

ISRM



CORONAVIRUS
CAMPFIRE REPORT

PART 4: **VACCINES AND VARIANTS: JANUARY - MARCH 2021**

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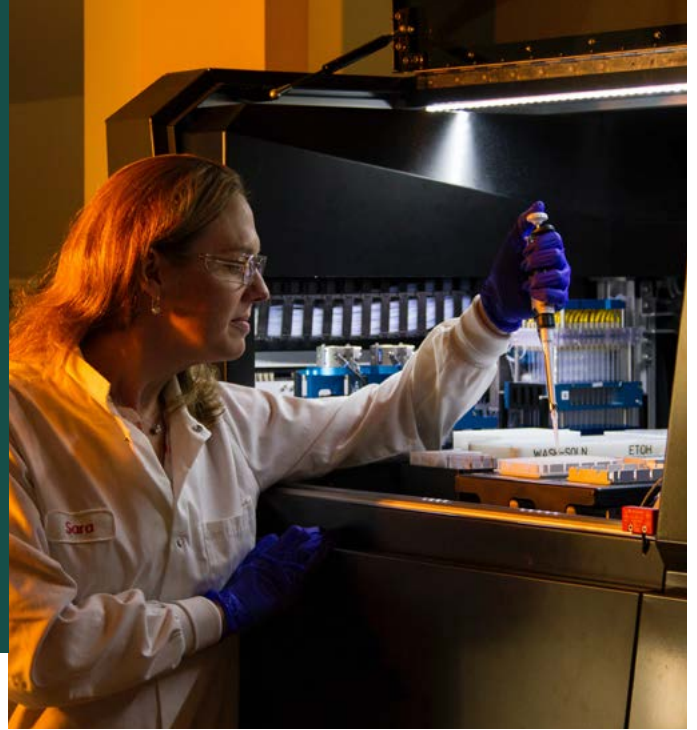
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*by Dame Juliet GERRARD, Chief Science Advisor
Prime Minister of New Zealand*

VACCINES AND MUTATIONS

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FORE-WORD:



When I first got the role as Chief Science Advisor to Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, I spent some time touring the country talking to people about priorities for science advice. In Alexandra, a small town in the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, I found myself in a primary school where a young girl was intrigued about my role and asked:

“So does Jacinda just call you when she gets stuck on the science question?”

I smiled and said that it was probably a little bit more complicated than that.

Little did I know that a year or so later I would be sitting in my pyjamas early one Sunday morning answering the phone to find it was the PM with a science question. When it came down to it, it really was that simple.

She wanted to know how virus mutations work, how worried we should be about them, and how likely that the virus causing the yet-to-be-named disease might mutate into something more sinister.

Luckily, I am a biochemist and so had the basics top of mind. At that stage in the pandemic, scientists were observing that the virus responsible for COVID-19 was mutating relatively slowly. The remarkable thing at that time was just how well adapted it was to human hosts from the get-go. There was no strong selection pressure for mutation. The gradual sequence drift actually proved useful in that we could track the passage of the virus from person to person, adding huge strength to our elimination strategy in Aotearoa New Zealand.

By the end of 2020, we were sequencing the viral genome of every case and using it in real time to support our contact tracing.

But a year into the pandemic the mutation landscape changed. With billions of cases of infection there had been all too many opportunities for the virus to encounter those rare chance mutations that made it more transmissible – and mutate it did. As I write, the COVID-19 news globally is full of the surge in new variants that the world now faces, especially the highly transmissible Delta variant, which is quickly becoming dominant worldwide.

Nerves are fraying as the world watches and waits to see whether the vaccines are effective against these new variants, and whether we will need to quickly change the vaccines to stay ahead of these changes. So far, so good – but what next?

Pondering these issues, I was delighted to accept this invitation to write the foreword for the ISRM Coronavirus Campfire Report. I read with interest the preceding parts of the Campfire Series, and valued the effort that had been made to capture and publish reflections in real time. Hindsight is a powerfully distorting lens and it is all too easy to forget how the thinking has actually played out globally, and instead rationalise what we must have been thinking in the light of what has happened since. So I was particularly pleased to read the captured reflections on the variants and the vaccines – eye witness accounts from around the world on a large-scale experiment playing out in real time, with tragic consequences.

We are now at a fascinating point in the trajectory of the pandemic. As someone who has had a front row seat in the Aotearoa New Zealand response, I've kept a close watch on all the data that have appeared globally and kept in close contact with my counterparts overseas. One of the most useful summaries I have seen appeared this weekend in the Atlantic, by Pulitzer prize winning journalist Ed Young.¹ He put forward three basic principles to help us understand the global trajectory from here:

- “1. The vaccines are still beating the variants
2. The variants are pummeling unvaccinated people
3. The longer Principle No. 2 continues, the less likely No. 1 will hold”

It has already become rather tired to say that no country is safe until all countries are safe, and bemoan at the same time the complete lack of international coordination in terms of vaccine distribution. So while the principles make a useful guide to predict how things may play out, they also represent a missed opportunity to act to maximise vaccine efficacy. My fervent hope is that the advent of mRNA technology, coming as it does with the potential to rapidly change the sequence of the vaccine and scale-up production, will enable us to stay ahead of the virus and accelerate the end of the pandemic.

Until then, I'll continue to closely watch how the race between vaccination efforts and the development of variants plays out – with my phone at the ready for the next science question.

¹ [*The Danger of Delta Holds to 3 Simple Rules - The Atlantic*](#)



Dame Juliet GERRARD

Chief Science Advisor
Prime Minister of New Zealand

24th June 2021



VACCINES AND MUTATIONS

January 2021

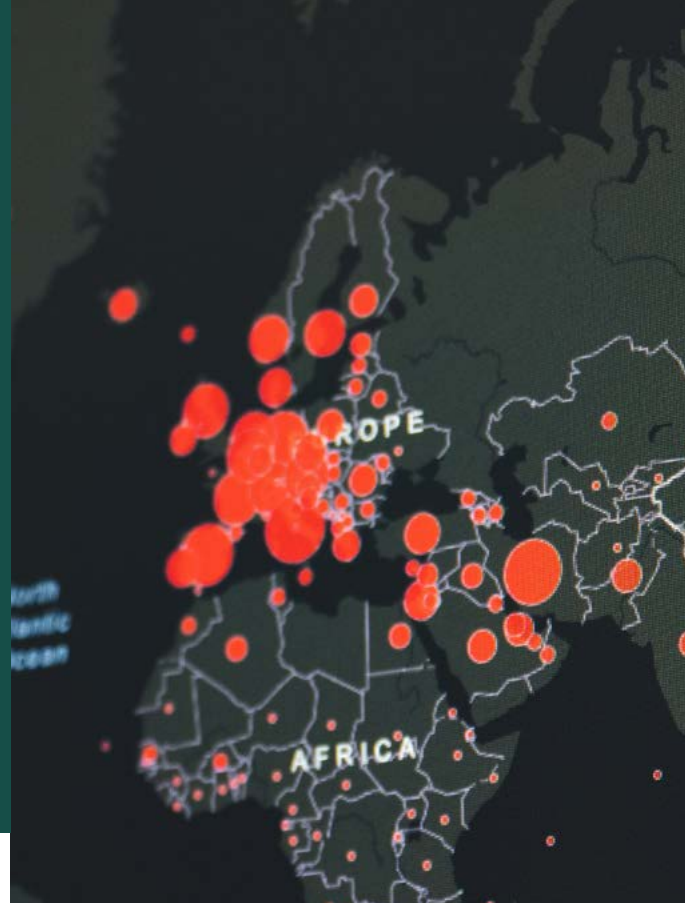
SHATTERED HOPES

As the world entered 2021 it also entered the second year of Global Pandemic Coronavirus. The last months of 2020 had seen the successful development of several vaccines and there had been a general feeling of hope around Christmas. In the first week of January all that hope disappeared, as new variants of the virus emerged, and the possibility of renewed lockdowns was openly talked about. The Coronavirus was far from gone and with the surge in infections the situation remained uncertain.



GLOBAL SITUATION

January started with pictures of an angry mob storming the US Capitol after being incited by President Trump and potentially threatening the safety of the representatives working in the building. The shock that went along with the event was one of the many negative headlines of the month. Vaccination processes started off slowly and with a lot of scepticism about the safety of the vaccines. Many people had reached mental breaking points and Covid-fatigue was spreading. The state of the world was that Covid-19 was starting to become a class issue: the poor around the world seemed to get proportionally more affected than the rich. With regards to the end of the pandemic, not every country would come out of it at the same time or under the same conditions. For now, most countries were biding their time and tried to keep things under control until the vaccination process would pick up.



UK

For the United Kingdom, 2021 started between a rock and a hard place. Even though the vaccine had been available for a couple of weeks, the vaccination was not moving forward as fast as needed to effectively counter the growing number of infections. The glimmer of hope that had been felt during the last weeks of December was replaced by renewed lockdowns and the realization that the NHS was working at its limit as well as a general feeling that the worst was still to come. The impact of the virus on the NHS was growing in such a way that it was now feared it could run out of capacity and reach its breaking point by the end of January. UK leadership had been continuously criticized throughout the pandemic for only planning two to three weeks ahead and not communicating well within and outside of governmental structures. Despite inconsistent communication, Boris Johnson also continued his habit of only sharing good news instead of appropriately reacting to an eroding situation, causing people to start losing trust and hope in their struggle against Covid-19. UK Campfire participants were expecting that the pandemic would become more intense and personal. The personal experience of seeing relatives in intensive care would change the perception of the people and make them accept that the situation affected everyone. For now, there was still scepticism and a very loud minority that claimed that Covid-19 was fake news.

EUROPE

Switzerland was facing a challenging situation as well. Even though the health minister had taken hard and effective decisions initially, there were relaxations when numbers hit a certain low. Since then, the situation got out of hand as Switzerland did not prepare for a second and third wave. Although it seemed that the government had understood the situation, they did not make any long-term decisions. All this caused a lot of confusion in the business sector as the lack of orientation left business owners on their own, not knowing what a worst-case scenario would look like. It was expected that 2021 would be a tough year, where parts of the economy would have to be rebuilt and reorganized. While some would be able to overcome this hardship, others would certainly be lost. There was little confidence that the government would remember those in dire situations.

For Germany, 2021 was going to be an election year. Politicians would try their best to gain favourable public opinion. The looming question had been who would replace Chancellor Merkel and if that person would be as effective as she had been during the pandemic, protecting both economy and people. Many politicians had already started to position themselves in her own party as potential successors.



The riots were considered an extreme reaction that went against Dutch culture but showed the consequences of prolonged pressure on society.

Yet, the seemingly effective way in which Germany had been responding to the pandemic was put into question with rapidly rising infection numbers and a growing opposition to pandemic measures. The economic consequences of lockdowns had already increased existing tensions and with recent spikes there would be no end for the lockdown any time soon. Over 2020 conspiracy theorists had blended with right-wing extremists and now formed a small but very vocal minority claiming to fight against government oppression. German participants of the campfire warned that the situation was not as stable as it seemed and that it might only need a spark to incite a wave of right-wing extremism.

The Netherlands was in a prolonged lockdown with an additional curfew. During the first weekend, people in every major city went out to protest against the measures. The situation calmed down after police forces focussed on the ongoing riots and prosecuted those that were responsible for property damage. The riots were considered an extreme reaction that went against Dutch culture but showed the consequences of prolonged pressure on society.

ASIA

Singapore was doing well during January, allowing the first travellers back. Vaccinations started for essential workers even though uptake was voluntary. One area of frustration was the lack of homogenous rules. While some people were allowed to do international business travel, others were forced to stay home after returning from work. The pandemic became an issue of social class here too.

MIDDLE EAST

Israel started 2021 with great hope for the future due to the rigorous vaccination programme. Out of a population of 9 million, 3 million were already vaccinated by the end of January. Most of the month was spent in Lockdown as results of the vaccination programme were not yet visible and new mutations made their way into the country. The population remained hopeful and saw the vaccine as the way out of the pandemic.

The situation in Dubai was described as business as usual. Despite heavy fines for not wearing masks, people were still walking around without them, stores were open, and flights to high-risk countries were still allowed. The government seemed to be primarily focused on empowering the economy. With 93% of Dubai's population below the age of 55 years, the mortality rate had been relatively low since the start of pandemic as well as the pressure on the health care system. The general opinion was that Dubai could not afford to go back into another lockdown and should be dedicated to getting businesses back on the right track. During January there were already talks about when it would be possible to get back to 100% working capacity, but near the end of the month new cases spiked.

AFRICA

Although public events were still on hold, Egypt would host the world's handball championship in January. There would be no audience for any of the games and some national teams already left the country as players and staff were tested positive for Covid. Despite these cases, the organizers put every conceivable effort in ensuring that everyone would be safe throughout the duration of the event, by enforcing strict protective measures.

Outside of the event, the government also took steps to get control of the situation. They started to impose a fine for anyone not wearing masks inside of public buildings or public transportation. Within the first day, estimates were that around 1.5 million people were fined. From one day to another, the number of people wearing masks jumped from a few to over 90% of the population. Additionally, the government started to force the biggest businessmen of the country to facilitate the vaccination of the population. Each one of those was supposed to adopt 2 million people and make sure that they would get vaccinated.

On top of a curfew, people were not allowed to go to beaches in South Africa as there were concerns that the virus would be transmitted there more easily. It was hard to assess the situation and many people did not know what would happen on the day the country would finally open up again.

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The national strategy was perceived to be a mutual agreement between the government and the population. It had been clear from the beginning that any decision would be made based on data available at any point in the crisis.

AUSTRALIA / NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand started Covid-free into 2021. The country had completely closed down initially, knowing that the health care system had only limited capabilities. The messaging was clear in telling the population that this would allow them to have a future without Covid-19 at the price of throwing a wrench into the economy. The country became a clear example of how to deal with the pandemic by communicating effectively and being as transparent as possible. The national strategy was perceived to be a mutual agreement between the government and the population. It had been clear from the beginning that any decision would be made based on data available at any point in the crisis, and that there had been a constant monitoring and on-going assessment of the situation.

From a geographical point of view New Zealand also benefited from being an island, which made effective lockdowns possible. In January, businesses were almost back to normal. The initial lockdown did not cause as much harm as many expected as it did not last for long and because the economy was rejuvenated by the influx of New Zealanders returning to the country with highly paid jobs. There were a few cases of Covid-19, but they were isolated and could be traced back to individuals that had been in touch with the initial Covid patients. An effective mapping system was put in place that allowed authorities to quickly trace any potential contacts and proactively allow the isolation of potentially new cases.

Australia started the year with few cases as well but had regionally varying measures in place that were implemented by the local government. There were regions where people could walk freely without masks on, and others where it was mandatory even though there had not been a single registered case in weeks. As Australia was also hosting the Australian Tennis open over the last fortnight in January, every international visitor was tested and put in quarantine if there was any hint of a positive result.

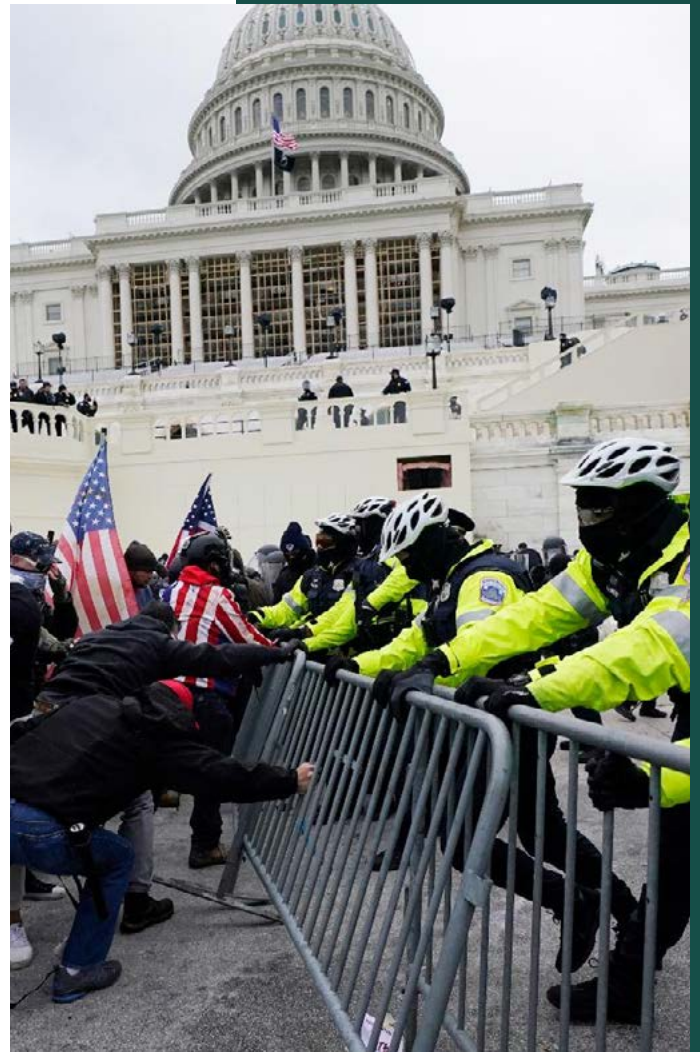


UNITED STATES

After losing the election in November, President Trump would end his tenure in the White House and Joe Biden would take over the helm of a deeply divided country during January. The situation had been heating up during the last months, especially following the election. The general consensus was that Trump would have actually won the election had it not been for his mishandling of the pandemic. Far from conceding defeat, misinformation about a stolen election and voter fraud was widely circulated and tensions erupted into a storm on the US Capitol on January 6th. President Trump legitimized the idea that if he did not like the rules, he would not follow them.

This led to encounters where people were calling out that wearing masks was not what freedom looked like. In some federal states, masks were only mandatory in stores and more specific in grocery stores and were not worn in the many sports events taking place or the fully operating schools. Not following the rules had been normalized and an armed insurrection became a worrying possibility for the remainder of Trump's presidency after the events at the Capitol.

There were many questions around the easiness with which the rioters overcame the barricades and broke into the building. More so since the Capitol had its own dedicated police force. They had the plan and the capacity to mitigate such an attack. Campfire participants argued that there had been a conscious effort to weaken the operational level of security and were wondering if and how that would impact US internal politics. While the investigations were still running, January 20th marked the end of a controversial period in recent US history. The administration changed, and the start of Joe Biden's presidency was accompanied with genuine relief and the hope of the US to turn around its Covid-19 response.



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A SLOW START

As vaccines had become available in the last months of the year, many countries immediately started their vaccination programmes, although most of them started out very slowly. Among the first to be vaccinated were first responders working for the health care sector, people from high-risk groups and the elderly. While lockdowns were widely seen as just transporting a problem further into the future, vaccines allowed a real solution to the pandemic and gave people much needed hope and confidence to return to a life of relative normalcy. However, the high demand of vaccines and the amount of misinformation around them posed several challenges.

First, immediate mass production to satisfy the expected roll out was almost impossible to achieve and would take time to be built up. Even with increased production capacity, delivery around the world would be a second major challenge. Costs for aviation transfers rose approximately five times compared to pre-Covid times and there was a lack of cargo airplanes. Passenger airplanes were used to also transport cargo, but with the current lack of civil flights, they were not available in the needed numbers. Second, the vaccination process itself was a challenge. A variety of issues slowed the process down such as mobility impediments that had not been considered. Finally, there was a serious case of vaccine hesitancy and scepticism. People were not convinced that the vaccine would be the best choice for them. Whenever there was a gap in appointments, few wanted to take leftover doses of the vaccine during the early stages. During the first weeks of the process, even vaccination centre staff did not want to take these doses up. Additionally, some people preferred one vaccine over another or had the misperception that they would just need one session to be fully vaccinated. Besides a positive awareness campaign there was the need to be honest with the population regarding the limitations of the vaccine. Global competition prevented countries to get the required amount of vaccine and slowed the distribution process down. Early estimates argued that it could take five to six years to vaccinate the population of the whole world, renewing the call for international cooperation. This seemed to be a serious challenge as one could already see vaccine nationalism across Europe. Participants criticised the approach in which it was reported on the situation. There were no mentions that effective vaccination programmes were due to nationalistic reasons or because some countries were able to take large quantities by outbidding everyone else. The public was not informed about the challenges with production, logistics and delivery of the vaccines, and expected unrealistic results as a cause.



NOT AN END-ALL SOLUTION

The current situation with lingering infections and seasonal spikes was expected to remain for years to come. While Campfire participants believed that there would be an opening for activities during summer, there could be a potential return to lockdowns due to new mutations in the later part of the year. However, many governments were not prepared for a second wave even though there had been exhaustive discussions about the serious consequences. Apart from possible repercussions in coming elections, there was almost no accountability for governments. Governments were responding to incoming information on a week-by-week basis. The assessment of the situation was predominantly done by medical experts, with politicians having to take a decision based on the presented information. While politicians made ambitious announcements, the situation indicated otherwise.

As parliaments did not hold governing bodies into account for their decisions, frustration with governments caused political trust to erode and sparked many of the protest and fringe movements that now caught the public's eye. In a post-factual world where lies could be spread without much interference it was long overdue for governments to get their communication right and show that they were in control of the situation. Part of that would be to develop a long-term strategy on how to proceed after getting in or out of a lockdown and how to mitigate the consequences of the Coronavirus in the daily lives of people. Lockdowns were not the end-all solution, especially when they were just put in place to prevent the virus from spreading without any other plan. Lockdowns were also different from region to region due to societal and regional variables. There were advocates of early harsh lockdowns with a ban on international travel to face the virus head on. However, as in the case of England, the border was only closed 10 months after the beginning of the pandemic, and many thought that the Coronavirus would not spread to Europe. This had started the chain of just reacting to the virus instead of trying to get ahead. As more infectious mutations were discovered, pro-active planning was in high demand again.



THE LONG RECOVERY AHEAD

Much like governments, some higher management in businesses also thought that the situation could resolve within a couple of weeks even though for many business sectors the pandemic meant a three-to-five-year problem. Some participants believed that during the upcoming winter there would be a lockdown again. At the beginning of the year, the hospitality sector in the UK still not recovered from the many hits it had taken during summer 2020, but there was some positive outlook for the second half of 2021 as booking and events started to be planned in greater numbers and with more confidence. The influx of tourism during the Christmas period provided some hope, as local economies restarted during this time. However, hospitality businesses mostly ran with only one-third of their capacity while others had no means to operate at sustainable levels. The event industry was similarly affected and was only looking to open up again around September if the vaccination programme would pick up and if people would actually feel comfortable coming back to stadiums and venues. Businesses that were dependent on physical delivery were struggling. This had been especially true for gyms and martial arts classes. While some aspects could be transitioned into online courses, the digital could not replace the physical. Not seeing any exit strategy would prolong the hardship and would put additional stress on the private sector. Those who relied on physical labour had additional stress that caused a reluctance in taking tests. If tested positive, they would not be able to work and not get paid or even lose their jobs. As there was insufficient social protection for these vulnerable groups, they could be potential drivers of the pandemic out of sheer necessity. As with everything, there were also businesses that profited from the pandemic. Those who had been working in security management had significantly more work to do, especially when borders and travel were involved or rumours about another harsh lockdown appeared, since the often changing and inconsistent messaging was causing confusion.

SETBACKS

One of the recurring issues of the pandemic had been compliance. Social distancing and mask wearing were questioned and ignored time and time again and with growing frustration about lockdowns and missing orientation it became harder to convince people to adhere to the measures. In the absence of a feeling of social responsibility people started to follow their own rules, due to inconsistent policies and the inability to enforce existing measures.

Campfire participants argued that compliance only mattered to those who saw themselves as integral parts of society. During crises, people tended to become more individualistic, even though human nature in general is driven towards being more collectivist than individualistic. There was also the tendency for states to become more individualistic and less cooperative with the rest of the world. January saw naming and shaming on an international level. New variants were labelled after countries' names, which had resulted in racist attacks. Despite globalization and interdependence, the world had made a step backward.

Within the national collectives, there were those that tended not to identify with societal goals and which manifested increased tribalism within society. With their governments seemingly not caring about them, they saw themselves justified to revolt with non-compliance to the measures. Additionally, those who followed the measures were thought of as unable to comprehend the situation. An easily recognizable version of this tribalism had been apparent during the Trump presidency, and with the emergence of conspiracy theory groups such as QAnon and increasingly vocal anti-vaxxers.





Despite the pushback, 100% compliance was neither necessary nor desired. There would always be people who broke the rules, either out of Covid-fatigue, wanting to take a stand or simply because there was no visible enforcement. After almost a year into the pandemic non-compliance should be expected and to a certain degree accepted. Different countries also experienced different levels of compliance due to regional and societal differences, which could be well compared when considering masks. In a dictatorship like Saudi-Arabia people followed exactly what their government demanded. Thanks to consistent messaging and strict enforcement through the police forces, people were wearing masks everywhere, even when riding alone in a car. After lacking compliance during the last months of 2020, Germany was back to high levels of mask compliance as the country saw massive spikes in infections. Conversely, with a vaccine programme on the horizon and frustration about the most recent lockdown, mask compliance was visibly low. Some Campfire participants called out for more restrictive measures to achieve stricter compliance, other participants advocated to be more consistent with mask-wearing and government messaging but to ease off from large-scale lockdowns to focus on partial and directed lockdowns.

ONLINE SCHOOLING AND MENTAL HEALTH



While large scale lockdowns kept infection numbers down, they also had massive effects on the mental and physical health of people, especially children. There was a lack of models on how to restructure the education system to allow children to cope with all the changes and to gain some sense of how schools would operate in the future. It was easy to forget that young children had spent a significant amount of their lives in lockdown. That had a huge impact on their social behaviour and education. The mode of delivery for classes had completely changed and students were now learning in a completely different environment with different support from their parents. While some children were flourishing with their learning process because they were able to learn at their own pace from the comfort of their home, others had to attend online classes while there would be an abusive parent in the next room. By spending the day in front of a screen, children might be better able to connect online but were gradually disconnecting from any social interactions. Children experienced more emotional swings and found it increasingly difficult to socialize with other children their own age after being isolated. There was also an increase of children being admitted to hospitals due to mental health issues. There were some community initiatives with neighbourhood gatherings, where people were able to talk with neighbours and allow children to come together which had a good mental impact. The idea was to involve children in as many activities as possible that are safe to do. They needed to get out of the house for whatever activity that offered joy to them. Physical health was the key to good mental health and people did not exercise as before the pandemic, which prompted Americans to label the virus Covid-10, for the weight every person seemingly gained. Besides the mental impact of the pandemic, the physical impact would also take an immense amount of time and effort to overcome.



VACCINES AND MUTATIONS

February 2021

TWO SIDES OF THE COIN

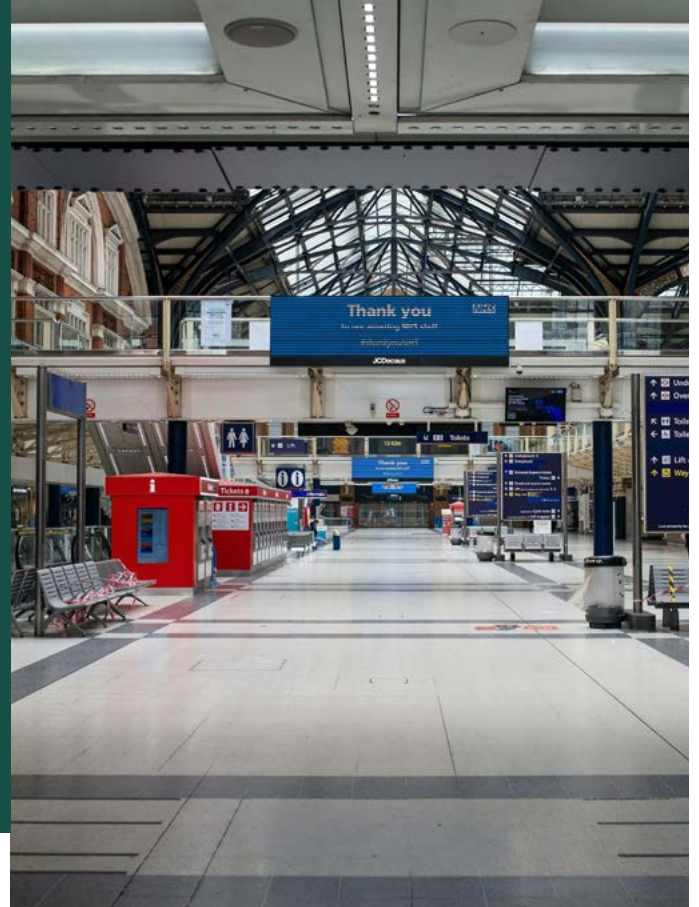
January had seen renewed lockdowns that most countries had continued into February. While there had been still a lot of uncertainty around the vaccination process, it had now picked up speed and the first countries had reached important vaccination milestones. The majority of countries were in a state where they could not yet see the effects of the ongoing vaccination efforts which led to simultaneous talks about reopening schools and major events while at the same time expressing concerns about having to move back into lockdowns in the near future. Having experienced uncertainty for several months, many people felt that they had reached the end of their rope and the concern of mental health issues became one of the dominant topics all the while the general feeling had also become more relaxed with sunnier days and many people started to feel that they would make it out of the pandemic sooner or later.

GLOBAL RESPONSE

Some of the big winners of the pandemic had been billionaires all over the world who had become even richer. The pandemic had not created a more fair society but had contributed to deepening the rift of society. Another process had also started slowly. As some countries had gone ahead with their vaccination programme, huge parts of the world had been left out of the loop as they could neither afford or receive the required amount of vaccines.

UK

After a slow start in January, the vaccination programme was now in full swing in the United Kingdom. Uptake had improved massively and where there had been reservations before people were now lining up to receive their shot. The government had taken first steps to ease up measures and with the first sunny days of the year, the mood had taken a turn for the positive. While there were already talks about vaccinating the younger population, the rest of Europe had seemed to get worse with new mutations rapidly spreading and delayed vaccination programmes. For the UK, it was now important to find balance between vaccinating the population and further reopening the country. It was important to keep in mind that whenever there had been a release from lockdown, numbers had started to rise again, and that the vaccine was not the key to everything. There was still the danger that vaccine-resistant mutations would negate the successes of any vaccine programme.



One step to prevent new variants coming to the country had been to quarantine travellers for a period of ten days. Travellers would be assigned hotels through the government. For people working in the hospitality this had come as a last-minute surprise for which they had not been preparing. Now they had the responsibility of guests spending ten days in isolation while the hotels had no plans of testing their own staff.

EUROPE

The people in Ireland received mixed messages from their government throughout February. The existing lockdown had been extended almost on a week-by-week basis and there was confusing communication around the vaccination programmes with regards to the number of available doses and administered vaccinations. Nurses had been working double shifts to deal with the situation in the hospitals, employees had been told to turn their bedrooms into offices for the foreseeable future and there had been widespread criticism on the absence of any plan for the current situation. Children were struggling and suicides had noticeably increased amidst economic hardship and participants expected that these mental health issues would last for a long time. The situation only improved towards the end of February when the vaccination programme picked up speed.



With additional emerging reports about several cases of blood clotting as a side effect of AstraZeneca, people were starting to refuse to take the vaccine further increasing the frustration within the countries.

Much like the rest of Europe, Slovenia had a lockdown as well as a curfew in place with only essential stores open for business and mandatory home-schooling. People had been concerned about the new variants the effectiveness of the vaccines.

Since December, Germany and Austria had been in a lockdown. As numbers had been slowly declining at best, the government still refrained from deciding on harsher lockdown procedures. After months of following the rules, compliance had started to break down as people had been weary of the long ineffective lockdown and the missing political direction. With additional emerging reports about several cases of blood clotting as a side effect of AstraZeneca, people were starting to refuse to take the vaccine further increasing the frustration within the countries.

A similar frustration erupted into riots in the Netherlands when the government imposed a curfew. Deemed unacceptable by the population as it related to dark times when the Netherlands suffered under Nazi occupation, people went to the streets, rioting and looting stores. Police forces cracked hard down on them and arrested a huge amount of the violent protesters. Their strict intervention had prevented worse damages and continued protests, but the fact that such a riot could occur within the Netherlands in the first place had been a shock for many.

MIDDLE EAST

Many good news came out of Israel during the month. The month had started with the successful trial of a new medicine that helped with treating severe cases of Covid-19. With almost 50% of its population vaccinated the hard lockdown would also come to an end by the end of February, allowing businesses to reopen, even though schools would remain closed for the time being. A further announcement promised grants for those who had lost their jobs during the pandemic but had taken up training programmes provided by the government. Unfortunately, some misinformation and hesitancy around the vaccine persisted. Many teachers were resisting vaccination, prompting a discussion if the government would need to force people in essential services to take the vaccine. A court case had been already underway that would decide if something like that would be possible. As the country prepared to completely reopen, many felt that it was a major problem that there had been viable exit strategies after one year into the pandemic. Every country had been completely alone in that situation and had to face the situation individually with their own resources.

In the United Arab Emirates, the government prioritized to use their resources to keep the economy afloat while also implementing strict measures against the pandemic. Infection numbers had stayed relatively high and the open shopping centres and food courts had been seen as concerning.

Neighbouring Saudi-Arabia continued to manage the spread of the virus. Tests had now to be taken regularly with the results being stored in a mandatory app. Negative results allowed access to a variety of places.

AFRICA

Participants from Egypt had felt that strict rules and penalties were needed to abide to the regulation. During Egypt's first wave, people had acted carelessly as the government did not take any serious measures against the Coronavirus. Even with rising infection numbers, it had been an unusual sight to see people wearing masks. Even though more and stricter rules were enforced after the first wave, the government itself did not comply with the standards it had set for itself. The only difference now had been that unmasked policemen now fined unmasked citizens.

South Africa had been going through a rough period. Alcohol abuse had become a coping mechanism for people who had nothing to do and had been depressed because of the situation. As it happened, few had understood the reason and the underlying psychological pressures, but participants hoped that there would now be a re-evaluation of the situation and that some effort and care could be brought to those afflicted. During February, with rising infection numbers and a previous easing up on measures, tighter regulations had been passed in the hopes that they could be eased again in due time.



Even though more and stricter rules were enforced after the first wave, the government itself did not comply with the standards it had set for itself. The only difference now had been that unmasked policemen now fined unmasked citizens.



Mid-February the fourth largest city in the United States experienced a blackout for a whole day. A severe snowstorm had knocked out Texas' critical infrastructure and left millions of people in the dark and without heat or running water throughout the state.

AUSTRALIA

After an outbreak of B.1.617, the region of Victoria in Australia had gone into a five-day lockdown. The Australian government had used local lockdowns as the primary measure to keep infection rates under control whenever an outbreak occurred. Australia also seemed to have everything under control with their vaccination programme and had already started to distribute additional vaccines to low-income countries under the COVAX agreement.

UNITED STATES

As the United States went through the transition period of changing offices, the country stayed behind the curve, even though the world was watching closely on how things would develop. For the time being some inconsistency in messaging remained between the federal government and the CDC but the vaccine programme moved ahead at increasing speed. Mid-February the fourth largest city in the United States experienced a blackout for a whole day. A severe snowstorm had knocked out Texas' critical infrastructure and left millions of people in the dark and without heat or running water throughout the state. Even though many had hoped that 2021 would be a better year, the Texas Freeze had demonstrated that issues such as climate change had not gone away and would have a continued impact on people's life.

THE POLITICS OF VACCINES

Throughout February, vaccination programmes had been a regular talking point on the Campfires and many discussions revolved around the topic in one or the other way. Early in the discussion, it had been widely accepted that it was necessary to continuously develop existing vaccines to deal with the new variants. While Johnson and Johnson provided a more generic vaccine, other companies had planned with a third shot on top of the main two shots, or, as in the case of Pfizer, had planned for special vaccines that directly targeted the new variants so patients could be kept 100% safe. It seemed to be a high probability that there would be three to four vaccines every year depending on how much the virus would mutate.

Regarding these future mutations, participants urged that the danger was not yet over. It could just be a matter of time until the hospitals would start to become overcrowded again if the vaccines would not move rapidly forward on a global scale. Governments had been planning for worst-case scenarios and the breakdown of the medical system. After the experiences of the first two waves and the onset of triage or mass burials, governments were hoping to never need to use these plans.

As the vaccination process had picked up, many of the processes seemed to be better organized communication had much improved from the government side. For the first time since the start of the pandemic, some participants felt that a strategic plan for the future existed. However, for some governments this seemed to include stockpiling vaccines as they had become the focal point of national strategies. Other participants claimed that there was still a lack of strategy and that governments were still not ahead of the situation. One of the arguments had been the discovery of the B.1.617 variant. When the new variant was finally acknowledged, cases had already skyrocketed. Yet, the British government had decided to ease restrictions. While it had been understood that the end of restrictions was completely dependent on successful vaccination programmes, the sheer existence of these programmes had not been an invitation to immediately go out and celebrate. Both nationally and internationally, no one was safe until everyone was safe.

The question was that with prevalent vaccine nationalism, could everyone be safe? As Covid-19 cases remained to be a lingering fire throughout the world, low-income countries had little chances of securing enough vaccines to protect their population from renewed outbreaks. There was a chance that vaccines could be used as political leverage and to pressure countries. Even if such behaviour would be condemned internationally, the current lack of international cooperation provided an opportunity to do just that.

PAPERS, PLEASE



Only few people had been fully vaccinated, when talks about possible summer vacations had taken off. While there was an argument to be had that any unnecessary travel should be avoided for the foreseeable future, people had been starving to get out of their confined lockdown spaces and could not wait to plan for their escape from where they had spent various lockdowns. This had led to the idea of vaccination passports and there had been heated debates over if they should be obligatory or not. First and foremost, there had been no expectations that any country would admit anyone without proof of a vaccine or a negative test. This had not been a novel idea as there had been similar passports in the past some countries already required certain vaccinations. In the end, airlines would be the ones enforcing that rule and not the states. With the whole world is at risk a vaccination passport should be accepted as a logical next step.

However, there should be some concern about the normalization of those measures. Even if such a measure was needed now, it should be considered a last barrier to overcome before getting back to normalcy. What it should not become would be the effect that 9/11 had on aviation security that was still in existence 20 years after the incident. Unlike terrorism, Covid-19 was something manageable.



REACHING BREAKING POINTS

Throughout February, there had been a noticeable rise in new cases especially in younger ages. One possible explanation had been that people had reached their mental limit, and many could not cope with the continued isolation. Additionally, the ongoing debate about the AstraZeneca vaccine had further dampened their hope. Even though vaccine hesitancy had not been an issue until now, the medical complications with AstraZeneca had let people wonder if they should get vaccinated after all. The international treatment of the vaccine did not help to clarify the issue. Some states had approved it uncritically, while others had restricted it completely. There was no knowing who had gotten it right. People needed to have trust in vaccinations, especially in a time where mental illnesses had skyrocketed, and people had been looking for a way out. The whole dispute had not made the people feel more secure, especially those who found it hard to cope with isolation.

Many Campfire participants had experienced their own issues with mental health during the pandemic. As their businesses fought to stay above water, inconsistent messaging added additional stress and turned coping with the isolation during lockdown into a serious challenge. Activities such as sports or martial arts trainings that would have normally helped with relieving stress had not been possible for a long time. Having a mental breakdown during the pandemic had just been a matter of time. The participants agreed that there had been times when they had experienced such a moment even if it had been different from person to person. All had had manage to get back because their businesses and families relied on them to get through this. It had been important to focus on the positive and to overcome the situation by leaning on people. For those participants who had been parents, there was concern for the younger generation. A lot of children did not see children their own age but were stuck in their bedrooms without practicing their social skills.

REGAINING TRUST

One of the recurring issues had been that governments had failed to have consistency in their messaging and had slowly lost the trust of the people over the winter period. With successful vaccination campaigns on the way and the hopes for a return to normalcy there had been the opportunity to rebuild some of that lost trust. People had wanted answers from their government but had understood that sometimes answer had not been available especially when a situation had rapidly escalated into unexpected outcomes. What they could have received had been the clarity of information. By sending out misleading messages that had been seemingly designed to make the population feel better but would not allow any insight into the government's plan on how to handle the pandemic, governments had created a lot of doubts and frustrations for people. The inability to provide a stable and justified narrative had fed all the conspiracy theories. This had also been partly due because people could not see an upcoming solution to their problem, when they needed a clear view of what would be done.

The vaccination programmes had allowed for a reset and had given governments a new opportunity to communicate in a more effective and transparent way. What was needed now was to take that approach to recovery planning and recovery thinking and give the people a roadmap for the future.



TURNING RADICALIZATION INTO RESILIENCE

It had been noted amongst the participants that there was the potential to be resilient, but that leadership had been lacking. A possible solution had been to give the power to those people who could lead the country through these difficult moments. Given the weight of some scientists and their influence on some of the pandemic measures this had partially already happened. However, resilience had been always about not getting into the crisis phase. There had been a need to foresee what was coming. There would be further issues along the road, and it was important to not normalize the kind of fragility that had been experienced throughout the globe in the face of the coronavirus but instead learn out of the current pandemic for the next one to build that much needed resilience for the future.

However, it was easy to see that there had been pressure building up after a year into the crisis that had prevented any build-up of resilience. Mental health issues and Covid fatigue could move people to the other side of the spectrum where there had been no recognizable logic. This had been apparent in the Netherlands when people had taken over the streets and started a riot. Additionally, there had been severe punishments in the UK for people who did not comply with lockdown measures. Some enacted laws could be seen as extreme and could potentially impose real dangers for affected countries as they could easily become normalized. There had been a noticeable shift for all states into the fringe of authoritarianism over the course of the past year.

The pandemic had given the final push to the radicalisation of many people. Throughout different social networks, echo chambers had emerged that had given a growing movement its strength. Encouraged by media coverage and incited by the open support of different politicians, these movements had become increasingly aggressive against the state. As had been seen after the storm on the US Capitol, these misguided people had been weaponized to take action against a government that had tried to protect its citizens. In the United States, the issue had now become how to deradicalize those people. Fed by conspiracy theories and propaganda their reality had been massively distorted, and the new administration had the task of getting its communication right to address mental health issues and to deradicalize the population.that could be re-engineered every year to cope with different strands of mutations, but there was still a lot of uncertainty about it which would only dissolve once the vaccination process was in full swing.



SPOTLIGHT:

GLOBAL INTER-DEPENDENCE

February had been a busy month for the United States. As such it had come as no surprise that a cyberattack on a water plant in Florida went largely unnoticed in the press. However, it had raised many questions for the campfire participants about resilience standards and critical infrastructure. There had been cyber attacks in the past, and the more famous ones such as Stuxnet or WannaCry were still well known. What was less well known is that there had been constant ongoing attacks against government agencies or critical infrastructure across the planet. While some countries had strict regulatory frameworks that were constantly revised, others were still using regulations that had been created over ten years ago. As many businesses had moved into the digital realm the importance of critical infrastructure and its protection could not be overstated.

The Chinese had become masters at infiltrating foreign businesses and data theft. Working along with Chinese companies would always imply that the Chinese government would be able to assert some influence on production processes. Despite this being well-known, 200 British academics had been collaborating with Chinese companies or universities on critical infrastructure research. Considering how China could potentially take advantage of that situation, this had been a shocking revelation. There was decision to be made in whether countries wanted to be interdependent with them and leave their critical infrastructure vulnerable to Chinese influence.

Campfire participants compared these politics of the cyber realm to those of the international relations of the 1950s. Things seemed uncontrollable and just one click away from an escalation. As computer systems had been interdependent there had been a global dependency on how the Chinese and Americans would behave in the digital realm concerning their interactions with each other and the rest of the world. As there had been few rules established in the digital realm, boundaries had been constantly pushed to identify red lines. Much like the Cold War, the possibility of mutual destruction had been still on the menu.



FIRST ANNIVERSARY

March 2021 had historical significance in a couple of ways. Firstly, it was the 10-year anniversary of the radiation release at the Fukushima power plant following the tsunami in north-east Japan. The official report following the disaster identified that the facility management, the responsible government agency and the industry regulator had all colluded to by-pass regulations that would have specifically prepared for, and mitigated against, such an event. Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) that owned the reactor had failed to introduce the necessary security installations because management 'did not think that something like that could happen'. That echoed similar reports following other crisis events (including 'A Failure of Imagination' following 9/11). The report on hurricane Katrina mentioned that they knew that something like that could happen, but they had not been ready. The crisis could have been avoided. Secondly, March marked the one-year anniversary of the first Coronavirus death in the United Kingdom but also the first month after a year that school children had been allowed to return to school. The significance could not be overstated as children had spent a large percentage of their lives in isolation and were finally able to socialize with other children again. Finally, March was also the one-year anniversary of the ISRM Coronavirus Campfires as the ISRM hosted both Campfire 100 and a virtual Global Coronavirus conference to look back at a year that no one had expected, and that would be studied in Crisis and Risk Management courses for decades to come.

VACCINES AND MUTATIONS

March 2021

GLOBAL RESPONSE



Globally the situation had further improved. There was certainly much to celebrate. Vaccines had been developed in under a year and many societies had been incredibly agile. Although a pre-Covid normality would not happen immediately the global trend had been that numbers were going down despite new mutations. The general feeling had been that around summertime the situation would be more or less back to normal. The only concern had been governments who could hijack the whole effort with their lack of leadership and overpromising to people just to get re-elected.

UK

After a slow start in January, the vaccination After the introduction of Boris Johnson's relaxation of Coronavirus restrictions at the end of February, there had been an increase in the number of people who had started to go out again in early March. Even though nothing significant had changed, people had started to act as if things had returned to normal. They had been desperate to go out again and made full use of the opportunity. Despite the promise of normalcy, people did not immediately forget the amount of bad decisions Boris Johnson had taken during the last year. Even now, people were wary that they could be another set of U-turns and maintained their belief that Johnson had been the wrong prime minister for the Coronavirus crisis.

As much as the criticism of the UK government was rightly deserved, it had been undeniable that the UK vaccine programme had been a huge success. The British government had gambled, and all bets had paid off in the end.

The first had been to not choose to be part of the EU vaccination programme, the other had been the decision to accept AstraZeneca as primary vaccine. The vaccine programme had been effective because the United Kingdom had no longer been part of the European Union and secured vaccines from many different companies. There had been further involvement of local authorities for the better implementation of the vaccine programmes. The community spirit and the ability to take ownership of their own problems had proven to be effective - as had been advocated throughout the Campfires. Any vaccine hesitancy had been countered through clear communication. People who were due for their second shot were followed up with and there was close cooperation with local communities to make them understand the importance of the vaccination. The NHS had a significant impact on the success of the programme by securing supply and distribution networks.

Even though the vaccination programmes had been applauded for all the right reasons, the reopening of schools had been the complete opposite. It seemed that no attention had been paid to an adequate education plan, children's psychology or the organization of the return to school. Some schools had been re-opened and others had remained closed. For those that had returned to schools, parents reported that at their first day, children had been forced to take mock exams after being hurried through a Covid test. The test itself had been mandatory, but mask wearing was not. Campfire participants had been irritated at the lack of understanding of the situation and the unnecessary stress that had been put on the children. What had been the point of having tests if the basic rules of protection had been disregarded?



The vaccination programme had been running normally and there were hopes that the process would be faster after the Johnson & Johnson vaccine had been approved.

EUROPE

The situation with schools had been similarly frustrating in Ireland. Students had been driven straight into exams and teachers had announced positive Covid cases through WhatsApp. The ongoing unaddressed mental health issues had also caused two suicides of school children shortly after schools had reopened. Ireland had been under a lot of stress and there had been a lot of additional protests. A lack of communication within the Irish governmental structure made the current strategy look slow and unorganized. However, there had been positive developments. The vaccination programme had been running normally and there were hopes that the process would be faster after the Johnson & Johnson vaccine had been approved. Closed businesses finally received financial support from the government and had been able to stand back on their feet again.

The turbulences in the Netherlands had finally stopped but the situation remained uncertain and disorganized (by European standards), albeit it had stabilized for the most part. Instead of rioting people had now started to release their frustration through anti-vaccination protests. The vaccination process had been affected by some degree of vaccine hesitancy caused by the reporting about the AstraZeneca vaccine, but the general feeling had been that the Dutch were slowly getting back to normal.

Switzerland ended its lockdown on the first of March which had caused a lot of relief in the population. Some businesses had already gone back to working normally, such as ski resorts and real estate agencies. Further discussions between the regional governments of the Cantons were already taking place to discuss the next steps on how to move completely out of the restrictions. The general feeling had been that the next steps were already known. This had transported over to the vaccination programme. Even though each Canton had its own pace and procedure, the process itself had been well organized and had been rolled out much faster than its neighbour Germany.

Germany had suffered from a slow onset of the vaccination programme that had caused widespread frustration.

There had been doctors who had volunteered to administer the vaccine, but instead of getting to work they had been put on waiting lists, and most vaccination centres had been only operating at regular business hours as there had not been enough vaccine. Being known for efficiency, Germany did not yet deliver on its vaccination programme. The media had started to widely report the failures and corruption scandals involving mask deals. However, those that were criticizing German politics had been accused of being political provocateurs. As the country was moving straight into an election period, there was no longer room for self-reflection.

MIDDLE EAST

March had been the start of a new life for people living in Israel. The vaccination programme had made further progress and the majority of people had now been vaccinated. Although the population did not know what was ahead of them, the return to normalcy went faster than expected despite warnings that Covid discipline was still needed to prevent any unexpected side effects. Whilst the government had tried to build resilience and mental health programmes for the future, the general population had already gone back to restaurants and parties. The vaccine had been effective in reducing severe cases and the stress on hospitals had significantly eased. The success of the vaccination had been contributed to by the willingness of the government to spend a lot of money on the vaccine programme. Participants that had argued that the pandemic had been a money issues had been proven correct by Israel's success story.

Saudi Arabia had also come out of restrictive measures that had been implemented during the February and early March. Businesses had reopened and people had even been able to return to gyms. The only restrictions that remained had the amount of people that were allowed to gather. All over the country pharmacies had started to distribute the vaccine to the people regardless of their age. The Saudi strategy had been to vaccinate as many people as possible before Ramadan to prevent a spike in cases as had happened during the previous year. At the same time there had been a really big push for people to visit Saudi Arabia for tourism. They were under pressure to keep the economy running and to attract foreign investments for many of the mega project they had already started.

Kuwait proved to be the completely opposite. They had blamed foreigners for the increase in Covid numbers and had completely banned traveling. International contractors had been basically trapped in the region and had been unable to leave the country.



The Saudi strategy had been to vaccinate as many people as possible before Ramadan to prevent a spike in cases as had happened during the previous year.



As with almost every shipment that Australia received, the doses would be shared with the wider Pacific area. In the case of neighbours like Papua New Guinea, this had not just been goodwill.

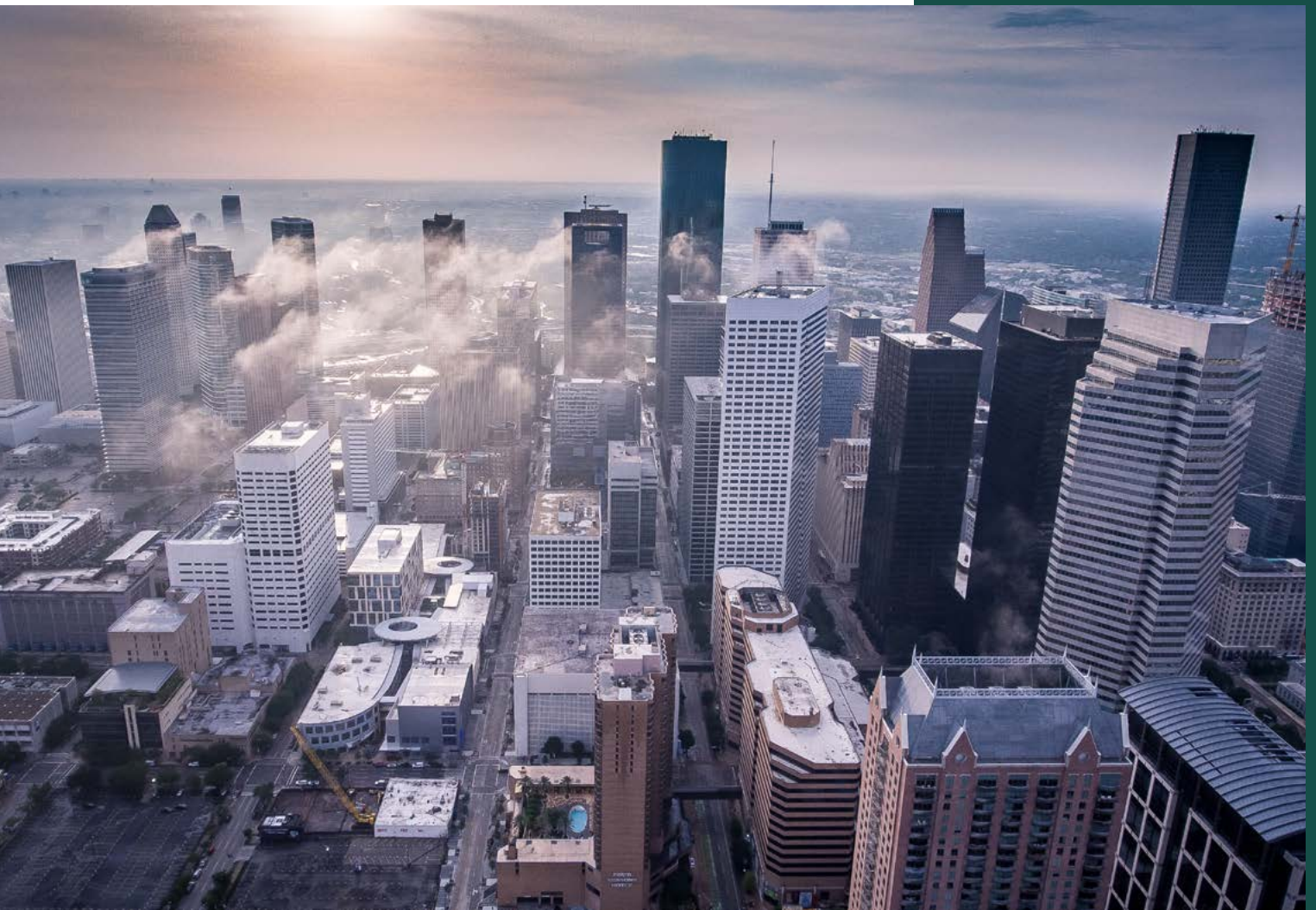
AFRICA

People in Egypt had not been concerned about the pandemic as much as Europeans. They had been more drawn towards the geopolitics of the region and the relation with Israel and Turkey. This had caused some frustration as the different prioritization meant that appropriate measures to protect the people were not taken. Different to European experience, local schools had only closed for a month, while international schools had continued with online schooling for this time. Whilst Egypt would have fewer problems with the mental health of the children, other problems lay elsewhere.

AUSTRALIA

Australia had received their first load of AstraZeneca vaccines at the beginning of March. Some of these doses would be redistributed to New Zealand and the wider Pacific region. Even though the COVAX agreement (whereby richer nations made vaccines available to poorer nations) was not making any progress until now, there had been hopes that this would change in the future and more vaccines could be distributed to those that needed it the most. Where COVAX had been unable to make a contribution, China had looked to provide their own vaccine to as many states as possible and had followed that up with huge investments into the region. Back in Australia, there had been a few cases where there had been side effects to the vaccination, but the government had tried to calm that news down to not give anti-vaxxers any reason to start a new set of protests against the vaccination.

As March progressed another ship that had been supposed to deliver one million doses of AstraZeneca to Australia had been stopped by Italy. Most Australians had taken that calmly as they had understood that situation in Italy had been much worse and that the Italian authorities had somehow been justified to stop the ship. Australia emphasized that they had a contract for those vaccines and trusted that they would eventually be delivered. As with almost every shipment that Australia received, the doses would be shared with the wider Pacific area. In the case of neighbours like Papua New Guinea, this had not just been goodwill.



Australia had received incoming Covid refugees from the region as their health care system had been unable to support the local population and its needs. As this had posed additional risk for infections due to the free travel it had also put additional stress on the Australian health care system. Providing vaccines to Papua New Guinea would help to protect the health care system and make the continent much less vulnerable.

UNITED STATES

After the power outage in February, following unprecedented snow storms, electricity had been switched back on in Houston, Texas. The state had also completely opened up in Coronavirus regulations and it had no longer been mandatory to wear mask unless a private business mandated it. The law protected the decision of these local businesses and anyone not complying with these private policies could be charged for trespassing. The governor had also issued statement that everyone would be responsible through their own behaviour to prevent another spread.

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THE STATE OF THE TRAVEL AND EVENT INDUSTRY

Travel had been one of the first things that had disappeared, but with growing vaccinations people had been eager to travel again. People had to be content that they would only be to travel with restrictions. It had been considered to be last barrier that would be needed to break before moving back to normal. For those who had been vaccinated, a green passport had been initiated that would allow them to travel and several countries had started to add countries to a green list of destinations.

For now, the process of travel arrival had been less well thought through. In Heathrow Airport, travellers had been gathered in one room in order to get tested before entering the country. That had meant that all people from different countries would be held together in crowded conditions for over four hours, which had been anything but good practice and would not help in preventing any spread of the virus.

Another thing that had fallen victim to early restrictions and not since recovered had been live events. They had been primed to return in full capacity during the summer and it was expected to be a renaissance for the industry. There would be no shortage of demand as soon as restrictions had been lifted. It was expected that people would act crazy and carelessly but the feeling within the event industry had been that vaccinations would help to keep that under control. However, there had also been concerns that a reopening of events would ultimately cause infection spikes. It was also identified that the rush to open events simultaneously would highlight the lack of appropriate personnel, many of whom would have left the sector or found other jobs, and even those who were available would have lost many of their muscle-memory skills due to lack of use. leverage and to pressure countries. Even if such behaviour would be condemned internationally, the current lack of international cooperation provided an opportunity to do just that.





After spending the year with Covid, Campfire 100 provided an opportunity to reflect on the past year and some of the issues that had occurred, and to look forward to the future.

Many participants remembered the chaos in relation to the onset of the pandemic in their countries. Despite politicians stating that everything had been under control, people soon had found out that this had not been the case. Governments had not learned any lessons, had not corrected their errors and had repeated the same mistakes. This included the WHO which had been hesitant to declare Covid-19 as a pandemic, a delay had caused deaths and had been partly responsible for many of the early government decisions that had turned out to be wrong.

The hesitance had been accompanied by a lack of communication. Governments had not been aware of how they should act during the pandemic. It had been a wake-up call for the Campfire participants that their governments had been unprepared. Politicians had acted as if the pandemic would just blow over at some point. From a crisis management perspective, it had been a management failure. Standard and well-understood crisis management principles would have offered a framework for discussion and for policy development, and would have created an integrated approach that would have mitigated many of the problems. However, in many countries those policies had not been implemented in either the right way or at the right time, and had been accompanied by a 'hope for the best' attitude and an initial belief that the situation had not been of concern as only older people had been affected by the virus. There had been hope that the lessons learned would mean that crisis management would no longer be seen as some sort of esoteric magic but as a science that needed to be studied and implemented rationally to prevent similar crises in the future.

The proliferation of sensational reporting had been another noteworthy development. The media had developed an early narrative that made people who viewed the news stressed and afraid. There had been people who had been too afraid to open their windows. After a short period of time this had caused noticeable distrust of the media as more and more people lost faith in their reporting. As people had started to turn away from traditional media outlets and towards more independent sources, misinformation had also started to spread widely. People were denying the existence of the virus as they could not accept the dystopian scenario that the media presented as a new reality. Among the Campfire participants several had stopped consuming the news because of how the reporting had developed.

Inconsistent messaging had also played a significant part in government mis-handling of the pandemic. It was a regular occurrence that different facts would be presented on a day by day basis, with subsequent changes in policy. Governments had the habit of overpromising and under-delivering. They had made headline-making promises that they knew they could not fulfil, but nonetheless had said what the people wanted to hear and what private businesses needed. Furthermore, parts of the pandemic had become overtly politicized. One of the more prominent cases had been the treatment of the AstraZeneca vaccine throughout Europe. Despite being approved and supported by WHO, the different approaches to communicating some of the rarer complications had caused outright rejection of the vaccine. There had been both internal and international pressures as European countries had protested about delays in deliveries of ordered vaccines. There was increased stress on their relationship with the UK, as it had placed a significant early order with EU suppliers, and was demanding that that was honoured before distribution of vaccines to European countries. While it could have helped the vaccination rate throughout Europe, distribution was severely disrupted.

Throughout the pandemic, mental health and the impacts of changing workspace had been a constant part of the Campfire discussions. The way people worked had changed drastically and while there had been massive improvements from an IT point of view, the personal impression of people working in home office had not always been as positive. Since the start of the lock down, roads had been relatively empty of traffic and public transport had been underused. Towns and cities themselves had often been deserted. Witnessing these circumstances for months on end had changed how people perceived inter-personal interactions. Some felt that they had forgotten how to speak to their clients in person and described the situation as feeling awkward. Others accepted the new work environment out of necessity but argued that they would have quit their job if that been the normality as their work had become so impersonal that the normal interactions of an office day had completely disappeared. Every meeting had been planned two to three days ahead. It had been the death of spontaneity.

By the end of March, there was the general feeling that the world was on its way out of the pandemic. There was still need for caution and a necessity for restrictive measures. A sudden release without any restrictions would just cause the same problems as the release from the first lockdown. Few countries had been ready for that, and people should not be urged to return to their offices and to immediately socialise with their friends. There were many reasons for being cautious when thinking about opening up. There was a need for contingency planning and preparation before measures could be lifted. Governments needed to learn their lesson and then move forward, even if that involved sharing some inconvenient truths with the public. Additionally, there needed to be the realisation that individuals should be held accountable for their actions.

As long as the vaccination process would not significantly pick up speed, new variants would remain the biggest issues. It was for this reason that WHO had been concerned about vaccine nationalism. Not progressing the vaccination process equally on a global basis would allow the virus time to develop vaccine resistant mutations. For as long as a vaccine-resistant variant did not exist there was room to be optimistic about the future.

Most countries had been at the very beginning of a recovery phase. This phase would need to take mental health issues into account along with the economy. Ultimately, people would start to lose interest in the importance of Covid-19. They had a desire to return to the better days from before the pandemic and an environment where they could pretend that everything would be normal. There were still two significant issues that could prevent that: a potential crisis that would derail the transitions back to the old reality and the uncertainty of the future. No one knew what would be coming next. There was a need to prepare for the future in an atmosphere of instability and uncertainty. The work of governments was far from over.

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME



CAMPFIRE REPORT

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