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The Coronavirus Crisis: Shaping a Way Ahead



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The View from the Hill: The UK in the COVID-19 Pandemic

03/24/2020

By Kenneth Maxwell

I am quarantined on my hill in Devon.

The British Media had been celebrating the “Dunkirk” spirit.

The British Prime Minister, the old Etonian, Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson, better known as as “Boris” or “BoJo” is the author of a book on Winston Churchill. He likes to think of himself as a Churchill Resurrected.

He has always wanted to be the prime minister.

Over the past fortnight he has been holding reassuring daily briefings in 10 Downing Street often flanked by the chief medical and the chief scientist officer, on the unfolding coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis over a lectern emblazoned with the slogan “Save the NHS.”

Yet as Italy became the coronavirus global hot spot and Spain followed and France enacted draconian measures to contain the coronavirus, Britain remained an outlier, safe it seemed in a BREXIT inspired off-shore island, splendidly isolated from Europe and from the World.

In Shakespeare’s words: “This fortress built by Nature for herself Against infection and the hand of war.” But on Monday 23 March “Britain Alone” was not enough. Boris Johnson has belatedly decreed a national “stay at home” policy and introduced tough new restrictions on daily life.

It is some irony in a British conservative prime minister is acting now to save the NHS and with it begin a desperate and belated attempt to contain the coronavirus epidemic.

The British National Health Service (NHS) was established after WW2 by the post-war Labour government. Winston Churchill and the Conservative Party had been roundly rejected by the British electorate in the general election of 1945. Churchill had called the election when opinion polls had showed him receiving strong approval. He was basking in the euphoria of victory in Europe. But in the general election in July 1945 the Labour Party under Clement Attlee won an overwhelming victory which was based in large part on their social policy proposals, and in particular on their policies on their proposals for public health.

As the leader of “His Majesty’s Loyal Opposition” (King George VI was then the British Monarch) Winston Churchill and the Conservative party opposed the legislation establishing the the NHS (the Tories voted against it 21 times). The British Medical Association was also ferociously hostile. Churchill, always a man with the ability to mobilize words had called the Labour Party “some form of gestapo.”

Boris Johnson is better known for his florid hair than for his rhetorical skills though he is not far behind Churchill (or Trump) in his capacity to invent and hurl rhetorical insults.

The diligence, persistence, and the passion of the Labour party's Health Minister, Aneurin Bevan, got a universal free at the point of service national health care system funded by general taxation established throughout the United Kingdom between 1946 and 1948. The NHS has long since become a much beloved and totemic British national institution (though it was scandalously underfunded by conservative led governments over the past decade).

Yet one thing is now absolutely certain. Boris Johnson and the NHS is about to be tested as never before by the Coronavirus epidemic which is about to hit Britain with the force of a hurricane.

And on the scale which has already hit Italy and Spain.

Hence my preemptive quarantine on my hill in Devon.

The Dunkirk "spirit" saw hundred of small boats put out to sea to pluck 340,000 allied soldiers from the sandy beaches of northern France close to the border with Belgium. In 2020 the British are showing a much less than doughty spirit. They are impatiently waiting congregated in huge lines to strip the supermarket shelves of toilet rolls and pasta.

Although pubs and restaurants were closed down on Friday night, City parks, rural tourist beauty spots and beaches, from Cornwall to Snowdonia, were packed with visitors over the warm spring weekend.

And on Monday the London underground was crowded with jam packed commuters. Few it seems we're taking any notice of Boris Johnson's confusing advise to "stay at home" and to "social distance."

In the face of the impending plague we were for too long much less in the "Age of Dunkirk" than in the epoch of "Phoney War" the eight month period from October 1939 until March 1940 at the start of WW2 when following the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, only limited military action took place.

People went on then as they did now behaving as if nothing was happening.

But national health staff were and are still crying out in desperation for wider coronavirus testing and above all for protective equipment (PPE) for the professionals tending to coronavirus victims, and for the desperately needed increased supply of ventilators in the face of chronic shortages.

Eventually and belatedly Boris Johnson got the message and decreed a national shut down on Monday evening 23 March.

"You must stay at home" he said in a national televised address. We are clearly in for difficult days ahead. Many war time restrictions are likely to reappear. We are told that food supplies are not under threat though the impatient and angry crowds outside supermarkets in recent days clearly do not believe it.

Boris Johnson much like President Donald Trump has a mighty deficit of trust to overcome.

His “stay at home” decree brought back memories of the age rationing which persisted in Britain until 1954. I remember going to the “tuck shop” at my boarding school as a ten-year old with my ration coupon a slip I got up once a week for the dry surgery mixture we could buy (sugar was rationed until 1954) as a substitute for “sweets.”

And the mad rush at the British supermarkets to buy toilet paper reminded me of the neatly cut and sting suspended small rectangular cut wads of old newspapers in the school “bogs” (our term for the school’s outside toilets) which we used to wipe our bottoms.

At least this will not be store for the bottoms of today since the Internet has virtually wiped out the age of newsprint.

But be prepared.

From my hilltop in Devon I am anticipating dark days ahead.

Will the Coronavirus Crisis be Wasted?

03/27/2020

By Robbin Laird

We have raised for some time the question of whether the liberal democracies can effectively crisis manage. And our colleague John Blackburn set up a new Institute in Australia a couple of years ago to focus attention on how Australia could become a more resilient society in facing significant global transitions.

With the Coronavirus pandemic we certainly are facing a global crisis. Governments are hunkering down nationally to deal with the crisis and generating their own solutions to get through the most immediate aspects of the crisis.

But which nations will rise to the task of leveraging the crisis to become more resilient in the future and to shape crisis management capabilities?

The current crisis certainly has exposed both unrealistic social expectations and political leadership shortfalls in the liberal democracies in coming to grips with crisis, as opposed to managing prosperity.

Divergent responses to the crisis across the board in the global liberal democracies will challenge the ability to shape common solutions going forward.

The underlying conflict between the 21st century authoritarian powers and the liberal democracies has been accentuated and highlighted as well. With Putin having tossed out most NGOs from Russia as part of his consolidation of power, the absence of credible information within Russia makes trust in Russia’s ability to contribute to a global management of a pandemic virtually non-existent.

The Chinese government has elevated information obfuscation an art form during the current crisis. This situation raises fundamental questions about trust with regard to China which are rooted in their

domestic system going forward. And certainly, the over reliance on Chinese supply chains, a subject to which we have dedicated many articles in the past few years, is highlighted as well.

But will the liberal democracies shape lessons learned and establish more reliable supply chains?

Will the liberal democracies shape more realistic working relationships with one another to have more resilient national capabilities shared across a shared sovereign space?

During my recent visit to Australia and upon my return, I have talked at length with Blackburn and Anne Borzycki, a director of The Institute for Integrated Economic Research-Australia about shaping a way ahead.

Or put a different way, will we waste the experience of the Coronavirus crisis or can we shape lessons learned and carve a more effective way ahead to deal with future crises?

We started the conversation by noting that Australia has had a tough time of over the past few months.

Blackburn: “From an Australian perspective, we’ve been through some of the worst bushfires we’ve experienced. We’ve had floods, hailstorms, dust storms, and now a pandemic. I think that the quote I made yesterday in the post that, “Who could have ever predicted this,” as an excuse for being unprepared actually summarizes the problem we have.

“I’ve been involved myself in pandemic exercises within the military, both as a military officer and a consultant; none of this is that new. However, we didn’t take sufficient notice of a lot of that analysis, because implementing the recommendations would have been difficult politically, and we tend to defer decisions until we are in the crisis itself. We are in a situation, in my view, largely of our own creation, and our lack of preparedness and the scale of panic we see, is alarming.

Laird: The core focus is too often on the following the soccer ball rather than putting an event in context. The Coronavirus crisis is the current soccer ball, with perhaps a few soccer games, but after the season ends, the hope will be to return to the way it was.

“The challenge is whether the crisis is simply treated as a bump on the road or whether it is recognized as a turning point.

Blackburn: When you’re in the crisis it is too late to prepare for the crisis you’re in. So, how do we prepare for the next crisis? It will come for sure. How do we adapt? How do we shape a way to prevent the worst effects of a future crisis?

“The key three focus areas for moving ahead are to ‘Prepare,’ to ‘Adapt,’ and to ‘Prevent’ where possible the worst impacts of a future crisis.

“We’ve been following this free market religion that the market can actually fix everything, let’s go for the lowest cost regardless of what the end price is. Just in time supply chains result in less resilience. One of the very first things we have to do is accept that that our current model of business and global supply chains is dead. It not going to work for us, so we have to think of a new model.”

Laird: One analyst has suggested that we are going to need to shift from just in time to just in case supply chains. And as our colleague Rosemary Gibson has noted that lowest cost approach to supply can end up being the most expensive option from the standpoint of social resiliency and national security ... “there is a very high price to cheap.”

Blackburn: When we redesign our supply chains, we need to pursue a “Smart Sovereignty” model. The scale or degree of sovereign capability you have in a country, will vary significantly country by country. A country the size of U.S., with its population and manufacturing capacity, will have a greater degree of sovereign capability.

“A country like Australia, with much smaller population and a different economic base will have a smaller degree of sovereignty, but we need a lot more than we have right now where we’re 90% import dependent for our fuels and we’re 90% import for our medicines.

“We also depend primarily on foreign owned shipping to move our trade; this is a major source of economic and supply chain vulnerability in times of crisis. Australia has one of the smallest nationally flagged shipping fleets in the developed world with only 14 ships of 2000 Tons or greater on the Australian register.

“What must go with Smart Sovereignty is Trusted Supply Chains. You have to have diverse supply chains, and you have to have assured yourself that you can trust them. What is evident here is the massive outsourcing and dependence upon China as the sole source of pharmaceutical ingredients and other essential supplies, cannot be ‘trusted.’ We’ve seen it fail in the current crisis.

“We need to test our supply chains. We need to verify them. Smart Sovereignty with Trusted Supply Chains is a part of addressing the problem in terms of ‘prepare, adapt and prevent.’

“We need a much more proactive approach to assuring our own sovereignty, and that’s part of the ‘prepare’ challenge. With regard to ‘adapt,’ we need to look at our supply chains and how they work. With regard to ‘prevent,’ we may need in time to exclude/replace those countries, or supply chain elements that we cannot verify and ensure they meet the required degree of trusted capability.

Laird: We are talking first of about a national strategy, but given we are all in a semi-sovereign state with regard to our economies, our security or our defense capability when considering the liberal democracies dealing with the 21st century authorization powers, we need to focus on how the liberal democracies can reset how they work together.

“And the question of trusted supply chains need also to be specific. Each nation needs to take a hard look at its priorities and seek out trusted partners with whom it shares common standards and can be certain that the information available is trustworthy.

“This puts an onus on the authoritarian societies which are clearly built on lack of transparency. This means that your focus requires a serious relook at how specific areas of cooperation can happen with particular countries rather than giving blank checks to the global marketplace or particular allies.

Blackburn: There has been an unwillingness at the political level in Australia to consider the risks of blind reliance on the market or how authoritarian capitalist regimes like China can impact our safety and security. We need to understand that the current crisis is yet another wakeup call and not just one to go back to sleep again after it is over.

Borzycki: In Australia, this is certainly a bipartisan problem, of being blind to the situation we have put ourselves into with regard to an inability to address our vulnerabilities as a core political task to be worked with the private sector. This crisis gives us an opportunity to rework the relationship between government and the private sector to build a resilient capability.

Laird: And this is clearly not simply a political problem; it is about unrealistic social expectations that we just get on with enjoying life and not having to face the inevitability of crises and that we are no likely to face an unchallenged road ahead with regard to international trade, commerce or military conflict.

Blackburn: We're in the midst of a crisis that we're trying to manage. But we also need to lay down the foundation for enhanced resilience in the future. We also need to shape more realistic expectations that crisis management is becoming a way of life and not just a "once in 50 year event."

Borzycki: There is a unique aspect of the challenge facing Australia today. We have had basically 30 years of prosperity and economic growth. We didn't take a hit during the GFC, so we have a generation of people, now in their forties and in leadership roles across Government and the private sector, whose entire generation's DNA has an expectation of market growth and prosperity. The prosperity that we have experienced as a nation has become a critical cultural weakness for us as we try to survive and move forward.

Blackburn: Meeting the challenge is not simply a government responsibility. It's a shared responsibility for governments of all levels, with industry, with the workforce, and with us as individuals.

"When I said 'prepare, adapt, or prevent', the 'adapt' is what we're going to have a hard conversation with our whole society saying, "we're going to have to change our expectations. This is not going to be sustainable." We will also have to take a degree of individual responsibility for our personal and community resilience – it is not an issue that the Government can address by itself.

"We have to change our expectations, our behavior. We're not clients of the government. We don't have human rights for absolutely everything to be provided to us. We are citizens with a shared responsibility. We've got to face these facts, face reality, and change."

The Coronavirus Crisis and Information War

03/27/2020

Clearly, the liberal democracies are being tested not just in terms of dealing with the physical aspects of the Coronavirus crisis but in terms of shaping an effective way ahead for the liberal democracies.

And part of that challenge is the information war which the 21st century authoritarian states are engaging in while the liberal democracies shape a way ahead.

As Jim Carafano has put it in a recent piece: "Beijing has launched a PR blitz to deflect attention from its fatally flawed handling of the COVID-19 outbreak.

“But no amount of spin can alter the reality that the Chinese Communist Party’s brand—as well as the Chinese economy—has taken another body blow. The latest round of propaganda is so ludicrous, it smacks of desperation born of weakness.”

Guy Taylor in a recent Washington Times piece highlighted how the authoritarian powers are working the information war in the current crisis.

China, Russia and Iran are flooding the global information space with false claims about the new coronavirus, according to U.S. officials, who say one of the biggest lies — that the virus that causes COVID-19 is a U.S. bioweapon and was brought to China by U.S. Army personnel — is just the latest in a “surge of propaganda” aimed at undermining America’s image on the world stage.

Beijing, Moscow and Tehran are using a vast web of social media accounts, fake news outlets and state-controlled global satellite media to promote false claims by academics and, at times, government officials to blame Washington for the crisis now gripping most of humanity.

The head of a key State Department counterdisinformation office said U.S. officials are ramping up their own efforts to counter lies about the new coronavirus that were first seeded by Russia in January and that China is now pushing in a bid to make Beijing appear as a superior global power to the United States.

With regard to Russia, Putin’s clearing NGOs out of Russia during his rule has prepared him well for information war for there is no credible information coming out from Russia on the real state of its own crisis.

With a country the size of Russia having cases on the scale of Luxembourg does challenge credibility.

And the lock down of Chinese society with both new and old means used by the Chinese Communist Party and claiming the superiority of their system underscores that reliable information is not a major Chinese export but viruses clearly are.

Taylor quoted a U.S. State Department official with regard to what the Administration seeks to do in response.

“We are going to make a concerted and public effort to counter disinformation by any regime on this because there are lasting consequences.

“The Chinese and Russians and Iranians are putting out these conspiracy theories and false narratives.

“It is deeply irresponsible, not just for America, but for the world. We’re in the middle of a global pandemic that is unprecedented. The fact that these regimes are taking the time to deflect blame from their own actions is deeply irresponsible.”

Our recent story of how the disinformation campaign is proceeding in Africa suggests that the conflict is global, not simply directed at the liberal democracies themselves.

Taylor quoted an Administration official with regard to a way ahead.

Exposing previous examples of disinformation by questionable sources, she said, is part of the effort to “flood the space” with accurate information. That, she said, can involve “engaging third-party credible voices, for example, non-U.S. government voices to be able to get the truth out there.”

Third-party voices can include fact-checking organizations, nongovernment organizations, investigative journalists, other governments, local community leaders or social media influencers, she said. “We work with organizations worldwide to do that long-term approach of increasing resiliency, decreasing vulnerability and then inoculating audiences to disinformation.”

And an article written by Chuck Ross and published on March 25, 2020 highlights another aspect of the challenge – the use by Western media of Chinese “information” inputs.

The Daily Mail, the popular British tabloid widely read in the United States, has published dozens of articles in recent months about coronavirus that were based on stories originating from People’s Daily, the communist party’s official newspaper, and other Chinese propaganda mills.

A Daily Caller News Foundation investigation found that the Daily Mail has published thousands of articles in recent years as part of a content-sharing agreement with People’s Daily.

Whether that agreement is explicitly in place now is unclear, but the tabloid has nonetheless cited Chinese government news outlets extensively in its coverage of coronavirus. The Daily Mail did not return multiple requests for comment

On Monday, the Daily Mail published [a story](#) with the headline: “Beijing’s leading doctor warns of a NEW coronavirus outbreak in China after the country reported its first case of someone ‘catching the illness from a person returning from abroad.’”

The story, which had a massive 1.1 million shares on social media, cited comments that Li Lanjuan, a top Chinese government doctor, gave to People’s Daily and China News, another government-controlled outlet. ([RELATED: Media Rhetoric On ‘Wuhan Virus’ Echoes Chinese Propaganda](#))

“One of China’s top coronavirus experts has warned that the nation is facing a second outbreak due to the increasing number of infections detected among new arrivals from abroad,” reads the Daily Mail piece, written by Tracy You.

In short the Coronavirus crisis is clearly not just about dealing with a virus; but an information war being conducted to try to position the 21st century authoritarian powers in a more favorable position after the crisis and to protect China’s position in the global economy.

Coronavirus: Geopolitical Stakes and Disinformation

03/23/2020

By Murielle Delaporte

The confinement generated by the Coronavirus pandemic has been at the origin of a light-spirited byproduct called “corona Vlogs” and the use of whatsapp to exchange jokes in order to kill boredom and diffuse potential anxiety (very similar to the underground humor characteristic of the Eastern bloc during the Cold war).

But in another sense, the response has been similar to the Cold War in another way as well.

The pandemic is also unfortunately providing the perfect environment for social anxiety which spawns rumor mills and fake news.

From advice such as drinking water every ten minutes to kill the virus to accusing the U.S. military of having brought the virus to China in the first place, global disinformation is rampant.

But we are better prepared to fight such disinformation than we used to just a few years ago.

We need to fight disinformation spun from the global pandemic.

And serious broadcasting and press agencies, as well as publications, have over the past years developed a fact-checking expertise which provide key tools to deal with disinformation.

The fight against Daech recruiting techniques as well as Russian interference in various electoral processes have been among the incentives and wake-up calls behind such initiatives.

Now another recent example is at hand.

A rumor currently is being spread in Ivory Coast by social networks about the “fact” that French soldiers have been contaminating Abidjan and are being taken care of at a French military base.

To illustrate such claim, a picture has been lifted from the French website www.operationnels.com showing French military medical staff attending patients.

Yet this photo was in actual fact taken years ago in Kabul International Airport during the Pamir operation, i.e. the French participation to ISAF in Afghanistan.

One should therefore be grateful for journalists, such as AFP “fact checker” Sadia Mandjo, who are seeking the truth against those who are trying to discredit French armed forces deployed in Africa for peace-keeping missions (such as in Ivory Coast) as well as in the fight against terrorism (like in Mali).

Editor's note : Murielle Delaporte is the editor of the French magazine Operationnels.

The then French Ministry of defense photo was illustrating an article initially published in Soutien Logistique Defense # 10, Winter 2013 (see PDF below page 20 / in French).

Mandio reached out to Delaporte to inform her of this case of disinformation in the Ivory Coast.

Coronavirus Propaganda and The French Press: A Case Study

03/27/2020

By Ed Timperlake

The very important second half of Chanel Rion's question, representing One America News (OAN), to President Trump about Chicom propaganda, and other bad actors was ignored by many of the White House press corps.

It was painfully obvious that they intentionally channeled their inner "Mean Girls" attitude to mock her brilliant set up; Is Chinese Food racist?

But she proved to be smarter than the lot by her mention of the international scope of the very significant Information War threat to America by many beyond China:

"Is it alarming that major media players, just to oppose you, are siding with foreign state propaganda, Islamic radicals, and Latin gangs and cartels and they work right here out of the White House with direct access to you and your team?"

While the WH press was mocking the OAN reporter for throwing a penalty flag at propaganda, the oldest news agency in the world was reacting to false attempts to blame the French military for the Coronavirus pandemic.

Agence France –Presse (AFP) is the world oldest news agency and when their editors and reporters recognized fake news trying to discredit their French military fighting and medical teams in combat they moved quickly.

The unity of purpose with AFP protecting the honor of France troops who were putting their lives on the line in helping Africans was commendable.

I am sure the very capable French intelligence services can vector in using cyber/Information war forensics to determine who libeled the French Army.

In the U.S. case, the Peoples Republic of China made it easy by having no qualms in slandering the United States Army as conducting germ warfare.

In Africa, it can be many bad actors that have an incentive to go after the French who are a significant force for stability and good.

In a social media disinformation campaign against French troops, it could be China, Russia or even home grown anti-government forces.

The point about Information war having many potential players makes Chanel Rion's statement/question even more prescient than her just looking at China.

She named many bad sources of propagandists trying to influence America unchecked by any honest diligent media skepticism.

Right now there is a global disinformation campaign trying to muddy up the real source of COVID-19 in the African Nation of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire.

This nasty propaganda effort of blaming the French military was seen by AFP, regardless of the source, and in recognizing that a photograph covering French military combat medicine in Afghanistan was being used to claim the French were spreading COVID-19 in Côte d'Ivoire, AFP acted professionally by reaching out to Murielle Delaporte.

Murielle Delaporte is an international reporter and editor who published the picture after being embedded with the French armed forces in Afghanistan in 2012.

This is no small matter because nations can become very unstable relying on fake news during a pandemic, especially as a third wave of epidemics is now expected on a Continent, where confinement will be even more difficult to implement than what we all experience right now.

AFP deserves great credit for remarkable heads-up situational awareness in spiking such a blatant propaganda effort because FAUX means FAKE in English and as we say in American military jargon good on em!

A rumor currently is being spread in Ivory Coast by social networks about the “fact” that French soldiers have been contaminating Abidjan and are being taken care of at a French military base.

To illustrate such claim, a picture has been lifted from the French website www.operationnels.com showing French military medical staff attending patients.

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One should therefore be grateful for journalists, such as AFP “fact checker” Sadia Mandjo, who are seeking the truth against those who are trying to discredit French armed forces deployed in Africa for peace-keeping missions (such as in Ivory Coast) as well as in the fight against terrorism (like in Mali).

Murielle Delaporte is the editor of the French magazine Operationnels.

The photo was lifted from an article published in 2014 in her related website (<https://operationnels.com/2014/05/11/au-coeur-du-metier-de-militaire-au-coeur-du-metier-de-medecin-la-chaine-soutien-sante-pamir-du-sc1-au-role-3-de-kaia/>) as a follow up of a reporting published in Soutien Logistique Defense # 10, Winter 2013.

Mandio reached out to Delaporte to inform her of this case of disinformation in the Ivory Coast.

Many in the American mainstream press have now surrendered any pride in being fair and accurate.

It is tragic for America that President Trump is actually 100% correct when he calls out fake news.

American's respect for the formerly honorable practice of accurate timely fact-based journalism is rapidly drifting away.

Many who should know better are squandering all American's sacred First Amendment protections by becoming ideologically driven hacks and the jury is out on whether this broken trust can be repaired.

China and the Global Medical Supply Chain: The Evolving Coronavirus Virus Case Study

02/11/2020

By Robbin Laird and Ed Timperlake

The Coronavirus Virus and its proliferation globally is clearly a key threat and challenge.

And it brings into clear view, how the Chinese handle their public crises and with global consequences.

The government is now cracking down on reportage on the epidemic in their own country.

According to a story by Raymond Zhong in The New York Times published on February 5, 2020: In recent days, both state-run news media and more commercially minded outlets have been told to focus on positive stories about virus relief efforts, according to three people at Chinese news organizations who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal directives.

Internet platforms have removed a range of articles that suggest shortcomings in the Chinese government's response or are otherwise negative about the outbreak.

Local officials have also cracked down on what they call online "rumors" about the virus.

China's public security ministry this week lauded such efforts, which have continued even after one person who was reprimanded for spreading rumors turned out to be a doctor sounding the alarm about early cases of the illness.

This is hardly unusual as this is how the authoritarian government works its information policies.

But it also highlights its consequence for globalization itself – transparency is required for the global community to prepare for and deal with the spread of the virus.

And the global community needs to ramp up its ability to deal with the crisis itself and turn to its medical suppliers to provide for the tools needed to deal with this crisis.

But one small problem: The West has outsourced its medical supply production to China.

Even if the Chinese government was an even-handed one, it will prioritize its own needs.

Rosemary Gibson has been a key analyst who has highlighted concerns about the reliance on China on our global supplies.

We earlier highlighted her work in both a book review of her important book on our dependence on Chinese medical supplies as well as conducting an interview with her.

We noted: “While there has been much focus on the potential threat of bioterrorism there has been virtually no focus on the US and the West putting into the hands of the Chinese, the means to cripple Western militaries in terms of medical supplies.”

The evolving coronavirus virus case study will clearly impact the global supply chain and the availability of “normal” drugs but could also affect how we will manage the spread of the disease.

We had a chance recently to talk with Gibson about the crisis as a case study.

According to Gibson: “The reality is when you have 80-85 percent of the core components in so many medicines being concentrated in a single country, if there are events, which I talked about in China Rx like a pandemic, then that will compromise the global supply of medicines.

“The coronavirus virus impact is certainly a warning, a shot across the bow, that we have to diversify our medicine supply chain away from China.”

“This situation underscores the importance of having some level of manufacturing of essential drugs here in the United States, any country. Certainly, China could say tomorrow that we are ceasing exports of essential products whether it’s antibiotics, medicines used in hospitals, protective gear, masks, gowns, and gloves, we’re ceasing exports because we need them here. Not an unreasonable request given the magnitude of the crisis.”

And the lack of transparency in China also exacerbates “market assessments” of what will happen as the supply chain is disrupted or redirected by the Chinese government.

Gibson added: “We have to look at what we’re getting, and where it’s coming from, and what it’s supposed to be, and certainly pertains to our medicine. We have to start production of essential medicines back here in the United States.

“The first thing China can do is say, ‘I’m sorry. We can’t export anymore. We have to keep it here in China.’

“The second thing is with shutdowns in China, people are not going to work. The production of essential medicinal products is clearly impacted. There will be shortages. Even when they do whenever come back online, who’s going to be looking at the quality and testing the quality of those products. Manufacturers are supposed to do that, but will they?

“FDA inspectors are supposed to inspect plants in China. Well, it looks like the next couple of months there won’t be FDA inspectors going to China to do that. It’s a voluntary assignment. Will federal government employees who work for the FDA even want to go to China to do those inspections?”

In effect, we have outsourced our medical wellbeing to another country. And simply a deep medical crisis in that country can shut down the supplies essential to our well being. And this country happens to be a major rival with the United States, and we have put in their hands a simple way to strangle us.

This makes no sense to us.

And we need to launch a proper response.

According to Gibson: “We’d have to see how much capability there is organizationally there is in the United States to ensure essential medical supply production and otherwise to actually do the work because we’re talking about thousands of medicines and many different kinds of active ingredients. It’s not going to happen overnight.

“That’s why we should start with those essential medicines that are core to any national health security and national security.”

She concluded: “We need a system just like we do for energy supplies and good commodities.

“We need an entity within the Federal government that does this tracking and projection of those vulnerabilities of global supply and demand current production levels for certain medicinal products so we can be prepared and know if this is shutting down what’s our alternative?”

Operation Resilience: France Offers More Military Aid Against Virus

03/26/2020

By Pierre Tran

Paris – France will deliver military assistance to the fight against coronavirus in an integrated manner under the newly announced Operation Resilience, armed forces minister Florence Parly said March 26.

The French services are also temporarily pulling troops out of Iraq as of today, as the training of local forces has been suspended due to social isolation, she said on RTL radio.

The proximity of Iran also prompts a withdrawal, as the neighbouring country has been heavily hit by the deadly Covid-19 infection.

President Emmanuel Macron announced last night the launch of Operation Resilience while on a visit to the hospital in Mulhouse, eastern France, where the army has set up a field hospital to back up the overloaded medical staff and facilities.

“This operation Resilience will be wholly dedicated to the help and support of the public as well as support for the public services in tackling the Covid-19 epidemic at home and abroad, particularly in health, logistics and protection,” he said.

Resilience will be separate from the Sentinel mission, which sees up to 7,000 troops in street patrols as a means to deter attacks by Islamist militants.

As part of operation Resilience, the navy will immediately sail the Mistral helicopter carrier to the southern part of the Indian ocean, and the sister ship, Dixmude, will at the end of April sail to the French Caribbean, to provide support and hospital facilities to the overseas territories, he said.

The two warships are presently sailing respectively in the Indian ocean and western Mediterranean. The third Mistral class vessel, Thunder, last weekend sailed 12 patients severely hit by the virus to Marseille from Corsica.

It was not immediately clear from the statement issued last night by the ministry the details of Operation Resilience.

The services were engaged, providing logistical support, health and protection missions, Parly said, pointing to medical evacuation by an air force A330 MRTT jet, naval helicopter carrier and setting up the army field hospital at Mulhouse.

“Resilience is the capability to overcome shocks and move beyond them,” Parly said. The services will provide support in an “integrated” manner.

The forces could help by guarding medical stores, escorting transport of medical gear such as masks, and supporting firefighters, she said. Such “protection” would lessen the call on the police.

The services would be in a support role and would not have the power of arrest, as that is for the police, she said.

Hundreds, and later thousands, of military personnel would be helping the civil authorities, depending on the requests.

French Arms Firms Grapple With Virus Lock Down

03/25/2020

By Pierre Tran

Paris – French arms companies have taken major steps following a national lock down ordered last week against the coronavirus, with some factories closed or cutting back, staff working from home, and shipyards working at a slower pace.

The government has declared a state of emergency in the health domain, with the Official Journal publishing March 24 a law granting two months of greater state power in the combat against Covid-19.

The lock down went into effect midday March 17, limiting the right for people to leave home and requiring an official document with boxes to tick for reasons of travel.

The government has since tightened those restrictions, including cutting the distance for personal exercise walks to one kilometer from home and a maximum of one hour to be out of doors. Hefty fines will be imposed for breaches of restrictions.

There are wide expectations the two-week lock down will be extended, as the pandemic continues to take lives.

Trade show cancelled

A spread of the virus has led to cancellation of the Eurosatory trade show for land weapons, a source close to the exhibition said.

The show organizers had decided it was “impossible” to postpone the exhibition, given the complexity for French and foreign exhibitors, and official delegations from around the world.

There were logistical concerns for the show, which takes 1-1/2 years to organize, the source said. A formal decision to cancel was expected March 26.

A cancellation follows the cancellation of the Berlin ILA and Farnborough air shows.

Eurosatory had been due to be held June 8-12 just outside the capital.

The Royal International Air Tattoo air show, a prominent UK military event, has also been axed.

A launch of a program for a European medium-altitude, long-endurance drone has been pushed back, with a deal expected in October or November, a source close to the deal said. Governments were ready to accept a budget of some €7.2 billion (\$7.8 billion), while industry seeks €7.4 billion. France had previously expected an agreement by mid year.

Fighter Jet Factory Locked Down

Dassault Aviation has closed factories and offices, including the key Merignac plant, southwest France, which builds the Rafale fighter jet.

“We are going through an exceptionally serious crisis with consequences on public health, with its breadth and impact on the medical care system, and also its effects on the economy and our company,” executive chairman Eric Trappier said in a March 22 note to staff posted on the company website. Factories were closed since the lock down started last Tuesday.

For office workers who could not work from home, the offices and open work spaces were cleaned every day, hand sanitizer provided and guidance given on distancing, he said.

A return to work would take place once factories and offices had been cleaned, he said in a March 23 note. The company was due to hold March 26 a special meeting of the works council to give an update, with information to be passed on to councils in each plant.

Production remained suspended until the health measures were implemented.

Dassault is prime contractor on the European project for a future combat air system and the Rafale, a key export product factored into the French defense budget. The company also planned to announce the launch of a new Falcon business jet this year. That was before the virus attack.

French Missiles Shuttered

MBDA, the missile maker, last Tuesday shut down its three sites in France, the only country of the four-nation consortium to do so. The plants in Britain, Germany and Italy are open.

In France, there are some 5,100 workers in three MBDA sites, with the head office at Plessis Robinson, just outside the capital, and plants at Bourges and Selles-Saint Denis, central France.

There are plans to return gradually to work, reflecting priorities assigned to certain programs. Staff will be given protection kit and there will be two work shifts – morning and afternoon – with a cut in the number at work.

The priorities could be delivery of spares and service for the Mica air-to-air missile, ASMP-A airborne nuclear-tipped missile, and MMP anti-tank weapon.

Those in France cleared to work on classified information must work in the office, otherwise staff will work from home.

Shipyards Slow Ahead

Pierre Eric Pommellet takes the top job at shipbuilder Naval Group in these troubled times, succeeding Hervé Guillou, who hit retirement age on March 24.

Among the management issues Pommellet must grapple with is slower work at the Cherbourg and Lorient shipyards, with the former building Barracuda nuclear attack submarines, and the latter building the air defense frigate and frigate for defense and intervention.

The Toulon yard handles service for the Rubis class of nuclear attack submarine and Fremm multimission frigate, while Brest handles service of the Triomphant class of nuclear ballistic missile boats.

Toulon is handling the last complete overhaul of the Perle, the most recent of the Rubis boats, website Mer et Marine reported. That service will last some 18 months.

Naval Group employs around 16,000 staff, of which some 4,000 are working from home, plugged into secure computer networks.

Small and medium yards, such as Piriou and Couach, have closed, as they are too small to install the health protective measures.

So far, the plan is to hold the Euronaval trade show October 20-23, a spokesman for Gican a naval trade association said.

Brakes on Military Vehicles

Arquus, a subsidiary of truck maker Volvo, has slowed production of military vehicles at its four sites around France – Fourchambault, Marolles en Hurepoix, Saint Nazaire and Limoges.

There are small teams at the plants sending spares to the French army, a company spokesman. Service support is a vital issue.

There is the prospect of further deliveries of the Griffon multirole troop carrier, one of the armored vehicles in the €10 billion Scorpion Army modernization program. Arquus supplies drivelines and remote controlled machine guns on the Griffon, and is partnered with Nexter and Thales on the Scorpion program.

The joint venture last year delivered 92 Griffon and is due to ship 128 units this year. Some 936 units are due to be delivered by 2025, in a total order of 1,872.

The industrial partners were also due to deliver this year the first Jaguar, a combat and reconnaissance armored vehicle.

A400M Back in Production

Airbus restarted March 24 final assembly of the A400M military airlifter in Seville, southern Spain, after a four-day shut down for a vast cleaning operation.

Airbus flew March 23 an A400M from Toulouse, southern France, to Getafe airbase at Madrid, delivering face masks to the Spanish defense ministry.

Airbus delivered the eighth A400M to the Spanish air force two weeks ago, and is due to hand over the first unit to Luxembourg in a week or so. That Luxembourg aircraft will be flown by the Belgian air force, which will operate its own seven-strong fleet.

Over last weekend Airbus flew an A330-800 airliner to bring some two million masks from China to Europe. That was a test aircraft.

Thales, an electronics company, said on its website, “To minimise the spread of the virus, the group is following the directives of the governments of its countries of operation, adapting its working practices in line with the recommendations of the health authorities, and instructing employees to work from home whenever possible.”

In France, the virus had by March 24 killed 1,100 people, with 240 dying in the previous 24 hours, afternoon daily *Le Monde* reported. That accounted only for those who dying in hospital, with grave concern for the elderly living in retirement homes.

Five doctors were among those who had lost their lives.

Worldwide, coronavirus deaths approach 20,000, *The Guardian* daily reported.

The Direction Générale de l'Armement procurement office declined comment on the impact of the lock down on the defense industry.

France Sails Helicopter Carrier on Medical Mission

03/23/2020

By Pierre Tran

Paris – The French navy sailed a helicopter carrier to the Mediterranean island of Corsica to pick up patients hit by the coronavirus infection, the armed forces ministry said March 22.

Florence Parly tweeted the arrival today of Thunder, a Mistral class helicopter carrier, at the port of Ajaccio, on the west coast of Corsica, known as the island of beauty.

“Solidarity with our medical staff,” she said.

“The services are there to protect the French.”

Parly thanked the sailors and the medical wing of the armed forces who conducted the evacuation.

Two ambulances drove on board the helicopter carrier, which had sailed from Toulon, the key naval base on the southern coast, the armed forces ministry said.

A medical team of military and civilian specialists sailed to receive the patients, who were placed in strict confinement.

The patients will be transferred to hospitals in the south of France.

The maritime mission was called to lighten the hospitals on Corsica, which had registered 164 cases and seven fatalities due to coronavirus by March 19, said the local health authority, BFM TV reported.

“The Mistral class is equipped with an onboard hospital, with two operating theaters and 69 beds, which can be extended. A 200-strong crew sails the warship.”

The navy sailed Thunder on a humanitarian mission to the French Caribbean in 2017, when the islands of Saint Martin and Saint Bartholomew were hit by hurricane Irma. Last year, the helicopter ship diverted from the annual Joan of Arc naval mission to sail to Mozambique, after cyclone Idai hit southern Africa.

The two other Mistral class ships, Mistral and Dixmude, are sailing in the Indian Ocean and western Mediterranean.

Meanwhile, on March 21st, the French Air Force flew a second flight of the A330 MRTT equipped with the Morpheus flying hospital unit, flying six patients to Bordeaux from Mulhouse.

The first medical flight of the A330 MRTT took place two days before, flying six patients from Mulhouse to Istres airbase, south of France.

The French air force has added a second Falcon jet to its medical evacuation flight, which now comprises six pilots and two cabin teams, a Falcon 2000LX and Falcon 900, the service said. The transport squadron flies that emergency service.

The airborne medical squadron has been stood up in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Those flight crews are trained to fly in conditions of nuclear, bacteriological, chemical and radioactive warfare, with the staff wearing protective gear and the aircraft disinfected. The pilots can fly with protective masks and gloves.

A crew from that squadron flew March 18 the A330 MRTT which brought six patients from Mulhouse, eastern France, to the south of the country

Parly visited March 18 Villacoublay airbase, just outside the capital, and met crews of the two specialist units. Parly said the services would support the national effort, especially the air force and its medical evacuation capability.

The army is setting up tents for its field hospital in the car park of the public hospital in Mulhouse.

That field hospital, equipped with 30 beds for intensive care, is intended to take some of the pressure off the staff in the general hospital, which is struggling to cope with the intake of stricken patients.

Specialists in the Direction Générale de l'Armement procurement office are testing safety masks proposed by companies, with some 700 samples received for tests. Results of tests are expected in the next few days, the ministry said.

The defense innovation agency has set a €10 million budget for a tender for projects to fight the pandemic, looking for ways to protect and test the population, track the course of illness in a patient, or how to limit the constraints during the health crisis, the ministry said.

The ministry has stood up five of the eight military hospitals around the country, with some 100 beds in each hospital set aside for patients with coronavirus, of which 40 are for severe cases. The ministry closed the noted Val de Grâce hospital in the capital in 2016.

The number of fatalities in France rose almost 20 percent to 562 over Friday and Saturday, with 6,172 in hospital, of which 1,525 are in intensive care, Le Monde afternoon daily reported March 22.

The first hospital doctor in France has died while treating coronavirus.

“This is a war, it will last,” president Emmanuel Macron said in *Journal de Dimanche*, a Sunday paper.

There was need to protect the most vulnerable and the health system, as well as control the stress on society, he said.

There was also need to tackle an unprecedented financial crisis and crisis in the underlying economy.

French Air Force Flies Medical Airlift in France for First Time

03/19/2020

By Pierre Tran

Paris – On March 18, 2020, the French air force flew six civilian patients severely hit by the deadly coronavirus in an A330 MRTT military transport jet fitted out with an onboard medical evacuation unit, the armed forces ministry said.

That was the first time the service flew its airborne hospital unit, dubbed Morpheus, in a domestic flight as the module was used to fly wounded personnel to France from distant overseas deployments.

The modular units, previously fitted on the C-135, can be equipped for intensive care as well as lighter medical conditions.

The A330 multirole tanker transport aircraft flew from Mulhouse, eastern France, and landed at Istres airbase in the south, allowing the patients to be transferred to military hospitals in Marseille and Toulon, the ministry said.

The military flight was ordered to lighten the load on hospitals in eastern France, one of the hardest hit regions, with the public health authority registering March 17 1,820 cases of coronavirus in that part of the country.

In other medical moves, armed forces minister Florence Parly told *Le Parisien* daily the ministry found it had five million surgical masks and was delivering them to the ministry of health and social affairs.

There has been widespread concern in the medical profession over the lack of masks, leaving the staff vulnerable to the superbug.

The ministry has also arranged for a mobile military hospital to be set up in the Alsace northeastern region.

Those limited military operations were in stark contrast to a rush of rumors and fake news stories on social media which fuelled talk of army deployment to enforce a national curfew.

A curfew has not been ordered.

Photos circulated on social media of armored vehicles on the motorway and in suburbs, with talk these would be used in the curfew.

Those photos dated from earlier times or were on routine movement.

Such was the spread of falsehoods, the armed forces junior minister, Genevieve Darrieussecq, tweeted “Stop Fake News,” saying the services would not intervene in the lock down and they were playing their part in a national effort against the epidemic.

The ministry’s website denied point by point the talk of the military taking on a greater role in the lock down.

French president Emmanuel Macron said March 16 in a live speech broadcast to the nation there would be a national lock down as of midday the next day. That restrictive measure required people to stay indoors unless going to work, had emergency needs or carried an obligatory travel document.

Some 100,000 police were mobilized to enforce the lock down, and would accept press cards in place of the travel document, the interior minister said March 16. The document can be downloaded from the internet or written out by hand.

Those breaching the lock down must pay hefty fines.

French hospitals had admitted March 18 3,626 patients, of which 931 were in intensive care, afternoon daily Le Monde reported.

The virus had claimed 264 lives, an increase of 89 deaths within 24 hours.

About half the patients with serious cases were under 60.

Toilet Paper and Total War

03/16/2020

By David Beaumont

The lessons that prepare defence forces and government institutions for crisis responses need not come from history books.

Lessons can come from extrapolating what we witness every day; from events that capture tangible and intangible aspects of sustaining normal life.

From natural disasters to global pandemics, Australia has had a tumultuous beginning of the year.

This time has been socially, economically and politically testing. The impact of this turbulence on essentially fragile national logistics, commerce and industry capability is starkly evident and has forced the nation to consider its national resilience.

The difficulty experienced in obtaining basic household products – toilet paper for example – as consumers buy in preparation for a state of quarantine that may never come, as trite an issue as it may be, starkly demonstrates how critical human behaviour is in the calculus.

It is a perfect analogy with which to consider military preparedness and strategic resilience.

People naturally gravitate towards the idea that strategic resilience is about maintaining a buffer for emergencies. Inevitably, and for sensible reasons, the topic of national reserves or stocks (or, in the military's case, 'war stocks') is raised.

Enough stockholdings of strategically significant commodities is critically important for national resilience, just as they are for military operations.

The absence of stock is, however, only the 'front-end' of the problem in a major crisis.

In some cases, the maintenance of unnecessary stock levels may actually detract from preparedness and resilience; vast quantities of inappropriate strategic reserves consume money and other resources that can be used in other critical areas.

Buffers, insurance and assurance (through planning and governance) are important for resilience, but there are intangible factors that need to be understood.

In military logistics, the greatest behaviour-based harm to logistics performance relates to trust that the logistics system will deliver, and from the impact of 'psychological effects induced by the [original] deficiency.¹

Even if the situation improves commanders will 'certainly place pressure on their planners and on their own superiors to insure future adequacy of support.'²

Commanders and logisticians at all levels will arbitrarily increase their demands, and others will do their best to meet the new requirement. Hoarding will occur. The military organisation – perhaps even government and industry – will rapidly try to respond to rapidly growing military requirements.

This sounds like a good problem to have; while having surplus production and availability certainly beats dealing with systemic shortages, logistics 'scaling' rarely occurs without problems. This 'under-planning / over-planning' sequence generally results in oversupply; wasting transport, clogging warehouses, limiting strategic mobility and costing resources that the force can't spare.³

It was a problem recently seen in the initial operations of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and was one reason for the 'iron mountains' of Operation Desert Storm over a decade earlier. If production or availability cannot increase, an inefficient transfer of resources from one area of the battlefield to the other can upend strategy. In these circumstances it becomes difficult for planners to direct resources to the right place, and what can be termed 'brute force logistics' – get as much as you can to the place what you believe is of the greatest need – comes.

The parallel with what is going on now with COVID-19 (coronavirus), or what was seen in the shortages of air purifiers and face masks during the Australian bushfire crisis this year, is clear. Australian consumers are fearful.

A normally stable balance of supply and demand is upset by events, with consumer behaviour in panic-buying magnifying the problem.

The ‘world’ is only at the beginning of its industrial and supply-chain response to the virus. Given that it is likely to have a pandemic on its hands, the production, transfer and management of resources globally is, quite obviously, going to be chaotic.

We’re waiting to find out what happens next. Some economists are predicting the global production output loss to enter the trillions of dollars, with global economic conditions likely to become recessionary. It is also possible that a huge multi-lateral economic response will lead to a version of the ‘under-planning / over-planning sequence.’ Governments may launch economic stimulus packages to deploy funding and offset a precipitous decline in trade.

While I won’t pretend to know the answer as to what might happen in a pandemic situation, the ideas of military logistics can offer a window through which to observe the situation. We can, however, use the events before us as a window of our own to consider military preparedness.

What if the scenario was a military crisis rather than a response to natural disaster or pandemic? Imagine we were talking about spare-parts or precision weapons rather than face-masks or toilet paper.

The simultaneous draw upon shared industrial resources by coalition partners might create ‘runs’ on necessary resources and stocks, for without these stocks military forces will be little more than a short-term buffer against the encountered strategic shock.

Preparedness systems fail, logistics processes collapse, and command struggles to regain control. The purpose of Martin Van Creveld’s *Supplying War* seems to be found in displaying militaries in disarray, and Richard Betts writes of the ‘unreadiness’ of the US military as its first tradition in the book *Military Readiness: concepts, choices, consequences*⁴

The ADF has experienced this ‘tradition’ in the past.

Two examples in recent Australian military history spring to mind.

The first was during the deployment of International Forces East Timor in 1999 when a massing coalition force drained the city of Darwin of hardware and deployable consumables, necessitating an ad hoc and inefficient procurement plan to be developed.

The second was during the deployment of the US-led coalition to Iraq in 2003 where because Australia lacked the competitive buying power to procure commercial airlift to support the deployment, it arranged with the US that its Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) would facilitate airlift.

What if the scenario was severe still, and a level of national mobilisation required? Naturally we would see proportionally severe exacerbation of the problems above. Histories of the First and Second World war attest to the problem of over-mobilisation; where the rush to put personnel in the field, on the ocean and in the air outpaces the capacity of industry to provide them with the materiel of war.

The increasing sophistication of modern weaponry, the high standard of materiel modern militaries expect themselves to operate with, the presence of an increasingly specialist workforce, and with lean force structures characteristic of periods of structural demobilisation, will make an incredibly difficult resilience challenge for a modern Western military.

The first losses of battle make the demand for materiel much more critical than the demand for manpower. It takes years to establish production runs capable of supporting the largest forces, especially as the manpower draw to the military draw is the same as to industry. But when industry starts to fulfil the need, it tends to do so in such excess that it is wasteful and a needless draw on limited national resources. The wrong things are produced at the wrong time and delivered to the wrong place.⁵

The systems of prioritisation and allocation fail, and in the rush to do something good, the best intentions create unforeseen and unwanted problems.

Logistics and preparedness are defined by ‘tangibles’ and ‘intangibles’. These two factors conspire to create complex systems that are difficult to control, especially when the impact of human decisions and behaviours is taken to account.

Until we have quantum computers and artificial intelligence to do the thinking for us, the best we may be able to do is research, study and observe the events before us.

What we may witness in consumer behaviour in highly unusual situations is like what might be witnessed with respect to ‘military behaviour’ in a war or a military crisis.

As ultimately innocuous as a consumer run on toilet paper might be to us now, the situation does tell a story as to how we might see our military logistics systems act in a time of strategic shock.

Understanding how they may act ultimately underwrites military preparedness and, in the case of strategy and national power, creates the national resilience that ultimately determines success in war.

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Footnotes

1. Eccles, H., *Logistics in the national defense*, The Stackpole Company, USA, 1959, p 109
2. *Ibid.*, p 109
3. *Ibid.*, p 109
4. See Van Creveld, M., *Supplying War*, Cambridge University Press, UK, 2004 (4th edition); Betts, R., *Military readiness: concepts, choices, consequences*, Brookings, USA, 1995
5. It was these observations of the Second World War that led Eccles to develop his theory of the *logistics snowball*, often caused by the under-planning, over-planning sequence.