STOP THE NEW GLOBAL TERROR: PANDEMICS

The Case for a Planetary Security Program

ACET ANALYTICAL CENTER OF EXCELLENCE ON TRAFFICKING

EndPandemics
Investing in Planetary Health

UNITED FOR NOW REGENERATION

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Later this month, in Rome, Italy, leaders of the world's 20 wealthiest nations will reconvene to address global priorities under the banner "People, Planet, Prosperity." High on this year's G20 agenda is improving COVID-19 vaccine rollout to lower-income countries, and improving preparedness for future outbreaks. This is of course badly needed. But it is equally important to take a step further and examine the root caused of zoonotic outbreaks in order to prevent new, potentially more destructive ones from happening in the first place, sparing us from undergoing entirely new inoculation and recovery efforts all over again.

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During the current pandemic, G20 nations have spent over $3 trillion dollars to defend their borders and citizens from "adversarial threats", including terrorism. That phenomenal spend, however, did not prevent 237 million people from getting sick, 4.8 million from dying, and a significant portion of the world's businesses from being harmed or destroyed – all in 21 months. And the deadly COVID clock keeps ticking.

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COVID-19 has inflicted more damage on our planet than any terrorist organization could dream of. Pandemics now pose the single biggest threat to national and international security. And yet there is no clear plan to stop them.

Such a plan would have to unite the fragmented, sometimes competing national security agendas, and link them to environmental and food security, to form a whole-of-planet approach that achieves *global* security and prosperity.

Pandemic mitigation plans are currently delegated to the health community. Emerging infectious disease experts drive discussions on how to prepare for, and scale down virus outbreaks. Environmental and agricultural experts are starting to be engaged more because the virus that causes COVID-19, like many previous pandemics, is assumed to be of animal origin. The rapid rate of species and habitat loss, the extensive wildlife trade, industrial

factory farming, and the proliferation of wildlife farms, are all coming under closer scrutiny as factors that increase the risk of new pathogen outbreaks.

Given the complex drivers of pandemics, the WHO and other UN bodies (FAO, OIE, UNEP) are advising world leaders to adopt a policy approach called "One Health", which envisions health, environment and agricultural sectors merging efforts to simultaneously protect people, animals and ecosystems, recognizing that they are all interconnected. The United States and Europe seem to be listening as they are ramping up funding through the development community to launch One Health systems in earnest. Corporations are taking up this language, for example in Danone's vision that is entitled: "One Planet One Health".

But a new pandemic will strike before One Health takes root if we leave this critical mission solely in the hands of the health and development communities and fail to properly resource the effort. Pandemics are a global threat, and we need a global security response to tackle them.

We need to repurpose our well-funded national security programs and link them to environmental, agricultural, and development programs to scale pandemic prevention efforts. Otherwise, millions more people will suffer and die from preventable virus transmissions, while well-funded militaries continue tracking Islamic insurgents and "enemy" planes and submarines. It's like installing an expensive security system around your home while it rots from within from termites. Deadly viruses are the new global terror. It's time to break down the walls between nations and agencies to make One Health the top international security priority.

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COVID-19 and 9/11 have a lot in common. In both cases, there was ample intelligence indicating a major threat was imminent. In both cases, the community tracking the threat was fragmented and had no common focal point to report to. With 9/11, it was the CIA, FBI, Pentagon, as well as some state authorities that detected signs of a terrorist plot, but their suspicions did not ring alarms at a common control switch. Similarly, for years, disease and wildlife experts warned of a new and disastrous zoonotic outbreak if relentless agricultural expansion and the wildlife trade continued unabated.

As a result of 9/11, the US government created Homeland Security, which brought several agencies under one roof to prevent intelligence from getting stuck in silos and to improve analysis. Other agencies were mandated to pitch in with data sharing and personnel. It's called the "whole-of-government" approach. The same needs to happen with pandemic prevention, but on a global scale. COVID-19 was a dirty bomb that hit the entire world. G20 leaders need to create a unified Planetary Security Program that pools intelligence and resources, and merges virus defense

efforts before a bigger viral bomb explodes.

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Whether COVID-19 emerged from a wild animal market, a wild and exotic animal farm, or a lab experimenting on wild animals, the virus jumped from an animal to a person, so it is zoonotic. We know from previous zoonotic outbreaks – HIV, Ebola, SARS, MERS, Bird Flu, Spanish Flu, the Plague, Leprosy, and others – what drives these outbreaks. Commercial trade in wild animals (including for medical laboratories) and the destruction of wild habitat puts high-risk species in close contact with human communities, where they can shed viruses to people or domesticated animals that have no immunity. It's called "spillover".

But our planet has paid scant attention to, and money on, addressing spillover sources. The multi-billion dollar illegal trade in wild animals is a problem left largely to environmental agencies, with modest law enforcement backing and pitifully small budgets, supplemented by the occasional small NGO grant. The legal trade, which dwarfs and masks the illegal trade, is governed by some of the same environmental agencies, together with agricultural agencies, which have little or no oversight over public health considerations.

Destruction of habitat – usually for industrial agriculture – is not only allowed, it is promoted across the world in the name of economic development and hunger mitigation. This is in spite of its negative impact on climate change and biodiversity, and the obvious benefits of regenerative agriculture, which produces healthier food and sustains, rather than clears, natural landscapes.

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One Health is indeed the best strategy for a multi-sector, global approach to prevent more COVID-like outbreaks, but it needs muscle and leadership. We need health, environment and agriculture experts on board, working together to guide a pandemic prevention strategy. But their organizations are not structured or budgeted to steer an emergency global effort, nor will they collaborate as intensively as needed without adequate resources and a high-level directive. Like 9/11, international emergencies demand a unified, emergency response that is interagency, international, public-private, and financially sustained.

Such an ask will seem daunting and even confusing to some leaders and legislators, who remain fixated on preparedness for the next outbreak to avoid another public health disaster. While preparedness is critical, it's not enough. Once a new virus is unleashed, it is very difficult to contain even with the best of pathogen surveillance systems. And current vaccines won't work against new strains and new diseases. We need to stop treating zoonotic outbreaks like unavoidable natural disasters. We need to go beyond bracing for impact to preventing ignition of catastrophes.

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Catastrophic pandemics are preventable. Health, environmental, agriculture, and national security stakeholders have all developed solutions – many, nature-based – that can significantly reduce the risk of spillovers and ring the alarm bell much faster when they start. These solutions fall under five categories:

1. Early detection;
2. Stopping trafficking of wild animals;
3. Reducing demand for wild animals;
4. Protecting natural habitats; and
5. Reforming farming.

But these sectors have not knitted their solutions together for maximum, sustained impact. One reason: Everyone is busy on their own projects, and have little time or incentive to collaborate. Another reason: they compete for funding.

Leaders can mandate the merging of these solutions, pay for them from existing budgets, and accelerate implementation of One Health. Nobody likes to lose their funding to another institution or program, and they don't need to. Budgets can be repurposed, often using existing personnel and technology. This should not be terribly difficult for some countries, like the US, whose Pentagon DARPA program already supports pandemic mitigation efforts ($500 million a year), currently aimed at keeping soldiers healthy on the battlefield. That battlefield has expanded to every neighborhood across 195 countries, so we are all now soldiers and potential victims.

Agricultural subsidies can also be repurposed without hurting farmers. The US currently spends over $48 billion a year to buy American produce, France about $14 billion to its farmers, and other countries pay roughly similar proportions of their GDP.[1] These enormous payments can be gradually repurposed to promote regenerative agriculture, which will improve long-term health of soil, thereby sustaining income for farmers, saving governments money, and producing healthier food for the planet. This shifting of more profits to local farmers also increases the chances that they will preserve soil, while decreasing the chance they will migrate for economic reasons—another threat to international stability.

Preventing wild and farmed exotic animals from mixing with people and domesticated animals requires additional financial and technical resources to stop poaching and trafficking, as well as new wildlife trade regulations. Law enforcement programs in most G20 nations now include a modest focus on environmental security. This focus can be increased by collapsing nature crime appropriately under transnational organized crime (TOC) line items, as Southeast Asia's police network, ASEANAPOL is doing. ASEANAPOL, which focuses on all forms of TOC, has added wildlife

trafficking to its permanent list of targets, making it part of annual work plans. This re-focusing enables police, customs, financial intelligence units, prosecutors and anti-corruption units to start helping rangers halt poaching and habitat destruction, and environmental inspectors catch wildlife traffickers. In due course, law enforcement agencies will discover links between syndicates driving the wildlife trade and other major trans-boundary crimes. They can also seize their criminal assets and reprogram them to reward and sustain nature protection, if and once legislators enable them.

Which points to another set of necessary actions: laws and regulations must also be changed. The massive legal wildlife trade has masked illegal trade and viruses for too long. In fact, whatever the source of this latest outbreak is, it will probably be linked to legitimate trade, as was SARS (farmed palm civets). The inconvenient truth for some is that the commercial trade in wild animals should be at least paused, if not permanently shut down. The G20 can appoint an independent panel[2] to prevent the risk of pandemics from the trade in wild animals and determine the legal options for international and domestic trade (including wildlife farming) going forward, including whether to ban all commercial trade in wild animals, or to ban trade in 'high-risk' species only. *No such ban would impact indigenous use or subsistence hunting.* Specifically the G20 can:

- Pause international and domestic trade in wild animals until the Independent Panel concludes.
- Institutionalize campaigns to reduce commercial, consumer demand for wild animals.
- Support amendments to: (a) the UN Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to include additional requirements to address health risks from trade; (b) the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) to include wildlife crime; and (c) the International Criminal Court's Rome Statute to include ecocide as an international crime.

The drivers of pandemics, extinction, and climate change are largely the same.

Climate change mitigation and biodiversity protection will benefit from cross-sector technical collaboration, and their programs and funding should be merged too. After all, the drivers of pandemics, extinction, and climate change are largely the same. Environmentalists need to break down their own internal walls too, and support a unified response to these three existential threats.

Governments will need a lot of help from the private sector, local communities and civil society in creating a planetary security program, which can provide valuable data, and inject critical expertise and innovations. Frontline NGOs and local communities around the world offer sharp insights and institutional knowledge about zoonotic threats and solutions. Businesses, which have much to gain from a pandemic-free world, can support data

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analytics, like IBM, Cellebrite, and Phillip Morris have done to improve counter-trafficking. Many companies are already re-considering their supply chain strategies to alleviate profit loss, which if done right can also alleviate pandemic risk. For example, B.Grimm has publicly committed to 'do business with compassion for the development of civilization in harmony with nature' through its environmentally friendly and yet profitable power generation in Asia." Religious institutions can join the effort to rally their constituents to help protect nature. For example, the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development did in September 2021 by co-hosting a global webinar on ending pandemics that included experts and change leaders from academia, government, civil society and business.[3]

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This whole-of-planet approach will save the world time, lives, and money. Current projections of COVID's cost to the world top $12 trillion, or almost $60 billion per country on average.[4] A recent estimate in the journal *Science* of costs required to mitigate the risks of new pandemics is between $22 and 31 billion a year for the entire planet.[5] This has ancillary benefits of mitigating climate change, conserving biodiversity, strengthening local economic development, and reducing pressures that create economic migration. Last year, the UK, France, India, and Russia spent on average $55 billion each on defense. China spent an estimated $252 billion. The United States: $778 billion.[6] The money is there. It's time to package and pay our planetary insurance policy.

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The US and China could lead the way in repurposing and merging parts of their national security programs to jump-start a planetary defense program. Each of their 2021 defense strategies lists the other as a priority threat to their nation's security. Currently, America and China's billion-dollar satellite, sea and terrestrial surveillance programs can track every 100 meters of movement of the other's fighter jets, war ships, and cargo caravans. Meanwhile, their ill-funded and equipped environmental agencies detect less than 5% of wildlife shipments crossing their borders, en route to the two largest wildlife consumer markets in the world. What better way to improve national and international security than to shift their sights and collaborate against a common, and certainly bigger threat?

COVID-19 has demonstrated that threats to our environment are menaces to national and international security.

COVID-19 has demonstrated that threats to our environment are menaces to national and international security. G20 leaders have a responsibility to their constituents and the world to share skills, technology, and budgets to ensure that we never endure such a disaster again. In the process of repurposing their mission, defense and agricultural sectors can not only save the global community enormous amounts of money and countless lives, they can also help build a sustainable planet.

Endnotes

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6. SIPRI Military Expenditures Database, Apr. 2021. World Economic Outlook Database, Oct 2020; and IMF International Financial Statistics Database, Sep. 2020.

About ACET

Powered by digital intelligence technology and frontline insights, the Analytical Center of Excellence on Trafficking (ACET) is a data fusion center that helps governments, business, civil society organizations, and individuals make sound decisions that reduce trafficking, and save time, money and lives. ACET is run by Freeland (www.freeland.org) in collaboration with other organizations, and has produced a series of studies and white papers on trafficking and transnational crime. www.acet-recovery.com

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