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RUSI VI

To promote national defence and security issues through discussion and engagement

Newsletter of the Royal United Services Institute of Vancouver Island

The Royal United Services Institute of Vancouver Island is a member of the Conference of Defence Associations. The CDA is the oldest and most influential advocacy group in Canada's defence community, consisting of associations from all parts of the country.

The CDA expresses its ideas and opinions with a view to influencing government security and defence policy. It is a non-partisan, independent, and non-profit organization.



Extraordinary Issue

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President's Message

With a rising number of infections and deaths, COVID-19 is having a significant impact on everyone. Due to the ongoing health restrictions on 'distancing', we just successfully held an electronic AGM for the first time in RUSI-VI history. Those restrictions also force us to cancel our remaining speakers. We will re-schedule our speakers from April (Oka: Legacy of a Political Crisis) and May (Epidemics and The Modern World) to next Fall, dependent on pandemic restrictions.

Our personal circumstances drive one consuming question- when will we get back to normal? Given the global reach and unknown length of the pandemic, is that a fair question? COVID-19's impact may last months or years, with waves of infection vulnerability, with restrictions lifted only to be re-imposed weeks, or months later. The more important questions relate to the long-term impact on our societies, how we conduct business, trade, the global balance of power and Canada's national security. The global impact of the pandemic may even change the way we think of security, national defence and conflict. The articles in this special edition of the newsletter explore some of those questions.

The first article serves as a thought-provoking introduction. On 17 April, 2020 the Times Colonist published a Q & A with Dr. Mitch Hammond, our speaker on Epidemics, now scheduled for next September. As an historian, Dr. Hammond looks for lessons from past pandemics and how they changed the civilizations of their day. In the search for those lessons, may be the clues to our own future.

Follow the health guidelines as much as you can, take care and stay safe!

Scott H. Usborne
President RUSI VI

Q&A with Mitchell Hammond: What history teaches us about pandemics

Times Colonist

APRIL 17, 2020

The COVID-19 crisis has shown that pandemics belong as much to the present as the past. From Ebola to HIV/AIDs to Zika, University of Victoria historian Mitchell Hammond says disease has played an increasingly significant role in global affairs in recent decades.

Hammond, an assistant professor in the Department of History, explores how diseases such as the plague, tuberculosis and the Spanish flu have shaped modern societies in his new book, *Epidemics and the Modern World*. As governments grapple with how to contain the coronavirus, Hammond shares what we can learn from the pandemics of the past.

Q. Why do you suggest in your book that we live in an era of “emerging infections”?

A. That term refers both to new diseases and to diseases that aren't new but which have increased in their incidence or geographic range. Tuberculosis is an example of an old disease that resurged in the mid-1980s, in part because millions of people living with HIV contracted it. Our new diseases include Ebola and the coronavirus diseases SARS and COVID-19. These threats remind us that we've made some progress against diseases with medical science and public health, but the conditions of modern life also create new opportunities and conditions for disease to spread.

Q. Is there a big difference between how we respond to pandemics now versus how they've been handled in the past?

A. There are some similarities. During the influenza pandemic of 1918, communities argued over quarantines, “social-distancing” measures, and the effectiveness of masks. COVID-19 is a respiratory disease like influenza, and we're still having similar debates today. I think one distinctive aspect of this pandemic is that we are experiencing it through statistics. Public-health officials are using the concept of “flattening the curve,” to encourage us to slow the rate of infection and avoid overburdening hospitals. They use numbers to relate coronavirus illness and individual behaviour to the disease's impact on health resources. No previous pandemic was discussed so extensively in terms of statistics.

Q. The so-called Spanish flu of 1918-19 is often used as an analogy for the current pandemic. Is it a good comparison?

A. In some ways it is a good comparison. “Spanish flu” was the last pandemic to circulate globally and cause high mortality. Both influenza and coronavirus diseases are respiratory infections. That influences how they spread and shapes how individuals and governments respond to them. People debated the utility of masks and various forms of “social-distancing” a century ago just as we do today. But in other respects, our 21st-century landscape is very different. We now have widespread air travel, bigger cities and denser exchange networks. All these things influence the potential for various pathogens to spread. Other changes are conceptual. In 1918, most Western people knew about germs, but they didn't think about them as a cause of disease to the same degree that we do now.

Q. What should we look for as the pandemic progresses?

A. The history of pandemics shows us that a single disease such as the plague, cholera or influenza does not necessarily create a common, shared experience. Disease outbreaks reveal fault lines in communities

between ethnic groups, social classes or dominant cultures and people who are marginalized. Epidemics can show us where society is weak and what we must do to strengthen it. That's what I'll be looking for in the months ahead.

Q. Can history tell us how and when the coronavirus pandemic will end?

A. I don't think we can expect the COVID-19 crisis to have a tidy conclusion. Written histories of epidemics often create a rise and fall narrative: warnings and early cases, alarm and deaths that rise to a peak, and then decreasing cases and sober reckoning. But our world is so densely connected that individual communities cannot live out this kind of story, at least with a highly transmissible pathogen such as SARS-CoV-2. We don't know how the crisis will resolve and we should be prepared for some uncertainty.

The Coronavirus Could Reshape Global Order

China Is Maneuvering for International Leadership as the United States Falter

By Kurt M. Campbell and Rush Doshi March 18, FOREIGN AFFAIRS

With hundreds of millions of people now isolating themselves around the world, the novel coronavirus pandemic has become a truly global event. And while its geopolitical implications should be considered secondary to matters of health and safety, those implications may, in the long term, prove just as consequential—especially when it comes to the United States' global position. Global orders have a tendency to change gradually at first and then all at once. In 1956, a botched intervention in the Suez laid bare the decay in British power and marked the end of the United Kingdom's reign as a global power. Today, U.S. policymakers should recognize that if the United States does not rise to meet the moment, the coronavirus pandemic could mark another "Suez moment."

It is now clear to all but the most blinkered partisans that Washington has botched its initial response. Missteps by key institutions, from the White House and the Department of Homeland Security to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), have undermined confidence in the capacity and competence of U.S. governance. Public statements by President Donald Trump, whether Oval Office addresses or early-morning tweets, have largely served to sow confusion and spread uncertainty. Both public and private sectors have proved ill-prepared to produce and distribute the tools necessary for testing and response. And internationally, the pandemic has amplified Trump's instincts to go it alone and exposed just how unprepared Washington is to lead a global response.

The status of the United States as a global leader over the past seven decades has been built not just on wealth and power but also, and just as important, on the legitimacy that flows from the United States' domestic governance, provision of global public goods, and ability and willingness to muster and coordinate

a global response to crises. The coronavirus pandemic is testing all three elements of U.S. leadership. So far, Washington is failing the test.

As Washington falters, Beijing is moving quickly and adeptly to take advantage of the opening created by U.S. mistakes, filling the vacuum to position itself as the global leader in pandemic response. It is working to tout its own system, provide material assistance to other countries, and even organize other governments. The sheer chutzpah of China's move is hard to overstate. After all, it was Beijing's own missteps—especially its efforts at first to cover up the severity and spread of the outbreak—that helped create the very crisis now afflicting much of the world. Yet Beijing understands that if it is seen as leading, and Washington is seen as unable or unwilling to do so, this perception could fundamentally alter the United States' position in global politics and the contest for leadership in the twenty-first century.

MISTAKES WERE MADE

In the immediate aftermath of the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, which causes the disease now referred to as COVID-19, the missteps of Chinese leaders cast a pall on their country's global standing. The virus was first detected in November 2019 in the city of Wuhan, but officials didn't disclose it for months and even punished the doctors who first reported it, squandering precious time and delaying by at least five weeks measures that would educate the public, halt travel, and enable widespread testing. Even as the full scale of the crisis emerged, Beijing tightly controlled information, shunned assistance from the CDC, limited World Health Organization travel to Wuhan, likely undercounted infections and deaths, and repeatedly altered the criteria for registering new COVID-19 cases—perhaps in a deliberate effort to manipulate the official number of cases.

As the crisis worsened through January and February, some observers speculated that the coronavirus might even undermine the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. It was called China's "Chernobyl"; Dr. Li Wenliang—the young whistleblower silenced by the government who later succumbed to complications from the COVID-19—was likened to the Tiananmen Square "tank man." Yet by early March, China was claiming victory. Mass quarantines, a halt to travel, and a complete shutdown of most daily life nationwide were credited with having stemmed the tide; official statistics, such as they are, reported that daily new cases had fallen into the single digits in mid-March from the hundreds in early February. In a surprise to most observers, Chinese leader Xi Jinping—who had been uncharacteristically quiet in the first weeks—began to put himself squarely at the center of the response. This month, he personally visited Wuhan.

Even though life in China has yet to return to normal (and despite continuing questions over the accuracy of China's statistics), Beijing is working to turn these early signs of success into a larger narrative to broadcast to the rest of the world—one that makes China the essential player in a coming global recovery while airbrushing away its earlier mismanagement of the crisis. Beijing is working to turn early signs of success into a larger narrative to broadcast to the rest of the world.

A critical part of this narrative is Beijing's supposed success in battling the virus. A steady stream of propaganda articles, tweets, and public messaging, in a wide variety of languages, touts China's achievements and highlights the effectiveness of its model of domestic governance. "China's signature strength, efficiency and speed in this fight has been widely acclaimed," declared Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian. China, he added, set "a new standard for the global efforts against the epidemic." Central authorities have instituted tight informational control and discipline at state organs

to snuff out contradictory narratives.

These messages are helped by the implicit contrast with efforts to battle the virus in the West, particularly in the United States—Washington’s failure to produce adequate numbers of testing kits, which means the United States has tested relatively few people per capita, or the Trump administration’s ongoing disassembly of the U.S. government’s pandemic-response infrastructure. Beijing has seized the narrative opportunity provided by American disarray, its state media and diplomats regularly reminding a global audience of the superiority of Chinese efforts and criticizing the “irresponsibility and incompetence” of the “so-called political elite in Washington,” as the state-run Xinhua news agency put it in an editorial.

Chinese officials and state media have even insisted that the coronavirus did not in fact emerge from China—despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary—in order to reduce China’s blame for the global pandemic. This effort has elements of a full-blown Russian-style disinformation campaign, with China’s Foreign Ministry spokesman and over a dozen diplomats sharing poorly sourced articles accusing the U.S. military of spreading the coronavirus in Wuhan. These actions, combined with China’s unprecedented mass expulsion of journalists from three leading American papers, damage China’s pretensions to leadership.

CHINA MAKES, THE WORLD TAKES

Xi understands that providing global goods can burnish a rising power’s leadership credentials. He has spent the last several years pushing China’s foreign policy apparatus to think harder about leading reforms to “global governance,” and the coronavirus offers an opportunity to put that theory into action. Consider China’s increasingly well-publicized displays of material assistance—including masks, respirators, ventilators, and medicine. At the outset of the crisis, China purchased and produced (and received as aid) vast quantities of these goods. Now it is in a position to hand them out to others.

When no European state answered Italy’s urgent appeal for medical equipment and protective gear, China publicly committed to sending 1,000 ventilators, two million masks, 100,000 respirators, 20,000 protective suits, and 50,000 test kits. China has also dispatched medical teams and 250,000 masks to Iran and sent supplies to Serbia, whose president dismissed European solidarity as “a fairy tale” and proclaimed that “the only country that can help us is China.” Alibaba co-founder Jack Ma has promised to send large quantities of testing kits and masks to the United States, as well as 20,000 test kits and 100,000 masks to each of Africa’s 54 countries.

Beijing’s edge in material assistance is enhanced by the simple fact that much of what the world depends on to fight the coronavirus is made in China. It was already the major producer of surgical masks; now, through wartime-like industrial mobilization, it has boosted production of masks more than tenfold, giving it the capacity to provide them to the world. China also produces roughly half of the N95 respirators critical for protecting health workers (it has forced foreign factories in China to make them and then sell them directly to the government), giving it another foreign policy tool in the form of medical equipment. Meanwhile, antibiotics are critical for addressing emerging secondary infections from COVID-19, and China produces the vast majority of active pharmaceutical ingredients necessary to make them.

Beijing’s edge in material assistance is enhanced by the fact that much of what the world depends on to fight the coronavirus is made in China.

The United States, by contrast, lacks the supply and capacity to meet many of its own demands, let alone to provide aid in crisis zones elsewhere. The picture is grim. The U.S. Strategic National Stockpile, the nation's reserve of critical medical supplies, is believed to have only one percent of the masks and respirators and perhaps ten percent of the ventilators needed to deal with the pandemic. The rest will have to be made up with imports from China or rapidly increased domestic manufacturing. Similarly, China's share of the U.S. antibiotics market is more than 95 percent, and most of the ingredients cannot be manufactured domestically. Although Washington offered assistance to China and others at the outset of the crisis, it is less able to do so now, as its own needs grow; Beijing, in contrast, is offering aid precisely when the global need is greatest.

Crisis response, however, is not only about material goods. During the 2014–15 Ebola crisis, the United States assembled and led a coalition of dozens of countries to counter the spread of the disease. The Trump administration has so far shunned a similar leadership effort to respond to the coronavirus. Even coordination with allies has been lacking. Washington appears, for example, not to have given its European allies any prior notice before instituting a ban on travel from Europe.

China, by contrast, has undertaken a robust diplomatic campaign to convene dozens of countries and hundreds of officials, generally by videoconference, to share information about the pandemic and lessons from China's own experience battling the disease. Like much of China's diplomacy, these convening efforts are largely conducted at the regional level or through regional bodies. They include calls with central and eastern European states through the "17 + 1" mechanism, with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's secretariat, with ten Pacific Island states, and with other groupings across Africa, Europe, and Asia. And China is working hard to publicize such initiatives. Virtually every story on the front page of its foreign-facing propaganda organs advertises China's efforts to help different countries with goods and information while underscoring the superiority of Beijing's approach.

HOW TO LEAD

China's chief asset in its pursuit of global leadership—in the face of the coronavirus and more broadly—is the perceived inadequacy and inward focus of U.S. policy. The ultimate success of China's pursuit, therefore, will depend as much on what happens in Washington as on what happens in Beijing. In the current crisis, Washington can still turn the tide if it proves capable of doing what is expected of a leader: managing the problem at home, supplying global public goods, and coordinating a global response.

The first of those tasks—stopping the spread of the disease and protecting vulnerable populations in the United States—is most urgent and largely a question of domestic governance rather than geopolitics. But how Washington goes about it will have geopolitical implications, and not just insofar as it does or does not re-establish confidence in the U.S. response. For example, if the federal government immediately supports and subsidizes expansion of domestic production of masks, respirators, and ventilators—a response befitting the wartime urgency of this pandemic—it would both save American lives and help others around the world by reducing the scarcity of global supplies.

While the United States isn't currently able to meet the urgent material demands of the pandemic, its continuing global edge in the life sciences and biotechnology can be instrumental in finding a real solution to the crisis: a vaccine. The U.S. government can help by providing incentives to U.S. labs and companies to undertake a medical "Manhattan Project" to devise, rapidly test in clinical trials, and mass-produce a vaccine. Because these efforts are costly and require dauntingly high upfront investments,

generous government financing and bonuses for successful vaccine production could make a difference. And it is worth noting that despite Washington's mismanagement, state and local governments, non-profit and religious organizations, universities, and companies are not waiting for the federal government to get its act together before taking action. U.S.-funded companies and researchers are already making progress toward a vaccine—though even in the best-case scenario, it will be some time before one is ready for widespread use.

Yet even as it focuses on efforts at home, Washington cannot simply ignore the need for a coordinated global response. Only strong leadership can solve global coordination problems related to travel restrictions, information sharing, and the flow of critical goods. The United States has successfully provided such leadership for decades, and it must do so again.

That leadership will also require effectively cooperating with China, rather than getting consumed by a war of narratives about who responded better. Little is gained by repeatedly emphasizing the origins of the coronavirus—which are already widely known despite China's propaganda—or engaging in petty tit-for-tat rhetorical exchanges with Beijing. As Chinese officials accuse the U.S. military of spreading the virus and lambaste U.S. efforts, Washington should respond when necessary but generally resist the temptation to put China at the center of its coronavirus messaging. Most countries coping with the challenge would rather see a public message that stresses the seriousness of a shared global challenge and possible paths forward (including successful examples of coronavirus response in democratic societies such as Taiwan and South Korea). And there is much Washington and Beijing could do together for the world's benefit: coordinating vaccine research and clinical trials as well as fiscal stimulus; sharing information; cooperating on industrial mobilization (on machines for producing critical respirator components or ventilator parts, for instance); and offering joint assistance to others.

Ultimately, the coronavirus might even serve as a wake-up call, spurring progress on other global challenges requiring U.S.-Chinese cooperation, such as climate change. Such a step should not be seen—and would not be seen by the rest of the world—as a concession to Chinese power. Rather, it would go some way toward restoring faith in the future of U.S. leadership. In the current crisis, as in geopolitics today more generally, the United States can do well by doing good.

April 17: Letter from Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) regarding COVID-19

April 17, 2020

Dear Families and Members of the Canadian Armed Forces,

Thanks to all of you, whether you have been deployed or working safely at your unit or dispersed at home, we have experienced a very low rate of infection in the CAF and those who have become infected have so far been recovering back to good health. I commend you all for your discipline and focus as we continue to preserve Force health and take the steps necessary to be ready for just about anything.

COVID 19 Response

Leadership at all levels are coordinating with local officials and military personnel will be made available for a range of local support tasks to help ensure our communities remain resilient. Across Canada, Regional Task Forces, RCN ships, and an Air Component have been prepared as we work towards allocating to CJOC up to 24,000 CAF personnel, healthy and ready, when needed. Most recently, we have received and responded to Requests for Assistance (RFA) in both Basse-Côte-Nord and Nunavik with Canadian Rangers. Work includes establishing triage and assessment sites and promoting COVID-19 awareness programs. Additionally, a team of Dental Technicians is helping the province of Ontario conduct contact tracing and, beginning this weekend, special medical teams will begin supporting the Government of Quebec to stabilize the situation in Long Term Care Facilities. We are also doing vital work in transporting medical supplies and our professional logisticians are playing a key role in the warehousing, management, and distribution of medical supplies throughout Canada in support of the Public Health Agency.

We are repositioning personnel and assets from and within our overseas missions to ensure force protection. Both CFB Trenton and the Royal Military College in Kingston are currently hosting personnel from Op Unifier and Op Impact for their two-week preventative isolation. I want to thank all those who continue to provide support to personnel in these locations.

Personnel and Training

Our individual and collective training programs are almost entirely shut down, and will remain so until our plans to recommence safely have been finalized. I think it is safe to say that our colleges and schools across the CAF will remain closed for training through the summer. We are doing detailed planning to re-open, and I expect we may have to expand our intake and individual training capacity in the months to come so we can continue to grow the CAF as we have been directed to do.

CANFORGENs have been issued recently to ensure broad awareness of policies affecting our members and their families during this difficult time. We will soon be issuing CANFORGENs in the following four areas: an update on PERs and succession management boards; promotions; compensation and benefits, and Reserve Force employment; and, Residential Housing Units. It is

important that each of you read and understand how policies affect you. If you have any questions or concerns, I encourage you to address these through your respective Chains of Command. The Administrative Response Centre (ARC) team is also here to help you. You can contact them at 1-833-445-1182 or by email at CMPARC.CRACPM@forces.gc.ca.

For those seeking to re-enroll in the CAF and/or those seeking to join, we are open for business; we are well postured to receive applications and to expedite the processing where feasible. Innovative recruiting solutions are in place and virtual enrolments are happening across Canada. To all those who are interested in joining us in service to Canada, you can apply now at [Forces.ca](https://forces.ca) and get to the front of the virtual line for enrolment, or re-enrolment for those who have previously served. We are particularly interested in re-enrolling leadership (Sr NCOs), skilled trades, medical personnel, and pilots.

To our own Health Services staffs, our Search and Rescue squadrons, our NORAD response squadrons, our cyber defence and communications teams, our Leadership in command and control teams in headquarters across Canada and around the world, our logistics and administration staffs, our deployed forces, our Military Police, and our CAF families managing the home front - a sincere thank you. As we stand on guard for Canada, and prepare for operations, there are some who have not been able to disperse or work from home. Military power is made up of many types of skills from many types of people and I am deeply grateful for the expertise, leadership, and dedication in our Regular, Reserve, and Canadian Rangers as we defend and protect Canada during this pandemic.

I want to close by reminding you that doing all you can to stay healthy and not contract the virus is part of your military obligation now. Detailed attention to physical distancing, hygiene, use of PPE where you cannot assure yourself of physical distance, and staying home when you can are mandatory parts of your role as a military member. One person testing positive can have a significant impact on the availability for operations of their colleagues they work with, as anybody in contact must be isolated to prevent spread. Everyone must follow the direction and guidance given, and not become a threat to your colleagues and their families.

I thank you and your families for staying the course.

J.H. Vance
General

How COVID-19 Could Remake Canada's Military

By [Elliot Hughes](#). Published on Apr 6, 2020 10:20am in [IPolitics.ca](#)

<https://ipolitics.ca/2020/04/06/how-covid-19-could-remake-canadas-military/>

"It's safe to say that everyone involved in defence procurement should expect a significant shift to the right in timelines, and a retrenchment and re-focus towards projects that align with the government's recast military and geopolitical priorities."



Second-Lieutenant Edgars Eglitis of the Latvian National Armed Forces (left), gives orders to members of his battalion as Master Warrant Officer James Aucoin, Sergeant Major of the Mobile Training Team from the Royal Canadian Artillery School at Canadian Forces Base Gagetown oversees training. Photo: Aviator Jerome Lessard/Task Force Latvia

Since everyone is either overrun with work or inundated with COVID-19 news, here's the bottom line up front (or the BLUF in military jargon): the COVID-19 pandemic will have a material impact on all aspects of *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (SSE), Canada's defence policy. These changes will be felt acutely in defence funding, overseas operations, and defence procurement, though it's too early to predict the scale of the impact. There you have it. You can now go back to watching Tik Tok videos.

For those choosing to forge ahead, it was only last week that Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan and Chief of the Defence Staff General Jonathan Vance laid out the domestic military response plan to the COVID-19 pandemic. Dubbed *Op LASER*, the plan will prioritize slowing the spread of COVID-19, support vulnerable communities, and assist provincial, territorial and municipal partners, if needed, by mobilizing up to 24,000

regular and reserve force members, all while maintaining the Canadian Armed Force's (CAF) ability to respond to natural disasters in Canada via [Op LENTUS](#).

This announcement was preceded by [a letter to all CAF members from General Vance](#) where he outlined the global pandemic's impact on Canada's military. In the letter, General Vance tells troops and their families in no uncertain terms that 'normal activities have changed dramatically'. Too true. But the impacts of COVID-19 won't stop with the women and men in uniform.

SSE was a historical investment in Canada's military, with new funding in the tens of billions of dollars (\$48.9B on an accrual basis, \$62.3B on a cash basis) from a party that some felt was not inherently defence friendly. The 20-year plan set aside hundreds of billions of dollars (\$497B on an accrual basis, or \$553B on a cash basis) to rebuild, retool, and refocus Canada's military after years of neglect during the Harper years. With unprecedented levels of new funding, DND finally had the plan, the funding, and the political commitment to move forward with confidence, poised to become the agile and adept military of the future. Then the world was hit with a global health crisis.

In the face of the pandemic, the federal government has, to date, announced [combined direct economic measures and tax deferrals of \\$190B](#). The numbers are eye-popping, and the implications of such spending are hard to fathom. The deficit this year and next could creep up towards \$200B. Now, there's no question these fiscal measures are necessary and non-structural, meaning they *could* be unwound depending on how the Canadian economy looks post-COVID-19.

The soaring deficits will place tremendous pressure on government to reduce its spending in non-COVID-19 areas in favour of healthcare and related priorities. DND/CAF had already been struggling to spend the money it had been allocated in SSE, and that was before their annual budgets increased significantly. People within and outside of government were beginning to question the department's ability to absorb the money they had been given. It is my view that COVID-19 will force Defence officials, with or without urging from Finance Canada, to use the upcoming five-year review period of SSE to re-assess and re-prioritize the entire strategy. In fact, that work is likely already underway.

There are some who suggest that defence spending is a good way to get money flowing back into the domestic economy, particularly through the manufacturing supply chain. And there are areas that should remain off-limits to claw backs including big ticket procurements like the Canadian Surface Combatants (CSC) and Future Fighter Capability Project (FFCP), programs that directly support troops and their families, domestic operations and disaster relief, investments to support the development of defence and security capabilities such as the [IDEaS program](#), IT investments (including in data analytics and updating key IT infrastructure), deferred maintenance, and perhaps most critically, cyber defence. Everything else will be fair game. Ring-fencing and reprioritizing essential programs won't be easy. But under the current circumstances, it's the right thing to do. Every department should be prepared to do the same.

Overseas operations, including joint military exercises and training, is another area COVID-19 will have a direct and material impact. At this juncture, it's hard to know how big a role the CAF will be asked to play domestically. The situation in Canada is evolving by the hour. The dreaded peak of the pandemic has yet to hit. While we should remain optimistic, we also need to be realistic. This means the military should be poised to intervene if required. We know that close to a quarter of all active troops are on standby and depending on the severity of the crisis, this number could go up.

On any given day, approximately 8,000 troops are involved in some form of deployment – preparing to ship out, actively engaged in theatre, or returning from mission. It's hard to see how this rotation rhythm escapes the reaches of COVID-19. Indeed, General Vance alluded to this in his letter stating, 'mission postures would be reviewed', and that this year's 'Annual Posting Season (APS) will be seriously disrupted'. It's likely the pull towards supporting domestic efforts will be strong.

That doesn't mean the desire to re-engage internationally won't persist. However, the ability to do so will depend on how the situation unfolds here in Canada, the willingness of countries abroad to welcome back foreign troops, and the impact COVID-19 has on the geopolitical landscape. (This is by no means an endorsement of that view. Canada should do everything it can to remain engaged internationally wherever possible, particularly with respect to humanitarian missions). Cyber defence is one domain we should do everything we can to remain engaged in. But while Canada's expertise and influence on the world stage is undoubtedly a positive one, this global pandemic will inevitably lead to a further focusing of our most critical interests.

Defence procurement, and the potential implications of COVID-19, is an area of acute interest to the defence community. This subject could be an entire article in and of itself (and if you're looking for the latest analysis on how DND/CAF was doing on procurement spending I'd encourage you to read [David Perry's piece from December 2019](#)). However, broadly speaking, it's worth noting that before this global health crisis hit, DND/CAF were progressing on procurement. Many projects, though not all, were moving ahead, even with the structural constraints and limitations of government processes holding them back. Large procurements, namely jets and ships, were plagued with delays that are expected for any large procurement. Now, given the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic, those typical speed bumps are bigger than before.

The reality for defence procurement today is that the pace of work has come to a grinding halt. Nearly all personnel across government are working from home. Government IT challenges persist, with DND staff having to coordinate amongst themselves to schedule when they can log on to their system. And any work requiring access to a secured system is a non-starter as this would require being in the office. The Defence department is a bit like an aircraft carrier in that it takes time to get up to full speed and doesn't handle sharp corners very well. This crisis will expose that rigidity.

But it isn't simply DND that needs to get back to work for defence procurement to start moving again – it will take a government-wide effort. For the process to run effectively officials from a range of government departments, including Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC), the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS), Finance Canada, the Canadian Coast Guard and Global Affairs Canada, need to be fully engaged. Today, those Departments are focused almost exclusively on addressing the immediate challenges posed by COVID-19, with this to continue for the foreseeable future. Moreover, one also needs to consider the impact COVID-19 is having on companies bidding on projects. The entire supply chain has been hit and it will take months to get it humming again.

How significant an impact this delay will have, and on which projects, is difficult to predict today. But it's safe to say that everyone involved in defence procurement should expect a significant shift to the right in timelines, and a retrenchment and re-focus towards projects that align with the government's recast military and geopolitical priorities.

We are still in the early days of this crisis. Government is projecting a return to some sense of normalcy in July, at the earliest. The run-on impacts of that kind of pause are hard to comprehend, with a full understanding of the entirety of COVID-19 impacts likely to take even longer still. This is a once-in-a-century event, with every person and institution expected to face indelible consequences. The very nature of the defence department, its size and scope, means we should expect a proportionate impact.

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COVID-19 and Conflict: Seven Trends to Watch

International Crisis Group - 10 April 2020 - www.crisisgroup.org

The COVID-19 pandemic unquestionably presents an era-defining challenge to public health and the global economy. Its political consequences, both short- and long-term, are less well understood.

The global outbreak has the potential to wreak havoc in fragile states, trigger widespread unrest and severely test international crisis management systems. Its implications are especially serious for those caught in the midst of conflict if, as seems likely, the disease disrupts humanitarian aid flows, limits peace operations and postpones or distracts conflict parties from nascent as well as ongoing efforts at diplomacy. Unscrupulous leaders may exploit the pandemic to advance their objectives in ways that exacerbate domestic or international crises – cracking down on dissent at home or escalating conflicts with rival states – on the assumption that they will get away with it while the world is otherwise occupied. COVID-19 has fuelled geopolitical friction, with the U.S. blaming China for the disease while Beijing tries to win friends by offering aid to affected countries, exacerbating existing great-power tensions that complicate cooperation on crisis management.

It is not yet clear when and where the virus will hit hardest, and how economic, social and political factors may converge to spark or aggravate crises. Nor is it guaranteed that the pandemic's consequences will be entirely or uniformly negative for peace and security. Natural disasters have sometimes resulted in the diminution of conflicts, as rival parties have had to work together, or at least maintain calm, to focus on preserving and rebuilding their societies. There have been a few signs of governments trying to ease political tensions in the shadow of COVID-19 with, for example, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Kuwait offering Iran – centre of one of the worst initial outbreaks outside China – humanitarian assistance. If the pandemic is likely to worsen some crises internationally, it may also create windows to improve others.

Crisis Group is especially concerned with places where the global health challenge intersects with wars or political conditions that could give rise to new crises or exacerbate existing ones

The coming months will be acutely risky, with the U.S. and European countries focusing on the domestic impact of COVID-19 just as the disease is likely to spread to poor and war-affected countries. With the exception of Iran, in its first phase COVID-19 mainly affected states – including China, South Korea and Italy – that had resources to manage the problem, albeit unevenly and at the cost of severe strains on their health systems and economies. To date, there have been fewer reported cases in countries with weaker health systems, lower state capability or significant internal conflict, where consequences of an outbreak could be overwhelming.

That is of little solace, however. The low numbers are almost certainly a function of insufficient testing or of a delay between the virus's onset and its manifestation. Confirmed case numbers are ticking up in fragile parts of the Arab world and Africa. If countries struggle to put in place social distancing or other measures to stop the virus's spread, or delay doing so, they could see spikes of cases like those now overwhelming parts of Europe, but with far fewer emergency care facilities available to save lives. The suffering that would cause is hard to overstate. If the disease spreads in densely packed urban centres in fragile states, it may be virtually impossible to control. The dramatic economic slowdown already under way will disrupt trade flows and create unemployment that will do damage at levels that are hard to forecast and grim to contemplate. A recession could take a particularly heavy toll on fragile states where there is greatest potential for unrest and conflict.

All governments face hard choices about how to manage the virus. Countries from the Schengen area to Sudan have already imposed border restrictions. Many are placing partial or blanket bans on public gatherings or insisting that citizens shelter at home. These are necessary but also costly measures, especially given projections that the pandemic could continue for well over a year until a vaccine becomes available. The economic impact of restricting movement for months on end is likely to be devastating. Lifting restrictions prematurely could risk new spikes in infections and require a return to isolation measures, further compounding the disease's economic and political impact and requiring further injections of liquidity and fiscal stimulus by governments around the world.

These are universal problems, but as an organisation focusing on early warning and conflict prevention, Crisis Group is especially concerned with places where the global health challenge intersects with wars or political conditions – such as weak institutions, communal tensions, lack of trust in leaders and inter-state rivalries – that could give rise to new crises or exacerbate existing ones. We also hope to identify cases where the disease could, with effective diplomacy, stimulate reductions in tensions. This briefing, the first in a series of Crisis Group publications on COVID-19 and its effects on the conflict landscape, draws primarily from the input of our analysts across the globe, and identifies seven trends to watch during the pandemic.

See the full article on the Seven trends at this link:

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/sb4-covid-19-and-conflict-seven-trends-watch>

The Future in Syria

This commentary on the future of Syria is from our neighbour to the north - no not Alaska or Russia - but USINNI (The United Services Institute Nanaimo and North Island) Newsletter.

“The Commentary is by Col (Retd) WJ (Bill) McCullough, MSC, CD, a Past President of our Institute and the now contentedly retired Chair of our Military & Security Committee. The Column is a product of his own continuing research, coloured by his own now fairly ancient but still extensive service in the Levant. The views expressed are his own.” USINNI

It’s been about 20 months since we last focussed on Syria. Much has changed since then, while much hasn’t. Syria is one of those places occupied by homo sapiens for somewhere in the range of an almost unimaginable 700,000 years, although the first evidence of a settled society dates to about 10,000 BCE. Syria’s capital, Damascus, is reputed to have been a built-up community, continuously occupied, since about 3,000 BCE. However, that’s all just “colour” and background for you. We want instead to suggest just why and how Syria remains a vital if unpredictable lynchpin to the Middle East circa 2020. The “muddle” is not a typo by the way; just how we see the Region. Modern history finds the Turks, the French, the British, the League of Nations, the United Nations, all followed now variously by Americans, Russians, Iranians, Turks (again) and the Europeans, all trying to redesign Syria for the Syrians; good luck that!

Syria sits smack in the middle of the Levant. They are today, as before, at the very centre of a clash of civilizations. Inevitably too, the recent “termination” of Iran’s Quassem Soleimani will yet have uncertain and probably messy consequences for any and all who are involved in Middle Eastern affairs.

The problem for we, on the outside looking in, is that it simply hasn’t registered on most Westerners that there are multiple long-lived wars ablaze in Syria, the most current of which date back at least fifty years, when Airforce General Hafez al Assad hijacked the socialist Ba’athist regime lodged in Damascus. The al Assads are a Shia Muslim extended family with well-grounded roots in Syrian and, to a lesser extent, Arab nationalism. The family are at the core of a minority Shia Alawite clan that has progressively managed to garner & concentrate state-power to itself at the expense of a much larger Sunni Muslim community that is a clear majority in Syria. That Sunni Muslim majority restlessly rises up in rebellion every decade or so, leading to increasingly harsh repression by the central government. The al Assads have survived Nasserism, at least two major Sunni rebellions, consistently lost wars with Israel, an Arab Spring that really never caught on in Syria, and, finally, the Sunni Salafist rebellion that seems, but may not actually be, on its last legs in both Syria and Iraq. With considerable help from some of Syria’s minority Kurd, Druze, Turkmen, Circassian, Greek, Assyrians, Armenian & Yazidis communities, plus significant help from the Russians, the Iranians and Lebanon’s Shia Hezbollah, Bashar al Assad remains secure at the helm in Damascus, but in a Nation State much of it now just smoking ruins, with millions of Syrians left refugees, internally or abroad.

The way back will be a difficult one for the Syrians. Russian and Iranian help was and is crucial to Syria's recovery, but they too will very quickly wear out the welcome mat. The Iranians are not Arabs, while the vast majority of Syrians of every ilk are. Most Syrians dislike and distrust the Iranians on historical, secular or sectarian grounds, or, combinations thereof. And, mixed in with this witches' brew, is the systemic criminality typical of the clan social structure so much a feature of Middle Eastern life today. State-sanctioned crime is endemic to the Levant, especially when the victims in the end are Europeans or North Americans. For the Syrians, what follows once Russia, Iran & Turkey inevitably declare "mission accomplished," will be a settling of scores by the al Assads. Syria's own Mukhabarat, with help from Syria's many allied militant minority groups, will now engage in a cleansing of Syrian society that will be of un- paralleled ferocity, even by Syrian standards. I doubt there will be many show trials. The accused will simply be "fingered", and then, with equal certainty, will be "disappeared" into unmarked graves. The numbers involved are not predictable, but it will be surprising if any form of reconciliation will be on the table. Provided he remains in good health, Bashar al Assad will be President of Syria through to the middle of this 21st Century. However, the more severe his treatment of Sunni Syrians, the more likely the Salafist fundamentalist rebellion will be renewed...for every action, there is always a reaction.

And, the losers? Well, the United States and Turkey failed in their declared goal of a Syria free of the el Assads. The Kurds will be rewarded for their fairly consistent support of al Assad, but the dream of Kurdistan remains just that; a faded away dream. Iran's influence has now peaked. As Persians they are simply not popular with or trusted by Iraq's, Syria's or Lebanon's Arab majorities...Sunni or Shia alike. Western influence will also continue to wane into irrelevance throughout the entire region. The real losers though are the Syrians themselves. Millions have been displaced; it's not clear if or how they will all come back.

And, the principal winners? With Turkey increasingly marginalized as a reliable NATO partner, Russia's Mediterranean presence is enhanced without the assumption of any obvious regional liabilities. The Russians are already significant economic "partners" in Cyprus, so President Putin is left with a "Southern Front" that is reasonably secure. He can now focus on his real goal: weakening NATO's presence in Eastern Europe; his Western Front.

Mark Your Calendar

Speakers (subject to Pandemic restrictions):

9 September- Epidemics and the Modern World- Dr. Mitch Hammond

14 October- The Emperor Besieged: President Xi in Trouble- Dr. James Boutillier