by resembling mobilization for war, and readiness to meet the challenge.

Second: Legal Mechanisms

Despite the right of states during crises to apply all legal procedures that they deem necessary to maintain public security and interests, including emergency laws, states showed diverse applications of this mechanism, and in general, penalties for curfew violators ranged from fines to imprisonment, perhaps due to the sudden nature of the crisis, as well as the fact that societies around the world were not prepared to deal with this crisis. Some countries were forced to pass legislation with heavy penalties for violators, as the case was with the Kuwaiti parliament. In France, the parliament passed a

law requiring the government to restrict public movement and transportation, necessitating people to pay fines ranging from 138 euros when violating quarantine rules. In Italy, a government decree included a legal provision for penalties for non-compliance with health regulations, and restrictions on the freedom of movement, restaurants, shops and shopping malls. In summary, in crises and disasters, the state has the right to take whatever measures it deems necessary to maintain the security and safety of society, and it is not permissible to invoke the issue of public and personal freedoms, nor other human rights concepts advocated by relevant organizations, and some countries have imposed punishments for spreading rumors in such times.

As important as these procedures are, some countries managed to excel in devising and implementing measures, with two examples:

First, Saudi Arabia went beyond imposing curfews to prevent movement between its 13 provinces, which helped identify the ones most infected to focus prevention and treatment efforts there.

Second, Jordan imposed a curfew followed by specific periods for buying necessities from nearby shops, except for people less than 16 years of age or above 60 for their vulnerability. The city of Irbid was quarantined following an outbreak from an infected person returning from Europe and attending a wedding there.

The goal is not only passing laws but imposing them properly, especially in crises that disrupt all segments of society.

Third: Media Mechanisms

Media's role is crucial in crises, and even more given the current technologically advanced means of communication, demonstrating by how Western and Arab media have developed with the unravelling of the pandemic crisis. At first, news was simply reported from China as the epicenter, but soon media began broadcasting general and scientific reports and analyses on infection and prevention; viewed as a scientific anomaly that requires comforting facts not scary rumors. Official news took center stage on the daily scene in all countries, away from general social media rumors. Notably, media roles during

crises are very difficult, as described by Steven Morris, Professor of Pathology in Columbia University, “In crises, journalists face the difficulty of balancing how to inform the public without scaring them.”

In general, all global media performed well in raising awareness beyond reporting, to the extent of running public announcements within news ads to explain symptoms of the coronavirus infection. Media also took a different approach, avoiding criticism usually directed at government agencies, but rather explaining and clarifying government plans and procedures in different programs, greatly spreading knowledge about dangers of the pandemic. Media also hosted professionals directly involved in countering and treating the virus, from medical and executive roles, to economic and political implications. Within this context, some reports praised the performance of media in a number of Arab countries.

With the importance of the aforementioned elements, the coronavirus crisis revealed the need for three media-related concepts in general, and its performance during crises in particular:

- 1- Scientific journalism, which was offered a weekly page in newspapers, will require a larger area from now on, especially medical news and advice.
- 2- The crucial role of a dedicated spokesperson is more important than ever during crises, to keep society updated on developments and requirements.
- 3- News anchors and program presenters need special crisis training to provide balanced reporting to the public, combining facts with comforting messages.

Fourth: The Role of Civil Society and Voluntary Work

During crises and disasters that affect all sectors, official state agencies might lack the ability to meet the needs of all citizens, and here the role of civil society organizations shines, by providing all forms of assistance in line with government efforts, and playing significant roles for two reasons:

- 1- Civil society organizations have lists of people that require special financial, social, and special assistance.

2- These organizations are able to reach these individuals under curfews and special public procedures.

Voluntary efforts have proved their importance during this crisis, with many examples, such as the announcement of young volunteers sanitizing their village in al-Wadi al-Jadeed province in Egypt, which led to many young people in other villages and provinces to follow suit, spread awareness, give out masks, and form social media groups for doctors to respond to people's needs and inquiries.

In the UK, people answered the Prime Minister's call to volunteer in support of the government's efforts to confront the coronavirus, with the number of volunteers to this date reaching around half a million. They will be tasked with transferring medical supplies between hospitals, delivering medicine and food to home-restricted patients, or talking to isolated people to comfort them in their loneliness.

Gulf states saw a corresponding and remarkable wave of voluntary activity. The Kingdom of Bahrain launched the National Campaign to Combat the Coronavirus, which promoted healthcare and humanitarian work and which met with an immediate response from 12,700 volunteers. In Oman, the National Youth Committee invited voluntary efforts to respond to the outbreak. Saudi Arabia launched an initiative by the Ministry of Health called, "Ready Health Volunteers". The UAE launched an initiative called, "Your city calls upon you". In Kuwait, the Ministry of Interior offered to train citizens on civil defense to handle emergencies to deal with risks.

All these initiatives emphasize the importance of combining government and public efforts for integration during crises. When Japan faced a triple threat in 2011, public efforts volunteered to complete government work to recover from an earthquake, tsunami, and a radiation incident at a nuclear reactor, commanding international admiration.

Fifth: Economic Mechanisms

The coronavirus pandemic has undoubtedly been a formidable challenge to the global economy, given its overall simultaneous impact on all sectors. Away from details and statistics, it is sound to ask how countries managed the crisis economically. In the beginning, governments strived to provide urgent

financial aid to the low-income segment, pledging to pay employee wages for several months. As important as these efforts seem, the international community is still aware of the importance of collective efforts to deal with the economic implications of the coronavirus crisis. Here are five important indicators:

- 1- The G-20 Virtual Summit, hosted by Saudi Arabia on March 26, in which King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud pointed out that the world was relying on G-20 nations to unite in fighting the pandemic, calling for a coordinated unified response, and the Group's pivotal role in addressing its impact. G-20 leaders agreed to inject US\$5 trillion into the global economy; part of fiscal policies, economic measures, and security plans to counter social, economic, and financial effects of the crisis.
- 2- EU leaders' decision on March 26 to give Eurozone finance and treasury ministers 15 days to devise a common plan against the economic fallout of the crisis. On April 9, they approved a €500 billion bailout package for the countries most affected.
- 3- The IMF announced on March 6 that US\$ 50 billion will be allocated to support the countries most affected.
- 4- The UN launched on March 25 a US\$ 2 billion urgent humanitarian response plan to help countries in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and South America; carried out by UN agencies.
- 5- The US-China Talks: following an exchange of accusations on the responsibility of the coronavirus outbreak, President Trump held a phone call with President Xi on March 27, in which he remarked upon China's experience in countering the spread of the virus and flattening the curve. President Xi welcomed cooperation with the US and the rest of the world in these efforts.