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 **Question**
From late December 2019 to January 2020, the world was struck unawares by a new corona-virus with rapid spread and devastating consequences. Attempt a critical assessment of the impacts of the pandemic. Part of the issues you need to address include the epicenter of virus outbreak; the conspiracy theories; was occurrence natural or man-made? What are the impacts on global health and global economy and state relations? How have the Great Powers handled the pandemic? Do at least a two-page write-up and digest.

 **Answer**

Coronaviruses are a group of related viruses that cause diseases in mammals and birds. In humans, coronaviruses cause respiratory tract infections that can range from mild to lethal. Mild illnesses include some cases of the common cold (which has other possible causes, predominantly rhinoviruses), while more lethal varieties can cause SARS, MERS, and COVID-19. (en.wikipedia.org).

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) is the name given to the 2019 novel coronavirus. COVID-19 is the name given to the disease associated with the virus. SARS-CoV-2 is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans. Coronaviruses are viruses that circulate among animals with some of them also known to infect humans. Bats are considered natural hosts of these viruses yet several other species of animals are also known to act as sources. For instance, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) is transmitted to humans from camels, and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus-1 (SARS-CoV-1) is transmitted to humans from civet cats.

The novel coronavirus detected in China in 2019 is closely related genetically to the SARS-CoV-1 virus. SARS emerged at the end of 2002 in China, and it caused more than 8 000 cases in 33 countries over a period of eight months. Around one in ten of the people who developed SARS died. As of 30 March 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak had caused over 700 000 cases worldwide since the first case was reported in China in January 2020. Of these, more than 30 000 are known to have died.

Conspiracy theorists on social media are increasingly posing a potential global threat and becoming an asset for states looking to disrupt the geopolitical narrative and spread disinformation. In the context of the global COVID-19 crisis, conspiracy theories have exploded across digital news sites and social media. While propaganda campaigns amid pandemics are nothing new, what is new in the current crisis is the global information environment in which it is playing out. The all-too-real impacts and stresses of the pandemic feed into the preexisting dynamics of the online information ecosystem, amplifying rumors, misinformation, conspiracies, and outright lies. For governments seeking to build trust and communicate clearly, it’s a nightmare. For those looking to sow chaos and doubt, it’s an opportunity. This conspiracy theory contagion has the overall effect of amplifying and strengthening conspiracy theories, partly due to

the nature of social media algorithms, which are designed to optimize for engagement. On a basic level, the more conspiracists you have believing in a particular untruth, the more content they generate promoting that untruth and the more they engage with that content.

For example, there could be five different conspiracy theories, but if they all contain the untruth that the coronavirus was created in the Fort Detrick lab in Maryland, the result overall is far more content connecting Fort Detrick to COVID-19 than would have been the case if the untruth were confined to one conspiracy. Algorithms designed to optimize for engagement will factor in the high level of engagement on content that connects Fort Detrick to COVID-19 and start actively recommending the conspiracy to other users. For example, as of April 8, Google’s top recommended related searches for “Fort Detrick” included “Fort Detrick coronavirus” and “Fort Detrick bioweapon.” These dynamics are having real-world consequences. For example, recent attacks on telecommunications infrastructure in the United Kingdom have been directly linked to conspiracy theories in which the COVID-19 crisis has been folded into existing anti-vaccination and anti-5G narratives. Conspiracy theories about the supposed health effects of 5G have been spreading like wildfire across social media in recent years, in part because the conspiracy often runs through long-established anti-vaccination groups, many of which now believe 5G is either causing illness directly or that it is a deliberate effort to use radiation to weaken immune systems to force everyone to accept vaccinations.

The specifics of how COVID-19 is grafted onto these preexisting conspiracies vary; some say the coronavirus crisis is a cover to fast-track the implementation of 5G networks, while others believe 5G trials in Wuhan, China, damaged the immune systems of residents as part of a wider plan to impose forced vaccinations. Some claim that maps of 5G hot spots match up with COVID-19 outbreaks or think it has something to do with interfering with atmospheric oxygen (or maybe it’s a plan to turn humanity into cyborgs, which is also in there). Some strains combine all of the above, spinning a nonsensical narrative about an effort by Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates to depopulate the planet using vaccines, 5G, and the coronavirus. Huang Yanling, a Chinese research scientist who yet another YouTube conspiracy video blamed for having created COVID-19 in a lab in Wuhan. The video was picked up by U.S. pro-Trump media, and Huang’s name is now being splashed around social media.

The global response to COVID-19 has been marked by critical shortages of ventilators, masks, and protective equipment. There is, however, another resource with a rapidly dwindling supply: public trust. Trust in governments and medical authorities is absolutely vital to achieve the kind of mass behavioral change needed to bring the world through this crisis. The corrosive effects of conspiracy theories on social media, combined with nation-states all too willing to exploit them, imperil that response and could prove fatal in more ways than one (Elise Thomas,2020).

The covid-19 pandemic has created unprecedented disruption for the global health and development community. It is clear that the outcry in virtually every country about the lack of equipment and supplies to test for and protect against COVID-19 will lead countries to reexamine their supply chains for critical

health and livelihood related products. This will lead to a surge of nationalism with respect to the need to produce pharmaceuticals, medical supplies, and equipment domestically. Even countries that traditionally had no capability in these areas will seek to develop the same.

The realization that the economic costs of a pandemic can be huge, far surpassing investments in research and prevention, will lead to billions more dollars of investment in research, vaccines, therapeutics, and non-medical methods of prevention. This will mean that trillions of dollars in economic losses, loss of life, and loss of livelihoods for millions of poor people all over the world will be averted.

With this crisis, the North-South paradigm is definitely over. The monopoly that traditional “development actors” have had in the last 40 years will quickly erode. China and South Korea used to be aid recipients until not so long ago. Now they are helping the World Health Organization, Italy, and other European countries to cope with the crisis.

Chinese charities are distributing masks to European governments, as Europe and the United States have been doing in developing countries for years.

Some of the largest hospitals in Europe are now calling for donations from the public. Doctors without Borders known for its international operations in conflict and poor areas, is now deploying medical camps in the center of Brussels.

The COVID-19 pandemic is threatening lives and livelihoods across the world. In just three months, more than a million people in 180 countries have fallen sick from the viral illness, while at least 50,000 have died in a public health emergency the United Nations is calling the world's "most challenging crisis" since World War II. In large swathes of the globe, lockdowns aimed at stemming the virus's spread have brought life and economic activity to a virtual standstill. In the worst-hit regions, hospitals are overwhelmed with the sick and dying, while the poor and vulnerable everywhere are facing severe food shortages and starvation. Highlighting the risk this poses to peace and stability in the world, the United Nations' Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued an urgent appeal for action on Tuesday, calling on politicians to "forget political games" and come together for a "strong and effective response". Whether millions live or die depends on the decisions the world's leaders take in the coming days and weeks. But analysts say the early signs are worrying.

In some countries, responses from heads of governments have been marked by dithering and denial, driven by personal interests, distrust of science or fears of wreaking economic havoc.

The government of Afghanistan tightened containment measures as the pandemic worsened, including screening at ports of entry, quarantine for infected people, and closure of public places for gathering. It later introduced strict social distancing measures and placed Kabul and some other cities under lockdown, which it extended for two weeks on April 12. Daily movements have been restricted to those deemed essential. Trade and transportation have been disrupted, and containment measures are inhibiting domestic activity, putting at risk the livelihoods of vulnerable households. Border closures and panic-buying led to a

temporary spike in prices of some foodstuffs which abated after private wholesaler’s boosted supply at the government’s request. The government has taken steps to replace wheat imports lost due to border closures with purchases from Central Asia. The Taliban expressed readiness to agree to a ceasefire in the areas hit by the outbreak under its control.

Actions are being taken by great powers and other states, in an effort to curb the coronavirus pandemic.China has been hit hard by the outbreak with over 82,341 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 3,342 deaths as of April 16, 2020 (mainland). The government imposed strict containment measures, including the extension of the national Lunar New Year holiday (ending on Feb 2 extended from Jan 30), the lockdown of Hubei province, and large-scale mobility restrictions at the national level, social distancing, and a 14 day quarantine period for returning migrant workers. The domestic transmission of the virus has slowed significantly, and mobility restrictions have been largely removed. While policy has tightened to contain the virus transmission of asymptomatic cases.

COVID-19 is propagating rapidly across Europe with 852,174 [confirmed cases and 85,926 reported deaths in the EU/EEA and the United Kingdom](https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/cases-2019-ncov-eueea) as of April 16. Most European countries have taken several containment measures ranging from lockdowns and travel restrictions to school closures and bans on large gatherings. Measures that favor teleworking were also widely implemented.

Iran has been hit hard by the COVID-19 outbreak with almost 80,000 confirmed cases and 4,869 deaths as of April 16, 2020. The government has adopted a range of measures to limit the spread of the virus, including stopping flights from China, [closing schools](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51760563), malls, markets and key religious sites, banning cultural and religious gatherings, releasing a high number of prisoners to fight contagion in prisons, and warning Iranians against traveling. On March 25, President Rouhani announced a partial lockdown, closing businesses and government offices for two weeks and banning travel between different cities. But, concerned about the economic damage from the outbreak, the government recently ordered a step-by-step reopening of businesses that it considers to be low or average risk in terms of spreading the virus. On April 15, the government embarked on its biggest-ever initial public offering, selling its residue shares in 18 companies (including 12 percent share of Social Welfare Fund, the largest public company) to generate income as it struggles with the economic consequences of coronavirus and U.S. sanctions.

Iraq has been hit by two shocks—the spread of COVID-19 and the sharp decline in oil prices. The number of COVID-19 cases stands at 1,232 as of April 9 with 69 fatalities. The authorities have implemented a range of measures to limit the spread of the virus encompassing closing borders, travel restrictions (including on international flights and internal public transportation), closing schools and universities, and a nationwide lockdown and curfew since March

According to the WHO, as of April16, 2020, Egypt has 2,505confirmed cases of Covid-19 and 183 deaths. The Covid-19 epidemic is likely to impact the Egyptian economy primarily due to declining travel and tourist activity, reduced worker remittances, capital outflows, and slowdown in domestic activities as people are asked to stay home. The weaker demand in the global market will also reduce Egypt’s exports as well as earnings from the Suez Canal. The authorities have taken a host of precautionary measures to

improve testing as well as to limit the community spread of the virus, including setting up testing centers, imposing a partial curfew for two weeks starting March 25th, temporarily closing places of worship, temporarily halting all air travel, and encouraging civil servants to work from home in non-essential sectors. Authorities have also suspended the export of all types of legumes for a period of 3 months and plan to start increasing strategic food reserves to meet domestic demand. The central bank and the government are actively implementing measures to contain economic implications of the epidemic.

Israel has been significantly affected by the global spread of COVID-19, with 12,591 cases confirmed and 140 deaths as of April 16. The government has implemented a range of measures to contain and mitigate the spread of the virus, and to support people, jobs, and businesses. Measures in response to the COVID-19 outbreak have included increased testing, travel restrictions, social distancing measures including restricting Israelis to 100-meter radius of their home for recreation, and closures of businesses except essential services and indoor premises.

Net inflows of COVID-19 cases are declining, however growth rates remain in some regions. As of April 16, the number of active cases was around 106,000 and about 22,000 people have died. The government has moved resolutely with containment measures. The nation-wide lockdown, announced in early March, was extended until May 3. Travel is restricted and public gathering are banned. All schools and universities are shut. Non-essential productive activities are closed across the country, with exceptions for supermarket and grocery stores, pharmacies, banks, public transport and essential public services. Strict safety measures have been introduced for industrial companies still operating.

Korea has reported 10,613 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 229 deaths as of April 16, 2020. The authorities have implemented comprehensive testing and tracking, which has enabled early isolation and treatment while minimizing widespread mobility restrictions. After registering more than 500 new cases per day in late February and early March, the number has slowed to an average of around 30 per day in mid-April.

Nigeria has been severely hit by the spread of COVID-19 and the associated sharp decline in oil prices. Government policy is responding to both these developments. The authorities have reported 407 cases of COVID-19 and 12 deaths as of April 16, 2020. A range of measures have been implemented to contain the spread of the virus, including closure of international airports, public and private schools, universities, stores and markets, and suspension of public gatherings. A “lockdown” has been declared in Lagos, Abuja and Ogun states. Work at home is also encouraged in several states and government institutions while isolation centers are being expanded in Lagos state. Testing capacity has been increased to 1500 daily and is expected to reach 2500 by the end of the week.

Saudi Arabia is being hit by two shocks the spread of COVID-19 and the sharp decline in oil prices. Government policy is responding to both these developments. The number of COVID-19 cases stands at 6380 of which 83 have died and 990 have recovered (as of April 16). The authorities have implemented a range of measures to try and limit the spread of the virus encompassing a nighttime curfew for 21 days, extended to 24/7 in the cities of Mecca and Madina on April 2, and several other cities on April 6; travel restrictions (including on international flights and internal public transportation and taxis); suspending

prayers at mosques; closing all schools, universities, and shopping malls; suspending employee attendance at government and private workplaces (except for critical staff); and increasing testing. Further, early in April, the Ministry of Hajj called on countries to delay their bookings for the 2020 Hajj season.

COVID-19 has been spreading rapidly across the United Kingdom with [over 103,000 confirmed cases claiming more than 13,700 lives](https://www.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/f94c3c90da5b4e9f9a0b19484dd4bb14). In response, the government has implemented a range of measures including travel restrictions, social distancing measures, closures of entertainment, hospitality, non-essential shops and indoor premises, and increased testing. The Prime Minister has set out that the British people can only leave their homes for very limited reasons including basic food shopping, to exercise once a day and essential work.

The US is facing a widening outbreak of COVID-19 that has claimed the lives of about 24,000 Americans and infected more than 600,000 persons across all 50 states. In response, the U.S. has implemented a range of measures including travel restrictions, social distancing, declaration of states of emergency, closure of schools, bars and restaurants, and increased testing.

In conclusion, the covid-19 did the impossible and brought the world to an abrupt halt. All resources by both Individuals and states have been put into finding a cure and solution to the pandemic. Conspiracies continue to fly and cause fear among the masses. With Trump actively calling the virus the Chinese virus, an already rocky US-China relations might finally give way once the pandemic is over. Isolation tactics is being used round the globe and surely. The world has better days ahead.

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