



ISRM

CORONAVIRUS
CAMPFIRE REPORT

PART 2: **FALSE DAWN: JUNE - SEPTEMBER 2020**

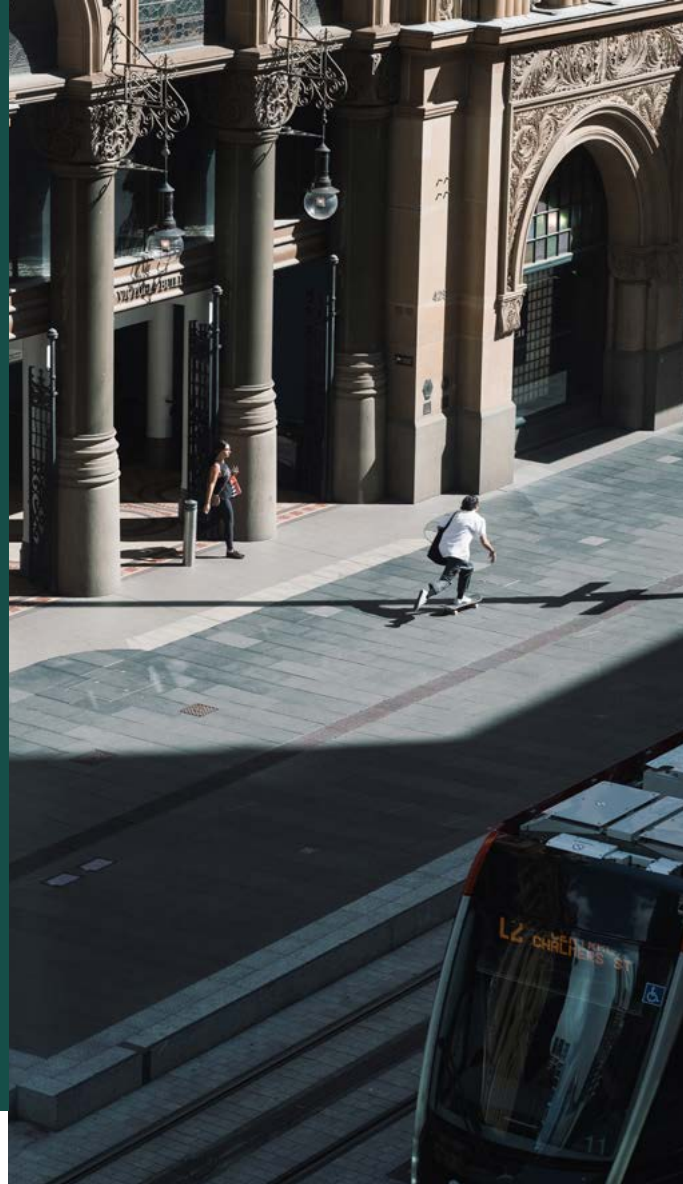
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FORE-WORD:

As we approach the anniversary of what has by any calculation been an unprecedented and highly distressing year, it is perhaps more urgent than ever that we gain a perspective of what Coronavirus / Covid-19 has meant for us, whether on a global, national or local level. It is only through a process of self-reflection that we can gain an understanding of what it is that we need to do both to prepare ourselves for what will undoubtedly be a long recovery (that is, if we are in fact past the worst of this pandemic), but also to prepare ourselves for future crises, whether they are pandemics or some other global-level event.

There is no question but that Covid-19 has been a wake-up call in terms of our understanding of what a global crisis looks like, and how unprepared we are to respond in what can be considered as a timely, effective and appropriate manner, based on multi-national frameworks aligned with local planning, management and solutions-delivery capabilities.



It became clear from the very start of Covid-19 that the event itself, and the impacts that had on multiple aspects of our national and global frameworks, but more importantly, the consequences that resulted from what was in effect a global lockdown, had gone beyond what we have imagined or planned for.

The fact that both Pandemic Influenza and Emergent Infectious Diseases featured prominently on the UK National Risk register in 2017 was a sign of effective threat identification. The fact that the official estimation of UK deaths for such an event was 250, showed that the consequences had not been appropriately mapped out.

The Congressional Report into 9/11 was titled 'A Failure of Imagination'. The Congressional Report into the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 was 'A Failure of Initiative'. Both of those titles could undoubtedly be used for the official enquiries into our management of Covid-19, and many of the lessons identified in those reports would be equally applicable to the actions of governments and associated agencies around the world over the last year.

However, in order to do that, it is important that we remember exactly what it was like to live through those days. It is surprising how quickly we lose the memory of the details of the lived experience. It is also important that we develop an authoritative record of those experiences, as it is possible, and perhaps likely, that some people will try to rewrite that narrative for their own purpose.

The report you are holding is the result of a year of twice weekly Coronavirus Campfire webinars that the ISRM has hosted since late March 2020. It had become clear by then that Covid-19 was going to be a significant event, though perhaps no-one knew at the time exactly how significant it would turn out to be. It is a record of the thoughts of over a hundred and fifty people from around the world, real time responses to the news of the day as well as to the impacts that had on themselves, their families and the communities they lived in. Reading through it, it is sometimes hard to remember how we responded to the changing moods associated with Covid -19 – the initial shock, the lack of understanding as to how people would respond to lockdown, the belief that ‘It will be over by Summer’, and then the dawning realisation that this was not an event that would be brought to a conclusion, but was something that would change the world we live in for the foreseeable future.

I am delighted that the ISRM had been able to manage this programme over the last year, and to deliver this report that will have value and significance for readers, researchers and policy makers across the world.

It is fitting perhaps that the Report should be released as the ISRM marks its second anniversary. It was the mission of the ISRM from the outset to create a platform where academics, practitioners and policy makers could come together to discuss significant issues of the day in an open, collaborative and supportive environment that could encourage both thought-leadership and the development of action-orientated policy. In sharing this report with the world, my feeling is that objective has been achieved.

If we have managed to come through Covid-19 so far, it is because of the work of uncounted thousands of people across the world, each of who is making their own contribution to the local, national and global efforts to respond to, engage with and recover from its impacts. This is our contribution to those efforts, and I hope that it will, in some way, impact on both the lives and the policies of those most in need.



Lord Toby HARRIS F.ISRM
ISRM President
Chair, UK Preparedness Commission
2nd March 2021



INTRO DUC TION:

The beginning of June saw the world moving out of lockdowns and into a summer of uncertainty. After not knowing what was going on early in the year, experiencing sudden impact in spring, and now seemingly stabilizing, the question now was how the world would look in four weeks. None of the participants of the Campfire could recall a crisis that had lasted for so long. With governments treading unknown waters, the situation seemed to be getting worse instead of better, governments were losing trust, legitimacy, and the public's passive endorsement. Additionally, social tensions that had been lingering for years, finally erupted. During the summer, the Black Lives Matter protests against police brutality took centre stage in the media and for a brief moment side-lined the pandemic. The world could only deal with one crisis at the time.



FALSE DAWN

June 2020

RE-OPENING

Participants of the Campfires in June experienced the month to be a tipping point. Many felt that the world had entered a new phase but were unsure how it would manifest. Amidst social turmoil in the United States and protests throughout the world, economies were reopening but it seemed that there was no one that actually understood what that meant. Had the situation stabilized? Would economies continue to reel?



GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

With summer around the corner and people being urged to get outside many countries had started to develop patterns that mixed internal turmoil and social unrest with the pressures of upcoming elections and a history of coercive policing. Would people come out and say that they did not care anymore and go on doing whatever they wanted, leading to riots and a cycle of increasingly oppressive responses?



UK

The general consensus had been that the UK was not good at strict policing. People could not just be coerced into adhering to restrictions, so the government would need to get out front and lead. The question had remained the same for several months now: Did the government have a strategic plan? Participants argued that the UK seemed to struggle with developing policies and was in desperate need of stability and meaningful Command and Control. The proposed return to school had already caused a lot of frustration. There had been no announced or agreed definition of risk between the government, teachers, and students and their parents. Furthermore, schools who had spent time and effort working on risk analysis and mitigation plans based on government guidelines had been bewildered by the government adjusting parameters, forcing them to redo most of the planning. Concerns were expressed that the recovery had started too quick, evidenced by the fact that there were still no adequate and reliable resting capabilities.

EUROPE

In contrast, the government in Switzerland was considered to have done a good job over the spring months. The country had increasingly opened up since the end of May, even though most people were still working from home.

Lack of contact and physical interactions, and social circumstances of those in lockdown had proven to cause the most negative effects and to be the biggest challenges. However, according to participants from Switzerland, national culture played a huge role in receptiveness to government-imposed restrictions. Now that some of the emergency measures were ending, so did the militia call. These citizens had been directly involved in the government's response and had brought the community level to it. Nonetheless, some levels of uncertainty remained. Spending that had been allotted for businesses during the pandemic came to end, but the effects that would have on small businesses that had relied on that aid were not yet clear.

Up until mid-June, cases in Russia had remained stable, but there had been concern that cases would go up as people were preparing to celebrate Russia Day. They would be out in masses and most likely ignoring existing guidelines. Besides this expected spike, Russia had also experienced social polarization. While some argued that only Putin was able to help in a time like this, others claimed that the country had had enough of Putin and desperately needed change. Most leaders had been around Putin's age and had the same mentality, so unless others became involved, there was little chance for change. One participant explained the Russian preference of leaders with a strong hand. The thought was that only strong leaders would be able to keep such a big territory united as a nation. It was a fallacy to believe one person would be able to solve all the problems and the idea more than not showed the weaknesses within the system.

The government had had little choice but to re-open the country due to economic and social pressure, but they never really had the situation under control since then, even if they had claimed otherwise.



ASIA

After the end of Ramadan and the beginning of the release from lockdown, the concerns expressed during May had become reality in Pakistan. Case numbers had been increasing dramatically since the end of the lockdown and participants felt that the situation could head to conflict and anarchy as pressure was building. The government had had little choice but to re-open the country due to economic and social pressure, but they never really had the situation under control since then, even if they had claimed otherwise. During June they had been trying to improve the situation by imposing selective quarantine measures, but the situation had still worsened. If no significant improvements would be made within the next few weeks, participants expected protests to emerge.

Uncertainty of another kind was felt in Singapore. The lockdown had ended, and the government had announced recovery measures, many of which had been considered too broad. Would the economy be able to recover? There had also been talks to hold a planned Formula 1 race as a sign of getting back to normality, only for it to be cancelled again shortly after.

MIDDLE EAST

Participants from Dubai reconfirmed that they had been feeling safe throughout the government's response, while those from Saudi Arabia were concerned by the lack of compliance since the release from lockdown.

AFRICA

Continuing the trend from May, the infection rate had been increasing slowly in Kenya and would likely do so in the future. Social tensions had been already visible due to high unemployment and were growing as the younger generation had been advocating for change. For now, there seemed to be a lack of people at all levels listening to each other, which did not defuse the situation.

While lockdowns had been ending all over the world, South Africa had initially extended its national state of emergency through the Disaster Management Act. This had given government control over lockdown restrictions and had been extended at the beginning of June for one more month. Because of public and political pushback, a political battle ensued that challenged the constitutional legality of the Disaster Management Act.

The argument had been that the government had to weigh the freedom of action versus the threat to the economy. While freedom of action had been restricted by the lockdown, economic consequences had also been appearing with criminals taking advantage of the virus environment, leading to an increase in crime. Few questioned the necessity of the lockdown, but the general feeling had been that it had been going on for too long. The economy was in need of a gradual release of restrictions. By the end of June these restrictions had been finally relaxed and the economic situation started to stabilize, and new opportunities had started to evolve.

US

Participants from the United States felt that the situation had been bad and was continuously getting worse. Besides the ongoing protests and civil unrest, the virus had become politicized, and both Republicans and Democrats fought for their interpretation of the pandemic. Many felt that the upcoming presidential election in the fall could be a tipping point and a real risk for the global community if President Trump were to be re-elected. This could cause further policy changes in the US and growing acrimony with China. For now, there was no sense of global connectedness within the US. People thought locally in micro-fashion. With summer approaching, their mind had been on being able to get out of the house, on restrictions being lifted and on the upcoming vacation season. People had developed a false sense of security and ignored all safety recommendations. Come summer, it seemed almost certain that there would be a spike in cases. Economically, the feeling was that companies had given lip service to having plans in order to please their shareholders but had not been thinking past the three-month dividend forecasts. Participants argued that any company that thought things would return to a close semblance of a pre-virus normality would be out of business within 24 months. The economy had been severely affected by the pandemic and would continue to be for some time to come. The recovery process was likely to be further lengthened by the federal government's neglect of the crisis. While things had looked bleak, there was still cause for hope. As there had been no one in the US under the age of 25 who had not experienced two major economic crises, there were many resilient people who would be able to adapt and overcome these current challenges.

People had developed a false sense of security and ignored all safety recommendations. Come summer, it seemed almost certain that there would be a spike in cases.



EGYPT

SPOTLIGHT:

During June, citizens of Egypt had to come to the realization that Covid-19 was something that they would have to live with for an undetermined period of time. With increasing deaths, new restrictions were put in place. Protective masks and gloves were now required on public transportation and in most businesses. Small businesses had been hit hard by the restrictions and many had already gone bankrupt and closed permanently. Egypt was struggling on several levels. The economy was collapsing, and the government was under growing pressure to reopen. All the while Egyptian citizens had been kidnapped and killed along the shared border with Libya, which suffered from a drawn-out civil war. Egypt's President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi had tried to take a leading role in the peace effort between Libya's warring factions in early June, but to no avail.

The Egyptian government decided to release the lockdown restrictions on July 1st. Near the end of June, curfew hours had already been reduced and compliance guidelines for re-opening had been issued. Businesses were working to meet those guidelines so they would be able to re-open. Campfire participants related this re-opening to scuba diving. Ascending too quickly without decompression could lead to decompression sickness. This painful experience could be treated but could cause long-term issues. Following this, a government that would open things up too quickly and along with poor information would see a spike in cases and lose credibility and the public's trust. Not knowing how and when the situation would be back under control, civil tensions could grow and crime rates rise for a variety of reasons, leading to a further erosion in trust in the government and an increasingly unstable situation.

Since the Arab Spring in 2011, different people had risen to power, but there had been no real changes. All of them followed the same rules and only learned from what tripped up past leaders to avoid similar mistakes. Much like Russia and most of the Middle East, strong leaders kept things quiet but retained a strong grip on the country. Recent Campfires had discussed male vs. female leadership. In Egypt, even the option seemed out of the question as one participant explained. Unless she had already proven herself and built a reputation, no one would even consider following a female leader. While this had been a cultural issue, there were also institutional differences. Following worldwide civil unrest, the Campfires touched upon the issue of pandemic policing and compliance through coercion. In the case of Egypt, the police had been historically weak and unable to adapt to changes. After 2011, there had been a considerable increase in equipment, training and a closer cooperation with the military. Nothing short of tanks and aircraft would allow the police to suppress any opposition to the government's course of action.

THE GLOBAL NEED FOR AGILITY

During May, Campfire participants had advocated for community-based solutions and talked in detail about how to empower local authorities. In June, the discussion moved to the global level. As had been discussed, there were no one-size-fits-all solutions on the national level.



This had been true globally as well. When social and economic systems were stressed as they had been with the pandemic, they not only exposed their strengths and weaknesses, but also their fragility. The current stress on the system had exacerbated already existing inequalities. With the possibility of a long-term social and economic crisis, countries with inherently good governance would fare better. Economically, they would have a competitive advantage going forward, while weaker systems would fall behind and suffer. However, countries with extreme inequality would not always fall apart. Even with woefully unequal wealth distribution there could still be a degree of economic stability. Socially, most of societies had been passively endorsing their government actions, by going along with restrictions and guidelines. That could easily change and reach a tipping point where flouting the rules could become acceptable for most of the public. Failure to address important social issues could turn non-compliance into civil unrest and challenge the internal stability of countries.

Governments had been forced to primarily make economically based decisions, which had not always been successful. Some of those that had been doing well fell back on authoritarian methods that would have not been tolerated anywhere outside those regimes.

For many governments, decision-making had been influenced by the available information, but the very nature of the problem did not allow the whole picture to be seen. Thus, decisions had been made on best efforts, but only a post-event analysis would be able to show if they had been successful. Even if governments successfully mitigated the virus in their country, how would they fare if international travellers would bring it back? Would they be at a disadvantage to those countries who had to deal with changing situations and case numbers on a daily basis?

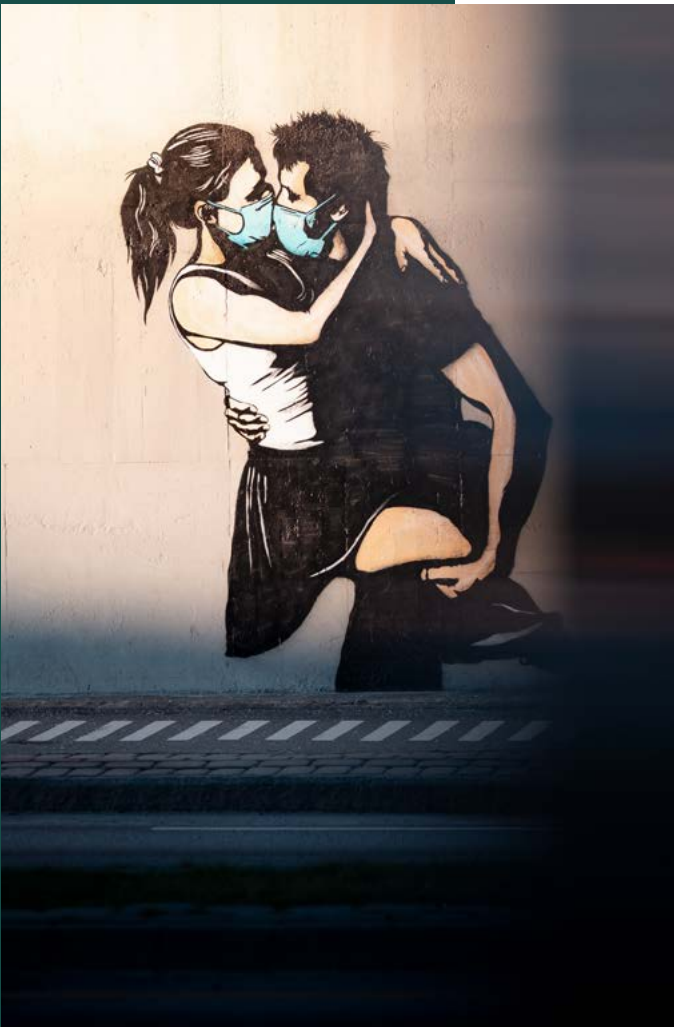
Even if there had been criticism, it was important to make those decisions based on best effort. Agile leaders would be able to learn from those failures, by reviewing the process and making adaptations. Sensitivity to failure was as much needed as leaders who took the pandemic head on. Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand's Prime Minister, had been cited as a great example of effective leadership because she had a communicative mindset and put people at the centre of her focus. Along with valuing outside opinions allowing for collaborative decisions, New Zealand had been able to deliver a range of proactive and publically supported policies that set it apart from many Western responses that had been largely reactive and suffered from political division and party politics.

DEFINING THE NEW NORMAL

Easing restrictions and coming out of lockdown seemed to be a good starting point to assess the impact the coronavirus had over the last months. Some of the Campfire participants were working in sectors that had been severely affected by the pandemic. After demand collapsed in Spring, the hotel industry was still miles away from even resembling pre-Covid-19 occupancies. In a world of uncertainty, the question at this point had been if customer's confidence would return and what the future business model would look like. The general impression had been that most future usage would be for business functions instead of parties or leisure. Whichever it would turn out to be, a return to any significant activity was not expected before 2021. For those working in risk management and business continuity, expertise had been in much more demand. Many large organizations that had previously questioned remote working had now almost completely switched over. Some of the participants expected future job interviews to almost always include the question 'Can you work from home?'

Those who had been working from home said that their workload alternated between doing nothing or being manically busy. And whilst working 14 hours a day on a computer had been keeping them busy, it did not provide any mental or physical stimulation. This had all been part of defining the new normal, as nobody was expecting the pandemic to be over before there was a vaccine. Even when it would be over, the recovery process might take five to ten years. It had been emphasized on the Campfires that much of the success of any response came down to the individual. People needed to be aware of the virus and remember why there had been restrictions in the first place, even if those directly impacted their lives. Nobody knew what the end of the year would look like, but the feeling had been that everything was possible from optimistic recovery to economic collapse and social disruptions.

When it would be over the recovery process might take five to ten years. It had been emphasized on the Campfires that much of the success of any response came down to the individual.





FALSE DAWN

July 2020

TRANSITION

July had been a month of transition. Not only was it the beginning of the second half of the year, which signified the start of the the journey towards the end of it, it was the month where countries all over the world would start to come out of lockdown. At this point, nobody knew what the next few months would look like. It was possible that a second wave would immediately follow and send the world back into lockdown. It was also possible that this was the start of the return to normalcy. While people were hoping for the latter, governments had to prepare for the worst.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Social unrest had dominated the news in June while countries prepared to move out of lockdowns. In July, many of them seemingly had successfully made the transition. However, as soon as lockdowns had been lifted, concerns about a second wave sprung up. Fuelled by warm weather, and the desire to return to as much of a pre-Covid-19 lifestyle as possible, compliance eroded. The novelty of the pandemic had faded away, and the isolation of the last few months had made people weary of the regulations. Moving towards the Autumn, would case numbers stay low, or would there be other spikes, ultimately culminating in a second wave and further prolonged lockdowns?

UK

The beginning of July saw the UK at an expected reopening, which seemed like a false start into the month. This decision had been largely attributed to economic impatience. The country would not be ready to deal with pending job losses and associated mental health issues as government-provided support had been nearing its end. People in fear of losing their jobs wanted to believe that their government cared and that they would introduce policies to help those struggling. However, the perceived reality had been that the government seemed to make things up as they were going along. Participants had felt that it had been reckless to reopen with little to no thought of the consequences, which is why trust and confidence in the government continued to erode and contributed to the general confusion. One cited example had been the supermarket chain Tesco. They had tried to use arrows to direct customer flow in its stores to reduce the risk of transmission. These guides were so difficult to follow that customers had felt that it was all but impossible to exit the stores. Another consequence been the breaking down of compliance. At the same time as health care experts had cautioned against reopening, the government's daily briefings had abruptly stopped. People had already ignored social distancing at the beaches, and it was expected that this would extend to other areas.



EUROPE

In an effort to restrict the spread of the virus, the Swiss government had issued national orders in early July. It was now mandatory to wear protective masks anywhere in country when using public transportation. The increased use of tracking apps had put additional stress on restaurant and pub owners as any case that could be traced back to them would further disrupt their businesses. While there had been reservations by the public with these measures, the general feeling had been that it was necessary to prepare for expected spikes in the Autumn.

Participants from Serbia emphasized that the difference in cultures had to be factored in. Risk sensitivity was largely based on different cultures and mentalities. In Serbia and other parts of Eastern Europe, people had been used to self-reliance and self-discipline, along with ample doses of political turbulence and social issues that disrupted life. Historically, Eastern Europe had developed a sense of tight communities and acting locally instead of waiting for government help. Notwithstanding, the situation had not been good. Case numbers had risen dramatically and had turned into a political crisis. The government had stated back in May that the battle against Covid-19 had been won and had then turned towards the preparation for the national election in June. They had provided poor guidance that had not been fact-based and as a consequence, there had been demonstrations. Much like in other countries that had experienced these kinds of demonstrations, they had been hijacked by right-wing groups that used them to further their own agenda.

In July, no lockdown had been in place and bars and restaurants were still been open. Social distancing had been largely ignored if it was *recommended*, and no law enforcement was around.

With money running out for businesses, individuals and the government, a resurgence of the virus could cause things to fall apart. By the end of July, just before the celebration of Eid, the government had decided to lock down its largest province out of fear that no one would follow social distancing guidelines in such a holiday setting.



With many European countries closing their borders again, Serbia's revenue from tourism would be heavily impacted. For decades, Serbia had been chasing living standards from the 1990s, when Yugoslavia had still existed, even though there had been little impact from the global uncertainty as Serbia had relied more on the agricultural sector than on the global supply chain network. However, the country had seen no growth for almost twenty years. The economy had already been stagnant before Covid-19, but would need some serious structural changes coming out of it.

ASIA

After a surge in case numbers during June, Pakistan had seemed to get back to business as usual. Even though the government had issued partial lockdowns, advised the public to take the virus seriously and emphasized the importance of taking precautions, regulations were not enforced. In the south of Pakistan, a provincial government had pretended to be in a strict lockdown, but besides wearing masks the public had largely ignored these restrictions. Social distancing had been shrinking and people had shown an increasing lack of awareness. Without a second wave, Pakistan's current course of action would be sustainable. As Pakistan did not have a developed national health infrastructure, the government had opted for a herd immunity approach and limited lockdowns. With money running out for businesses, individuals and the government, a resurgence of the virus could cause things to fall apart. By the end of July, just before the celebration of Eid, the government had decided to lock down its largest province out of fear that no one would follow social distancing guidelines in such a holiday setting.

MIDDLE EAST

Israel had been in the middle of a second spike during July and more restrictions had been put in place. Not wearing masks in public was now met with substantial fines. However, the panic from the first wave had gone and people were no longer stockpiling food. Some businesses were actively looking for loopholes to remain open. Gyms and health clubs had tried to relabel themselves as studios, which had been allowed to stay open. Many people had become desperate for money. Independent contractors had not been eligible for government assistance and had been struggling without any government support, with many not working since March. There had been a lack of trust in the government, despite its size and supposed focus on the Covid-19 response.

AFRICA

After June had been very tense, the number of registered cases had been down in Egypt, even though the number of deaths had been up. No one had trusted government numbers as nobody was able to verify that they were correct. People were back at work and had a completely different perception of the situation. Social distancing was largely absent in public transportation and the population seemed to be relaxed and at ease about the virus. Some regulations and restriction had been in place since the reopening and these included hotels that were only allowed to have a 50% occupancy rate and required a mandatory compliance agreement. The government also encouraged working from home and home-schooling. This had been problematic as the government did not provide any standardization requirements on school's online learning formats, further putting pressure on children and parents at home.

The end of the lockdown had been largely driven by economic reasons but that had not been the main concern in Egypt during July as the pandemic had been side-lined by the lingering conflict in Libya. Many companies had been concerned with corporate security and an increase in criminal activities and had been actively looking for contract security personnel. The government deployed troops at the Libyan border in response to the conflict and it remained the biggest topic in Egypt throughout July.

Earlier Campfires had painted a picture of good governance and a well-rounded response in South Africa only to take a turn in the July Campfires. There had been violence in the country and the military had been deployed to help with civil unrest, despite neither having training nor equipment for such a mission. As South Africa had experienced high unemployment and had a very young population, tension had always been high, even without the coronavirus. As a measure to slow the spread of the virus via shared bottles or cigarettes, the sale of liquor and cigarettes had been banned. Not only had break-ins into stores sharply increased, but the government had also deprived itself from tax revenue from those sales. People in South Africa had been desperate before the coronavirus but now it seemed to get worse. Financial support would eventually run out, leaving many more vulnerable in a country that had poor overall health and high rates of tuberculosis and HIV. One participant argued that the relation of population of South Africa to its government had been an ironic one. While they did not trust the government at all, they had still been very obedient to following the imposed rules.

There were, however, also economic pockets of excellence, that had been keeping the economy afloat. Some industries had also been better off now than they had been before the lockdown, such as mining and agriculture. South Africa's economy had been locally self-sufficient and mostly operating outside of international markets. Tourism had all but disappeared, along with tourism-related jobs.

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There had been specialists such as airline pilots or civil engineers that suddenly found themselves out of work. One commercial airline pilot had even changed fields and trained to become a plumber as he did not expect his company to resume flights at any point in the near future. Much like Serbia, South Africa had been different, with a focus on being a self-resilient culture.

US AND AUSTRALIA

The situation in the United States had been tense since March, and July proved to be no exception. Campfire participants argued that the situation seemed to get worse and that there had still been no guidance from the federal government. Questionable decisions had allowed the virus to accelerate its spread and let it take off in unforeseen directions. Wherever restrictions had been relaxed, people had quickly shown initiative and a willingness to wear masks and self-distance. After a short period of time, this initiative would have slowed down or disappeared, and a new cycle of infections would begin. One of those cycles had emerged in Texas, attributed to a lack of federal and state leadership and the politicization of important decisions. Signs of a second wave had appeared in Houston, after a false narrative of re-opening had led to a relaxation of restrictions. Followed by an increase in cases and a stretched medical system, the city was about to enact a two-week lockdown. Any progress that had been made was lost because of poor decisions, lack of communication, and weak leadership. It was questionable if any lessons had been learned as politics always factored into the decision-making progress. Many large companies located in Houston had been talking about further layoffs. The economic effects were likely to include negative impacts on the heavy spending periods around Thanksgiving and Christmas and would be felt into 2021. For better or worse, the US elections in November would be a big factor in the coronavirus response throughout the United States, either turning the situation around or continuing its divisive path of putting politics before people.

An example of miscommunication and communication breakdown had also occurred in Australia. A huge spike in cases had occurred in Victoria after a poor communication of restrictions and guidelines by Victoria's premier. Hotels that had been used as quarantine sites included the use of private security. Those private security guards had been given far too many tasks and responsibilities causing them to lose control of the situation and allowing those in quarantine to slip out and spread the virus, ultimately causing a spike. Such a loss of control could have had a dramatic effect on local health potentially costing the Australian taxpayers billions of dollars. Even after the local authorities had taken over and imposed more control there had still been no engagement with the community or any effort to do so further down the road.

DUBAI

SPOTLIGHT:

The Campfires had regular participants from Dubai's entertainment industry, who had not only been able to share insight into how the government's response played out but also invaluable insight into a sector that had been substantially hit by the coronavirus.

Throughout Spring and early summer, Dubai had been locked down. All sectors in Dubai somehow relied on tourism, so it had been unsurprising that local businesses had been struggling with the severe lack of tourists. Parts of the local population had still been going out, albeit at a much lower level. It had been a challenge to get them into theatres while also following social distancing guidelines and any open business could only fill a fraction of their pre-Covid-19 capacity. For businesses to break even, they would need to draw a 40% attendance rate. While the maximum rate allowed while complying with social distancing guidelines had been 60%, venues had been negotiating with the government for rates up to 50% to ensure that safety protocols could be maintained, and businesses remain open. This had not been a case of being over-cautious but had been a necessity to stay in business. Hotels and airlines had been announcing layoffs while trying to stay afloat. The effect of layoffs had been considered to be worse than those of the financial crisis in 2008. The government had helped locals by providing them with paid leave. Those who had not been citizens of the UAE had been put on unpaid leave. Some had been returning to work, but only at 25% of their normal salaries. Many were also expecting a second lockdown in the future. This had been one of the reasons why businesses were eager to re-open during Eid and to take advantage of the holiday. Operating regulations had been issued for different businesses, but Dubai's government had also tried to give people ownership of their own safety. There had to be an understanding that what people did outside of work would also affect the environment inside work and there were discussions about employing the quarantine model of sports and entertainment organizations where staff and crews would quarantine to allow the organization to function somewhat normally.

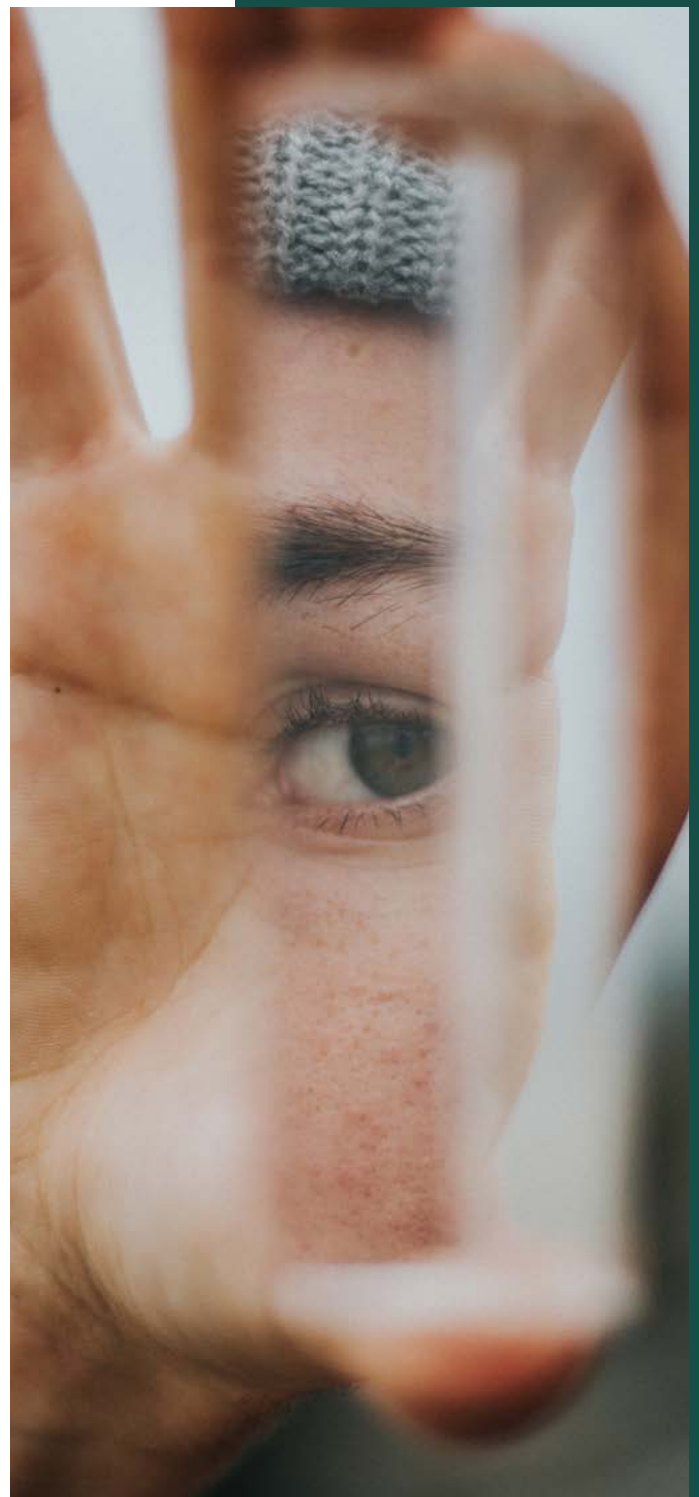
As Dubai was coming out of lockdown, the government had employed track and trace protocols and tried to provide assistance to businesses. Borders had reopened on July 7th, with testing conducted at all airports and points of entry. Whilst numbers and tracing should have been accurate, the numbers fluctuated noticeably. Most people assumed that they had been incorrect and felt that things lined up for a second wave. While the government had learned from the first wave and had been better prepared in July, there had been no announced plans or policies for another spike in numbers. Even as a new lockdown would be likely less restrictive than the first one, it was expected that some hard calls would have been made.

A SCHIZOPHRENIC EXISTENCE

Mid-July, a Campfire participant had noted that society was experiencing a somewhat schizophrenic existence. On one hand, people wanted to get back to work or school. Traffic on public transport had picked up and organizations started to show interest to hold physical conferences and meetings as early as September. On the other hand, people were also afraid of getting out of lockdown too quickly. Social distancing had already diminished, and there were fears of a second wave. More cautious businesses were planning to be able to operate in a somewhat normal environment around January 2021 at the earliest.

Getting out of lockdown would almost certainly be accompanied by spikes in cases. These were expected. No matter how calculated the numbers had been, the consensus on the Campfires had been that a second wave would undoubtedly be coming, which would be tougher from almost any standpoint. How resilient would individuals and small to mid-size enterprises be? Smaller businesses had not had any chance to refresh their resources and a return to lockdowns similar to those in March would put additional stress on them that they would not be able to mitigate. On an individual basis, people who had been dealing with issues from work, had their kids at home all the time or had been taking care of elderly relatives would at some point reach their mental breaking point. Governments and companies would need to step in to relieve some of that pressure, but would they be able to do that? More importantly, would they be aware of those issues?

Working from home certainly had worked for some people and organizations. A hybrid model would seem likely in the future, such as a couple of days in the office and the rest at home. The IT business had already been getting back into a semblance of routine and was already operating at almost 100% of its pre-Covid workload. However, as one participant told it, not being in the office had affected team synergy and interaction. For participants from the hotel industry, July had proven to be another drought month as capacity of open hotels barely exceeded the range of 5-20%. Those that had closed down were still hoping to reopen in September, with business travel picking up again. In retail, the last months had shown accelerated structural changes that would put many unsustainable shops out of business. Some had tried to change their business models and find opportunities to still do business. Another participant argued that this model would need to be about the product, and aspects of it that could not adequately be shown online: personal interaction and expert advice.



HELLO, IS THERE ANYBODY IN THERE?



As the first wave and the imposed lockdowns were slowly fading away, Campfire participants were trying to identify what had been learned during this first phase of the pandemic. One participant argued that quite a bit had been learned about crisis mismanagement from this experience with Covid-19. Some problems had been understandable as governments were trying to understand what was going on and what to do about it. As it appeared now though, governments had not used the time to prepare, whilst many organizations did apply lessons from the first wave and had used the time in between wisely. It was a popular saying that when it came to preparedness and response, people were usually not where they thought they were. Governments would have to adopt that mindset and start to think ahead of what the current situation meant and looked like. One of the issues from the beginning on had been that most governments did not listen to experts and that there was a general lack of crisis and emergency management experts in key planning groups or departments. The role of those experts would not be to give answers but rather help decision-makers with guidance, frameworks, and insights. Crises were chaotic, but not random.

The general feeling had been that there was a lack of sensible people in government and institutions and some participants questioned whether or not governments were actually listening. Had they understood what was going on, or were they rich, old, white men that had tried to make decisions based on how they were seeing the world?

An overarching strategy was needed, as many previous exercises had identified the need for a pandemic Concept of Operations. Meanwhile, government leaders had tried to please too many people at the same time. It was contradictory, to say the least, to try and ease economic hardships while at the same time trying to maintain health-related restrictions. By dropping the government press conferences on Covid-19, narrative control had been taken out of government's hands. People would now listen to what they wanted or needed to hear. Those who had been able to work at home stood in contrast to those who had to get out and risk virus infection in order to stay in the work force and support their families. Those had been the people not willing to put up with more lockdowns, regardless of the severity of the virus.

Moving forward, better preparation for the personal and economic shocks that would accompany a second wave was a critical issue. As previous pandemics had indicated, a second wave seemed almost inevitable.

Moving forward, better preparation for the personal and economic shocks that would accompany a second wave was a critical issue. As previous pandemics had indicated, a second wave seemed almost inevitable. This would result in localized lockdowns that would most probably hit those areas that had been already at a disadvantage and were less able to respond to the challenges, causing those most vulnerable to be disproportionately affected. One campfire participant argued at the beginning of the month that people would comply with regulations and guidelines to ensure that a second wave would be avoided. By the end of July, he had to restate his opinion. Discouraged by the public's inability to follow health care guidelines, he said that a second wave would be unavoidable and only relieved when a vaccine would become available. This was echoed by other participants. Many argued that discussions would still revolve around alternating between opening and locking down in two months' time and would remain so until a vaccine was developed. Until then, the virus could be merely controlled to some degree and this control could be easily lost again. More cautious voices expressed their concern about how vaccine would be allocated. Influential countries were already trying to tilt the balance of development and distribution in their favour. Would this further exacerbate existing inequalities?



POLICING DURING COVID-19



SPOTLIGHT:

June had seen massive demonstrations in the US after the killing of George Floyd. They had been rooted in the growing frustration of the systemic racism experienced by persons of colour in the United States. Whilst the issue had been acknowledged by the Campfires, they were not the place to discuss these complex social issues. With rising social tensions throughout the world and increased deployment of police and military forces to enforce restrictions, a discussion took place on one of the early July Campfires about policing. Further demonstrations and unrest in the streets were expected in the weeks and months to come, which had led to the question of what state the police was in. Racism was still a persistent issue, even though awareness had been growing and it had started to be confronted during the last couple of years. Cultural differences had been an obstacle for minorities during training and recruitment. This had only been reinforced by the elimination of community policing, which had developed trust between the various communities and the police, allowing for local recruitment and better insight into the mentality of specific neighbourhoods.

Social factors had led to additional frustrations that were increasing the risk of confrontation between youths and the police. These had included unemployment, school closures, and a lack of available jobs. On the other side, the police had been under-resourced which affected their capabilities. Some lesser crimes like shoplifting could no longer be pursued aggressively due to a lack of resources. Cuts to law enforcement budgets had also contributed to mental health problems within the police community. During times of serious events such as riots mental health experts had often been unavailable. All of this had been exacerbated by Covid-19. A further problem had been the politicization of the police force. In the UK this had already started under Margaret Thatcher and how she had dealt with the miner's strike and had been continued by Tony Blair and now Boris Johnson. The politicization of government departments that were supposed to be neutral had always led to problems and the question was, in which way the police forces would be used to possibly enforce compliance in countries where they historically had not fulfilled that role in a long time, if ever.



FALSE DAWN

August 2020

ONSET

New Zealand had been considered a textbook study in how to deal with Covid-19. Officials had received accolades for effective management and leadership, and it appeared that their method of handling the virus had worked. But the effects on the economy had been drastic, both in general and for the virtual elimination of tourism. Roughly 120 days after the first recorded case, New Zealand declared itself Covid-free. Public sporting events resumed, as did socialization. But signs appeared of new infections from various sources, leading to the lockdown of the city of Auckland. Even as New Zealand had gone hard and fast against the coronavirus and had tried to control the spread of the infection, it had been reminded in the end that the virus was part of the ecosystem and that declaring to be Covid-free meant nothing. It seemed that the only possible option was to learn to live with the virus.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Globally, there seemed to exist two different worlds. One pretended that the pandemic was over and that it was time to get back to normal as the economy recovered. The other one was afraid of a second wave, as every country that had opened up experienced spikes in cases. The feeling was that they had signed up for a 100m run but found themselves in a marathon when they showed up.

UK

The UK saw a huge increase in testing during August and reportedly had used an effective method of reporting cases that self-corrected for errors and for skewed data based on weekday versus weekend input. Even though there had been no openly designated number that marked a threshold for lockdown, there had most certainly been a number that was referenced behind closed doors and used for government assessment. There had been criticism that transparency had been lacking and that there was no visibility on what government policy and management decisions were based on. A participant from Manchester told during an early August Campfire that they had not yet hit that unknown critical number for lockdown, but many restrictions had been put in place to attempt to prevent one. During the initial outbreak, cases had spread quickly in the south. Several months forward, the north now had problems with large numbers of reported cases, which included Manchester. Unlike the situation in April, when the virus had gone through care homes and severely affected the elderly, those who were getting infected now had been much younger. Luckily, as August progressed, hospital admissions were going down in the greater Manchester area as did death rates. Those that had tested positive had either been asymptomatic and had not known that they were infected or had symptoms at the lower end of the spectrum. One estimate at that time had been that 20% of the UK's population had been infected with the coronavirus.



Manchester had also conducted a full *Lessons Learned* review that had been held with regional health authorities. These had looked at how plans, such as flood evacuations, would work in a post-Covid-19 world. Now, all evacuation and transportation efforts had to account for people affected by Covid-19, as well as those not affected by the virus but otherwise ill or weak, and those who were healthy but needed to be kept separate from the other two groups. Whilst this had further increased the complexity of the planning, it had also been regarded as a major improvement to be achieved during the crisis where it could have an immediate positive impact. An impact of the more negative sort had been the increasing amount of mental health related issues. While mental health care had already been decimated, mental health support had also been scaled down during lockdown, leaving many in need on their own. After it had received some attention at the beginning of the pandemic, mental health had taken a backseat to medical and economic issues. There was no denying the importance of mental well-being and how detrimental a prolonged lockdown, economic fears and social isolation had been on the psyche of those affected. Even those who had been working from home since the start of the pandemic had started to feel the effects. One participant had only noticed how much the situation had drained him after taking two weeks off from work and getting away from home. Working from home during the pandemic had become a less funny version of Groundhog Day. Further down south in Cornwall, locals had been bracing themselves for an influx of tourists. Surprisingly, far fewer tourists than expected showed up at most tourist attractions. However, the beaches were still packed with people and little regard to social distancing. Given that France had seen a huge spike in cases over the last weeks, and that similar developments had been mirrored in the UK a few weeks later, the break-down of compliance was a cause for worry.

Initially, the Israel Security Association had been supposed to monitor every civilian's phone to be able to better investigate and locate infection hotspots. That had not worked well for a variety of reasons and had been replaced by another application from the Ministry of Health.

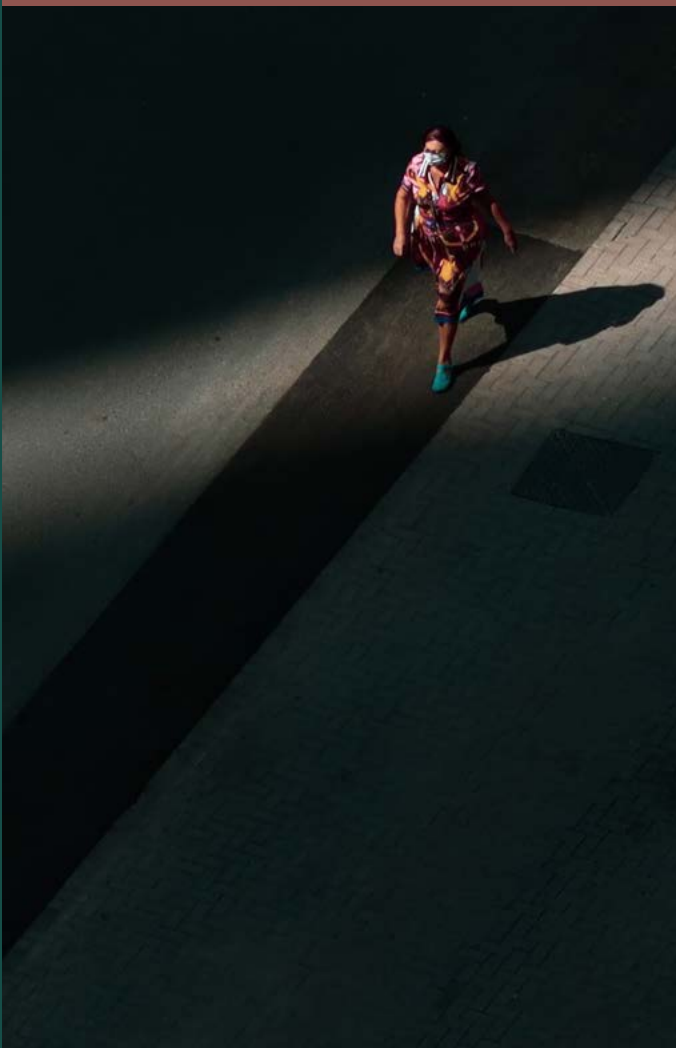
ASIA

India and Pakistan both faced challenges in a fragile environment. Cases numbers had looked high but represented only a minor percentage of the population. With regards to social distancing and other protective measures, official or business-related facilities had experienced good compliance. This had not been the case in smaller shops and offices. Here, adherence to the rules had been more lax. Day-to-day life for most people remained hard and the job market had been tough, especially for those who had been recently laid off.

MIDDLE EAST

The feeling in Israel had been that the government had learned from the first wave. Whilst they had been slow with their initial response, testing and tracing had now been put into local hands and lockdowns were also localized. There had also been a growing reliance on technology, that had not met with success and highlighted some of the issues of the government's approach. Initially, the Israel Security Association had been supposed to monitor every civilian's phone to be able to better investigate and locate infection hotspots. That had not worked well for a variety of reasons and had been replaced by another application from the Ministry of Health. This had been symptomatic for the government's approach that was perceived to be slow and change on a daily or weekly basis. A further loss of trust was attributed to local authorities making announcements on decision that were not approved in time by the government.

Dubai had seen some relaxation during July, and the government was trying to open borders with its neighbouring countries, as Dubai needed an influx of tourists to strengthen its economy. By the end of August, some cross-border commercial traffic had been allowed, but not open tourism. Infection numbers had been alternating between low and high numbers and while the UAE government had done a good job pushing out information on pandemic regulations, they did not have enough people to enforce them. At the same time, the government also relaxed some Covid-19 control measures which had caused some confusion. Passengers on inbound flights had been required to provide evidence of a Covid-19 test prior to departing for UAE destinations. However, passengers on recent flights had noted that upon arrival they had not been asked any questions or tested prior to departing for the UAE. There had been no onsite testing, nor had they been asked questions relating to potential exposure. This had led people in the UAE to switch off and become lax with measures helping to contain the virus, like social distancing.



In Dubai, adherence to social distancing had almost become a game of hide-and-seek. If people thought that no one was watching, they would not wear masks, even though there had been regulations mandating them. People were not thinking about the big picture, but solely about themselves. Meanwhile people had been leaving Dubai in droves. In an economy that heavily relied on tourism, lay-offs had been unavoidable. Expats were also looking at exit strategies as there had been little room for optimism. Those that were able to hold onto their jobs had to worry about the mental health of their children. Some of them had been more emotional and prone to bursts of aggression. Schools had announced rules that needed to be followed, but they had been too hard for first graders to follow. Kids needed to interact with other kids, but the rules in place had made that unlikely to happen while social distancing was enforced both at home and at school.

AFRICA

Continuing the trend from previous months, Egypt went into a chaotic August. As in previous months, nobody believed the numbers that had been shared by the government. There was not enough testing available, and people were afraid to go to hospitals out of fear of limited treatment and the potential to get sick in there. Daily government briefings on the situation had disappeared from view. It was still possible to find the information, but it had been buried and people would need to work hard to obtain it. With continued turmoil on the western border with Libya and internal issues near Egypt's north-eastern border grabbing their attention, people had moved on and largely started to treat Covid-19 like a mild non-threatening virus. There had been many stressful factors affecting people's everyday life and there had been no feeling that the central government had a plan moving forward. Unlike in other countries, there were no independent local community structures, so people had been left on their own. Near the end of August, the government was claiming that by the end of September, there would be zero Covid-19 cases in the country. Given that reported cases had doubled shortly after the announcement had been made, that there had not been enough people to enforce the rules, and that there had been a culture of non-compliance, this had been a truly bold statement, but one that was nowhere near grounded in reality.

Even though there had been high levels of non-compliance, some people had started to understand the need to adhere to safety regulations in order to survive. For those, the ability to put food on the table had been a behaviour-changing issue. Another recent trend had seen small and medium-sized companies merging. They were looking to cut costs, reduce staffing and trying to survive the virus-related economic downturn. As most countries had been planning to reopen schools after summer, so did Egypt.

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One of the many concerns of European countries come winter and a fully-fledged second wave had been the increased stress of flu patients on the national health systems. A fear that might now turn out to be obsolete as long as social distancing measures would be continued.

The younger the children, the more classes they would need to attend on site. Children in higher grades would take their classes online. For those attending, the government promised that schools would closely monitor the situation and take proactive steps if needed, but schools would need massive amounts of material including things like hand sanitizers. Children that went to international schools seemed to be slightly better off, as parents at these schools were more involved and responsive with decisions. Unfortunately, large classes of 50-60 kids made it hard to handle students.

AUSTRALIA

Parts of Australia had been in lockdown throughout the whole of August and were looking to remain so until mid-September when an already announced exit plan would kick in. A positive side-effect of these lockdowns, social distancing and mask hygiene in general had been that the flu season in Australia had been a complete non-issue. One of the many concerns of European countries come winter and a fully-fledged second wave had been the increased stress of flu patients on the national health systems. A fear that might now turn out to be obsolete as long as social distancing measures would be continued.

With furloughs ending, the economic impact of the pandemic could be seen as layoffs became more and more visible and even the national football league had to cut its staff in half. This had not been the only story that had made the news. The media had been giving anti-mask protests a lot of airtime. For now, these protests seemed to be confined to a small group but could grow in the future. Echoing how children adapted to the challenges of pandemic schooling, a participant shared the story of his kids being perfectly able to operate their Zoom meetings, but apparently losing the ability to communicate with other kids after their online classes had ended.



OPPORTUNITY AND DESPAIR

Back in July, businesses had been preparing to reopen in September. In early August there still had been a sense of the pandemic being over and that a return to normalcy was just a matter of weeks. At the end of August, these talks about recovery had ceased to exist. As long as furloughs had been active, short term employment had been protected. They had been planned to conclude in October, putting pressure on businesses that had relied on the scheme to maintain their workforce. Layoffs would be inevitable unless businesses model changed. In the security sector, this proved to be both a chance to reset and promote the role of security, which had been long overdue. By changing the perspective and starting to think about managing risk and not just clocking hours, the sector could be made more dynamic and collaborative. If the sector would be able to utilize manpower and technology and got better at providing risk management and solution it would soon be seen as an essential service. There had been other opportunities. Jobs would start to exist in the next few months that no one would have imagined in July or August. The IT sector had been growing exponentially as a result of Covid-19 and further emphasis would be on jobs concerning risk management and infrastructure. What had been seemingly forgotten was the fact that the UK had been on the brink of a recession just before the pandemic had set in. While the hospitality business had been hit by the coronavirus, other sectors had been impacted before and Covid-19 had just accelerated and exponentiated their failing business models. One of these had been high-street retail, which had been losing thousands of jobs per week in August. City centres had been empty and luxury retail boutiques had moved from 200 customers a day to ten. Stores had not been selling enough to keep them sustainable, and their end seemed inevitable. Other sectors such as the aviation industry were also experiencing massive layoffs. Covid-19 had also affected companies with lots of office space. As the majority of the office workforce had transitioned into home office, companies were looking for ways to adjust their contract or pull out of commitments for buildings they had no staff to fill at the moment.

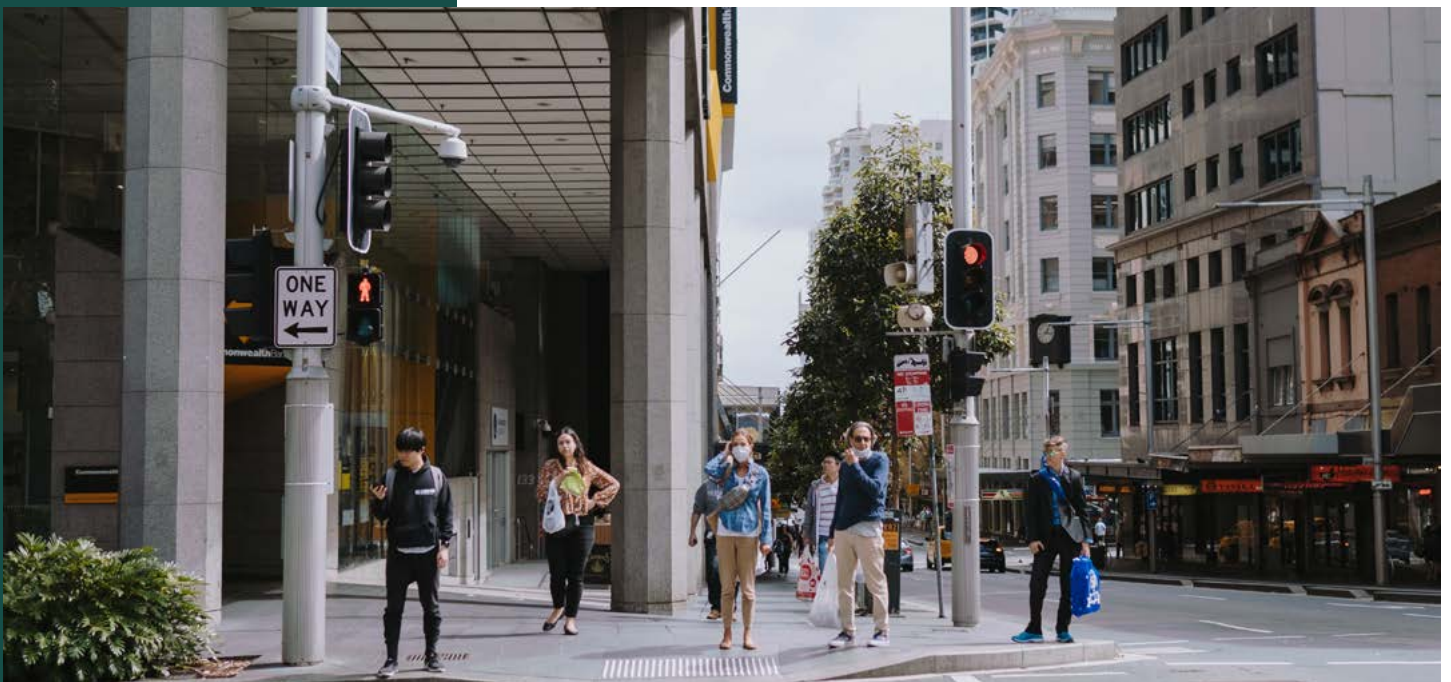


A NUDGE IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

A common trend had emerged during the summer months throughout countries that had been affected by the coronavirus. Wearing masks and keeping social distance no longer seemed to be common-sense social behaviour. Five months into the pandemic the question needed to be asked as to why people were acting irresponsibly this far into the pandemic. Either the messaging had not been right, or people had just not gotten it. It had been hard to understand why people were not following the rules since there had been a much better understanding of how the virus was transmitted. Yet there were still crowded beaches with people packed next to each other.

One of the issues had been that these regulations were perceived as being black and white. However, they had not been intended to be 100% complied with. Some of the imposed rules had been unenforceable and even contradictory. The goal had been to nudge a critical mass of people in the right direction. In general, people wanted to be told what they were supposed to do. Rather than making their own decisions, they wanted to be micromanaged.

Not following these regulations did not necessarily mean an active act of disobedience. Human behaviour had always been about survival and whether it was economically, socially or mentally, almost everybody had their own stake in the game. One of the identified problems had been language. It simply had not been clear enough. There should not have been any 'if and then' ambiguity and there should not have been a focus on fear in the messaging. Making people understand the benefits of rules and regulations would nudge them in the right direction. Changing the narrative without sufficient explanation would just increase confusion and reluctance to follow these guidelines. This would only be further enhanced by differing and unclear government messaging.



POST-GOVERNANCE:

One thing that had seemed to be common around the world was the view of how governments responded to Covid-19, predominantly with a lack of transparency and a gap in using crisis managers.

Leaders were still saying that policies would be reviewed in ten days. Few, if any, were looking a year ahead. Campfire participants agreed that the quality of a country's governance had been central to managing the crisis and would inevitably show in the depth of the recession countries would go through after the pandemic. Strong governments had a plan B, had given authority to people on the spot and had transparent communication channels. They also would have built an excess of managerial skills and cognitive diversity. There needed to be a national strategy that empowered local authorities and provided them with the necessary information and resources. If risks were configured locally and were dependent on the local risk dynamic, those on the ground would be able to make the best decisions. This included the understanding of why some areas were higher risk than others.

Other participants argued that even though global drivers seemed to be leading to a more community-focused form of governance, it was not yet clear how that new model would look like. Many problems were still waiting to be solved, and old systems tended to die hard. Regardless, the next 5-10 years would see the governance landscape severely disrupted. For now, the reality had been that democracies were heavily focused around their electoral cycles and to a certain extent also the news cycle. These had been some of the reasons why governments had tried to avoid to go on record. They had been attacked relentlessly by the press on an individual and collective basis which was detrimental to their re-electability. When they had gone on record, they had often times created more uncertainty, panic and a lack of confidence in their ability to deal with the pandemic, thus amplifying the many issues people felt overwhelmed by.





BEIRUT AND THE STATE OF THE WORLD

SPOTLIGHT:

Five months into the pandemic, it had been clear that disasters would not just stop occurring because of the coronavirus. The first Campfire of the month had been held two days after the massive explosion in Beirut, which provided a starting point into a discussion about different regimes and the state of the world. The explosion had been caused by ammonium nitrate that had been stored in the port for years, without any oversight. There had been several reasons for this. One had been the large space that port areas occupied. Another had been the issue of having to operate with fewer people due to the coronavirus and economy-related lay-offs. Ports were often the size of small cities, and frequently run by the equivalent of organized crime outfits. They had no interest in relinquishing control or making changes, regardless of the safety benefits. There had been confusion about one part of Lebanon's government, the Hezbollah. Being regarded by many as both a criminal organization and political entity, the means of dealing with Lebanon had been different from that employed with other countries. The explosion had been an example of how a nation's security had become lost in a sea of corruption and political objectives. Leaders had no interest in crisis management. They were worried about elections, retaining power and obtaining money. The explosion had also been symptomatic of long-term strategic issues dating back to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The practice of no questions asked concerning maritime cargo or destinations had been carried over from Soviet operations and had continued with corrupt ship owners, maritime officials and financiers.

Hezbollah had engaged in suspicious activities around the world. A current campaign in Egypt to collect relief funds had been met with concern whether the money would actually get to the Lebanese people or would be siphoned off along the way. One Campfire participant recalled a story from 2007, where authorities in Yemen had seized a ship that was smuggling weapons. The authorities had agreed to give two-thirds of the weapons to local tribal sheikhs and the government would keep the remaining third for itself. That had resulted in the majority of those illegal weapons making their way onto the local black market, available for purchase by anyone regardless of their intent. Another campfire participant compared his home country Pakistan with Lebanon, which had been considered to be one of the most corrupt countries in the world. An event similar to the explosion could also easily happen in Pakistan since the central government had no oversight body to monitor hazardous materials or even private security operations. This lack of oversight had been common in most poor countries. Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia had all faced significant internal problems. Oman and the United Arab Emirates had been the only stable countries in the region. There seemed to be no stability and no indicators of movement towards progress.

A Syrian project manager had claimed back in 2011 that the type of chaos experienced around the Arab Spring would never occur in Syria as it had been too stable. Saudi Arabia had also experienced internal conflict. As long as the economy was good, the country was doing well, but with oil prices plummeting, internal problems could escalate. Generally, when a country had a weak government but a strong military, it was bound to have problems. Generals who had left the armed forces would not let go of their power. During the Arab Spring, the Muslim Brotherhood had made the mistake to allow the military to join in the protests. Egypt had a long history of a failing economy and weak governments controlled by the army. The army had been good at national defence, but not at running the country. Yet currently 19 out of 26 governors were ex-Generals. Retired Generals had been reluctant to accept civilian rule because they often had millions of dollars in overseas bank accounts that would be seized if they relinquished control. They would also undoubtedly face jail time for human rights violations.

In general, there had been a lack of environmental awareness that had contributed to some of the previous outcomes. However, situational knowledge and time perspectives had always varied between countries. During the Six-Party talks on limiting nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula, a Japanese representative had commented that his country viewed long-term policy as 15-20 years in the future. For China, that perspective was 100 years. For the United States, it seemed that it often was no more than 6 weeks. The unilateral world seemed to come to an end and participants discussed what the American Age would be succeeded with? Did the world head into an Age of Russia or an Age of China? Would the US retain their dominant position? An Age of Russia was highly unlikely due to bad demographics and a socio-economic outlook on life that was still tied to Soviet days. The Age of America seemed to come to an end as the US was imploding. In August, it still seemed possible that Trump could win re-election, but it was also possible that he would lose and simply refuse to accept the results. China maintained a long-term perspective and also viewed itself as the centre of Asia. It had only negotiated from a position of strength and continued to pursue – and achieve – global reach and influence. Ten years ago, the question had been whether China would be a good neighbour. The answer had been a resounding no. What would it look like five years ahead? Would the global situation improve or get worse? Given that the pandemic was still far from over, what effect would weakened or even collapsed economies have on the international environment?





FALSE DAWN

September
2020

IF NOT NOW, THEN WHEN?

As summer was coming to an end, so did the respite from the coronavirus. This second phase had been characterized by an uncertainty of what the coming months would look like. The slight optimism from May had long since disappeared and had made way for the realization that a second wave would be inevitable. The economic impact of the pandemic became more and more visible, mental health eroded and people reached their breaking points as they tried to juggle work and family while being confined to their homes. As the challenges became clearer as the months went by, were governments prepared to make the right decisions going into Autumn, and had they learned from the first lockdowns in spring and summer?

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Infection numbers continued to rise all over the world. While some countries were certainly doing better than others, many agreed that the coronavirus would not simply disappear. The question no longer was if a second wave would come, the question was if countries had prepared for its impact.

UK

In early September and with six months into the pandemic, the UK government had still maintained a week-by-week reaction instead of implementing long-term strategy. By now, it had been clear that significant impacts from Covid-19 would continue into Spring 2021. According to one model, a second wave would spike in January and February. One Campfire participant from the UK expected the pandemic to drag on further into the next year, with lockdown policies still in effect in the summer of 2021. Another participant worried about the stability of the medical system as many problems were overlaying each other. There had already been an argument for an ongoing second wave in the UK, winter could bring additional pressure with the annual influenza season and many treatments and elective surgeries that had been postponed because of the pandemic were about to be picked up again. On top of all that, Brexit had the UK departing the EU, and it was questionable if a deal could still be reached. As the UK acquired 76% of its medicine from the EU, this could bring about the collapse of the system. It had been agreed that the UK did not have a crisis leader that was trustworthy and thought strategically.



The current UK leadership had not shown any understanding of what things would look like three to five years down the line. Given that it would likely take a decade to recover from the pandemic, this seemed to be a reasonable timeframe. However, the lack of coherent understanding and action had not been unique to the UK. There had not been any clear exit strategies in place anywhere in the world. In the UK, communications and messaging had been weaker than policy, and issuing upbeat messages without the capability to realize them had not helped. The government had also made U-turns on multiple issues.

However, things were still different from the beginning of the pandemic. A younger and more resilient population had now been catching the virus instead of elderly and vulnerable people. With many university students expected to return to campuses all over the country, students had been encouraged to get tested. As primary and secondary schools had opened some weeks prior, the effects of that would be apparent in two weeks' time. The result of opening universities back up would follow two weeks after that. The decision to return children to school had been a truly 'Wicked Problem'. On one hand there had been concern over education and social learning for children, on the other hand there had also been the concern of a rise in cases if all students returned to classes. By the end of the month numbers were going up and more severe lockdowns had already been put in place and more were expected to follow.

There had been no solid plan in place for dealing with the pandemic and moving the country forward. Business owners had wanted everyone back at work because they were losing money, but they had ended up sending employees home again after cases increased.



AFRICA

The situation in Egypt had remained dire. Official numbers cited 200 cases daily, but those numbers had not been reflective of the real situation as the government had reduced the number of random tests. Furthermore, all official data had been considered to be politically manipulated. The suspected fatality rate in the country had been 10-15%, but no one was paying attention to health issues anymore. People had stopped talking about the pandemic and instead had focused on the recent increase in prices for basic goods. People had been busy trying to survive and had started to live for today since they did not know what was coming tomorrow. The announcement of the government's deadline of October 1st for Egypt to be Covid-free had been met with indifference. People had moved past the stage of trusting leaders. They had also been divided about the guidelines. They either completely complied with them, rejected them fully or just followed them where they absolutely had to, such as accessing offices and shops. There had been no solid plan in place for dealing with the pandemic and moving the country forward. Business owners had wanted everyone back at work because they were losing money, but they had ended up sending employees home again after cases increased. Business continuity had been a problem for those who could not work from home.

Those workers had the same need to provide food and support for their families. There were 100 million people in Egypt, but it was estimated that 50% had less than \$100 in savings. If these people could not earn money, crime and civil unrest would inevitably become an issue.

School had been scheduled to start again in mid-October, now with classes entirely online. However, connectivity in Egypt was poor and expensive. Not everyone could afford it which would impact their children's education. Transportation to and from classes would also be an issue for the universities. Despite the pending influx of students, schools had no testing available.

There had been a growing number of issues around the coronavirus which had not been addressed by the government and people had started to grow frustrated. However, those who opposed the government in Egypt, disappeared.

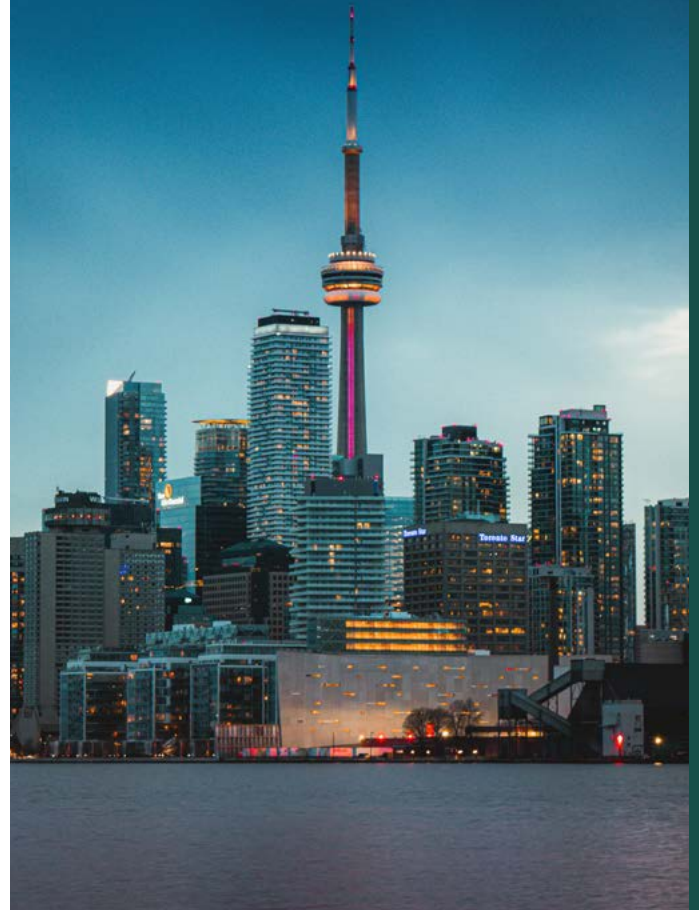
AMERICAS AND AUSTRALIA

The situation in the US had somewhat relaxed, at least in Southern California. Restrictions and response effectiveness were city specific. Some cities, like Los Angeles and San Diego, had been doing well at getting people to comply with regulations. Others had been less successful or were ignoring regulations entirely. Masks were expected indoors but different businesses provided different enforcement levels.

Due to the sheer size of Canada, the messaging varied from the East to the West. One participant from Calgary explained that there had been initial differences when the pandemic hit, that had now diverged further as time went by. In Alberta, attention had been paid to local experts rather than national or international voices. Locals had focused on their own priorities and had favoured a free economy driven mindset. Their mindset had been very different from that of the national government. The local focus had been on re-opening safely and trying to live with Covid-19 rather trying to fight it daily. Even though winter could halt some of the progress that had been made, the general feeling was that a heavy cloud had been lifted. The government was trying to prop up the tourism industry and there had been ideas floating around to permanently fund those that had been out of work. Working from home had been a mixed bag. Some had already returned to work; others were expected to be back to work by May and the unfortunate rest had been told that their return was still to be determined.

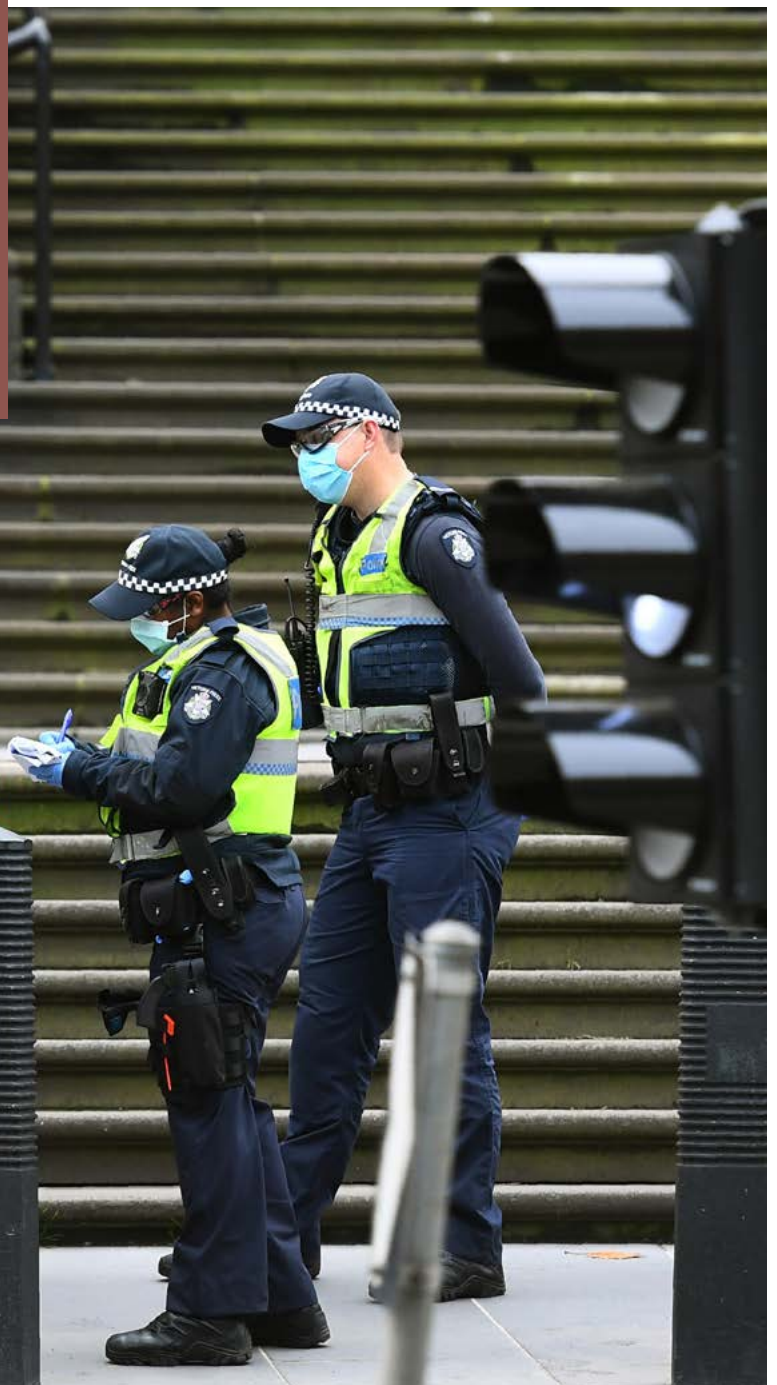
Things had been quiet in the Bahamas after some tension. The government had been planning to ease restrictions rules and to use local lockdowns instead of national lockdowns. This had come after the Prime Minister attempted to lock down Nassau without any advance warning after a spike in case numbers. As the public had been tired of lockdowns, this had led to protests and some arrests, quickly followed by the lifting of the lockdown. The last lockdown before this incident had been put in place in June. No travel had been allowed and the affect had been severe. Lockdown had put a tremendous strain on the economy, as there were virtually no tourists anymore. Anyone who came into the country had been required to remain in quarantine for 14 days. There had been an increase in domestic violence during the lockdown but also a drop in violent crime since only the police had been allowed on the streets. Those who did not take the lockdown seriously would find themselves in court. The Prime Minister was a doctor, and his relationship with medical advisors had been different than what could be seen from other heads of state. In the beginning, public spaces were closed fairly fast, followed by a nightly curfew, and finally a ban on any holiday activities. Now, the government had announced the resumption of international flights around mid-October.

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Melbourne had been basically under a curfew and lockdown, with only limited reasons and time allowed away from home. Communications from the local government had been poor and the decision-making was not the best either. The case numbers that had been presented as the threshold to lift the lockdown would be hard to achieve as they did not seem proportional to other cities or states in Australia or even globally. This lockdown could decimate the economy. However, Melbourne was not indicative of the Australian response. Most of the country had been taking a better and more effective approach by managing the outbreak through effective contact tracing and tracking methodology. Data was been critical, but it had been just a tool in the process. A broader view was needed when the impacts from response choices were considered. There needed to be more thought and agility in decision-making.



POLICING IN THE UK

As some Campfire participants during September were also active-duty police officers, a chance had presented itself to return to the question of how the pandemic had affected the role and capabilities of the UK police force.

An impact was definitely felt on staff resources and capabilities, as those with children or domestic partners they had to care for had been unavailable. Street policing had also changed as a consequence of the virus. Police officers had become deliverers of Covid-19 when they had to enter homes, which could happen multiple times a day. As a consequence, police departments were trying to limit physical contact in an effort to prevent the virus from spreading. They had also tried to maintain test and trace based on the number of people affected from shifts. This had been a challenge and had built pressure on top of that coming from normal duties. How sustainable had policing been in a Covid-19 environment? Rank and file did not trust their leadership and saw no forward planning. Universities had provided an example of an environment where curves were trending in the wrong direction, but rather than learning from that example, the data had been ignored.



In the Covid-19 environment, another challenge had been to have new laws to enforce with only a six-hour advance notice. While the public was already upset, officers had little time to feel out the subtleties and nuances in regard to dealing with the public on new regulations. The UK government had said that people should report those that violated the rule of six, meaning that there were no more than six people allowed to gather. This had been somewhat of a novelty as that advice had not been given before, not even during World War II. However, there was not much that police could do if they were called. There were not enough officers to answer every call on rule breaking. And even if one of those calls would be followed up, it would take repeat offenses before a ticket would be issued. An early fear had been that there would be rioting over an extended lockdown, as people could not take being confined anymore. Post-lockdown, the fear had been a return to crimes like looting and burglaries. It only took a small catalyst to incite chaos.

CAMPFIRE 50

SPOTLIGHT:

On the 17th of September, the ISRM hosted its 50th Coronavirus Campfire. Six months into pandemic, it was time to take a step back and evaluate what had changed, what the current situation was and what some of the possible significant developments for the next six months could be.

One of the things that had been said during the very first Campfires had been the need for a global response. Six months later, that response had not only been missing, but it had been replaced with the feeling of not knowing where this was all going. Countries had been stuck in their own silos, and there had not been enough international communication, neither from governments nor from international organizations. For societies, it had been amazing to see how quickly they had adapted to the new normal and dealing with the unknown as a permanent reality. On an individual level, everyone had been dealing with the challenges and experiences in different ways. Some struggled with the lack of interpersonal engagement during lockdowns and others with the lack of physical activity. Regulations and guidelines had also been followed or broken for a variety of reasons, some personal, most economic.

Economically, there had been winners and losers. Job losses in the hospitality and service sector had been massive. Especially those in the 18-24 bracket had felt the impact, further straining their mental well-being by not being able to afford their studies or find a job. Covid's impact on the economy had not only been felt at the individual level. Whole industries had been affected and their business models had ceased to function overnight. In March, one Campfire participant had claimed that at the end of the pandemic there would be just eight airlines left in the world. Coming out of the pandemic, the work environment would undoubtedly massively change in the months and years to come. With the exception of some that had been resistant to change, most companies had already made hybrid or full transitions towards home office allowing their employees to be more flexible, avoid the need for commuting and having a positive impact on the environment.

Politically, trust in national governments had almost completely vanished, with only a few exceptions. During this time, it had been pointed out over and over again that regional and local structures would be needed to deal with the pandemic, as national systems lacked local awareness and knowledge and would be eventually overwhelmed. During August and September, local authorities had been increasingly empowered and given more and more responsibilities to slowly move away from national strategies towards local and customized solutions.

During the first lockdowns, social unrest seemed to be inevitable the longer they would continue. Many had expected large scale protests and while there certainly were massive protests, they had been held for completely different reasons. Most countries had only experienced low-level non-compliance. With lockdowns to be expected for the next months, would that level of non-compliance remain or could a movement against Covid-measures emerge? Social media had been discussed on the Campfires, but it had been used to both share information and to provide an echo chamber for the frustrated. The ability to spread misinformation and amplify negative images could not be underestimated and would surely gain importance if people would be trapped in prolonged lockdowns over the next months.

A question that had not been answered on the Campfires had been what the end of the pandemic would look like. There had been different scenarios but all of them involved a vaccine that would be shared around the globe. In September, the discussion about vaccines had just slowly started. Some participants cautioned against unrealistic expectations or miracles as vaccines would not be able to be 100% effective. It might not work if the virus mutated, which was a certain possibility. Logistics would be another major issue in moving vaccines across the world in very large numbers. Even if the vaccine could be distributed globally, it could not be estimated how high pick-up rates would be. To achieve any meaningful effect, 60-70% of the population would need to be vaccinated. This would include a vast amount of predominantly younger people that might be feeling that they were not as affected by the virus.

With the current increase in numbers, a second wave seemed to be unavoidable and a vaccine still far away. People had gotten used to live in the new normal for now, but it was uncertain how that would change after two months in a lockdown with the associated mental pressure. Any effort and commitment to mitigate the effects of the virus would only be truly sustainable if people's expectations changed. This would only happen after people knew a first-person relation who had died of the virus. That would be the point when all of this became real.



CAMPFIRE REPORT

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