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## **AFRICA: COVID-19 Will Almost Certainly Impair Security and Undermine Governance**

**Summary:** The COVID-19 pandemic will almost certainly escalate rapidly in Africa, further deteriorating human security, endangering governmental stability, aggravating territorial conflicts, and enabling Chinese expansionism throughout the continent.

**Spreading Epidemic:** By 2 April, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) reported 6,234 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 223 deaths across Africa. The limited testing capabilities of most African nations probably results in the underreporting of actual cases. Although Africa continues to document relatively low case counts, it remains in the initial stages of an almost certain epidemic. COVID-19's spread in Africa will almost certainly mirror its escalation elsewhere, circulating rapidly as states struggle to establish mitigatory strategies with lacking authority and resources.

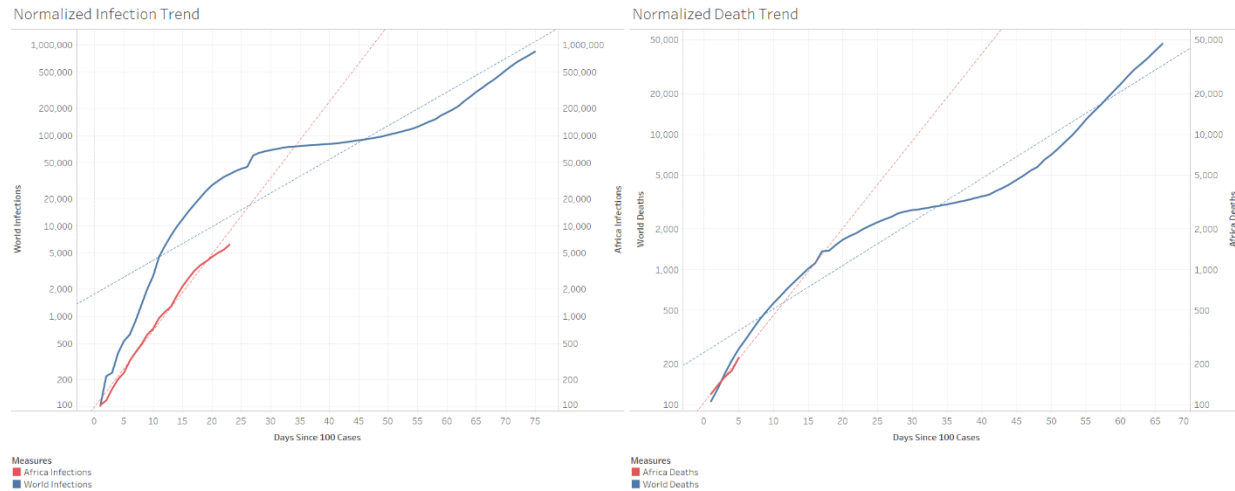
**Fragile Infrastructure:** African healthcare systems will presumably wither under the strain of the COVID-19 epidemic. Its infrastructure suffers from the sustained burden of endemic diseases and shortages of vital healthcare facilities, resources, and professionals. Sub-Saharan Africa as a region holds around 11% of the world's population and carries 24% of the global disease burden. In contrast, Africa makes up less than 1% of global healthcare expenditure and only has 3% of the world's healthcare workers. As a result, African health systems have a very limited capacity to absorb the pandemic, and rural regions have little to no healthcare facilities at all.

**Unrestrained Travel:** The COVID-19 epidemic may impact persist disproportionately within African nations due to porous borders, particularly in western Africa. Reports from the Ebola outbreak highlight that population mobility in West African nations is seven times higher than anywhere else in the world. Unpatrolled and unenforced border constraints enable the relatively free movement of both people and diseases between nations. The absence of effective travel restrictions may contribute to the prolonged spread of COVID-19.

**Governmental Cooperation:** Partnerships amongst African Union (AU) member nations will likely dissipate despite officials' calls for increased cooperation. Additionally, the AU's material support of members may remain limited, restricting the preventative capacities of governments in combatting the spread of COVID-19.

**Constrained NGO Aid:** The demand for aid in initially affected regions and new restrictions will inhibit non-governmental organizations' (NGOs) support of African nations in the short-term. The widespread impact of COVID-19 in combination with scarce medical resources constrains predominately western NGOs from supporting Africa and focuses their support inwards. Due to large expenditures of time, resources, and personnel in other regions of the world, the ability of NGOs to assist any potential outbreak in Africa will likely remain low.

**Outlook and Implication:** China may exploit Africa's vulnerability and the West's inability to assist in the midst of the COVID-19 epidemic to expand influence and further its strategic goals in the region. The rapid spread of COVID-19 will almost certainly overwhelm Africa's limited healthcare infrastructure and enable China to provide aid in an attempt to foster diplomatic relationships, protect economic investments and bolster political influence.



Although Africa has experience fighting epidemics, the lack of medical resources will restrict governments' ability to contain the spread of the virus. The continent's sensitivity to widespread contagion may result in a disproportionate infection and mortality rates. Assuming that the ECDC's data accurately portrays real case counts, conservative projections show that Africa's infection count will exceed 20,000 and deaths will reach 1,500 by 17 April. Without foreign aid, the transmission of COVID-19 will likely mirror the exponential growth of the world trend, raising the infection and death counts rapidly.

African authorities will likely struggle to disseminate health regulations and combat misinformation. Spreading correct information to rural communities will be difficult, especially as rural African communities vary in religion and cultural beliefs. Some touted antimalarial drugs as effective for combating the virus on media platforms, which may push Africans to panic buy these drugs in hope of protecting themselves, likely driving the production of counterfeits. Antimalarial drugs' effectiveness for treating COVID-19 is inconclusive and shortages will likely damage the African healthcare system's ability to combat malaria as a result.

The global spread of COVID-19 will almost certainly impede Africa's economic growth and effective governance, deteriorating human security by exacerbating territorial conflicts and competition for scarce resources. Reduced demand in the global energy market and falling oil prices impacts Africa nations inequitably due to high reliance on energy exports. An economic slowdown will disproportionately affect those living in poverty, possibly driving the unemployed to criminal, terrorist, and insurgent organizations.

[Riley Coder, Alli McIntyre, Parker Labine, Gianna Geiger]

## **HUNGARY: Extension of State of Emergency Likely Sign of Consolidating Power**

**Summary:** Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's expansion of powers under the guise of extending COVID-19 precautions will likely decrease democratic practices and ideals in the country.

**Development:** On 30 March, the Hungarian parliament voted to extend Hungary's state of emergency indefinitely, allowing Orbán to rule by decree. The bill passed 137 to 53, due in part to the Fidesz party, which retains a majority in parliament. The passage of the bill continues to draw criticism due to concerns of potential abuse of power and erosion of the democratic government. Meanwhile, Orbán defends the bill, citing the growing spread of COVID-19 as the reason for the increasingly stringent measures. The bill allows for severe measures taken against those seen as misrepresenting the COVID-19 precautions the government implements and suspends all elections and referendums, along with meetings of parliament for reasons other than to discuss the virus.

**Analysis:** The passage of the bill almost certainly represents Orbán's desire to consolidate power by taking advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through securing a rule of decree, the power granted to Orbán will continue to grow, likely while oversight decreases. The press will probably become more regulated, due to the provision allowing repercussions for those perceived to spread false information about the virus or the government's handling of the situation. Parliament's inability to meet for matters other than the virus and a vague definition for "false information" will likely allow Orbán to push through legislation that may ordinarily receive pushback. The criticism received will likely not have a major impact, especially while Orbán continues to defend the bill and his newly extended powers. Without a projected end date for the state of emergency, the ability for opposition parties and organizations to push for effective change within Hungary diminishes.

[Alli McIntyre]

## **VENEZUELA: Russian Oil Asset Acquisition May Further Economic Instability**

**Summary:** The Russian Federation purchased all Venezuelan-based Rosneft oil assets, further entrenching Moscow's interests in the region. The shift may strengthen the effects of sanctions and further impair Venezuela's already fragile economy.

**Development:** On 28 March, the Russian oil firm Rosneft halted operations in Venezuela and liquidated its assets in the country. A Rosneft spokesperson described the assets' anonymous buyer as a Russian state-owned company. Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro remains reliant on Rosneft's operations, which account for a majority of the country's exports and crude oil production.

**Analysis:** Rosneft's liquidation of its assets in Venezuela may endanger the Latin American nation's oil-reliant economy, opening it to stronger sanctions and reducing oil production. The shift signals Moscow's intention to expand influence in Latin America and further its relationship with Maduro. However, the Russian-controlled holding company may lack the financial support and commercial networks to sustain its oil operations, potentially depressing the Venezuelan economy and undermining Moscow's intention to bolster the Maduro regime. A continued recession may also provoke an influx in emigration, further impairing Venezuela's labor force and therefore its economy base.

[Riley Coder]

## [ISRAEL: Police May Aid Health Regulation Compliance in Ultra-Orthodox Communities](#)

**Summary:** A stricter police presence due to a spike in coronavirus cases in ultra-Orthodox communities may make citizens more compliant with the health regulations.

**Development:** On 1 April, the Israeli Health Ministry reported that COVID-19 cases in the city of Bnei Brak increased by nearly 30%. Bnei Brak, like several other ultra-Orthodox communities, emerged as a coronavirus hotspot because the public continues to ignore the regulations put into place, such as limiting social gatherings. These occurrences resulted in a demand for stricter police enforcement of health regulations. Police patrols have increased to enforce the restrictions and help slow the virus. Bnei Brak's mayor, Avraham Rubenstein, insisted the city did its best but did not expect religious Jews to embrace the restrictions.

**Analysis:** Frequent police patrols may lessen the spread of COVID-19 if they can effectively restrict travel. However, continued refusal to comply may cause officials to order the complete lockdown of the noncompliant communities to protect the rest of the population. Stricter police enforcement of the health regulations might cause citizens to reconsider resisting social distancing precautions. The ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities' refusal to comply with restrictions will possibly prolong the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in Israel. Even facing more restrictions, the ultra-Orthodox population will most likely not change daily routines until rabbis, who claim that prayer and Torah study will protect them, endorse restrictions to slow the spread of COVID-19.

[Sarah Reiter]

## **IRAN: General Ghaani's Attempts to Stabilize Diplomacy With Iraq Will Likely Fail**

**Summary:** Iran's Expeditionary Quds Force General Esmail Ghaani arrived in Baghdad to unify Iran and Iraq's fractured diplomacy as both countries face economic uncertainty and political unrest, but his efforts will unlikely replicate his predecessor's success.

**Development:** On 1 April, Ghaani arrived in Baghdad with the goal of resolving Iraqi political turmoil. A major bloc in Iraqi politics shares the views of Ghaani and Iran's Quds Force, who oppose the current Prime Minister designate Adnan al-Zurfi. Iraq currently faces an economic crisis as its oil industry suffers due to plummeting oil prices. Tehran faces a similar economic volatility due to compounding factors caused by Western sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic. The trip marks Ghaani's first visit to Iraq since his succession of General Soleimani in January. General Soleimani proved very successful when negotiating in Iraqi politics but General Ghaani lacks the network and prestige Soleimani fostered.

**Analysis:** General Ghaani's attempts to intervene in Iraqi politics will likely fail due to his lack of key relationships in Iraq's elite political circles. Ghaani will likely introduce harsher measures in a bid for political control over Baghdad's various factions. Iran's opposition to al-Zurfi likely stems from his clashes with groups who oppose Western incursion in the region. Tehran likely sees al-Zurfi as a threat to its own agenda, although Ghaani probably will not influence Iraqi politics, given his limited ties and minimal Arabic. Al-Zurfi's removal as Iraq's Prime Minister remains possible, but may materialize due to internal unrest instead of Ghaani's interventionism.

[Timothy Fergus]

## **SYRIA: Failed Islamic State Prison Break May Prompt Humanitarian Reform**

**Summary:** Islamic State (IS) prisoners' attempted prison escape may lead to provisions of international intervention and aid.

**Development:** On 29 March, a riot broke out in the Syrian Democratic Force's (SDF) Ghweran Prison in the northeastern Syrian city of Hasakah. The prison allegedly houses between 3000 and 5000 low-level IS members. The prisoners successfully took control of the first floor of the facility and destroyed security cameras, internal walls, and doors. The facility director, Roubar Hassan, claimed the prisoners demanded to meet with human rights organizations and the international coalition, but neither the SDF or the international coalition substantiated this claim. The SDF's General Mazloun Abdi claimed on 30 March that no prisoners escaped and that the situation remains under control.

**Analysis:** The SDF will likely face extensive criticism from international human rights organizations, potentially diminishing international assistance. The recent riot demonstrates that limited capacity in prison cells can foster internal insurrections, precipitate escape plans and raise security concerns. Security footage shows conditions in the facility have not improved since 2019, generating speculation on the condition of other SDF-held prisons, potentially prompting investigations from international humanitarian organizations. Harsh prison conditions may prompt countries supporting the SDF to reduce assistance. The reduction in assistance will probably hamper the SDF's fighting efforts against Turkey in northern Syria and IS in the East.

[Dorian Taylor]



**This is a global intelligence briefing prepared by the students of the Global Security and Intelligence Studies program at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona. The views expressed in this briefing are those of the students, not the university.**

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