

# SPOTLIGHT ON AFRICA:

## Mapping geopolitical trends for Quarter One 2020



associated with

UNISA   
university of south africa

**Contributors:**

Faith Mabera, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Global Dialogue associated with UNISA,

Kenny Dlamini, Research Officer at the Institute for Global Dialogue associated with UNISA

Makhethe Makamase, Research Assistant at the Institute for Global Dialogue associated with UNISA

**Edited by:** Philani Mthembu, Executive Director at the Institute for Global Dialogue associated with UNISA

Cover image by Bruce Rolff

[https://www.123rf.com/photo\\_7163210\\_magnify-glass-focus-on-africa.html](https://www.123rf.com/photo_7163210_magnify-glass-focus-on-africa.html)

Published in May 2020 by the Institute for Global Dialogue

Institute for Global Dialogue associated with UNISA

3rd Floor Robert Sobukwe Building

263 Nana Sita Street

Pretoria

Tel: +27 12 3376082

Fax: +27 86 212 9442

info@igd.org.za

www.igd.org.za

All rights reserved. The material in this publication may not be reproduced, stored or transmitted without the prior permission of the publisher. Short extracts may be quoted, provided the source is fully acknowledged.



## Contents

Introduction .....	3
Growing militancy in the Sahel and beyond .....	3
The internationalization of the Libyan crisis.....	5
The hydropolitics of the Nile.....	6
Navigating high-wire transitions in Sudan and Ethiopia.....	7
The global Covid-19 pandemic: the black swan of 2020 .....	9



## Introduction

As the year moves past the first quarter, a close observation of multi-dimensional developments across political, economic, social and geopolitical spheres will provide crucial insights into emerging and established trends that will impact Africa in the medium-term to long-term horizons. Some of the trends, such as the growing threat of jihadist violence in the Sahel have developed over a number of years, and have evolved counter to shifts and shortcomings in policy responses.

Moreover, amidst reports of increased attacks by Islamist insurgents in the northern province of Mozambique, there is an interregional aspect to the extremist contagion pointing to greater risk of spread over wider geographical space, with crucial policy implications at regional and continental level. On the contrary, other trends such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has taken centre stage as the black swan of 2020, causing massive disruptions on a global scale and exerting maximum pressure on governments' crisis management systems and capabilities in handling a multi-faceted crisis that extends beyond public health emergencies, encumbered with political, social and economic consequences.

As chair of the African Union in 2020, South Africa will need to keep abreast of the key trends and dynamics across the continent, and be adept at aligning strategic policy responses to priorities and anticipated challenges. Particularly, foreign policy stakeholders will need to embrace granular risk analysis and scenario planning as a way of reinforcing a more coherent and integrated orientation at the core of an Afro-centric foreign policy agenda.

## Growing militancy in the Sahel and beyond

### *The essentials*

The upheavals in the Sahel continue to wreak havoc on millions of civilians caught up in the violence propagated by rapidly expanding violent extremist and jihadist groups across Burkina

Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger. A surge in inter-communal violence has led to humanitarian crisis and mass migration as thousands flee in search of safety. The security situation is further exacerbated by environmental risks in the form of droughts, fluctuating rainfall and water shortages. Governments in the region have turned to militarized responses to the crises, amidst signs of a growing transregional threat across the Sahel, Maghreb stretching to the Horn of Africa region. Military solutions seem to be failing in delivering sustainable solutions leading to increased securitization of development. The extremism threat in the Cabo Delgado province in northern Mozambique will also be under the watch of South Africa and broader SADC region given the potential for a humanitarian crisis in the province with broader regional implications

### *The context*

The violence rates from extremist groups in the Sahel have doubled every year since 2015, recording 700 violent events in 2019, a spike in fatalities from 225 to 2000 and displacement of more than 900,000. Three groups, [the Macina Liberation Front \(FLM\)](#), [the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara \(ISGS\)](#) and [Ansarul Islam](#) are responsible for roughly two-thirds of the extremist violence in the central Sahel concentrated in central Mali, northern and eastern Burkina Faso, and western Niger.

The *modus operandi* of the extremist groups is to stoke inter-communal conflict, undermining an already weakened social fabric and exploiting grievance narratives to build up anti-government sentiment. Another trend that emerged in 2019 is the [complex assault on specific targets](#) such as military bases, in addition to hit-and-run attacks and taking of hostages. The militants continue to exhibit high levels of adaptability and coordination, taking advantage of the poorly-controlled territories in the Sahelian borderlands where there is little or no policing.

The main responses to the rise of violent extremism across the Sahel has been in [the security sector](#), evident in the doubling of military expenditures of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger in

attempts to bolster [national security architectures](#). The three countries have also launched several military operations to counter militant Islamist groups, in addition to conducting patrols by mobile units. At the regional level, the countries of the Sahel established the G5 Sahel Force in 2014, a coalition comprising of Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mauritania and Chad aimed at coordinating counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations across the region. There are also a number of [foreign military troops](#) in the region including France's *Operation Barkhane* and peacekeepers deployed to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), and the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM).

From an implementation perspective, the G5 Sahel Force has been impeded by a number of coordination and operational challenges, such as funding shortfalls and poor coordination and intelligence-sharing among the troop-contributing countries. The most recent summit of the G5 Sahel force in Pau in January 2020 saw the French commit an additional 220 troops to the Sahel, in addition to the 4500 deployed under *Operation Barkhane*. The summit also endorsed the creation of the [Coalition of the Sahel](#) to facilitate joint operations and enhance intelligence-sharing. Additionally, the EU pledged to increase its presence in the Sahel through the creation of a new taskforce called Takuba to supplement logistical support provided by the United Kingdom, Denmark and Germany. The [Takuba](#) task force, expected to be fully operational in early 2021, will be made of special forces from European partners including Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, and will be deployed as the counter-terrorism pillar of the Coalition for the Sahel, and will be aimed at capacity-building of local armed forces and redeployment of state authority in strongholds of the jihadists.

Against the grain of increased troop deployment by European partners such as the UK and France, the US is [drawing down its military presence](#) in the Sahel and closing down a \$110 million drone base that has been a major boost for intelligence

and logistics for counter-terrorism operations across West Africa. The large-scale drawdown of US military presence in West Africa has been attributed to a push from the Pentagon to direct focus on priorities such as great power competition from Russia and China.

Another notable trend that is of growing concern is the expanding reach of jihadists with the heightened risk of using [Burkina Faso](#) as a launching pad for operations further south into coastal West Africa, potentially targeting Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin and Togo. By virtue of its central position, a takeover of Burkina Faso by Islamist militants could allow expansion of violence on a regional scale, undermine stability and foster a dispersal strategy that would increasingly undermine regional and international counter-terrorist operations. The jihadist contagion and the risk of its spread over a wide geographical area demand a more coordinated response from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in collaboration with neighbouring North and Central Africa regions, as well as the formulation of policies that prioritize the security-development nexus at the core of underlying root causes of conflict in the Sahel.

Closer home in southern Africa, there have been reports of increased attacks by ISIS-inspired insurgent group, Ahlu-Sunnah Wal Jama'at (Al-Sunnah), in the [Cabo Delgado province in northern Mozambique](#). According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) over 900 people have been killed since the insurgency began in late 2017, and more than 80 attacks with over 100 deaths have been recorded since the beginning of 2020. The presence of large reserves of natural gas in Cabo Delgado with mining contracts operated by foreign companies has also upped the stakes for the extremist groups who have resorted to a 'winning hearts and minds' approach to the local population, presenting themselves as an alternative to the government which has provided little support to the locals in the province. According to experts, the long-term strategy of the militants could be aimed at winning over local populations and then

conducting guerilla warfare over a sustained period in similar fashion to the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) during the civil war. A further complication to the situation is the proliferation of organized crime, including trafficking of narcotics that could be used to finance the insurgency. The Mozambican government has turned to military assistance from Russia, France and Pakistan in tackling the insurgency but there is a glaring need for the [Southern Africa Development Community](#) to step up a coordinated response to the insurgency in its backyard by operationalizing its counter-terrorism strategy which was drawn up in 2015.

## The internationalization of the Libyan crisis

### *The essentials*

The growing presence of external actors, supporting different factions of the civil war in Libya have exacerbated the thorny path to a political solution in the long-drawn conflict between the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) and the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by General Khalifa Haftar. External actors, with complex and often competing geopolitical interests have marginalized African actors such as the African Union in the search of politically driven solutions, further complicating the situation and contributing to intensification of violence as warring factions dig their heels in. During 2019, there were divisions within the AU under the chairmanship of Egypt where it openly supported General Haftar while the AU has traditionally supported the Prime Minister al-Sarraj's GNA. As part of its priorities as chair of the AU in 2020, South Africa has indicated a greater focus on finding a political solution to the Libyan crisis and support for AU led initiatives such as the High-Level Committee on Libya.

### *The context*

The conflict in Libya, which has entered its tenth year since the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)-led intervention that facilitated the ouster of authoritarian leader Muammar

Gaddafi, has morphed into an [internationalized war](#) with the involvement of a range of foreign actors backing rival factions and meddling in a number of summits attempting peace talks. Following contested elections in 2014, the first civil war broke out, splitting the country along an East-West divide with internationally recognized Government of National Accord led by Prime Minister Fayeze al-Sarraj based in Tripoli, and the eastern-based House of Representatives (HoR) backed by General Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA).

In addition to the proliferation of armed groups who compete over resources and interests, the rival factions have been backed up by a mix of foreign actors including Turkey, Qatar, Italy, France, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Russia, who have exacerbated belligerence and stymied efforts towards a political solution. In 2019, the conflict [entered a new stage](#) when Haftar-led forces launched an offensive against Tripoli with the alleged objective of fighting Islamists. Haftar is supported by France, UAE, Egypt and Russia who have provided significant military hardware to his campaign. On the other side, the GNA is backed by Qatar, Turkey and Italy. Haftar's assault on Tripoli has been characterized by air raids, drone strikes and ground support from a number of Russian mercenaries and Libyan armed groups. This has tipped the nature of warfare in Libya with the LNA carrying out more than 900 drone strikes using UAE-made drones in 2019, provoking an escalation of offensives by other foreign powers. In January 2020, Turkey upscaled its support to the GNA, sending troops and Turkish-backed Syrian fighters.

Strategically, [Turkish involvement](#) has to be viewed against its interests in the Eastern Mediterranean with reference to maritime agreements signed between Turkey and Libya that ensure the former's access to extensive areas of the sea. In the pro-Haftar camp, Russia has also stepped up its military assistance through the Wagner Group, a private military contractor, in alignment with its broader strategy to expand its influence in the Middle East and

North Africa in the wake of limited engagement by the EU and the US.

The complex web of actors with geoeconomic and geostrategic interests in Libya has also influenced the broader search for a political settlement of the conflict. A peace summit held in Berlin in January 2020 ended with an agreement by key parties to uphold [the UN arms embargo](#) that had been routinely violated, and to support a Libyan-led political process through cessation of military assistance. The German initiative was preceded by a Russian mediation attempt to bring Haftar and al-Sarraj to the negotiating table. The Moscow meeting ended in failure with Haftar refusing to sign a seven-point ceasefire agreement, perhaps an indication of pressure from one of his key backers.

The actions of foreign actors in Libya underscore the geopolitical context within which the conflict is unfolding and the counterproductive effect on prospects of peace, emboldening warring parties to take on hard-lined stances. The conflict also feeds into the economic sphere with the [blockade on oil fields](#) and terminals by armed groups loyal to Haftar. This has slashed Libya's overall oil production resulting in losses of billions of dollars. As of February 2020, losses from the oil shutdowns had exceeded \$1.4bn and were expected to rise in light of escalation of violence.

The [marginal engagement of the AU](#) in Libyan peace efforts points to the realpolitik of stakeholders involved and the shrinking space for an African-led initiative, partly due to perceptions of partiality of some African leaders who have maintained ties with remnants of the Gaddafi regime. The chair of the AU High Level Committee on Libya, President Dennis Sassou Nguesso, was invited to the Berlin Summit at the last minute. Furthermore, the meeting of the AU High Level Committee on Libya was on the backfoot of the Berlin, Moscow and Geneva talks, signaling that in spite of proclaimed prioritization of Libya in line with its 2020 theme of 'Silencing the Guns', the AU's bandwidth on Libya will

remain constrained by limited leverage and financial shortfalls.

## The hydropolitics of the Nile

### *The essentials*

Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia continue to engage in several rounds of talks to settle the ongoing dispute over the Nile with no end in sight for now. Notable is the absence of the AU as a key interlocutor in the negotiations, which has been sidelined by a number of external actors. In 2019, the US brokered negotiations between Ethiopia and Egypt to resolve the disputes, however Ethiopia remains wary of the partisan intentions behind Washington's involvement. The Arab League also passed a resolution in support of Egypt, condemning Ethiopia's refusal to sign the agreement produced in the tripartite dialogue, intensifying tensions and accusatory rhetoric between Cairo and Addis Ababa.

### *The context*

The dispute between Egypt and Ethiopia over the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) has taken a turn with the breakdown of talks in February 2020. In November 2019, the [US brokered talks](#) with the foreign and water ministers of Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan in an attempt to reach an agreement on the filling of the GERD reservoir. The negotiations in Washington were also coordinated by the Department of Treasury and the World Bank.

For Ethiopia, the GERD is a crucial component of its national development plans with the dam expected to boost hydroelectricity production in the country, with add-on benefits for the entire region. Egypt, which is 90% reliant on the Nile for its water supply, is concerned that an upstream dam on the Blue Nile will reduce supply to its Aswan High Dam, and takes the dam as a contravention of [historical treaties](#) over usage of the Nile's water, with reference to the 1959 Egypt-Sudan Pact. According to the 1959 treaty, Egypt claims historical rights over 66% of the water supply amounting to 55 billion cubic metres, leaving 18.5 billion cubic metres to Sudan

and the remainder to evaporation. This treaty did not recognize the rights of upstream countries, a point that has driven Ethiopia to label the historical pact as anachronistic and an obstacle to upstream Nile development.

Ethiopia began construction of the GERD in 2010 and is nearing completion with filling of the reservoir expected to commence in July 2020. To guide peaceful sharing of the Nile resource, in 2015, Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt agreed on a [Declaration of Principles](#) that outlined equitable and reasonable use of the river with minimal harm for other riparian states. There have also been efforts by upstream countries to finalize a [Cooperative Framework Agreement](#) to regulate transboundary resource sharing under the Nile Basin Commission, though the CFA is yet to be ratified by all parties. Egypt, however, has remained adamant about the applicability of the historical water allocation treaties and has rejected key parts of the CFA based on the [‘inviolability of its water share.’](#) The proposed filling of the GERD 74 billion cubic metre (bcm) reservoir is to unfold in three phases: the first will take one year to test the initial turbines with 3bcm of water; the second would test all 13 turbines with 12 bcm and the third stage would fill the rest of the reservoir. It is the final stage that worries Egypt and fuels the spat with Ethiopia. A potential agreement proposed that Ethiopia release [a fixed amount of 35 bcm](#) downstream annually as it fills the dam, but Ethiopia rejected this proposal in an avoidance of commitment to a fixed water quota urging instead for a flexible agreement with room for periodic reviews.

The negotiations brokered by the US reached a stalemate with Ethiopia’s withdrawal from the talks, refusing to bow to pressure to sign a draft agreement it considered highly partisan. From Addis Ababa’s perspective, the US [overreach](#) in the talks sought to appease Egypt, a long-standing strategic partner in the US’ Middle East foreign policy calculus. The deadlock prompted Cairo to turn to the Arab League, who passed a resolution in March 2020 condemning Ethiopia’s stance and escalating tensions on a regional

scale. Meanwhile, Ethiopia has indicated that it stands ready to return to talks on the condition of fairness and impartiality, while continuing the construction of the dam as planned.

There remains room for compromise if the Nile dispute negotiations take up [a staggered approach](#) that considered first the initial filling of the dam, and then focuses on the longer term issues of water storage especially during periods of prolonged droughts. This also presents an opportunity for the AU to step in as an impartial mediator, especially during a year dedicated to sustainable peace and conflict resolution under the theme of ‘Silencing the Guns.’

## Navigating high-wire transitions in Sudan and Ethiopia

### *The essentials*

The political transitions in Sudan and Ethiopia will be under close watch of the AU in view of its 2020 theme of ‘Silencing the Guns’. Sudan seeks its removal from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism, while Ethiopia is keen to sustain momentum for its reforms under PM Abiy Ahmed, while navigating an election year under precarious conditions for social cohesion and unity under ethnic federalism.

### *The context: Sudan*

In the wake of a popular uprising in 2019 that led to the ouster of strongman Omar al-Bashir who had held power since 1989, an [interim transitional council](#), made up of 11 civilian and military members, was established in August 2019 to oversee the 39-month transitional process under the leadership of Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok. The civilian component of the transitional council, the Forces for Freedom and Change Coalition (FFC) is made up of a coalition of professional, civil society and political organizations. The most prominent of these groups is the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) which had played a major role in mobilization of people support during the 2019 uprising. Another active group is the Sudan Call, a civil society group that rallied behind the SPA’s



leadership in sustaining the protests momentum and the pressure for inclusion of civilian oversight in the transition.

Alongside the civilian element, the military component, [the Transitional Military Council \(TMC\)](#) is made up of the Sudanese Armed Forces, the Rapid Security Forces (RSF), intelligence services and allied militias. The fact that the top brass of the TMC, specifically General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his deputy Mohammed Hamdan Daglo (also known as Hemedti), had established links with the Bashir regime has largely undermined the legitimacy of military and security actors in the eyes of the Sudanese public, who are wary of the history of violence under military governance and the potential of undue influence by external interests such as Gulf benefactors. The underlying tension between the civilian and military components of the transitional council point to the precarious nature of the transition and the need for external [economic and diplomatic support](#) to safeguard it. On 9 March, an assassination attempt on Prime Minister Hamdok in Khartoum alarmed both local and international observers, who pointed fingers at members of Bashir's former ruling party, the National Congress Party and the Islamists as likely suspects.

At the top of the list of priorities for Hamdok's interim government is the recovery of the economy encumbered by high inflation rates, shrinking revenues from oil sales and an unsurmountable debt burden. A second priority is the [rescission of Sudan from the US State Sponsors of Terrorism \(SST\) list](#). The SST lifting will pave the way for FDI flows into Sudan and access to debt relief options from the IMF and Paris Club creditors. In support of Sudan's economic reform, the Friends of Sudan, made up of a group of Western and Gulf States, as well as multilateral organisations including the AU, EU and UN, established a multi-donor trust fund in 2019 to back the transitional government's quick

impact projects that would boost prospects for economic recovery. Overall, the transitional government will need both external support and local buy-in while also drawing crucial lessons from other post-revolutionary cases such as Tunisia and Egypt on balancing forces of power and breaking from the past across all sectors of society.

### ***The context: Ethiopia***

In Ethiopia, the broad political reform agenda initiated since Abiy Ahmed's election in 2018 has resulted in a raft of changes that have included the release of political prisoners, increased representation of women in prominent political positions and the opening up of the economy to private investors. Diplomatically, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed received international recognition for realizing a rapprochement with neighbouring Eritrea after a protracted border dispute that had spanned two decades. The efforts at fostering regional peace and stability earned Abiy Ahmed the [2019 Nobel Peace Prize](#).

Ethiopia's political landscape has also seen a wave of changes, particularly the ruling coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) which has been disbanded and replaced by a pan-Ethiopian party known as the [Prosperity Party \(PP\)](#). The transformation into the PP comes months ahead of significant general elections in August 2020<sup>1</sup> that would prove to be a litmus test of the legitimacy and longevity of the broad political and economic transition initiated under Abiy Ahmed.

The prime minister's tenure came on the back of widespread protests that had began in 2015 in the Oromia region. The calls for greater political inclusion of historically marginalized groups struck at the heart of the [ethnic federalism model](#) that had been entrenched since the EPRDF's rise to power in 1991. The factious political and security situation is underpinned by inter-ethnic clashes that have fostered cleavages and

---

<sup>1</sup> The elections scheduled for August 2020 were postponed indefinitely in March 2020 as a result of the novel corona virus pandemic.

tensions along politicized grievances and instrumentalized identities. The proposal to do away with ethnic federalism has been met with resistance from federalists who are loath to a homogenized national system; contrary to nationalists who view the ethno-national federal order as well past its due date in a reformed Ethiopia.

To boost the prospects of a successful political transition initiated under Prime Minister Ahmed, the administration will need to deliver [free and fair elections](#) while navigating political faultlines and ethnic cleavages to guarantee a win for the PP. Moreover, the administration will also have to address long-standing security issues such as the internal displacement crisis that has resulted in humanitarian challenges for 2.6 million internally displaced persons in Ethiopia. Boundary disputes across regions also underscore the need for ad hoc commissions on national reconciliation and administrative issues. Part of the process of forging social cohesion and national unity will be contingent on the promotion of inclusive national dialogues and the articulation of a novel vision of unity encompassing both state and non-state actors, as well as civil society groups, political parties, the media, youth, academia and think tanks.

## The global Covid-19 pandemic: the black swan of 2020

### *The essentials*

The novel corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic, labelled as the [‘worst global crisis since the Second World War’](#), has massively disrupted social, economic and political life across the globe as states implement a range of measures to flatten the curve with respect to exponential spread of the virus. The rate of infections in Africa, which is still in the early stages of detection and response, is relatively low in comparison to the US, Italy and Spain that have recorded the highest numbers of infections and fatalities. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has warned Africa to [‘brace for the worst’](#) given a constellation of social, political and economic

factors that make the continent particularly vulnerable to the short and long term effects of an unparalleled global pandemic. As of [2 April 2020](#), Africa recorded 6400 cases of COVID-19 infections, across 49 countries, with 229 deaths.

### *The context*

As the world grapples in the throes of the global COVID-19 pandemic that has upended any semblance of normalcy across the world, African countries have been warned to aggressively prepare for the worst, including the long-term spiral of social, economic and security impact. Although Africa is only at the initial phases of responses to the pandemic, experts warn that a configuration of risk factors will impact the trajectory of infection and containment on the continent, demanding a [‘know-your-virus-know-your-response’](#) approach that is suited to the context in Africa. The deplorable state of public health systems across most African countries, crowded living conditions, high poverty rates, lack of access to basic amenities including regular water supply and porous borders will complicate African attempts to flatten the curve of COVID-19 infections as countries experiment with various response measures.

According to a comprehensive report by the [International Crisis Group](#) on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on conflict affected states and vulnerable populations, the interplay between the global pandemic and political, economic and social risk factors, may give rise to new crises or exacerbate already existing ones. For instance, conflict-affected countries and ongoing conflict hotspots such as Libya, Syria, Yemen, DRC and South Sudan face an additional layer of crisis, in addition to heightened health challenges in view of issues such as limited access for relief and humanitarian workers. Furthermore, IDPs, asylum seekers and refugees are at high risk of exposure to the COVID-19 outbreak, given the squalid living conditions in camps and the limited access to basic amenities and proper healthcare.

COVID-19 could also negatively impact [social order](#), especially in societies where there is

declining trust between governments and citizens, dissatisfaction with governments' handling of the pandemic or inability to provide welfare and financial assistance to a restive population facing loss of jobs, livelihoods and limited access to already strained healthcare systems. The risk of social and political disorder will build on an already emerging trend, the spread of protests in 2019 that were fueled by a range of issues such as demand for political reforms, economic justice, accountability for corruption and respect for human rights and political liberties. Similarly, there is also the risk of political exploitation of the pandemic by some governments who may extend the restrictions and regulations applicable during states of emergencies to crush dissent or get away with excessive use of force in enforcing restrictive measures. Overall, these risks will exert pressure on crisis management systems across country, regional and international levels, demanding enhanced global solidarity and a coordinated approach to complex interrelated public health, economic, social and political crises.

The WHO has called for Africa to pursue an aggressive prevention strategy, prioritizing swift action and preparedness of personnel. Aggressive prevention necessitates clear policy formulation on case identification, tracing and containment measures, clear and transparent communication with the public, and resource mobilization across government departments. Several countries have resorted to a range of strategies including travel restrictions, closure of borders, social distancing and lockdowns. Some African states such as Rwanda, South Africa and Nigeria have also employed a lockdown strategy, drawing lessons from European and Asian countries that have pointed to it as the only effective way of flattening the curve. The effectiveness of a lockdown strategy demands a [comprehensive set of regulations](#) regarding the closure of business, strict curfews and remedial assistance to the most vulnerable and those who lose income.

The human, social and economic disruptions brought on by the pandemic has also

underscored the [interconnectedness](#) of a globalized world and the ripple effects of the outbreak of virulent diseases with debilitating, wide-ranging costs. The COVID-19 pandemic has cut off supply chain production, destabilized international markets and put millions of jobs on the line as the volatile global economy goes into freefall. Projections point to financial losses that will far surpass those of the 2008 financial crisis.

With regard to international politics, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed loopholes in multilateral cooperation, particularly the [lack of coordinated global response](#) to public health emergencies. The UN has been caught up in geopolitical rivalries as China has used its presidency of the UNSC during March 2020 to jettison any resolution or joint response to the pandemic. Additionally, as the epicentre of the virus spread in Wuhan, China has also taken advantage of its record in being the first country to contain infection by moving to [alter the narrative](#) of its role as ground zero of the pandemic, dispatching medical teams and medical assistance to the most-affected countries.

The stark differences in responses across regions and countries have also exposed divisions such as in the [EU](#) where member states have failed to come up with a unified plan to support the bloc's economy, leaving states to deploy individual strategies and rescue packages. Strained relations between the US and China have also sunk to a new low involving exchanges of scapegoating accusations and spread of propaganda. The Group of 20 held a virtual meeting that ended with a pledge of \$ 5 trillion targeting national fiscal packages. The WHO has also been criticized for dragging out its labelling of the COVID-19 as a global pandemic, following [unverified endorsement](#) of Chinese reports and initiatives by WHO Director-General Tedros Ghebreyesus in the early days of the spread of the virus. The virulent nature of the pandemic has also highlighted the related problem of an 'infodemic,' exacerbated by the spread of misinformation and unverified data via widely accessible social media platforms and other

media outlets. The infodemic phenomenon has put pressure on governments and international organisations to urge citizens to verify information sources for accuracy and validity, working closely with variety of social media platforms and media to direct evidence-backed information campaigns.

The glaring lack of global coordinated action has brought to the fore tensions between models based on cooperation vs. Hobbesian alternatives, informed by selfish national interests at the expense of the greater good. This has been seen in the scurry for a vaccine to the COVID-19 virus and the growing pressure on manufacturers to meet growing demand for medical equipment and supplies. There is now more than ever a need for [a coalition of the willing](#) to guide a multilateral response, promoting international coordination in the rush for a vaccine and the promotion of large scale investment in economic and social

systems. The world after the pandemic will be a different one for the better, if the right lessons on preparedness, adequate responses and crisis management are identified and diligently pursued.

The range of scenarios going into an uncertain future has ranged from a dystopian political order where surveillance, policing and a vastly reformed social contract has reshaped state-society relations, to one in which '[a herd immunity](#)' has prevailed enough to prevent further spread of the disease. The third scenario, the more plausible one, is a constant experimentation with a combination of measures as viral spread continues until a vaccine is found. These scenarios have accelerated a profound all-round appreciation for [complex modelling](#) for crisis management and policymaking and the centrality of variables such as explainability, logarithmic bias and trust.

