

DEFENSE DOSSIER

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AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY COUNCIL

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to the October 2020 edition of the American Foreign Policy Council's *Defense Dossier* e-journal. In this edition, we explore how countries around the world are grappling with the coronavirus, the widest ranging global pandemic in a century.

We begin with Latin America, which is rapidly becoming the world region hardest hit by the crisis. Next, we shift focus to look at the Arab World, where some regimes have been able to suppress the virus while others have been far less successful in doing so. In Eurasia, we outline how the government of Russian president Vladimir Putin has gambled heavily on a cure for the pandemic – and come up short. Further east, we chart the trajectory of a number of Asian nations which, despite early successes, are now struggling with the long-term political and domestic effects of the pandemic. We close with an eye to the future, discussing how the People's Republic of China's poor handling of the virus, its egregious violations of human rights and privacy, and its aggressive foreign policy maneuvers are coalescing a new—and expanding—anti-China consensus.

We hope you find the pages that follow both interesting and insightful.

Sincerely,

Ilan Berman
Chief Editor

Richard M. Harrison
Managing Editor



Crisis and Opportunity in the Americas

Joseph Humire & Kylie Skorupa

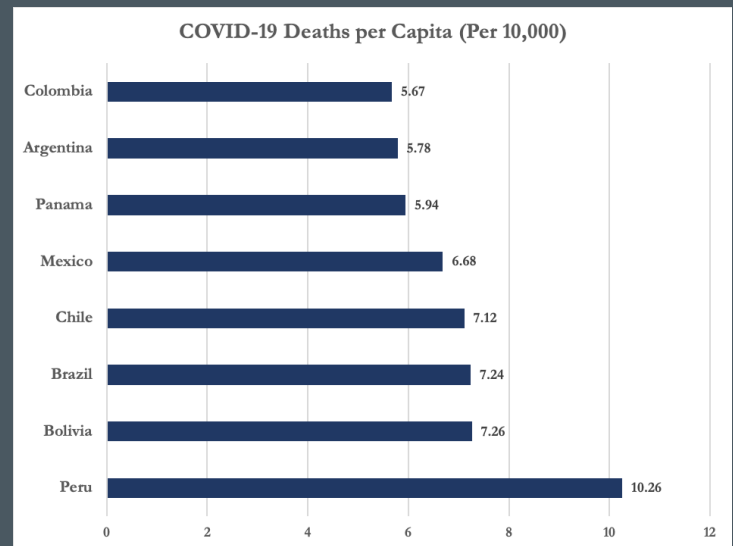
The novel coronavirus that swept the globe and has altered life as many know it first appeared officially in Latin America on February 26th. In a region already precariously situated, both economically and politically, the virus aggravated many of Latin America's endemic problems and plunged it into a health and economic crisis. Since that first recorded case in Brazil, Latin America has erupted to become a global epicenter of the virus—accounting for approximately 34% of worldwide COVID-19 related deaths¹ in a region with only 9% of the world's population.²

For many regional experts, this has not been a surprise. Latin America has large informal economies, inadequate sanitation and fragmented health systems, overpopulated cities, and was starting its winter season. Of all the regions of the world that have been heavily infected, it stood perhaps the worst chance of containing the virus. Even so, misconceptions and errors about the pace of the pandemic in the region still abound.

CORRECTING MISCONCEPTIONS

Although almost no countries handled the health crisis without criticism, few have been reprimanded more on the world stage than Brazil. President Jair Bolsonaro was discredited by the international community and ridiculed by the press for apparently doing too little to stop the spread of the virus in Brazil. Throughout the pandemic, Brazil appeared to have the worst contagion in the region, with the highest gross number of confirmed cases and related deaths. But when adjusting for population size, it was revealed that there were far worse cases than Brazil in Latin America.

Presently, the countries in Latin America with the highest number of COVID-19 related deaths per



Source: Data sourced from local government websites and credible news sources. Figure current as of October 19, 2020.

capita are Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Mexico, and Brazil, each surpassing 6 deaths per 10,000 inhabitants, while most countries, on average, sit at 3.2 deaths per 10,000. According to Johns Hopkins University, Peru's per capita COVID-19 mortality rate is higher than that of any other nation except a small European country called San Marino with a population of only 34,000.³

Peru has received very little international press compared to Brazil, however, even though week after week it consistently topped the list as having the worst community spread and related deaths of the virus in the region. The country's large informal economy, in which more than two-thirds of the population works, and the bustling capital city of Lima (a preferred passage to popular tourist destinations like Machu Picchu in Cusco), made Peru the perfect victim of the novel coronavirus.

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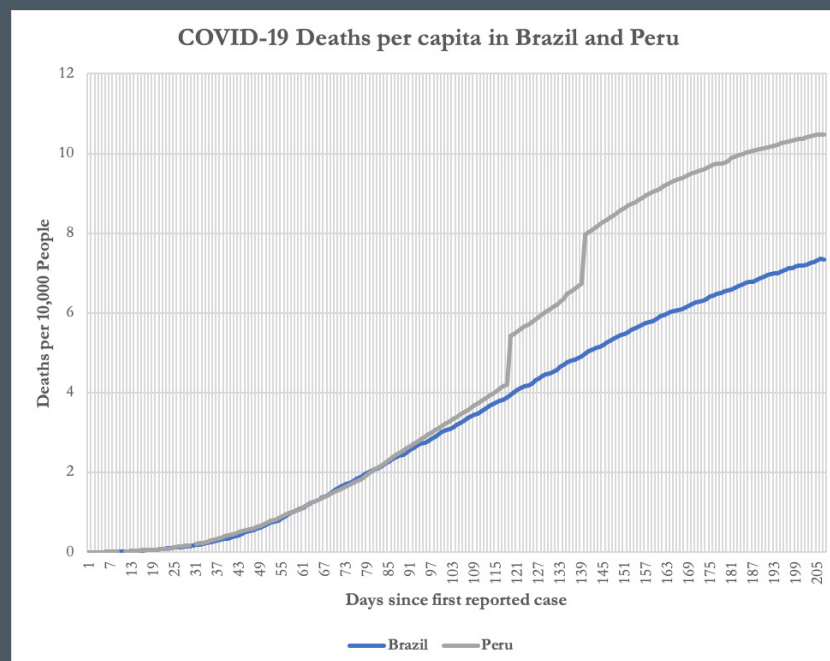


Since that first recorded case in Brazil, Latin America has erupted to become a global epicenter of the virus—accounting for approximately 34% of worldwide COVID-19 related deaths in a region with only 9% of the world’s population.

Although Brazil was criticized for taking a seemingly *laissez faire* approach to the virus, with state governors in charge of implementing mitigation measures, the data shows the viral outbreak was in fact much worse in Peru. President Martín Vizcarra’s government instituted strict, country-wide quarantines in mid-March, before Peru hit “day zero” of confirmed cases. On March 15th, Peru announced its first national State of Emergency for 15 days, while closing all borders; suspending work,

school, and public events; and establishing a mandatory quarantine, prior to the country’s 100th confirmed case of COVID-19.

Yet the situation in Peru seemed to deteriorate, even as stricter measures were taken. Many Peruvians were forced to disobey quarantines and other mitigation measures in order to make a living in the informal economy or ensure basic human necessities. For example, according to a 2017 census, less than half the population owned a refrigerator,⁴ making frequent stops to crowded marketplaces nonnegotiable. The overcrowded conditions in Lima—where, according to one economist, more than 30% of households have four or more people sleeping in the same room⁵—certainly did not help when mandatory stay-at-home orders took effect. Mixing sick people with the healthy in a country that, according to one index, ranks among the lowest in the region in terms of healthcare turned out to be catastrophic.⁶ By June, almost 85% of Peru’s ICU beds with ventilators were currently occupied as the country went into a “health catastrophe.”⁷



Source: Data sourced from local government websites and credible news sources. Figure current as of October 19, 2020.



Brazil, on the other hand, handled the pandemic differently. Like Peru, the larger South American country did experience a heavy contagion of COVID-19 that has infected at least 5 million people, including President Jair Bolsonaro himself, but the health system survived. While the press focused on President Bolsonaro's routine clash with his governors and health experts on how to handle the virus, Brazil's federal system ensured that at least parts of the country had strong mitigation measures. Of the 27 states, more than a third had quarantine measures in place for most of the pandemic, making it inaccurate to say that Brazil did nothing to contain the virus.

It is clear, however, that President Bolsonaro preferred to keep Latin America's largest economy alive by opting against stronger mitigation measures that would hurt the country's workforce. This has paid off as Brazil in June recorded its best trade balance since records started in 1989 and the Ibovespa, the Brazilian stock exchange, accumulated an increase of around 50 percent, which is the best second quarter since 1997.⁸ As a result, contrary to that of most world leaders, President Bolsonaro's popularity has risen during the pandemic, hitting his highest approval ratings in his 20 months in office.⁹

HEADING TOWARD HARD TIMES

Before the pandemic, the decline in the price of commodities and rising insecurity had already placed several countries in Latin America on the path to a recession. Earlier this year, prior to the pandemic, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had projected the region's growth at 1.6%, with recession setting in in several countries. This projection was updated recently to account for economic shocks caused by the pandemic, and the IMF now forecasts a 8.1% contraction in the region as a whole.¹⁰

This makes Latin America the hardest hit region in the world, economically, by the virus. COVID-19 is causing the region's worst economic crisis since the "lost

Before the pandemic, the decline in the price of commodities and rising insecurity had already placed several countries in Latin America on the path to a recession. Earlier this year, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had projected the region's growth at 1.6%, with recession setting in several countries. This projection was updated recently to account for economic shocks caused by the pandemic, and the IMF now forecasts a 8.1% contraction in the region.

decade" of the 1980s, when foreign debt exceeded the earning power for many countries, resulting in Latin America experiencing negative growth for more than a half-decade. Currently, the hardest hit sector in Latin America is tourism, which is affecting many countries, most conspicuously Costa Rica and Caribbean nations. This Fall, Costa Rica's statistics agency announced that unemployment had hit its highest levels ever, sitting at 24.4%.¹¹

Beyond tourism, the overall decline in economic growth and rise in unemployment is expected to exacerbate poverty throughout the region, where, according to the World Bank, an additional 53 million people will cross below the regional poverty line—bringing the total in Latin America to 240 million people.¹² These harsh economic forecasts have Latin American governments concerned, based on the understanding that whenever unemployment surpasses



China is weathering an economic downturn and facing reputational harm from its negligence surrounding the pandemic. Its lending to Latin America has been in decline for several years, dropping from a high of more than \$35 billion in 2010 to a low of \$1.1 billion last year. Understanding that China may not be the “white knight” protecting the region from the worst effects of the pandemic, many Latin American countries are now looking to the United States.

10% for any extended period of time, social and political unrest soon follow.

THE COMING INSTABILITY

On September 9th, a Colombian cabdriver, Javier Ordoñez, was killed by police in Bogota in a case that was eerily similar to the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. National protests immediately erupted throughout Colombia with calls to “defund the police,” while the hashtag #ColombianLivesMatter went viral on social media. Like the George Floyd protests, what started peacefully quickly exploded into violence, with 56 police stations attacked resulting in the death of at least nine protestors in Bogota and Cali.

While at first glance the protests in the U.S. and Colombia may seem unrelated to COVID-19, the staggering economic impact of the virus has exacerbated conditions in many countries where social crisis and political instability is on the rise. For Colombia, this is especially worrisome since its belligerent neighbor, the regime of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, stands ready to

exploit any opportunity to weaken one of its harshest critics, the Colombian government.

The Maduro regime has already shown it’s capable of using mass protests as an asymmetric weapon of choice throughout Latin America. Last November, protests rocked Colombia over possible austerity measures, like pension and tax reforms. More than 200,000 protestors came out in enough force to close borders and deploy national troops.¹³ And while some may have had legitimate grievances, many were stoked by external forces from Cuba and Venezuela.

Chile also faced massive protests prior to Colombia. In October 2019, mass demonstrations against an incremental increase in metro fares resulted in violent protests that burned the metro system in Santiago and attacked police and military installations. Chilean President

Sebastian Piñera, who admitted he was caught off guard by the size and intensity of the violence, also pointed to “foreign forces” behind the protests, much like in Colombia a month later.¹⁴

A study that analyzed 7.6 million digital interactions (including posts on YouTube, Facebook, public Telegram or WhatsApp groups, or digital news media) on unrest in Colombia and Chile found that less than one percent of users generated more than 28 percent of the social media content in both countries, and 58 percent of those accounts were geolocated in Venezuela and Cuba.¹⁵ These cyber-enabled social media networks would subsequently prove useful during the pandemic, driving disinformation and heightening fears about the novel coronavirus.

COMBATting DISINFORMATION

Although Latin American countries experienced varied fallout from the virus, disinformation blanketed the region in a coordinated attempt by China and its



regional allies to convince the world that the U.S. was secretly the original source of COVID-19.¹⁶ In March, a spokesperson for the Chinese government said that the U.S. Army might have brought the virus to Wuhan, fueling conspiracy theories and the regional propaganda machine.¹⁷ This blatant propaganda was echoed by certain autocratic leaders in Latin America, such as Bolivia's exiled former president, Evo Morales, who repeated the false claim and also stated that "China [has already] won the third world war."¹⁸

The COVID-19 disinformation campaign was accompanied by medical diplomacy from Cuba and China and an apparent Sino-Cuban "wonder drug" that was supposed to be the cure for the coronavirus.¹⁹ As Latin America continues to wage war against the virus, China, Cuba, Venezuela, and other regional allies are waging another type of war laced with lies, half-truths, and aggressive propaganda to delegitimize the United States in Latin America.

The propaganda effort is focused on attacking U.S. regional allies, such as Brazil, Bolivia, and Colombia, exacerbating public sentiments against their political leaders while distracting from other potential coronavirus hotspots who simply refused to accurately report data. Nicaragua and Venezuela were among the most notable in this regard.

A CHALLENGE, AND AN OPPORTUNITY

While the entire region remains in a vulnerable state, the influence of external actors, namely China, is on the rise in Latin America. The last time the world faced a similarly grim economic forecast was after the global financial crisis of 2008-2009. Fortunately for Latin America, that crisis came right before a boom in commodity prices that helped many of the export-oriented countries of the region weather the economic downturn. Trade and investment from China, in particular, was key, as the PRC nearly double its demand for Latin America's raw materials in the three years after the last global financial crisis.

In 2020, times have changed. China itself is weathering an economic downturn and is also facing reputational harm from its negligence surrounding the pandemic. Its lending to Latin America has been in decline for several years, dropping from a high of more

than \$35 billion in 2010 to a low of \$1.1 billion last year.²⁰ Understanding that China may not be the "white knight" protecting the region from the worst effects of the pandemic, many Latin American countries are now looking to the United States.

A recent election for the head of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) placed, for the first time in the institution's 60-year history, an American at its helm. Mauricio Claver-Carone, who previously served as the White House point man for the Western Hemisphere, overcame a campaign to postpone the September election and earned votes from 30 of the IDB's 48 governors, in a clear message that Latin America is looking toward U.S. leadership.

In a recent virtual conference hosted by the American Enterprise Institute, Claver-Carone mentioned that small-to-medium size businesses are the motors for economic growth in the Americas and looks to break the bottleneck of investments to this sector.²¹ In a separate interview, he clearly addressed the future vision of the IDB vis-à-vis China, stating that "China plays an important role in international trade, but it is a country far from the Americas and completely controlled by a state. So, what we are looking for is to fulfill the dream of Pan-Americanism, which has existed since before China was an economic power."²²

Ironically, the pandemic, with all the challenges it has created in Latin America, has presented an opportunity for the region to emerge from crisis better than before. In order to do so, however, regional governments must take a hard look at their foreign policies and engagement with China and revisit the root causes of why the rule of law remains weak throughout the region. There is, after all, no reason why COVID-19 should lead to another "lost decade" for Latin America.

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Weathering the Pandemic in the Arab World

Alberto Fernandez

Less than a year since the onset of the global coronavirus pandemic, and with most countries still grappling with the domestic effects of this unprecedented health crisis, a comprehensive review of its impact is impossible. In nation after nation, we have seen narratives rise and fall, and success stories turn into failures. The Arab World is no exception in this regard, and recent months have presented massive new challenges to countries already hit hard by local and regional instability.

IRAN, AND ONWARD

One cannot discuss the effects of the pandemic on the Middle East without beginning with Iran. Assuming that the data Iran has provided to international health organizations is correct (and there is considerable skepticism on that score), Iran is, without a doubt, the regional nation hardest hit by the coronavirus. Whether counting by deaths per hundred thousand or by observed case-fatality ratio, Iran leads the region. As of early October, the number of coronavirus-related deaths in the Islamic Republic (27,888) was three times that of Iraq (9,683) and Turkey (8,667), which were ranked second and third, respectively, in number of deaths.¹ Moreover, some Iranian observers claim that the number of dead in Iran is in fact far greater than what has been disclosed by the country's clerical regime.²

More significant than the domestic health situation inside Iran, however, is that it was the place from where the virus initially spread to many of its neighbors (Iraq, Bahrain, Lebanon, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar). Indeed, the fact that the virus spread and circulated from Iran to Lebanon and Iraq became a domestic political issue in both places, as critics used it to push back against the regimes in both countries, which are seen by many as subservient to Tehran.³

AUTHORITARIAN MANAGEMENT...

Yet if Iran served as the original point of infection for many Middle Eastern states, the subsequent course of the pandemic in those places has helped reveal regional realities that are often obscured from a distance. For the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the crisis has uncovered some superficial differences, but many more similarities. GCC states, wealthy and with decades of investment in quality health care, have weathered the storm relatively well. Qatar and Bahrain may have comparatively high infection rates, but like their Arabian Gulf neighbors they have had relatively few deaths. This is particularly remarkable given that GCC states also have some unique risk factors in their populations, such as elevated incidences of diabetes and obesity.

Saudi Arabia is comparatively worse off; as of October 9, the Kingdom had 338,132 infections and nearly 5,000 deaths.⁴ Yet Riyadh has also received international kudos for not letting the pandemic get completely out of control, as happened in Iran. The Saudis had the additional challenge of handling pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, limiting the *Hajj* this year to a specific number of persons already in the Kingdom, rather than canceling it altogether.

If any lesson on governance can be drawn from the GCC experience with COVID-19, it is that the combination of relative wealth, authoritarian governments and relatively efficient bureaucracy can manage its way out of this crisis. None of these states are actual democracies, so very little was lost in terms of an erosion of existing personal freedoms among local populations as a result of official efforts to stop the virus's spread.

Another Arab state that distinguished itself by its performance is the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. While poor compared to the Gulf states, Jordan took early and aggressive steps to stem the spread of the illness. The country's lockdown and strictly-implemented curfew,



coupled with a good medical system and prior planning, yielded beneficial results, and as of early October Jordan had the lowest figures of any country in the region.⁵ Jordan's Health Minister, Dr. Saad Jaber, a heart surgeon and former Major General in charge of medical services for the Jordanian Armed Forces, became something of a folk hero for his public role in explaining and leading the health professionals' response. But while Jordan has done well, it has nonetheless been affected by regional upticks of the virus in places like Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, which have adversely affected the Kingdom's reopening.

If any lesson on governance can be drawn from the GCC experience with COVID-19, it is that the combination of relative wealth, authoritarian governments and relatively efficient bureaucracy can manage its way out of this crisis.

...AND REGIONAL HOTSPOTS

If GCC states and Jordan have done relatively well in their responses to the disease, other Arab states have not. Iraq is the Arab state today with the most COVID-19 deaths and second in infections, after Saudi Arabia (which has far fewer deaths). While these other countries have had relatively well-run medical centers and reasonably efficient good governance, Iraqi hospitals have at times been overwhelmed. Patients fought staff for scarce oxygen tanks in some hospitals, but the problem runs deeper than simply scant resources. Iraq's endemic corruption has meant that hospitals have "ghost employees" that only exist on paper, and imaginary stocks of medicine and oxygen. The country's health crisis is unfolding against a deeper crisis of governance as a new reformist government tries to handle

a drop in oil revenues, rampant corruption, political unrest and Iranian political ambitions.

Many Iraqis doubt the official virus figures and indeed, in April 2020, the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission (CMC), a repressive and politicized arm of the state infiltrated by the country's Dawa Party, fined and banned the Reuters news agency for three months for a well-sourced news report claiming that the number of real cases in Iraq was higher than was officially reported.

Yet while the situation in Iraq is poor, there is at least some transparency. The health situation in Syria, by contrast, is much murkier. According to official

statistics, the pace of infections and deaths in Syria is still low, but in this case, Syria bears more of a semblance to Iran – with its dodgy statistics and lack of transparency – than it does neighboring Jordan. Syria is also coping with economic collapse and the results of a brutal nine-year old civil war. The Assad regime is extremely corrupt, but anecdotal information speaks of significant outbreaks not only in the capital, Damascus, but in camps for internally displaced persons and detention centers in Kurdish controlled areas holding thousands of pro-ISIS detainees.⁶

Still, it is the Assad regime that bears most of the blame for the country's coronavirus crisis, keeping official numbers low to appease its Iranian allies (the virus seems to have arrived from Iran). Seventy percent of the country's healthcare workers are refugees or internally displaced persons. A Damascus doctor estimated in late August that one out of every four Damascenes may be infected in the near future.⁷ Meanwhile, quarantine centers are likened to Syria's notorious detention centers, where you go in and never return alive.

War-torn Yemen is similar to Syria, in that it faces multi-faceted conflicts, dysfunctional governments, and the scope of the health crisis seems to be woefully underreported. Like in Syria, many years of war, a collapsed medical system (half of the country's health facilities are not operational because of the war), and rising poverty have only exacerbated the risk of the pandemic.



Neighboring Lebanon, also closely connected to Iran, saw its highest daily tally of new cases—1027 new infections—on September 24th, as the health crisis combines with economic collapse, rampant inflation, the destruction from this summer's Beirut blast (where ordinary people had to gather to clean up) and demonstrations against a rotten government.⁸ On August 21st, the state imposed a 17-day lockdown on the country to try to stop the spread at precisely the same time that businesses were trying to survive dire economic conditions and the damage of the Beirut Port explosion. Many desperate business owners vowed civil disobedience, while the authorities have given the military full powers in a “state of alarm” through the end of 2020. With both the state and the economy in freefall and no end in sight, this power can be used to fight the pandemic. Just as easily, however, it can be used to target desperate demonstrators.

The Arab world's largest country, Egypt, has also demonstrated some of the overall characteristics visible elsewhere, including a lack of transparency and reports of overwhelmed health facilities. Some doctors and medical personnel critical of the government's response to the pandemic have been detained on terrorism and misuse of social media charges, as authorities try to control the narrative and flow of information. While there were—as in other Arab countries—complaints that the Egyptian government was undercounting the number of infected, the government itself has admitted that this was a problem. In May 2020, Egypt's Higher Education Minister, in an event attended by President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, admitted that the number of COVID-19 cases in the country was likely over 71,000, in contrast to the official tally at the time of 14,000.⁹ Like many other states, Egypt clamped down, faced difficult times, saw its infection numbers decline eventually in the summer, but then begin to climb again in August.

Neighboring North African states have witnessed the same trajectory—lockdown, subsequent decline in infection rates, re-opening, and a rise in those numbers. In August, in the middle of a civil war, the Libyan govern-

ment in Tripoli went into lockdown to stop the spread of the coronavirus, conveniently doing so at the same moment that antigovernment protests spiked. As of mid-September, the real number of cases in the country seemed to far exceed official figures.¹⁰ Morocco's numbers peaked on August 15th as infections rose following a government re-opening in June after three months of lockdown. And in democratic Tunisia, infection numbers and mortality rate were considerably lower for months than in any of the country's North African neighbors. But now as economies struggle to re-open and citizens become fatigued by months of precautions, the numbers of new cases in Morocco, Tunisia and Libya are all spiking.¹¹

The greatest long-term impact to the pandemic in the Arab World is one that is still unfolding: the economic consequences of the crisis. The global economic recession, low oil prices, the collapse of international tourism, soaring debt, the forced shutdown of economies for months and spiking unemployment will only exacerbate existing socio-political fissures.

A MIXED BAG

So, what are the lessons to be learned from how Arab states have responded to this unprecedented health crisis? There are states that seemed to have functioned relatively efficiently, especially at the beginning—the GCC states, Jordan, Tunisia—and those (like Syria, Iraq and Yemen) where it seems to have been handled poorly, and everywhere else where regimes muddled through, some doing so better than others. Not surprisingly,



states that are better run have handled this crisis better. The GCC states' expensive health care has kept fatality rates down. Countries worn down from war and rampant corruption have, not surprisingly, done worse.

But the greatest long-term impact to the pandemic in the Arab World is one that is still unfolding: the economic consequences of the crisis. The global economic recession, low oil prices, the collapse of international tourism, soaring debt, the forced shutdown of economies for months and spiking unemployment will only exacerbate existing socio-political fissures. Whatever progress some nations, like Egypt and some of the Gulf states, had made toward economic reform has been largely wiped out. The ability of Gulf states to provide aid for other countries or even to generate new private sector jobs for talented Lebanese and Palestinian guest workers has cratered. Countries that initially did well managing the health crisis, like Jordan and Tunisia, now face crippling economic consequences. The regional image is one of superficial political stability, but with unresolved structural and social problems and simmering political grievances, with far fewer resources to address them.

One hopes that this crisis will represent new horizons for reform. It is much more likely, however, that we will bear witness to enhanced repression as states seek to weather coming turmoil in hopes of better economic days. In this scenario, repression and stagnation could be the most immediate consequences inside the region in the next few years, with that bitter reality igniting new migration flows into Europe. The advent of the pandemic had led to a 38% decline in migrant—mostly North African—arrivals in Spain,¹² but as travel becomes easier and economies stagnate, those numbers will assuredly rise.

For those remaining, the pandemic has succeeded in unmasking the utter moral and physical bankruptcy of most of the region's regimes. These regimes unable to cure or protect, are increasingly fragile and threadbare except in their ability to repress. Repression, as we have seen in authorities using the cover of the health emergency in Lebanon, Libya and Egypt to enhance their control, will remain and flourish long after the pandemic fades.

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Sputnik-V's Failure to Launch

Matt Maldonado

On August 11th, 2020, President Putin gathered members of his government on a televised conference call and announced Russia's approval of the world's first COVID-19 vaccine. Dubbed "Sputnik-V" by the Russian media, the move was meant to evoke nostalgia for Soviet scientific triumphs in space over sixty years ago. Unsurprisingly, the global scientific community expressed its collective skepticism, while nearly half of Russia doctors surveyed said they did not feel safe enough with the process to take the vaccine themselves.¹

Under scrutiny, the vaccine announcement fell flat in much the same way as has the Kremlin's response to the pandemic. While official statistics and messaging painted a picture of stability during the spring and summer months, journalists, doctors, and activists alike braved censorship and arrest to expose the Russian government's inept response. As state authorities prepare to make the new vaccine mandatory for some, it's important to understand how its introduction fits in with the larger Russian effort to portray the outbreak to its citizens and the world.

THE STATE AS AN OBSTACLE

Throughout the pandemic, Russian state authorities have undertaken a concerted effort to suppress vital information critical to efforts to slow the spread of the disease. They did so, simply, because of fears of its effect on regime stability. One of the most controversial datapoints produced over the past several months has been Russia's official death count. According to official statistics, the Russian COVID-19 death count at the beginning of September was 17,759, with over a quarter of all deaths occurring in Moscow.² That tally is extremely low in comparison to similarly sized countries, raising suspicions of data manipulation. Back in May, journalists at the *New York Times* and *Financial Times* analyzed the data through a different lens. By comparing average deaths in Moscow during the month of April over the previous five years to total deaths recorded in the city during April 2020, they found a 1,700-death disparity, dwarfing the official tally of 642 deaths in the city.³ It quickly

became clear that Russian authorities were underreporting their COVID-19 deaths.

In response to the revelation, the state mobilized to suppress the information. Representatives of the Russian Foreign Ministry branded the reporting "disinformation," while state censors appealed to Google for the removal of Russian articles that cite the *New York Times* and *Financial Times* coverage of the topic. In the months that followed, analysts continued to use the same method to produce statistics on COVID-19 deaths that paint a more accurate picture than state figures. Data from July 2020 alone shows that across Russia, over 31,000 deaths in excess of the five-year average occurred, making it the deadliest month in Russia since 2010, despite the official figure of only 10,079 deaths during the same period. In total, over 55,000 deaths in excess of five-year averages had been recorded as of early September—well in excess of the official body count of 17,759 disclosed by the Kremlin.⁴

Labs and research institutes attempting to do their part in the fight against COVID-19 also found their work obstructed. Rospotrebnadzor, the Russian agency in charge of health safety and regulation, was one of the driving forces behind this effort. Back in January, Rospotrebnadzor hastily developed a testing kit through its Vektor research lab, despite the availability of reliable tests on the European market. The Vektor tests were notorious for their insensitivity, producing false negatives as much as 20-30 percent of the time.⁵ Samples also had to be sent to Novosibirsk for verification, adding weeks to the lag in results.

The problems did not stop there. In early April, when the virus' spread across Russia began to accelerate, private labs that did independent testing had their operations interrupted when Rospotrebnadzor released new guidelines restricting the shipment of biohazardous material. Testing would be limited to state-run labs where data on virus spread could be controlled and manipulated if necessary.⁶ By mid-April, the testing restriction was lifted by order of Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, but deep divisions between



Rospotrebnadzor and the clinical lab industry remained. According to interviews with researchers at other labs, Rospotrebnadzor has been giving preferential treatment to its own Vektor lab at the expense of other qualified institutions, such as the Smorodintsev Influenza Institute and the Russian Academy of Sciences.⁷

As a regulatory agency, it restricted access to hazardous material by labs from within Russia, while also holding the import keys for samples coming in from abroad. As a result, some scientists resorted to working in secret with samples that had not been authorized by Rospotrebnadzor.⁸ All of this has been detrimental to efforts to study and understand the virus in preparation for a vaccine. By funneling material and research away from qualified labs, Rospotrebnadzor created an environment in which any vaccine coming out of Russia would be met with skepticism.

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THE PLIGHT OF THE MEDICAL WORKER

According to official statistics, Moscow was the Russian city hardest hit by COVID-19. As of September 2020, over a quarter of the country's one million cases were detected in the capital, and images of ambulances queueing for hours outside hospitals quickly became commonplace on the locked-down streets of the city. Anonymous interviews with ambulance driver offered a window into the struggle unfolding on the pandemic's frontline. Their job entailed ferrying patients from hospital to hospital in search of an open bed. Those unable to be accommodated were returned to their homes, only to restart the process every new day. All of this took place with little material support from the state, for many first responders were not provided with sufficient Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). One first responder in

particular told *The Moscow Times* their daily routine included washing a construction jumpsuit in bleach for use on the job.⁹

Even if a patient was fortunate enough to secure a hospital bed, however, the logistical nightmare did not stop at the infirmary door. The hospital system in Russia is in a horrid state. Years of budget cuts and neglect have taken a tremendous toll, and an internal audit conducted in February of this year found that a whopping 31 percent of Russian hospitals lack running water, while nearly 41 percent operate without central heating.¹⁰ In some instances, understaffed COVID-19 wards had to be manned by medical students in their early 20s who volunteered for service.¹¹ In short, the Russian healthcare system was simply not prepared for an outbreak of this magnitude.

As spring turned into summer, the pressure on Russian hospitals gradually subsided, but not without cost to frontline workers who labored tirelessly in hazardous conditions in service of their communities. In late April, disturbing reports of medical workers plummeting out of windows began surfacing in the media.¹² The three incidents took place in Voronezh, Krasnoyarsk, and Moscow Oblast, and personified the physical and psychological toll of weeks on the job without PPE, hazard pay, and other necessities. Police investigations in all three cases found no evidence of foul play, but details remain gruesome. One such instance involved Alexander Shulepov, a frontline physician whose VKontakte video denouncing his supervisor's demands that he remain on the job after testing positive for COVID-19 went viral, only for him to recant his reaction as "emotional" in a follow up video.¹³

Days later, Shulepov fell from a hospital window and fractured his skull. In the place of state support, doctors such as Anastasia Vasilieva took it upon themselves to help frontline workers by fundraising and donating PPE. She was on her way to deliver supplies to a poor village outside Moscow on April 2nd when the police detained her at a roadblock.¹⁴ Vasilieva was already known to authorities for criticizing the Kremlin's COVID-19 response to the pandemic, and according to eyewitnesses, the police were waiting for her that night.

When piled together, these inadequacies exacted a clear human cost. State statistics are unreliable, but a site organized by medical professionals for frontline workers to record the names of their deceased colleagues listed over 670 deaths as of early September.¹⁵ In a story with few heroes, credit is due to the brave souls who staffed the hospital wards, drove



the ambulances, and treated patients in a time when state authorities proved unwilling or unable to support them.

A PROPAGANDA OFFENSIVE

Information and perception, meanwhile, have been top priorities for the Russian state throughout the pandemic. As early as January 2020, state media was spreading disinformation about the origin of the virus to domestic audiences in popular outlets such as *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and *RIA Novosti*.¹⁶ Via those platforms, senior politicians and military experts blamed the U.S. diplomatic presence in Wuhan, China for intentionally spreading the virus as a bioweapon.

By March, it became clear that Russian efforts to mislead the public were not confined to within the country's borders when the European Union published a document warning of similar disinformation taking place in Europe.¹⁷ It detailed how the Kremlin's foreign language news outlets, such as *RT Spanish*, were generating stories designed to compete with authentic information, inciting confusion and chaos in countries battling the virus. In a subsequent act of subversion, the Russian hacking group Cozy Bear targeted the data and research of labs working to develop a COVID-19 vaccine in the U.S., Canada, and Britain.¹⁸ Cozy Bear is known among western cybersecurity agencies to have ties to Russian intelligence, and is suspected of involvement in previous cyberattacks on Western targets. The report detailing the operation, published by the UK-based National Cyber Security Centre, cited phishing as a method used by Cozy Bear for infiltration.

While media and intelligence actors were fanning the flames of the pandemic, truckloads of medical equipment were packed onto military transport planes and shipped around the world in a series of goodwill gestures. Many of the usual suspects received aid, such as former Soviet republics Kazakhstan and Belarus and allies Iran and Venezuela.¹⁹ In March, news broke that Italy was also receiving aid from Moscow, including a shipment of 600 ventilators. It quickly became clear, however, that the operation had a propaganda function to it, given the trucks carrying the equipment were adorned with stickers reading "From Russia with Love." Later, Italian outlet *La Stampa* quoted an anonymous source when it reported that 80 percent of the materials received from Russia were "useless."²⁰

On April 1st, to the surprise of many, a Russian cargo plane even landed at JFK Airport in New York carrying a

payload of ventilators, PPE, and sanitation equipment for use in the United States. To date, however, the ventilators remain unused in storage due to safety concerns, since fifteen of them belong to the *Aventa-M* line suspected of starting fires at hospitals in Moscow and Saint Petersburg.²¹ At a time when Russian doctors, nurses, and first responders were struggling with PPE shortages and hospital wards filled to capacity at home, their government was gifting or selling pieces of their critical stockpiles to countries abroad as a means to burnish its global image.

Information and perception have been top priorities for the Russian state throughout the pandemic...in popular outlets such as *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and *RIA Novosti*...senior politicians and military experts blamed the U.S. diplomatic presence in Wuhan, China for intentionally spreading the virus as a bioweapon.

PUTIN'S PRIORITIES

2020 was supposed to be a banner year for Vladimir Putin. In January, he shocked the world by proposed a series of constitutional amendments aimed at limiting the powers of the presidential office for after his scheduled departure in 2024. Yet by the time he revealed his true intentions—using members of the ruling United Russia Party to propose an additional amendment to reset his presidential terms and permit him to rule until 2036—the COVID-19 pandemic was already threatening the country. The virus was not able to block the president's political ambitions, however, and on July 1st he claimed victory in a rubber-stamp referendum on the amendments, sustaining a deep blow to his legitimacy in the process.

Now, President Putin is trying to secure a diplomatic and political victory by pushing out a vaccine that received regulatory approval before it even finished clinical testing. Yet the reality remains; after witnessing Russia's negligent response to the pandemic, the world is right to distrust the



science and data—not to mention the motivations—behind Russia’s preferred remedy.

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Summer of COVID: How East Asia Has Coped

Devin Stewart

Over the summer, some countries in East Asia that had earned early praise for their COVID response found that completely eliminating the virus represents an enormous long-term challenge. In late July, Asia saw an unexpected resurgence in cases of the pandemic, dashing hopes for increased travel “bubbles” between countries.¹ Inside the region, earlier this year, the four countries of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore had received mostly praise for their handling of the pandemic.² As a whole, the region has done moderately well (in raw numbers) to quite well (per capita) in its response to the COVID crisis.³ As of this writing in mid-August, Vietnam and Thailand were among the ten countries in the world with the lowest deaths per capita.

TOKYO'S STRUGGLE

Initially garnering attention with its own “model” to control the virus, Japan was on track to manage the crisis by focusing on economic recovery, regional travel, and limited testing.⁴ But since late July, it has become a cautionary tale of a country that moved too quickly to open its bars, restaurants, and sporting events. Earlier, Japan had promoted its cultural virtues of mask wearing (and even the way people talk) and its own “three Cs” rubric of places to avoid: closed spaces, crowded places, and close-contact settings.⁵ By the end of July, however, the country saw 1,000 COVID cases per day for the first time.⁶ In mid-August, Japan had 58,000 cases total (or 463 per million) and more than 1,000 deaths total (or 9 per million) with the rate of increase rising in late July and early August.

The virus’s resurgence in Japan, a country with a total population of 126.5 million, has significantly harmed prospects for an economic recovery by dampening consumer spending and pushing businesses to cut

salaries and jobs.⁷ The virus is expected to shrink the economy at the fastest pace in decades in the year through March 2021.⁸ The Japanese economy recorded its largest drop on record in April-June, shrinking by 7.8% for the quarter, or an annualized 27.8%.⁹ Economic activity stalled under a state of emergency due to the pandemic, marking a third quarter of negative growth. Private consumption, accounting for more than half of the economy, fell by 8.2%, a bigger drop than expected.¹⁰ Government data showed that in June, despite a drop in unemployment to 2.8%, job availability was at its lowest in more than five years.¹¹ Over the summer, however, Tokyo governor Yuriko Koike won a landslide reelection, taking about 60% of the vote and beating 21 challengers, a sign of support for her response to the COVID crisis.¹²

On foreign policy, Japan, under new Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, has continued former premier Shinzo Abe’s attempt at balancing between its two most important relationships, that with the United States and that with China. Since 2018, Japan has pursued an increasingly fragile “tactical detente” with China, emphasizing mutually beneficial economic relations. While the United States is Japan’s closest ally, China is its biggest trading partner and source of tourism. Due to this dependency, Japan’s approach toward China’s recent incursions in contested waters near Japan and the disputed Senkaku Islands has been mild.

The disease has caused a number of notable diplomatic disruptions, however. A COVID outbreak at two U.S. bases in Okinawa over the summer was a source of tension between the allies.¹³ Japan in March was likewise forced to postpone the Tokyo Olympics from July 24, 2020, to July 23, 2021, but experts are now skeptical about whether even that new date is possible given the

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trajectory of the pandemic.¹⁴ Tokyo also postponed the official state visit of Chinese leader Xi Jinping, which had been scheduled for April 2020. That visit would have been the first of its kind by a Chinese leader since 2008 (the year of the Beijing Olympics). The Prime Minister's own ruling party, the LDP, and the Japanese public at large would like to see the visit called off altogether, given Beijing's recent clampdown on Hong Kong, which has effectively removed the city's political autonomy and quashed democracy movements there.¹⁵ As part of its attempt to mitigate risks revealed by the crisis, the Japanese government has started assisting 57 Japanese companies to reduce reliance on China by building manufacturing capacity in Japan and Southeast Asia.¹⁶

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SEOUL'S CALCULUS

South Korea is another Asian country that has been considered a success story for its response to COVID, but which still sees a pandemic lasting for months.¹⁷ The country's spike in cases took place on March 1, 2020, with 1,062. Since April, however, the number of new cases in the ROK has remained mainly below 100 per day. As of mid-August, Korea had more than 16,000 (or 320 per million) cases and more than 300 deaths (or a low 6 per million) in a population of 56.1 million. Korea's overall success has been attributed to elite contact tracers, including epidemiologists and database specialists, who were deployed to quell the spread of the virus in a country that was once the second hardest hit. Korea's accessible, universal healthcare system, built

over decades, has been also cited as a major factor in the country's success.¹⁸

Nevertheless, the disease has exacted a heavy economic toll. During the second quarter, Korea's GDP shrank by 3.3%, with the country joining Japan, Thailand, and Singapore in a technical recession (defined as two consecutive quarters of negative growth).¹⁹ The pandemic is likewise hitting Korea's exports (which account for 40% of the economy), construction, capital investment, and manufacturing. The IMF now forecasts a contraction of about 2.1% in Korean economic growth for the year 2020. In July, President Moon Jae-in introduced a \$94.5 billion program called the Korean "New Deal" to provide jobs (with a goal of creating 1.9 million new jobs) and advances in areas of technology, green energy, and digitalization, and the creation of a smart green industrial complex.²⁰ The program aims to train 100,000 people in artificial intelligence and invest in energy-saving homes and electric cars.

On foreign policy, Korea, in a move somewhat similar to that of Japan, has sought a moderate path vis-a-vis its giant neighbor, China. It has, for example, held talks with China to update the five-year-old FTA between the two countries.²¹ Meanwhile, Korea's relations with its fellow democratic neighbor Japan continue to be rocky; a Korean court in early August decided to liquidate the assets of a Japanese company to compensate for Japan's colonial occupation.²² Like in Japan, an incumbent party, in this case President Moon's Democratic Party, in April won a national victory thanks to its handling of the pandemic.²³ Korea was one of the first countries to hold a vote since the pandemic began, and its ruling party now holds the largest majority in the national parliament since the country began holding elections in 1987.

TAIWAN IN FLUX

A third democracy in Asia that has been the subject of much praise for its COVID response is Taiwan--with one of the lowest death counts in the world. Taiwan had only 486 confirmed cases (or 20 per million) and 7 deaths (or 0.29 per million) as of mid-August for a population of 23.7 million. Taiwan used travel restrictions



by closely monitoring flights, community partnerships, lessons learned from the 2003 SARS outbreak, and technological solutions such as geofencing, which creates a virtual perimeter around geographical areas.²⁴ Business travelers as of June 22nd were getting exemptions from strict quarantine rules. Taiwan has looked into the cheap steroid dexamethasone as a COVID treatment after the United States bought up supplies of Remdesivir.²⁵ A trial in June in the United Kingdom showed the steroid saved the lives of COVID patients, and Japan has approved its use as well.

Economically, Taiwan's success has shown that a competent COVID response can generate economic growth. According to IMF forecasts, the world economy will shrink about 4.9% this year.²⁶ But a Taiwan-based economic research center, the Chung-hua Institution, forecast anticipated Taiwanese GDP growth of 1.77% this year, thanks to the country's success in containing the virus and an expansive government stimulus program that included spending vouchers.²⁷

Taipei has also parlayed the pandemic, and the geopolitical shifts it has presaged, into a stronger diplomatic position. Despite protests by China, Taiwan in early August welcomed the highest level ever official visit from the United States. The delegation was led by Health Secretary Alex Azar, who offered President Trump's strong support for the democratic island and its success in dealing with the COVID crisis, for which President Tsai Ing-wen expressed appreciation. China responded to the visit by sending air force jets that briefly crossed the Taiwan Strait midline.²⁸ The meeting could well be a portent of things to come. As U.S.-China ties worsen, it is likely that Taiwan will become increasingly important to U.S. policy in Asia. In turn, even as its ties to Washington warm, Taipei's relations with Beijing will grow increasingly contentious.²⁹

STRUGGLING IN SINGAPORE

Finally, Singapore is yet another Asian nation that received praise early on, due to its use of aggressive

Taiwan in early August welcomed the highest level ever official visit from the U.S....led by Health Secretary Alex Azar, who offered President Trump's strong support for the democratic island and its success in dealing with the COVID crisis. China responded to the visit by sending air force jets that briefly crossed the Taiwan Strait midline.

contact tracing, but subsequently saw an increase in the pandemic outbreak – largely stemming from overcrowded dormitories that house foreign workers.³⁰ As of mid-August, Singapore had more than 56,000 confirmed cases (or about 12,000 per million) of COVID and just 27 deaths (or 6 per million) among a population of 5.6 million. The country had brief spikes in cases in late April and early August. The city-state said in early August it would ask incoming travelers to wear electronic tags, equipped with Bluetooth and GPS, to ensure they followed quarantine rules.³¹

With large parts of the Singaporean economy shut down since early April to stop the spread of the virus, the economy experienced a larger than expected contraction of 42.9%, a record decline in GDP, in the second quarter.³² Sectors that were particularly hard-hit included construction, accommodation and food services, and transportation and storage. The economy is expected to shrink by 5%-7% in 2020.³³ The government has used unprecedented monetary easing in March; and it has deployed wage subsidies and public service opportunities to protect workers. The country's July 10th election saw the return of the ruling People's Action Party to power, but with a reduced majority.³⁴



With large parts of the Singaporean economy shut down since early April to stop the spread of the virus, the economy experienced a larger than expected contraction of 42.9%, a record decline in GDP, in the second quarter. Sectors that were particularly hard-hit included construction, accommodation and food services, and transportation and storage. The economy is expected to shrink by 5%-7% in 2020.

The opposition Workers Party had its best showing to date, winning 10 seats. For the first time, the leader of the opposition party was given the title “Official Leader of the Opposition,” due to its newfound relevance.

Like Japan and South Korea, Singapore is seeking a balanced approach toward China. Marking the 30th anniversary of its bilateral relationship in July, senior officials from the two countries vowed to increase cooperation in public health, COVID vaccines, and diagnostics, as well as increased connectivity in finance, supply chains and infrastructure such as China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).³⁵ Japan and Singapore agreed in August to ease travel restrictions, in place since September in response to the pandemic, on businesspeople and expatriates.³⁶ Beijing has sought to tighten ties with its Asian neighbors, including Singapore and Korea, as its ties with Washington have deteriorated and the burgeoning U.S.-China cold war intensifies.³⁷

A NEW NORMAL

Since the summer, East Asia has proven to be more successful than other regions in fighting the virus.³⁸ But just as in elsewhere in the world, governments in

East Asia are continuing to navigate their responses to the COVID crisis, the increasing influence of China in world politics, and strong economic headwinds. These intertwined challenges are ever more acute in what China sees as its own backyard and ground zero for political influence.

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The Emerging Anti-China Consensus

Claire Christensen

There is today a growing consensus among western democratic countries regarding the People's Republic of China (PRC): that the PRC's threats to national sovereignty, economic prosperity, and national security, its blatant violations of human rights, and its disdain for international law represent a threat to the free world.

In recent months, the dangers of relying on China for essential goods has become undeniable, as businesses struggle to keep supply chains operating and countries scramble to procure critical medical equipment and pharmaceuticals in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. The lies perpetrated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regarding the global crisis, coupled with its aggressive "wolf warrior" diplomacy, provocations in the South China Sea, and clashes with Indian troops along the disputed border between the two countries have all underscored that the "peaceful development" long touted by Chinese officials is nothing more than a talking point for foreign consumption.

It may now be receiving greater critical attention, but communist China's conduct is not new, or a temporary anomaly. Rather, it is a reflection of the Leninist totalitarianism that lies at the core of the Chinese Communist Party and which—long obscured by savvy politicians in Beijing—is now more on display than ever before. As such, we are now seeing the scale of the threats the CCP poses to freedom, democracy, and the international rule of law-based system.

For U.S. policymakers, now waking up to the global threat posed by a rising PRC, the operative question is how best to respond. Here, history is instructive. Success in every major challenge to our country's survival to date—among them the American Revolution, the Civil War, World War II, and the Cold War—has followed a similar trajectory.

First, there is the *recognition* that a problem exists which threatens the survival of our nation. Second, public *debate* follows, centered around the extent of the problem. How big is the problem, and how real is the danger? Throughout these stages, new and targeted actions are taken to address specific threats and issues.

Next, a *consensus*—though one that is usually not unanimous—is formed. The majority of government and the public accepts that there is a real, serious problem that requires pragmatic solutions. A subsequent *mobilization* effort takes place toward a solution that is defined by new strategies, structures, and systems. New language is used, and new formulas are incorporated to address the threat. These new strategies, structures, and systems are then vigorously *implemented* and constantly improved upon until success is achieved.

We are now seeing a similar pattern emerge in western democracies in response to the threat posed by communist China. Though the coronavirus pandemic has accelerated these stages, the problems that western democracies face with the CCP are not in fact new. Prior to the pandemic, countries had already started becoming more and more disillusioned with the PRC. The pandemic and China's subsequent aggressive actions, however, have helped make the threats emanating from communist China impossible for democratic countries to ignore or deny.

RECOGNITION

Since taking power in 2012, Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping has embraced a more aggressive, confrontational approach to his country's place in the world. Deepening digital totalitarianism, coercive economic practices, the One Belt One Road initiative, systematic theft of intellectual property, and multiple global

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Heightened economic competition helped jump-start a broader effort in the U.S. to counteract the CCP's attempts to infiltrate our societies, seize control of critical technologies, violate human rights, and destroy the global rule-based system.

influence campaigns have made it increasingly clear in recent years that China was not transforming, in fact, into the “responsible stakeholder” that Western policymakers hoped it would become. In tandem with that dawning realization, relations between China and western nations declined.

In the U.S., the Trump administration’s December 2017 *National Security Strategy* most clearly encapsulated this new recognition by asserting that China represents a “revisionist power.”¹ Yet, despite this shift in U.S. policy, much of the Administration’s public emphasis—at least initially—was centered around trade. Over time, however, heightened economic competition helped jump-start a broader effort in the U.S. to counteract the CCP’s attempts to infiltrate our societies, seize control of critical technologies, violate human rights, and destroy the global rule-based system.

Nor was the U.S. alone. As China’s economy expanded, and Xi’s China became increasingly assertive (particularly in the South China Sea), there was a clear shift in policy and rhetoric on the part of the government of Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. Turnbull recognized Australia faced a significant political interference problem with China. In 2017, he launched a massive inquiry into the country’s foreign interference and espionage laws that led to a legal overhaul.

In New Zealand, too, there was a dawning recognition of the threat posed by China’s growing influence. Professor Anne Marie Brady’s 2017 research on CCP political interference in New Zealand was dubbed a “Sputnik moment” that prompted public discussion on the islands and influenced the recalibration of the NZ-PRC relationship.

The government of President Jacinda Ardern recognized the China challenge and increasingly adopted a deliberate, measured approach toward deterring communist China. Writing for *The Diplomat*, Brady described New Zealand’s approach as “one of passive defense: not acts of passive aggression, but rather very quiet acts to boost resilience and resistance.”²

DEBATE

One of the most widespread debates that occurred in and between western democratic countries was whether to allow China’s technological giant, Huawei, to construct 5G networks. Arguably, the decisions of various governments regarding whether to use Huawei equipment could

be seen as a test of how seriously they viewed the threat of communist China, whether they prioritized short-term gains or long-term security, and how confident they were in their ability to push back against the PRC.

Canada, for instance, has grappled with whether to ban Huawei’s next-generation telecom equipment. While the government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has been caught in the unfolding competition between the U.S. and China, it also faces growing domestic pressure. A May poll by Angus Reid, for instance, found that four out of five respondents supported a rejection of Huawei.³ However, as of this writing, the Trudeau government’s preferred policy has been passivity. As Reuters, citing sources with direct knowledge, has reported: “The absence of a solution will eventually settle all problems.” This non-decision is likely to result in an effective blocking of Huawei.⁴ But it also reflects the fact that popular concerns about communist China have clearly taken root in the public debate regarding Canada’s path forward.

Amid the backdrop of Brexit in January, the United Kingdom—not wanting to incur economic setbacks or delays in rolling out 5G—chose to grant Huawei limited involvement in building its advanced telecom networks. However, Prime Minister Boris Johnson faced significant backlash for the move from critics, many in his own Conservative party, who clearly understood the Huawei threat. Just months later, in July 2020, the British government reversed course in the wake of the CCP’s



oppression in Hong Kong and growing opposition to collaboration with China at home. As a result, telecom operators will be prohibited from purchasing equipment from Huawei starting in January 2021, and Huawei 5G equipment currently in the UK's network will be removed by 2027.

CONSENSUS

There is a clear anti-China consensus that is taking shape among western democracies. Voices critical of a tougher approach to communist China are becoming increasingly marginalized. The coronavirus and the PRC's subsequent actions further propelled the issue of China into the public discourse and highlighted the broader threats emanating from communist China. Consequently, western democracies have woken up to the seriousness and immediacy of the threat like never before.

The challenge of China, for instance, has become a major issue in the U.S. 2020 election. A recent Pew survey found that 73 percent of Americans have a negative view of China (up from 47 percent in 2018).⁵ The issue of the CCP's gross human rights abuses has permeated beyond government and into pop culture, with recent calls to boycott Disney's "Mulan" for filming scenes in Xinjiang.

Across Europe, perceptions of China have also gotten significantly worse. According to the survey by the Pew Research Center, 85 percent of respondents in Sweden and 75 percent in Denmark have negative views of China. Negative evaluations of China have also reached 74 percent in the UK, 73 percent in the Netherlands, 71 percent in Belgium and Germany, and 70 percent in France. The Pew survey further found that in Canada, 73 percent of citizens have unfavorable views of the PRC, while 81 percent of those polled held the same view in Australia.⁶ And according to a poll by Australia's Lowy Institute, 94 percent of Australians now want to find markets other than China for their nation's goods and services.⁷

Countries have also begun to take action against certain Chinese policies, such as the CCP's eradication of freedom in Hong Kong. In the aftermath of Beijing's imposition of a new, restrictive national security law, Australia, the U.S.,

the UK, Germany, Canada, and New Zealand suspended extradition treaties with Hong Kong. France also issued a decision not to ratify its extradition agreement.

Additionally, after calling out China's trade practices and criticizing the CCP's human rights abuses in Hong Kong and Xinjiang, the President of the European Commission announced in her state of the union address that a proposal will be put forward for a European version of the Magnitsky Act.⁸

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Further, greater support has been directed toward Taiwan on the part of foreign governments. The U.S. and the Czech Republic have both sent official delegations to Taiwan, and the Trump administration announced plans for a \$7 billion arms deal with the island. Numerous western countries—such as New Zealand and Australia—have also continued to voice their support for making Taiwan an observer at the World Health Organization.

MOVING TOWARD MOBILIZATION

As more and more governments take steps to counter the PRC and become more critical of Beijing's human rights abuses and repressive domestic policies, concerns about a



Investment in critical advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, biotechnology, and space development is likewise essential if western nations are to avoid another Huawei-like scenario. Keeping in mind China's military-civil fusion strategy, countries must prevent the transfer and export of sensitive dual use technologies to communist China as new technological breakthroughs take place.

U.S.-China "Cold War" are less likely to hold any weight. At its core, this is not a competition between America and China, but between two systems—one governed by freedom and the rule of law and one controlled by the CCP—in which all free democracies have a stake.

Accordingly, momentum is building toward a potential mobilization effort—but countries need to be willing to double down on addressing the threat. First, countries need to continue to diligently focus on economic and technological resiliency and security. The economic leverage and potential for coercion that communist China currently possesses cannot remain the norm if western democracies are to truly overcome the broad range of threats that the PRC presents. Diversifying supply chains, moving manufacturing out of China, and opening up new markets for exports are all essential to reducing overdependency on the PRC.

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There also needs to be an emphasis on constructive cooperation between countries that value democracy, freedom, and sovereignty. Such nations need to work together within established international organizations in order to check communist China's global influence.

And as mobilization takes shape, a continuing and aggressive public education campaign needs to be implemented in each country. It should become common knowledge that the CCP has a goal to make China the global superpower by 2049. Overcoming the attendant threats will require an all-of-society effort in each sovereign nation.

As Sun Tzu wrote in *The Art of War*, "By discovering the enemy's dispositions and remaining invisible ourselves, we can keep our forces concentrated, while the enemy's must be divided."¹ The threat of the Chinese Communist Party and its goal of global superpower status requires the

destruction of freedom, sovereignty and the international rules-based system. As this realization takes root, western democracies have begun to coalesce around a consensus. But hard questions remain. Namely, what constitutes success in overcoming the threat? And how do democratic nations design and implement the strategies, systems, and structures to get there? The answers will help define this new and all-important struggle.

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