



Edited by Marco Di Liddo

May 2021

# The impact of Covid-19 on Human Security

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**THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HUMAN SECURITY  
MAY 2021**

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## **I INDEX**

Methodological remarks	5
Introduction	7
The impact of the Covid-19 on Human Security: an overview	11
Perception and risk of Covid-19 and climate change	19
Covid-19 in the Netherlands and the need for a more inclusive approach	26
Conclusions	32

## | **METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS**

This paper intends to investigate and analyse the impacts of the covid-19 pandemic on Human Security, defined as an approach to national and international security that "gives primacy to human beings and their complex social and economic interactions". An approach based on the assumption that the State is not the main supplier, recipient, subject and object of security policies and that the latter are not limited to the police and military dimension only.

The project underlying the realization of this paper was approved in the second half of 2020, following the first pandemic wave in Italy and Europe. At that time, the community of experts, academic and analysts were moving in a so-called terra incognita, as the spread of the virus only allowed them to glimpse what could be its present and future impacts. Precisely for this reason, the reflections contained in this document are to be considered "pioneering" and embryonic in the first phase of the scientific debate on the subject. In this sense, the aim of the work was to raise awareness of how the virus was beginning to change the lives of human beings, both as individuals and as a community, in its various economic, social, political, security and psychological dimensions. At the end, the goal is to initiate a generalized critical reflection and offer ideas that, possibly, should be developed in other future research projects.

The work was set up in three distinct phases: during the first, CeSI contacted members from its network of Italian and foreign experts to discuss the subject in question.

Subsequently, a closed-door round table was organized between some of those experts to discuss the thematic approach of the work and finally, 4 experts agreed to

contribute to draft the paper.

The process led to the identification of three thematic chapters: one dedicated to a general overview on the relationship between pandemic and Human Security, one dedicated to the impact of the pandemic on global awareness about the problem of climate change and, finally, a specific case study dedicated to relationship between contagion mitigation measures (lockdown) and social tensions in the Netherlands.

The paper is organized in 4 sections: an introductory one, 3 central chapters focused on the three themes mentioned above and a concluding one dedicated to future perspectives.

## | INTRODUCTION

The last time the World was hit by a pandemic was between 1918 and 1920. In that case, it was the so-called "Spanish flu" that killed over 50 million people and infected 500 million people out of a global population of about 2 billion individuals<sup>1</sup>. The death rate of the Spanish flu was even worse than that of the "Black Plague" of the fourteenth century. Among the most illustrious victims of the disease were also the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire and the German sociologist Max Weber. At that moment, the First World War was ending and with it the era of imperialism. The world was not globalized and Western societies did not benefit from today's public services and levels of well-being and wealth. The global population communicated mainly with letters and by the postal service. There was no mass media, but newspapers and magazines were the main sources of information. According to the most authoritative medical studies, three main elements contributed to the infection: the lack of awareness of the population, who did not have the cultural tools to deal with a similar disease, trench warfare and the consequent gathering of soldiers on the front and the exceptional climatic conditions of the five-year period 1914 - 1920, characterized by particularly high and prolonged rates of cold and units. Calculating the economic, social and political impact of the Spanish influence was not easy, since it inevitably overlapped and intersected with that of the First World War.

A century later, the world is once again confronted with a

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Spanish Flu (H1N1) <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-pandemic-h1n1.html#:~:text=It%20is%20estimated%20that%20about,occurring%20in%20the%20United%20States.>

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**The outbreak of the pandemic represented a diversified emergency by sectors and by human units**

new pandemic phenomenon, the one caused by the spread of the covid-19 virus. First identified in China in December 2019, the virus soon spread around the world, reaching its fourth wave at the time of writing this paper. In total, from 2019 to date, the infected have been 163 million and the dead over 3 million<sup>2</sup>. Today, as in 1918-1920, there have been some exogenous factors that have helped the spread of the virus: **the initial underestimation of the risk of contagion outside China, the speed and globality in the movement of goods and people and finally the initial unpreparedness of national health systems for very high numbers of infected people.** The global resilience capacity has been entrusted, unlike the beginning of the last century, to the formidable global industrial, scientific and pharmacological machine, capable of producing personal protective equipment and vaccines in record time.

**The outbreak of the pandemic represented a diversified emergency by sectors and by human units. It has had first and foremost medical and health impacts and, secondly, economic, security, social and psychological impacts.** The measures adopted by individual governments to stem the contagion (lockdown, travel limitation, etc.) have had direct consequences on the world job market, on global economic productivity, on the growth and education of the younger generations and finally on the mental health of individuals. In trying to calculate the extent of the damage caused by the pandemic, certainly a quantitative approach that investigates the variations in index and data can initially help. This approach is particularly appropriate to the economy field and states that, in 2020, global GDP contracted by 5%<sup>3</sup> and that some strategic sectors such as energy and automotive have

<sup>2</sup> Data WHO <https://covid19.who.int/>

<sup>3</sup> Data IMF <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO>



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A reading of  
the pandemic  
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Security could  
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compromise

experienced vertical collapses. In this regard, just think of the oil price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia, triggered by the collapse of oil demand following the slowdown in industrial consumption and which caused the WTI to slide into the negative area (- \$ 40 per barrel, April 2020).

Likewise, the German and US auto industry saw sales downsizing of 40% (June 2020). Finally, the unemployment rate rose by 1% in Italy and Germany, by 5% in Canada and the United States and by 2% in the United Kingdom<sup>4</sup>.

However, as useful as they are, mere economic data are not enough to offer an exhaustive picture of how much the pandemic has affected and may affect the future of the global development model as a whole and the lives of human beings. In fact, the economic data is, by definition, “cold” and cannot grasp the nuances and peculiarities of the social and political dynamics that affect individuals and communities. Furthermore, the pandemic is part of a global geopolitical context of great change, characterized by renewed environmental activism and the commitment against climate change, by the global, interactive and unfiltered communication of social media and by the technological transition in a generalized moment of economic crisis. Therefore, to grasp all the nuances, the quantitative approach must be accompanied by a qualitative approach and the mere macroeconomic data must be accompanied by that relating to the evolution of the perception of insecurity by the population. Furthermore, in its global and transversal dimension, the pandemic is a phenomenon that does not only concern the security of states and that cannot be addressed only at the state level.

The economic, political, social and psychological impacts of

<sup>4</sup> BBC World (2020). Coronavirus: How the pandemic has changed the world economy <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-51706225>

the pandemic risk translating into security criticalities capable of producing instability. Security problems that go beyond the sphere of "military" threats but no less dangerous for this.

In this regard, just remember how the pandemic has been politicized both internationally and nationally. During the first wave (2020), the US administration of President Trump accused China of having contributed to the spread of the virus to destabilize the West. Similarly, Eurosceptic movements and parties have used the social tensions within individual European countries to point the finger at the alleged mismanagement of the health emergency by Brussels. In other countries, protests against contagion mitigation measures have created political fractures within the government majorities and have resulted in violent street demonstrations.

**For all these reasons, a reading of the pandemic under the slow of Human Security could represent a broad, exhaustive and satisfactory compromise.** The concept of human security represents a departure from orthodox security studies, which focus on the security of the state. The subjects of the human security approach are individuals, and its end goal is the protection of people from traditional (i.e., military) and non-traditional threats such as poverty and disease. Moving the security agenda beyond state security does not mean replacing it but rather involves complementing and building on it. Central to this approach is the understanding that human security deprivations can undermine peace and stability within and between states, whereas an overemphasis on state security can be detrimental to human welfare. The state remains a central provider of security, but state security is not a sufficient condition for human welfare.

# THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON HUMAN SECURITY: AN OVERVIEW

By Marina Caparini<sup>5</sup>

The emergence of COVID-19 is unprecedented in modern history. Officially declared a pandemic on 11 March 2020, it triggered systemic crises in public health, global economy, and political governance. One year on, much uncertainty remains over the shape and pathways of eventual recovery. In this context, the concept of ‘human security’ is one of the most helpful frameworks for attempting to understand the complex and inter-related challenges the pandemic has generated across multiple dimensions.

**Human security is a people-centred concept that seeks to address the root causes of insecurity.** While not replacing the traditional notion of State security, the idea of human security provides a counterweight to it, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional challenges to human survival and well-being by focusing on people’s needs. It is most pithily summed up as the 3 freedoms: “freedom from want”; “freedom from fear”; and “freedom to live in dignity”<sup>6</sup>.

The United Nations considers human security as ‘an approach to assist Member States in identifying and

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<sup>5</sup> Marina Caparini, PhD, is Senior Researcher and Director of the Governance and Society Programme at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). The views expressed here are personal.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, *Human Security Handbook*, Human Security Unit, January 2016, <https://www.un.org/humansecurity/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/h2.pdf>

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**Human security is a people-centred concept that seeks to address the root causes of insecurity**

addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people’, and calls for a human security approach that stresses “people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people and all communities”.<sup>7</sup> Human security has been mainstreamed across all UN activities in humanitarian assistance, building and sustaining peace, and advancing sustainable development.

The 2030 Agenda or Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also reflects the fundamental principles of human security. On the cusp of the pandemic, the world had seen significant albeit uneven developments towards human security. For example, global rates of extreme poverty had declined significantly, from 28% in 2000 to 8.6% by 2018, though these gains were concentrated in East Asia and South Asia and the rate of reduction had slowed. Those gains in poverty eradications also helped drive progress in other areas. For example, deaths of children under 5 years of age globally dropped from 9.8 million in 2000 to 5.4 million in 2017. Just prior to the pandemic, the Secretary-General António Guterres warned that despite progress in certain areas, many areas required urgent collective attention if the SDGs were to be achieved by 2030, not least the environment, violent conflicts, global hunger, education of children, and structural discrimination facing women<sup>8</sup>.

The Secretary-General also promoted the mainstreaming of human security across all of the UN’s activities. In fragile and conflict-affected states, there has been increasing focus on

<sup>7</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 10 September 2012, A/RES/66/290, para 3, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/476/22/PDF/N1147622.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2019.pdf>

people-centred peacebuilding approaches, efforts to be more holistic, to overcome institutional and disciplinary silos. The triple nexus approach, advanced by multilateral organizations and major donors, sought to align efforts towards common objectives and realize synergies in the siloed approaches to humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding, and development assistance.<sup>9</sup>

**COVID-19 has reversed a number of development gains and much uncertainty surrounds pathways of recovery from the pandemic's wide-ranging effects<sup>10</sup>.** It is useful to consider in this context 7 components or types of needs or issues associated with human security as elaborated by the UN: health security, economic security, food security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security<sup>11</sup>. A brief overview of these 7 dimensions, drawn from various country contexts, illustrates their utility in understanding the complex impact of the pandemic.

## **HEALTH SECURITY**

Health security encompasses access to health services and living in a safe environment. The emergence of the novel coronavirus has created a severe global public health emergency. At the time of writing in March 2021, COVID-19 has killed over 2.6 million people around the world<sup>12</sup>. In

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<sup>9</sup> Marina Caparini and Anders Reagan, 'Connecting the dots on the triple nexus', SIPRI Backgrounder, 29 Nov. 2019, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-backgrounder/2019/connecting-dots-triple-nexus>

<sup>10</sup> UNDP, 'Impact of COVID-19 on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a World Reshaped by COVID-19', 2 Dec. 2020, [https://sdgintegration.undp.org/sites/default/files/Impact\\_of\\_COVID-19\\_on\\_the\\_SDGs.pdf](https://sdgintegration.undp.org/sites/default/files/Impact_of_COVID-19_on_the_SDGs.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> UNDP, 1994 *Human Development Report* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/255/hdr\\_1994\\_en\\_complete\\_nostats.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/255/hdr_1994_en_complete_nostats.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Johns Hopkins University, Coronavirus Resource Center, Dashboard, 10 Mar. 2021, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

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**The pandemic experience in many countries has revealed and amplified structural inequalities in affected societies**

In addition to direct deaths caused by the coronavirus, there are likely to be many indirect deaths resulting from delays in seeking healthcare for other disorders or from overwhelmed health systems, or the diversion of resources to deal with the coronavirus. Unexpectedly, the US and the UK, which had earlier been identified as the two countries best prepared for a pandemic in 2019<sup>13</sup>, ended up as among the worst affected due to flawed and delayed government responses in combination with deepening social and health inequalities that have had disproportionate impact on racial and ethnic minority groups. By 10 March 2021, over 528,000 Americans and over 125,000 British have died from the coronavirus<sup>14</sup>. **The pandemic experience in many countries has revealed and amplified structural inequalities in affected societies.** The pandemic has driven home the point that health has social determinants that include discrimination and racism, access to adequate healthcare, education and housing, and occupations that put some categories of ‘essential’ but low paid workers at high risk on the front line.<sup>15</sup>

### ECONOMIC SECURITY

As a result of the pandemic, poverty has grown and economic disruption has affected people in many countries. The World Bank estimates that in 2020, as a result of COVID-19 and its economic effects compounded by the effects of armed conflict and climate change, between 119 and 124 million people were pushed into extreme poverty (those living on

<sup>13</sup> Global Health Security Index 2019, <https://www.ghsindex.org/>

<sup>14</sup> Johns Hopkins University, COVID-19 Dashboard, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

<sup>15</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ‘Health Equity Considerations & Racial & Ethnic Minority Groups’, 12 Feb. 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html>

under \$1.90 per day)<sup>16</sup>. In 2021 the crisis will continue and is projected to intensify, and those figures will further rise to between 143 and 163 million.<sup>17</sup> Measures to contain the spread of the virus such as repeated lockdowns brought economic disruption which threatened nearly half the world's workforce with loss of their livelihoods<sup>18</sup>.

### **FOOD SECURITY**

Food security, access to basic nutrition and food supply, is closely related to economic security. **Many people who lost jobs or experienced reduced work hours lost income and became food insecure.** Lack of social protection further affected people in both rich and poor countries. In the US, the pandemic led to higher levels of food insecurity than seen during the Great Recession of 2008-9, reaching 38% in March-April 2020. Again, effects were disproportionate for ethnic minorities, with 48% of Black households and 52% of Hispanic households experiencing food insecurity<sup>19</sup>. In developing and fragile countries, the pandemic has eroded incomes, disrupted markets and supply chains, resulting in shortages of food and price increases.

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<sup>16</sup> The World Bank's original estimate expected 100 million to be pushed into poverty in 2020. See full analysis in World Bank, *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020: Reversals of Fortune* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2020), doi: 10.1596/978-1-4648-1602-4

<sup>17</sup> Christoph Lakner, Nishant Yonzan, Daniel Gerszon Mahler, R. Andres Castaneda Aguilar, and Haoyu Wu, 'Updated estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty: Looking back at 2020 and the outlook for 2021', Data Blog, WorldBank.org, 11 Jan. 2021, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/updated-estimates-impact-covid-19-global-poverty-looking-back-2020-and-outlook-2021>

<sup>18</sup> 'Impact of COVID-19 on people's livelihoods, their health and our food systems', Joint statement by ILO, FAO, IFAD and WHO, 13 Oct. 2020, <https://www.who.int/news/item/13-10-2020-impact-of-covid-19-on-people's-livelihoods-their-health-and-our-food-systems>

<sup>19</sup> Julia Wolfson and Cindy Leung, 'Food Insecurity During COVID-19: An Acute Crisis with Long-Term Health Implications', *AJPH Perspectives*, Editorial, Vol. 110, No. 12 (Dec. 2020), p. 1763, <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/pdf/10.2105/AJPH.2020.305953>

## **ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY**

There is concern that as governments in some states focus their efforts on containing COVID-19, they are less able or willing to enforce regulations that govern environmentally sensitive activities such as mining and logging, resulting in greater environmental harm. During the first five months of the pandemic, deforestation appeared to have increased by more than 50% in Africa, Asia and South America<sup>20</sup>. Illegal logging, mining and land grabbing has rapidly increased in Brazil during the pandemic, and the soaring number of environmental crimes appear to be further driven by minimal risk of punishment by authorities<sup>21</sup>. In Cambodia, travel restrictions prevented international conservation NGOs from maintaining a presence in sanctuaries to help monitor and deter deforestation<sup>22</sup>. In Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of Congo governments have deliberately rolled back regulations and environmental protections in order to boost economic growth<sup>23</sup>.

## **COMMUNITY SECURITY**

In the context of human security, community security refers to 'protection against the breakdown of communities through loss of traditional relationships and values and from

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<sup>20</sup> Anna Gross, Andres Schipani, Stefania Palma and Stephanie Findlay, 'Global deforestation accelerates during pandemic', Financial Times, 9 Aug. 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/b72e3969-522c-4e83-b431-c0b498754b2d>

<sup>21</sup> Ernesto Londono, Manuela Andreoni and Leticia Casado, 'Amazon Deforestation Soars as Pandemic Hobbles Enforcement', New York Times, 6 June 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/06/world/americas/amazon-deforestation-brazil.html>

<sup>22</sup> Chris Humphrey, 'Under cover of COVID-19, loggers plunder Cambodian wildlife sanctuary', Mongabay, 31 Aug. 2020, <https://news.mongabay.com/2020/08/under-cover-of-covid-19-loggers-plunder-cambodian-wildlife-sanctuary/>

<sup>23</sup> Christine Murray, 'World's tropical forests and people imperiled by legal rollbacks under COVID-19', Thomson Reuters Foundation News, 18 Feb. 2021, <https://news.trust.org/item/20210218163427-1azq9>



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**Authoritarian leaders have used the pandemic to suppress dissent and strengthen their control over the levers of power**

sectarian and ethnic violence<sup>24</sup>. Analysts warn of further instability in the world's poorest countries that are already suffering from hunger, disease, lack of opportunity, climate change and conflict<sup>25</sup>.

*Personal security*

This issue concerns freedom from the threat of physical violence. An increase in intimate partner violence has been seen as a consequence of COVID-19. Gender-based violence is known to be exacerbated in times of crisis, such as conflict, humanitarian crisis, or economic stress<sup>26</sup>. **As a result of movement restrictions and stay-at-home orders aimed at containing the virus, victims have faced increased exposure to abusers and, simultaneously, restricted opportunities to seek assistance from formal and informal networks and reduced support services<sup>27</sup>.**

**POLITICAL SECURITY**

Political security for people means that they live in a society that respects basic human rights. **The COVID-19 pandemic is not only a health and economic crisis but has also emerged as a political crisis in which authoritarian leaders have used the pandemic to suppress dissent and strengthen their control over the levers of power.** As articulated in an open letter signed by over 500 political and civil leaders, authoritarian governments have used emergency powers to

<sup>24</sup> Mely Caballero-Anthony, 'Community security: human security at 21', *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2014.994812>

<sup>25</sup> Tarek Ghani, 'The Sting in COVID-19's Tail: For Poor countries, What Comes Next Could Be Worse', *Foreign Affairs*, 26 Jan. 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2021-01-26/sting-covid-19s-tail>

<sup>26</sup> UN Women, 'Inter-Agency statement on violence against women and girls in the context of COVID-19', 24 June 2020, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/statement-inter-agency-statement-on-violence-against-women-and-girls--in-the-context-of-covid-19>

<sup>27</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality, *The COVID-19 pandemic and intimate partner violence against women in the EU* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021), Introduction, <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/covid-19-pandemic-and-intimate-partner-violence-against-women-eu>

restrict human rights and enhance state surveillance, without adequate safeguards and provisions for the restoration of constitutional order<sup>28</sup>.

This overview has sought to illustrate how a human security lens can help to understand the complex, multi-layered reality created by the COVID-19 pandemic, with its interconnected and mutually reinforcing threats to human security. A domino-like succession of effects is apparent: health crisis and containment measures produce economic insecurity, poverty and unemployment, further triggering food insecurity and hunger. Lockdowns have resulted in skyrocketing rates of domestic abuse. Pandemic response draws resources away from normal regulatory enforcement, as in the environment, and in worse contexts is being utilized for repression. Environmental degradation has exacerbated inter-communal and inter-group conflict and made targets of environmental activists and indigenous leaders in many parts of the world, including for predatory political elites and governments.

At the heart of the human security framework is the lived experience of people in their daily lives. This reminder of the responsibility of governments for the lives and well-being of individuals and communities must inform recovery and efforts to “build back better”.

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<sup>28</sup> 'A Call to Defend Democracy', 25 June 2020, Press Release, International IDEA, <https://www.idea.int/news-media/news/covid-19-crisis-threatens-democracy-leading-world-figures-warn>

# PERCEPTION AND RISK OF COVID-19 AND CLIMATE CHANGE

By Andrea Grieco<sup>29</sup>

*The spread of the pandemic has undermined the balance of the global system, highlighting cracks and fragility both in the internal political dimension of the States and in international relations. Every country in the world, regardless of its level of development and production capacity, has suffered a strong backlash: in a sense, the virus has acted as a litmus test for the vulnerabilities of the international system and environmental policies individual actors and in this context, it has been and continues to be a major security challenge, whether it is interpreted in a more classical sense or whether it is based on the concept of human security. The challenge for international bodies and national governments is to grasp the actual nature of the threats that have arisen, in order to be able to cope with them in a profitable manner.*

## INTRODUCTION

The introduction of the concept of human security was a real revolution, a paradigm shift in the so-called security studies<sup>30</sup>. Until the 1990s, in fact, security had a purely state-centric meaning and, daughter of the experience of the Cold War, was to be understood as the freedom of one State from the threat of external invasion by another. Imbued with the sacred value of sovereignty, it was combined mainly in military terms and almost exclusively with the defence of

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<sup>29</sup> Andrea Grieco manages the Sustainability Area at Will Media, the views expressed here are personal.

<sup>30</sup> Catia Gregoratti, *Human Security, Encyclopedia of Governance* (2007).

borders. Already in the early years of the 21st century certain trends had begun to erode "security" terms, such as the enormous development of the debate on human rights and gradually the emergence of new forms of war and violence, while the economy, politics and finally the threats to peace were becoming increasingly globalized. Furthermore, with the decline of the State's traditional role in favour of other non-State actors, the clear distinction between internal and external security has become increasingly blurred (Churruza Muguruza, 2017). The first definition of "human security" was provided by Mahbub ul-Haq in the *Human Development Report* by the UN Human Development Agency (UNDP) in 1994. The elaboration of this term has led the security concept to be understood as "protection and emancipation of individuals"<sup>31</sup> and drawing attention to the multitude of emerging threats across the entire spectrum of human activities to highlight the interconnections between security, development and human rights so as to promote a new commitment to integrated and coordinated efforts for peace between nations. A peculiar feature of this approach is its "population-centred" essence, which allows us to identify, and consequently mitigate, threats perceived as such by people in a given context. Ensuring the security of the population therefore becomes one of the key tasks of good governance, especially in modern Western democracies where the political system legitimacy derives from the popular vote: security, as the primary need of people, it is therefore a key factor for the stability and peaceful development of States.

This perspective therefore open to new forms of insecurity, which originate no longer exclusively from forms of physical

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<sup>31</sup> United Nation Trust Fund For Human Security, *Application of the Human Security Concept and the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security*, (2009).

violence, but also from conditions of poverty, the inability of the population to access food or water resources, and the global context of the ongoing pandemic, including the sudden onset of a virus which is spreading worldwide at an increasing rate, endangering those standards of development that allow individual actors to remain stable and relatively peaceful.

#### **THE LINK BETWEEN COVID AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

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**The emergence of a new pandemic was not unexpected**

The Covid-19 has prompted states and civil society to take radical measures to limit the spread of the virus. These measures are unprecedented in recent world history and resemble the effort of war in times of international violent conflicts. Most people alive today have some knowledge of the catastrophic consequences of two World wars, but few of them have witnessed, in their lifetime, governments calling their citizens to return from abroad immediately, or seen their governments closing airports and borders to neighbouring states to protect human security. Democratic societies around the world have been imposing a curfew on entire populations. For all intents and purposes, it is as if states have declared war against a common enemy. Indeed, French President Emmanuel Macron declared: “nous sommes en guerre” – we are at war.

**The emergence of a new pandemic was not unexpected given the increased understanding of how population growth and urbanization, habitat destruction, globalization of trade including intensive livestock farming increased risk of transmission of zoonotic pathogens.** Indeed, such human activities have contributed to the repeated emergence and spread of several zoonotic diseases since 2002 such as SARS,

MERS-CoV, Zika and Ebola, all caused by viruses<sup>32</sup>. Decreased biodiversity, deforestation and ecosystem imbalance increase the likelihood of the emergence of an epidemic<sup>33</sup>. Features of the built environment, from crowded housing to inadequate ventilation in commercial spaces and mass transit vehicles and the destruction of ecosystems may facilitate virus transmission.

Improving knowledge of the ecological and behavioural drivers of coronavirus infection emergence and spread is essential. There is an important need to determine how much habitat destruction on the one hand and human activities/behaviours (farming practices, hunting, markets...) on the other hand, which both favour contacts between wild and domestic fauna and humans, have contributed to the recent emergences of zoonotic diseases (in particular SARS-CoV-2).

Regarding the dimension of human security, the impact of Covid-19 is disproportionate in low-income and minority groups reflecting the role of socio-economic factors in exposure and vulnerability to the virus.

The Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically shown that infectious diseases and non-communicable diseases are highly interconnected, the latter strongly contributing to the severity of the former. It is therefore important to study the interaction between viral infections and environmental factors of chronic diseases such as chemical toxicants, air pollution, climate change and socio-economic determinants. For instance, the dual role of indoor air quality in both environmental contamination and viral spread requires more research focus, as well as innovative solutions for mitigation,

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<sup>32</sup> OECD Report, *Biodiversity and the economic response to COVID-19: Ensuring a green and resilient recovery*, 2020

<sup>33</sup> S. Morand, C. Lajaunie, *Biodiversity and Health; Linking life, Ecosystems and Societies*, 2017.

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**What the  
Covid-19  
experience  
teaches is  
how the  
reality in  
which we live  
is complex  
and fragile**

including development of air purification technologies<sup>34</sup>. Covid-19 has influenced behaviour, working conditions and business in many parts of the world, including increased digitalization and decreased physical interactions and mobility, and will have long lasting effects on the built environment and the way cities are organized. In addition to the disease itself, the recovery plans may have their own influence on the environment and on future population physical and mental health. Furthermore, both the pandemic and the related control measures have highlighted profound inequalities in most societies that may further increase with the economic crisis. While the pandemic has been a tragedy, many of the responses offer lessons for environmental health and researchable questions.

Concerning the health crisis management per se, this pandemic has highlighted the difficulties of considering environmental health perspectives in policies and control measures which have mostly focused on curbing the infectious outbreak. The pandemic seems to have fuelled excess use of plastics and disposables, thus failing the sustainability targets in this area. Exploring benefits and risks as well as potential consequences of the decisions taken to control the spread of an infectious agent is needed to better integrate and promote environmental health issues into health crisis management. The health crisis has become a social, economic, environmental and political challenge. It is imperative that recovery plans and taxpayers' funds go beyond the current economic and social crisis, support and reinforce the EU's ambitious Green Deal and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to benefit health and efficiently

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<sup>34</sup> S. Domínguez-Amarillo, J. Fernández-Agüera, S. Cesteros-García, R.A. González-Lezcano, *Bad Air Can Also Kill*, 2020.

prevent future crises <sup>35</sup>.

**What the Covid-19 experience teaches, in conclusion, is how the reality in which we live is complex and fragile, vulnerable to sudden changes that threaten the balance.** A threat of this kind can only be considered a security problem and becoming aware of it allows you to start monitoring stress factors of the system in advance by avoiding too much room for instability and by meeting the security needs of the population, there can be no development and stability without security. The pandemic therefore gives us back a more insecure world, struggling with an invisible enemy from which we still do not know how to defend ourselves and which strikes with more force in fragile realities and is tried by poverty and conflict. The real test for the global system will be to rebuild the broken balances by avoiding tracing the fractures that the social inequalities and the strong inequalities are opening at the expense of the world's population. The macroeconomic shock linked to the emergency measures adopted to limit the spread of the infection was unprecedented in peacetime. The long-term consequences of the pandemic on the world economy and on geopolitics as well as on human behaviour, in particular on travel and the way of interacting with the surrounding environment, will be important. Today, concretely outlining the actions to adapt to climate change, underlying those measures that most contribute to the objectives of the European Green Deal and which can be taken more forcefully thanks to the post-emergency health policy, implementing them and completing them, will determine an increase in resilience also with respect to the spread of emerging diseases and could change the current trend of global warming. The effects of the pandemic make it clear that there

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<sup>35</sup> WHO, *Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19*, 2020.



is a need to reverse course and reimagine our model of society and economic development, more equitable, more respectful of the environment, more sustainable to protect our health and preserve humanity. From this point of view, the green global policies, about the mitigation of climate change, and the radical transformations that they entail, seem to indicate the way forward.

# COVID 19 IN THE NETHERLANDS AND THE NEED FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE APPROACH

By Jeanne Abdulla and Siebrich Visser<sup>36</sup>

## THE RIOTS

A protest, or bored young people? Corona-related, or 'just used as a reason to do these kinds of things? Starting the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 2020, after a night curfew was imposed in the Netherlands, a diverse group of citizens took to the streets to protest and riot, a broad mix that included virus deniers, football hooligans, far-right extremists and political protesters. The majority, however, were youth, who went uncontrollably wild<sup>37</sup>.

The rioting ended after three days, with the police arresting hundreds of people and politicians harshly condemning what transpired. The Prime Minister's views on the riots exemplified the wider political response. He labelled the riots as "criminal violence", saying "that's how we'll treat it"<sup>38</sup> and bluntly adding that there was no need to analyse the root

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<sup>36</sup> Siebrich Visser is a program officer for Human Security Collective, Jeanne Abdulla is the Co-founder of Human Security Collective, the views expressed here are personal.

<sup>37</sup> 'Netherlands shaken by third night of riots over Covid curfew', *The Guardian*. Accessed February 15, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/26/netherlands-third-night-riots-covid-curfew-lockdown-protesters>

<sup>38</sup> 'Dutch politicians condemn weekend rioting as curfew started', *The Independent*. Accessed January 27, 2021. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/dutch-politicians-condemn-weekend-rioting-as-curfew-started-eindhoven-violence-politicians-police-politicians-b1792143.html>

causes of why so many people took to the streets. Although a firm condemnation of the violence is completely justified, we believe we should always keep the conversation going. And whilst rioters might represent a minority, we also view these riots as a sign of social unrest in our society, which requires further analysis rather than just letting it smoulder. As Human Security Collective we feel that it is necessary to further study and engage with diverse groups in society to understand whether riots are a sign of growing segregation, inequality and resentment felt by many citizens. In this article we focus on youth, a demographic we work with to enable more inclusive decision making on complex security issues in society.

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## **The Covid-19 pandemic has had significant psychological and social effects on the population**

### **TACKLING A COMPLEX CRISIS WITH A HAMMER?**

The Dutch approach to combatting COVID-19 relies heavily on the expert epidemiologists of the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM). In early 2020, the government took the approach they labelled an ‘intelligent lockdown’. After a relatively open summer, in October the government spoke of the need for ‘a big enough hammer to strike down the virus’<sup>39</sup>. Since the outbreak in March 2020, nearly 70.000 infections and 6.200 deaths had been reported by August 24, 2020. By mid-October, there were 10.000 more infections per week (RIVM figures, week October 14, 2020)<sup>40</sup>. This, as well as concerns over new mutations of the virus, led to the decision to impose stricter measures, including the closing of restaurants, cafes, shops, and by the end, schools too. On top of that, in January 2021, a

<sup>39</sup> ‘Dutch order bars, restaurants closed over pandemic fears’, APN. Accessed February 20, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/virus-outbreak-pandemics-mark-rutte-netherlands-europe-32bb7d7b95a6cecd2e2c631b9038c55>

<sup>40</sup> RIVM. <https://www.rivm.nl/coronavirus-covid-19>

night-time curfew was imposed.

**The impact of the measures on Dutch society touches many domains of people's lives. Apart from economic insecurities for people in various sectors, numerous studies<sup>41</sup> point out that the Covid-19 pandemic has had significant psychological and social effects on the population.** Young people are among the groups that are highly impacted, which is also apparent in several interviews we conducted<sup>42</sup>.

Although, our in-depth interviews are a small sample, and are in no way representative of the entire Dutch youth population, let alone the rioters, they highlight the fact that this complex crisis has had a huge impact on their lives.

One interviewee spoke about the effect social distancing and the curfew has had on him *“Aside from the fact that these days I hardly meet up with those boys [a small close circle of friends], unfortunately I am doing less sports. And that leads to feeling depressed.”*<sup>43</sup>

Whereas another interviewee spoke more about the feeling of heightened stress, *“It just made me a bit more anti-social. (...) I always find new situations very difficult, and this makes it more difficult. When it happens all the time, getting to know new people, it is easier. But now... For example at the interview for my internship... I found it quite scary to come into a new social situation”*<sup>44</sup>.

The stories told are supported by recent studies which point

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<sup>41</sup> See, amongst others; ‘Impact corona op psychisch welbevinden neemt toe’. Accessed February 24, 2021. <https://www.113.nl/actueel/impact-corona-op-psychisch-welbevinden-neemt-toe>; ‘Research on behavioural rules and well-being: round 10’. Accessed February 25, 2021. <https://www.rivm.nl/en/novel-coronavirus-covid-19/research/behaviour/-behavioural-rules-and-well-being-round-10>; ‘Corona creëert nieuwe scheur in samenleving’. Accessed February 15, 2021. <https://www.socialevraagstukken.nl/corona-creert-nieuwe-scheur-in-samenleving/>

<sup>42</sup> These interviews were conducted by two interns, studying Applied Psychology, in the month of February 2021. They interviewed their peers at the college of Applied Sciences on the topic of Covid-19 and the impact it had had on their lives.

<sup>43</sup> Interviews (February 2021) Respondent c.

<sup>44</sup> Interviews (February 2021) Respondent d.

out that the crisis puts tremendous pressure on young people's mental health. In a survey conducted amongst four universities, 27.1% of the students expected a delay to their studies, 52.5% felt lonelier, and 44.6% felt gloomier<sup>45</sup>. Apart from the impact the pandemic has had on personal lives, we also see the effect it has had on wider society, leading to a larger trust deficit between citizens and the government. Whereas in the beginning of the crisis, a large majority of the Dutch population had trust in the government's approach to dealing with the crisis, this trust has diminished in more recent months. Research from the RIVM shows that *"fewer and fewer people believe that different social interests are being considered carefully"*<sup>46</sup>. This was also expressed by some interviewees:

*"The measures taken have no impact. There is a curfew.... yet everyone comes together. Yesterday, it was extremely busy. It makes no sense, supermarkets are busy....it makes no sense. As if he [Prime Minister] had to come up with a list of what he had to do and he could not think of anything else so just started writing. It makes no sense, there is no logic behind it."*<sup>47</sup>

*"They [young people] do not feel taken seriously by the government, a lot of things happen without our say. Youth want to be heard"*<sup>48</sup>.

These interviews underscore a recent study<sup>49</sup> that points out

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<sup>45</sup> 'De geestelijke gezondheid van studenten tijdens de Covid-19 pandemie', Accessed February 14, 2021. [https://www.vu.nl/nl/Images/Rapportage\\_CaringUniversities\\_GeestelijkeGezondheidStudentenCOVID19\\_19082020\\_tcm289-949689.pdf](https://www.vu.nl/nl/Images/Rapportage_CaringUniversities_GeestelijkeGezondheidStudentenCOVID19_19082020_tcm289-949689.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> 48% in February 2021, down from 63% in November according to RIMV Research Study on behavioral measures and well-being: <https://www.rivm.nl/en/novel-coronavirus-covid-19/research/behaviour/-behavioural-rules-and-well-being-round-10>

<sup>47</sup> Interviews (February 2021) Respondent b.

<sup>48</sup> Interviews (February 2021) Respondent c.

<sup>49</sup> *The Social impact of Covid-19 in the Netherlands, an explorative study*, Accessed March 1, 2021. <https://rsw.erickson.international/archivio/vol-n-2/the-social-impact-of-covid-19-in-the-netherlands-an-explorative-study/>

the broader impact the pandemic has had on society, affecting all aspects of people's lives in different ways. Youth have lost the structure of school and exercise, feel more worried about school and health. The outbreak has increased the number of teenagers calling – the Dutch children's line for help, as they experienced domestic violence. Before Covid-19 broke out, almost one in five households struggled with problematic debts which are expected to increase due to the measures taken.

These are only a few examples of the diverse multi-dimensional effects of the measures. They show the need to analyse the impact of measures in a multi-disciplinary way to fully understand the challenges.

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**We need to recognize the need to engage citizens more profoundly in mapping out the problem in all its complexity**”

#### **HOW CAN A COMPLEX CRISIS BE TACKLED WHILE EMBRACING EXISTING COMPLEXITY?**

Covid-19 highlights the boundaries of prevailing models to effectively manage today's complex crises. In our view, measures taken require a Human Security approach, ensuring a proportionate balance between preventing a health system from collapsing and citizens' wellbeing. This approach recognizes the close interdependence between different dimensions of Human Security, such as healthcare, employment, education and social stability. This means that cooperation between government, civil society, private sector and scientists from multiple disciplines is critical in order to come to a broader understanding of the challenges, and following on from that, to collectively designing solutions which address the interdependencies between these sectors.

**ENGAGE IN DEEPER CONVERSATIONS WITH DIVERSE CITIZENS, INCLUDING YOUNG PEOPLE**

An important starting point of a Human Security approach towards Covid-19 is to recognize the diverse experiences that people have in dealing with the pandemic. It includes the courage to listen deeply to other people's perspectives, however messy, polarized and controversial these opinions might be.

**As a very first step, we need to recognize the need to engage citizens more profoundly in mapping out the problem in all its complexity. In our work, we pay explicit attention to the impact Covid-19 has on the social life and the psychological well-being of young people.** This goes beyond listening to their perceptions on how Covid-19 and the measures have impacted their lives. What do they perceive as threats in society and what do they need to tackle these issues? The methodology is one of deep dialogue, consciously bringing together policy makers and youth to manage these opposing views and perceptions and finding ways to co-create more sustainable solutions in dealing with Covid-19.

## | CONCLUSIONS

By Marco Di Liddo<sup>50</sup>

Honestly, it must be admitted that the time is not yet ripe to grasp the so-called “lessons learned” of the pandemic, both at the epidemiological level and, more broadly, at the level of deep understanding of the economic, social, political, security and psychological impacts.

In this, a historicist comparison can help. It took the Second World War and the Second World War to understand how much the First World War had changed European societies and relations between states. It took the second tragedy to understand the wounds of the first.

Of course, it is hoped that, with the pandemic, the same scenario will not repeat itself and that no other global health emergencies will be needed to capitalize on the lessons of the covid-19 experience. However, as in the case of the relationship between the First and Second World War, even in the case of the pandemic it is not possible to venture into defining absolute models of crisis management based on the achievement of a comforting scientific truth.

However, the exploration and analysis of the impact of the pandemic on the subjects, themes and approaches to problem solving that fall under the umbrella of Human Security can help to obtain some interesting preliminary considerations.

**In its exceptional nature, the pandemic has acted as a stimulus for public debate and critical reflection on two main issues: the relationship between civil society and institutions and environmental activism.** Regarding the first

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**Before the outbreak of the pandemic, environmental activism had become the main driver of social mass mobilization on a planetary level**

topic, as the Dutch case cited in this paper highlights, public opinions have developed a polarized attitude to public policies adopted to combat the spread of the infection. The polarization has developed both on the contents of these policies (imposition, timing and severity of the lockdown) and on the methods of construction of the same. Civil society and, in particular, the younger generations would have liked to be more involved in the decision-making process and not to be "passively" subjected to the imposition of measures capable of so profoundly conditioning their existence. The feeling of disconnect between people and institutions perceived by society risks to extend well beyond the “pandemic” issue, reaching a broader fight for the definition of the future development model.

One of these issues could be precisely the choices of governments in terms of combating climate change and creating economic and production systems that respect the environment. **Before the outbreak of the pandemic, environmental activism had become the main driver of social mass mobilization on a planetary level.** The spread of the virus and the ban on public demonstrations have affected the visibility of this mobilization, but it has not weakened its spirit and determination. Indeed, the dissemination of studies that highlighted the connection between covid-19 and the change in the environmental balance on Earth and that underlined how the most polluted areas of our planet were those where the pandemic had caused the most victims, reinforced the belief that the virus was one of the umpteenth signals about the suffering of the ecosystem. Beyond the full scientific verification of these hypotheses, which are currently in an embryonic stage, the relationship between viruses and the fight against climate change is manifested above all at the level of awareness of environmental activists. According to them, the most important lesson that the ruling

classes should learn from the pandemic is the need to apply corrective measures and contingency plans before a phenomenon explodes in a radical and harmful way. In many cases, green activists have highlighted the unpreparedness of governments and international institutions for the pandemic, reiterating how such a "failure" cannot happen in the case of climate change since, in that case, the irreversible alteration of the environmental balance could lead to the extinction of life on Earth, including humanity.

In any case, climate change could only be one of the issues around which public opinion could polarize significantly. While it is not possible to draw long-term parables, the economic cost of the pandemic will presumably be very high. **It seems difficult to calculate when and how the sectors most affected by the crisis (tourism, entertainment, catering to name a few) will return to pre-crisis levels and it is equally complicated to try to understand what the guidelines of the post-pandemic economy will be.** The widespread and almost necessary diffusion of some innovations (smart working above all) could become permanent, forcing institutions and the labour market to evolve and adapt. The distribution of income could change and, with it, the vectors of consumption.

In summary, the pandemic could accelerate some dynamics of economic transformation already underway and consolidate ways and styles of working that were previously in a purely experimental phase or not very widespread. Such changes, when they occur so suddenly, lead to disorientation and uncertainty.

**Uncertainty and poverty will create more fragile, insecure and unstable societies.** Institutions will be responsible for managing these weaknesses and ensuring that vulnerability does not turn into fertile ground for the proliferation of violent forms of mobilization.

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It seems difficult to calculate when and how the sectors most affected by the crisis will return to pre-crisis levels

In this regard, just think of what happened in the Sahel, and in particular in Mali, in the second half of 2020. Following the spread of covid, Bamako has imposed lockdown measures that have hit, in particular, the agricultural sector (which uses 70% of the workforce and which is mainly based on daily and seasonal laborers). Deprived of their only source of livelihood, both peasants and urban workers have seen their income and access to the minimum means of subsistence drastically reduced. The economic crisis immediately turned into a social crisis and exacerbated the extent of the continuing political protests against the President of the Republic Abubakar Keita. In this sense, the economic crisis and the uncertainty linked to the pandemic have played a fundamental role in ensuring that social mobilization in Mali reaches the point of no return and manifests itself in the most extreme form of the President's exhaustion.

Similar considerations can be made for the episodes of violence that hit US cities in 2020 and 2021 in the context of the protests for the defence of the rights of the African American community and the presidential elections. How much have the economic, social and psychological stress caused by the covid-19 pandemic and the impacts of contagion mitigation measures affected the polarization of public opinion? To what extent has the social tension resulting from generalized uncertainty facilitated the spread and consolidation of radical positions even in those generally moderate sections of the population which were previously impervious to extremism? Today there is no consolidated scientific literature able to offer exhaustive answers, even if it is possible to say that **what happened in the United States between the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021 was a "perfect storm" in terms of economic pressures and stresses, psychological and political for the population.**

In the same way, it is legitimate to ask how much the economic crisis and the spread of virus in Russia have acted as force multipliers for the anti-government protests and the increase in support for Alexey Navalny's political opposition against the Vladimir Putin.

At the time of writing, the world's population and governments continue to face the pandemic, which has now entered its second year. Despite the logistical and medical difficulties associated with the production and distribution of vaccines and the emergence of new variants of the virus, the world seems to see the end of this long tunnel. However, as soon as the pandemic nightmare ends, its impacts and costs will have to be dealt with. Today, the efforts of governments and international institutions are focused on so-called recovery plans which have the main purpose of stimulating the economy and minimizing the negative effects of the pandemic in terms of work and social security. However, focusing exclusively on the productive and income dimension risks making us forget the factors of individual and collective psychological vulnerability and ignoring the lesson concerning the evolution of the relationship between citizens and institutions and the risks of polarization of the public debate that can derive from it.

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