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**Covid-19 in the Gulf
Special Coverage**

**Covid-19, a Common Threat towards Intrusive Regionalism
Mahdokht Zakeri**

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Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic news has become the top headline of almost all international media and the topic of everyday conversation among people. Coronavirus, like international terrorism is a global challenge to both states and societies, and a common transnational human security threat that requires a collective work to tackle and would be a great opportunity for regional cooperation and an Intrusive Regionalism¹, simultaneously. For instance, a global coalition has been formed to counter the common transnational terrorism of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), despite there were national and political differences among states. Likewise, the fight against the threats posed by Coronavirus outbreak to international human security and economy can also succeed only through regional and international cooperation despite discrepancies in other areas.

While the challenges posed by 1973² and 2008³ crises to the international energy and economic security, the current international crisis caused by this pandemic also draws our attention to the challenges facing the global human security. In retrospect, collective cooperation and global solidarity were the only solutions to such transnational problems. Similarly, under the current situation, regional

cooperation at the operational level (micro) and global coalition at the strategic level (macro) seem to be the only effective solutions in dealing with the current crisis.

Undoubtedly, loss of human life is one of the greatest threats inflicted by this pandemic and according to the latest statistics released by the World Health Organization (WHO), as of today (April 17, 2020), the total number of confirmed cases in more than 200 countries has reached almost [2.074.529 million people and the number of total deaths is 139378 people](#). According to this statistic, [4958 of Iranian people](#) have died so far. Considering the WHO geographical divisions, the death toll in the Eastern Mediterranean Region consisting of Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Arab states of the Persian Gulf and North Africa has been reported nearly [5662 cases](#).

On the other hand, another threat posed by the virus against global security, are the enduring conflicts in the region. The most recent war-torn countries (Syria, Afghanistan, and Yemen) are located in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, concerning this situation which is resulted from the fact that the current wars in these countries could be ‘two-front wars’: against the virus and between the fighting groups neglecting the lives of hundreds of people including women and children

¹ “Intrusive regionalism” was coined by Amitav Acharya in the paper “Regionalism and the Emerging World Order: Sovereignty, Autonomy, Identity”, CSGR 3rd Annual Conference ‘After The Global Crises: What Next For

Regionalism?”, University of Warwick 16–18 September 1999.

² The first oil shock, when OAPEC proclaimed an embargo to consumer countries supporting Israel during Yum Kippur War.

³ The Global Financial Crisis.

who are trapped in this chaotic region. Vulnerable social groups such as asylum seekers, prisoners, working children, and marginalized people are also other groups faced with these such threats. This makes it essential for the countries involved to follow up and monitor these groups' humanitarian demands.

Growing concern about the global recession is another imminent menace for the international and regional economic security. The declining global oil demand in recent days that provoked a sharply fall in oil prices and prompted OPEC members to seek solutions for coping with this situation is particularly affecting the Middle East. Another economic threat concerns the capital and stock markets in the region that have suffered sharp declines following consecutive shocks including rising global gold prices and declining crude oil prices.

What can be done?

As many individuals, institutions, and government officials stated, resolving the Covid-19 dilemma requires an international coalition and global cooperation. So far, many international organizations affiliated to the United Nations, and the World Health Organization, have made extensive efforts to cultivate a global response to the issue. Other institutions and forums such as the [G20 countries](#), the [G7 countries](#) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([UNOCHA](#)) have issued statements, taking actions and making efforts in this regard, although daily expansion of this pandemic, requires much greater efforts.

Legal measures

The first step required in this relation, is an international consensus to convince the UN Security Council to declare Coronavirus pandemic as a 'threat to international peace and security' in line with Article 39 of the UN Charter. In 2014, with the outbreak of Ebola in Africa, the Security Council declared (for the first time in its history) a public health situation as a threat to international security by adopting [Resolution 2176](#). Although the WHO has declared Covid-19 a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) and considering comparisons between the fatality rate of Ebola and that of Corona, the Security Council has not yet taken any effective action; therefore, a global coalition seems to be necessary to put pressure on the Security Council to adopt an operational and binding resolution for all governments.

Operational measures

In implementing the World Health Organization's project, [Health as a Bridge for Peace](#), the spread of this virus could be considered as a common threat and, in the framework of Intrusive Regionalism, an opportunity to achieve cooperation and a possible peace agenda for the region or even for the world. Therefore, it requires a coherent and continuous action in the framework of a centralized virtual regional institution encompasses Persian Gulf neighboring countries with the following proposed structure, tasks, and objectives to cope with the spread of the threat:

1. Establishing a virtual structure and mechanism consisting of diplomats

and public health specialists as representatives of the countries in the region to implement the international decisions for countering Covid-19 at the regional level.

2. Providing logistics support, making immediate regional decisions, monitoring and supplying medical and treatment equipment, developing common policy makings, supporting vulnerable groups in the region such as asylum seekers and, of course, sharing information and medical and treatment operations shall be among the tasks of such institution.
3. Negotiating to ceasefires and stopping the military conflicts in Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan shall be among the most important goals of the proposed institution.

Iran's opportunity for regionalism and peacemaking

Based on previous failed experiences of regional cooperation in Middle East, the facts of "collective threat" and/or "low politics" seem to be among the factors that can bring the regional states together and possibly push them to cooperate. Considering the concept of intrusive regionalism, 'intrusive' meaning the common threats which many of the neighboring countries in the region simultaneously engaged with. Therefore, by the Covid-19 outbreak and its regional consequences, probably it could be the right time for Iran as a regional actor, to take measures for putting forth the mentioned proposed virtual institution. One of the effective and decisive measures that Iran can propose as a part of this platform is to take the lead in starting negotiations for achieving

peace in conflict areas such as Syria and Yemen. In addition, to provide regional human security and preventing further escalation of the conflicts and more extensive spread of the virus, these measures will also provide the ground for post-Corona negotiations on the other vital long-term regional issues. One need to remember the 'Tehran Conference' in 1943 and the meetings and negotiations that the leaders had on managing the crisis caused by the WWII, which changed the world and paved the way to achieve a relatively post war sustainable global peace. Perhaps by showing willingness to engage in a constructive virtual institution on confronting the virus, Iran with a coalition of other regional players would be able to bargain on existing regional conflicts as well as future relations and order of the region.

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The "Gulf Insights" series is published by the Gulf Studies Center on a weekly base with the aim to promote informed debate with academic depth. The Gulf Insights are commentaries on pressing regional issues written by the GSC/GSP faculty, staff PhD and MA students, as well as guest scholars, and they can be between 1,200 to 1,500 words.

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