

From Traditional to Humane Security Challenges — Analysing Pakistan's Response to the Poly Crisis of Covid 19

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Abstract

For Pakistan coping with the Covid-19 pandemic, came as a polycrisis coupled with critical concerns including climate change and challenged governance indicators. Characteristic of a polycrisis, human lives were not the only casualty, grappling with an economic crisis marked by slow growth, high inflation and rising debt, the pandemic could not have hit Pakistan at a worst time. The comity of nations, comprising the most powerful and mighty to the least developed stood equally challenged and affected by this pandemic. Where there was a rush in the scientific community across the globe to discover at the earliest a viable cure for this virus, the pandemic brought home several sobering realisations with regards to revisiting the notion of security, the level of preparedness by the contemporary state in addressing multiple challenges and response to threat convergence. Through this paper an attempt is made to examine the impact and consequence of rising non-traditional threats, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper will further review what necessitated the early thinkers on seeking an alternative discourse on security, once realising that the classic and traditional perspective on security is no longer sufficient to answer what are now being termed faced by the state actors. Lastly, what measures and policies can be undertaken by the state at various levels of governance to incorporate and effectively deal with nontraditional security measures at a sustained level.

Keywords: Covid -19, SDGs, NCOC, Pandemic, Poly Crisis, New Normal, Humane Security, WHO.

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Introduction

The world that its inhabitants comfortably knew, altered drastically as of December 2019 with the outbreak of a new strain of *Corona* virus in the Chinese city of Wuhan. Claiming a sizeable number of lives all across the country, this novel strain of the corona virus, nomenclatured the COVID-19 (Corona Virus Disease 2019) fast surged beyond China and by March 11th, 2020 it was termed as pandemic by the World Health Organization¹ (WHO) due to its rapid spread and transmission that has affected hundreds of thousands of lives in more than a hundred countries.² Within six months since the outbreak, by the end of May 2020, the total affected worldwide were close to the staggering figure of 234,093,937 with more than four million fatalities recorded.³ In four years, the virus has claimed more than seven million lives.⁴ Where at one hand, respiratory outbreaks and localised pandemics by no means are a new occurrence, as in the last two plus decades alone, the world has faced major viral outbreaks including the Ebola,⁵ Congo fever,⁶ Swine flu,⁷ the highly pathogenic H5N1Avian *flu*,⁸ as well other strains of

¹ “WHO Director-General’s Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020,” *World Health Organisation*, <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020> .

² “WHO Director-General’s Opening Remarks,” *World Health Organisation*.

³ “Coronavirus Update (Live): 234,093,937 Cases and 4,788,7251 deaths,” *Worldometer*, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus>, Updated till April 13, 2024.

⁴ “Coronavirus Update (Live).”

⁵ A rare but severe and often fatal illness initially transmitted zoonotically *Ebola Virus Disease (EVD)*, formerly known as *Ebola haemorrhagic fever*, has an average fatality rate of around 50%. The EVD first appeared in 1976 in West Africa with 2 simultaneous outbreaks. Source: “Ebola virus disease,” *World Health Organisation*, February 10, 2020, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ebola-virus-disease>,

⁶ The *Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever (CCHF)* known as the *Congo Fever*, is a disease caused by a tick-borne virus, and carries a 10-40 per cent. case fatality rate. More rampant in Africa, the Balkans, the Middle East, and certain Asian countries. Source: “Crimean-Congo Haemorrhagic Fever,” *World Health Organisation*, January 31, 2013, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/crimean-congo-haemorrhagic-fever>.

⁷ “Swine influenza,” is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses that regularly cause outbreaks of influenza in pigs. A variant of this Influenza virus H3N2 was first discovered in 2009 in humans and has been a cause

corona virus such as the SARS,⁹ MERS, commonly known as the Camel flu,¹⁰ with some having spillover zoonotic capacity to inflict humans and other species. But what made the COVID-19 (C-19) worrisome was its fast-spreading nature, easy and rapid transmission via human-to-human contact, and in some rare cases cross-species transmission,¹¹ its ability to remain airborne or active on surfaces and for hours, and a longer incubation period.¹²

In its surge across the globe, this pandemic left no person invulnerable. A true poly crisis in its nature and impact, as the comity of nations,

of death in at least 12 states of the USA. Source: "Situation Summary on Influenza A (H3N2) Variant Viruses ("H3N2v")," *Centers For Disease Control & Prevention*, August 03, 2016, <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/swineflu/h3n2v-situation.htm>

⁸ The *Avian Flu* is an Asian highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) A (H5N1) virus that mainly occurs in and is highly contagious among birds. The virus was first detected in 1996 in geese in China, and in humans in year 1997. Had a widespread re-emergence in 2003 and rare, sporadic human infections with this virus have been reported in Asia, and later in Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. Human infections with Asian H5N1 viruses have been associated with severe disease and death.

Centers For Disease Control & Prevention, December 12, 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/h5n1-virus.htm>

⁹ *SARS coronavirus*, also known as SARS-CoV, is a virus which can cause severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). SARS coronavirus belongs to a family of enveloped single-stranded, positive-sense RNA viruses, and so far, there were seven known human coronaviruses: HCoV-229E, HCoV-OC43, HCoV-229E, HCoV-OC43, SARS-CoV, HCoV-NL63 and HCoV-HKU1, the current pandemic being a recent one. The SARS-CoV outbreak caused an atypical pneumonia that spread rapidly throughout parts of Asia, North America, and Europe during 2002-2003. Source: *Sino Biological*, <https://www.sinobiological.com/research/virus/sars-coronavirus-overview>

¹⁰ The Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) or commonly referred to as Camel Flu, was first discovered in the summer of 2012, in Jeddah, in a patient with acute pneumonia and renal failure. There are no specific treatments for illnesses caused by the MERS-COV, and between September 2012 to June 2013, the WHO confirmed 40 deaths. *Sino Biological*, <https://www.sinobiological.com/research/virus/mers-cov-overview>

¹¹ *Cross-Species Virus Transmission*, primarily implies the occurrence of human diseases when an established animal virus switches hosts into humans and is subsequently transmitted within human populations. Source: Colin R. Parrish, Edward C. Holmes, et. al, "Cross-Species Virus Transmission and the Emergence of New Epidemic Diseases," *Microbiology and Molecular Biology Reviews*, vol. 72, no. 03 (September 2008): 457.

¹² "COVID-19: How does Coronavirus Compare to other Outbreaks?," *Future Learn*, March 10, 2020, <https://www.futurelearn.com/info/blog/covid-19-how-does-coronavirus-compare-to-other-outbreaks>

comprising the most powerful and mighty to the least developed stood equally challenged and affected by this pandemic. Where there was witnessed a rush in the scientific community across the globe to discover at the earliest a viable cure for this virus, finally resulting in *Vaccine Diplomacy*,¹³ the pandemic brought home several sobering realisations with regards to revisiting the notion of security, the level of preparedness by the contemporary state in addressing the challenges posed by such poly crises and response to the threat convergence. Additionally, giving rise to the question, whether all countries stood uniformly affected by the fallout of these developments or there is a difference between states' responses.

Through this paper an attempt is made to examine the impact and consequence of rising non-traditional threats, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper will further review what necessitated the early thinkers on seeking an alternative discourse on security, once realizing that the classic and traditional perspective on security is no longer sufficient to answer what are now being termed faced by the state actors. Lastly, what measures and policies can be undertaken by the state at various levels of governance to incorporate and effectively deal with non-traditional security measures at a sustained level. Coupled with traditional conflicts, poverty, poor governance, rising ultra-nationalism, these non-traditional threats manifest a systemic inter-connectedness that carries multipronged challenges for the global security dynamics. This inter-complexity and interconnectedness of multifaceted threats referred to as *Perma Crises or Poly Crises*¹⁴ are testing and taxing states' comprehension, capacity and response.

Poly Crisis As the New Normal

Why are the contemporary security challenges being termed polycrisis? Is this a new normal for viewing the multitude of threats faced by global

¹³ "Vaccine Diplomacy Boosts Russia's and China's Global Standing," *The Economist*, April 29, 2021. <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/04/29/vaccine-diplomacy-boosts-russias-and-chinas-global-standing>

¹⁴ The term was first coined in the 1970s by *Complexity theorist*, Edgar Morin who in a 1999 book authored with Anne Brigitte Kern, *Homeland Earth*, explained it as a complex inter-solidarity of problems, antagonisms, uncontrolled processes, and general crisis of the planet.

actors? The term *Polycrisis* finds its origin in the works of French Complexity Theorist, *Edgar Morin* in the 1970s which was later elaborated in his co-authored volume *Homeland Earth*¹⁵ published in 1999. Morin & Kern stated that the most ‘vital’ problem of the day was not any single threat but the ‘complex inter-solidarity of problems, antagonisms, crises, uncontrollable processes and the general crisis of the planet.’¹⁶

Morin in a recent article refers to the lethal strife resulting from the Palestinian carnage and Ukrainian war as *Midnight in the Century*, and states,” with an increasing number of wars, climate change and the rise of authoritarian regimes, the world may be heading for disaster, but we must resist hatred. These crises are feeding on each other in a kind of environmental, economic, political, social and civilisational polycrisis that is growing in magnitude.”¹⁷ Morin’s term of *Polycrisis* has increasingly been used by later authors, who seek to comprehend and resolve the crises confronting the contemporary world which Albert states are, “not simply a climate crisis, nor simply a collection of numerous isolatable problems that can be studied by separate disciplines, but rather a “polycrisis” or nexus of reciprocally entwined crises characterised by complex feedback loops, blurred boundaries, cascade effects and (in many cases) mutual amplification.”¹⁸

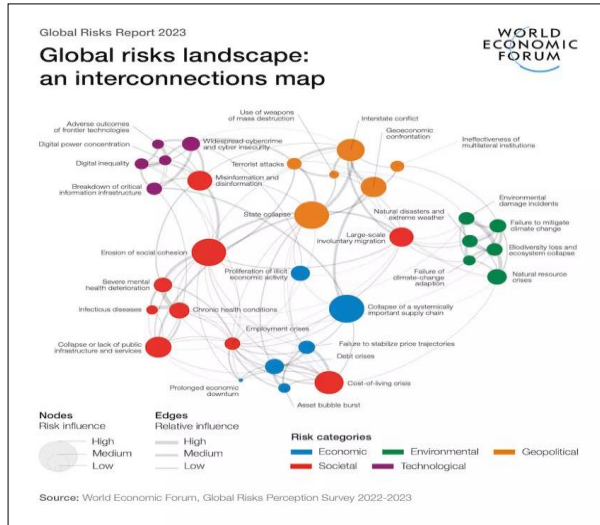
¹⁵ Edgar Morin and Anee Brigitte Kern, *Homeland Earth: A Manifesto for the New Millennium – Advances in Systems Theory, Complexity, and the Human Sciences* (London: Hampton Press, 1999).

¹⁶ Morin and Kern, *Homeland Earth*, 74.

¹⁷ Edgar Morin, “‘Faced with the polycrisis Humanity is Going Through, the First Resistance is that of the Spirit’,” *Le Monde*, January 24, 2024. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2024/01/24/edgar-morin-faced-with-the-polycrisis-humanity-is-going-through-the-first-resistance-is-that-of-the-spirit_6460205_23.html

¹⁸ Micheal J Albert, *Navigating the Polycrisis Mapping the Futures of Capitalism and the Earth*,” (Mass: MIT Press, 2024), 02.

Diagram No.1



Source: World Economic Forum, *Global Risks Perception Survey 2022-2023*, <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2023/>

Beckman describes polycrisis as “the circumstance where multiple discrete and overlapping shocks impact a system.”¹⁹ He further states that,

“A poly-crisis can exist at the international, national, regional or local level. These crises drain budgets, test the patience of our constituents, place greater demands on staff, require instantaneous communication and public messaging, and necessitate the coordination and collaboration of a more complex set of public and private sector partners.”²⁰

Whereas Lawrence, Dixon, Janzwood et al describe this term by studying “the causal entanglement of crises in multiple global systems in ways that significantly degrade humanity’s prospects.”²¹ Mark Swilling in a 2013 article describes the term as, “a nested set of globally interactive

¹⁹ Luke Beckman, “Navigating Poly-crisis: The New Reality for Crisis Management in the United States,” Paper, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, June 2023.

²⁰ Beckman, “Navigating Poly-crisis.”

²¹ Micheal Lawrence et al., “Global Polycrisis: The Causal Mechanisms of Crisis Entanglement,” *Global Sustainability*7, e 6, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2024.1>

socio-economic, ecological and cultural-institutional crises that defy reduction to a single cause.”²² Lastly, Adam Tooze states, “if you’ve been feeling confused and as though everything is impacting on you all at the same time, this is not a personal, private experience, ... This is actually a collective experience.... And it has a name Polycrisis.”²³

To tackle such polycrises, the need is to comprehend the intra-systemic as well as inter systemic²⁴ impacts, focusing on crises both within as well as across our systems. Sensitisation towards emerging threats and their growing interconnectedness as raised by Morin and others cited above, also resonated through the works of economists and likeminded intelligentsia who later were the proponents of Alternate or Human Security framework. The emphasis was on creating a sustainable, equitable and strong world order that stands resilient to such future occurrences.

From Classic to Humane Security Alternatives

As early as the 1960s at the height of the Cold war, the realisation that viewing security from the traditional militaristic lens alone is insufficient had been felt. Furthermore, the state’s *classical* role as the net provider, as well as its capacity to adequately address multifarious challenges to security were deemed unilateralist, insufficient and limited. Initiatives such as the *Club of Rome*,²⁵ the *World Order Models Project*²⁶ of 1966,

²² Mark Swilling, “Economic Crisis, Long Waves and the Sustainability Transition: An African Perspective,” *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, vol 06 (March 2013): 96-115.

²³ Kate Whiting and Hyojin Park, “This is Why “Polycrises” is a Useful Way of Looking at the World Right Now,” World Economic Forum, March 7, 2023, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/03/polycrisis-adam-tooze-historian-explains/>

²⁴ Lawrence, Homer Dixon et al.,3.

²⁵ Founded in 1968 the *Club of Rome* was created at Accademia dei Lincei in Rome, Italy. Comprising current and former heads of state, UN bureaucrats, high-level politicians and government officials, diplomats, scientists, economists, and business leaders from around the globe, this consortium was meant to address and seek comprehensive solutions to multiple crises facing humanity and the planet. Source: “About The Club of Rome,” Home Page *The Club of Rome*, <https://clubofrome.org/about-us/>

later to be followed by reports by independent commissions such as Barndt Commission's *North South Report* (1980)²⁷, a follow up report, *The Common Crisis*²⁸ and the complimentary Palme Commission's *Common Security Report*²⁹ set the tone for an alternate perspective on security which would be comprehensive and humane in nature. These consortiums and reports not only focused on the need to invest on sustainable economy but recognised and raised awareness about issues such as poverty, hunger, ill-health, environmental degradation and pollution, resource depletion as well as criminality that have affected countries indiscriminately. As per this perspective, unless there is a global effort by all states concerned, regardless of their economic or political power to join hands and address the common afflictions with equity, justice and empathy, the world with its finite capacity will start declining and the resulting chaos will be a threat for human survival.

The *Club of Rome* was founded in April 1968 as a consortium of likeminded scientists, thinkers, industrialist as well as organisations, who were profoundly concerned with the long-term consequences of unbridled economic and industrial activity, resource depletion and

²⁶ The *World Order Models Project (WOMP)* was established in 1966 as a network of scholars, intellectuals, political figures, and community-based social activists from various regions worldwide engaged in the promotion of a just world peace, economic well-being, social justice, ecological balance, and positive identity. *Union of International Associations, Open Yearbook*, <https://uia.org/s/or/en/1100015025>

²⁷ The *North-South Report* was published by the *Independent Commission on International Development Issues* — an initiative of the World Bank, commonly known as the *Brandt Commission*, named after its head the former Chancellor of Germany, Willy Brandt, set up in 1977. The report brought forth a set of recommendations for the reform and restructuring of the world economic system around the principles of *equity, fair balance and mutual benefit*, most essential aspects essential to avoid the 'threat to human survival posed by the threatening chaos in the world economy.' For Details: The Independent Commission on International Development Issues, *North-South, A Programme for Survival*, Washington DC: Pan World Affairs, 1980.

²⁸ Brandt Commission, *Common Crisis. North-South Cooperation for World Recovery* (London: Pan Books, 1983).

²⁹ Known commonly as *Palme Commission*, after its head the Swedish Prime Minister Olaf Palme, the Common Security Report sought arms limitation and disarmament through negotiation and dialogue amongst the major state actors over a period of twenty years. For Details: The Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, *Common Security: A Programme for Disarmament* (London: Pan Books, 1982).

environmental pollution and degradation, poverty, criminality and endemic ill-health. The organisation was based on three core ideas that remain consistent to date; a global and long-term perspective, the concept of “problematique,” and comprehending a cluster of intertwined global predicaments whether economic, environmental, political, or social in nature.³⁰

Its lead publication in 1972, a report titled *The Limits of Growth*,³¹ and an earlier, less mentioned study by select members of this Club, *The Predicament of Mankind – Quest for Structured Responses to Growing Worldwide Complexities and Uncertainties*, explored the impact of exponential economic and population growth on a world which holds finite supply of resources. Drawing some alarming conclusions and timelines, it predicted the peak capacity of production, food growth, industrial capacity, and services to the initial three decades of the 21st century to be followed by a “sudden, rapid and uncontrollable decline.”³² Unless the growth trends are altered so that sustainable ecological and economic stability could be achieved. Receiving its share of appreciation as well as criticism³³ for being over simplistic, idealistic, and drawing incorrect assumptions,³⁴ it is still considered a groundbreaking study which has “withstood the test of time and, indeed, has only become more relevant.”³⁵

Published in the late 1960s and early 1970s, these initial documents paved the path for an alternative perspective on security. As mentioned earlier the *Limits of Growth* report was followed in the 1980s by the

³⁰ The Club of Rome, *The Predicament of Mankind – Quest for Structured Responses to Growing Worldwide Complexities and Uncertainties A Proposal*, 1970.

³¹ H Donella, Dennis L Meadows, Jørgen Randers, W William, *The Limits to Growth; A Report for the Club of Rome’s Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

³² Debora Mackenzie, “Boom and Doom: Revisiting Prophecies of Collapse,” *New Scientist*. January 04, 2012, <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg21328462-100-boom-and-doom-revisiting-prophecies-of-collapse/>,

³³ J. Farley, “Limits to Growth,” in J. B. Callicott and R. Frodeman (Eds.) *Encyclopaedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy* (MI: Macmillan Reference, 2008): 45-47.

³⁴ H. S. D. Cole; Christopher Freeman, et.al., eds., *Models of Doom: A Critique of the Limits to Growth* (Universe Publishing, 1973).

³⁵ Peet Jørgen Stig, Ragnarsdóttir John, Vala Kristín, “The History of The Limits to Growth,” *The Solutions Journal*, vol. 1, no. 2 (March 2010): 59-63.

World Bank led initiative the *Brandt Commission* as well as the *Palme Commission*, both of which served as a strong voice for seeking alternative solutions to non-traditional challenges to world security. The Brandt Commission's *North South Report* stressed upon grass-root problem solving approach to be adopted by state actors to empathetically comprehend global challenges. It further sought equitable sharing of world resources coupled with social justice and the willingness on part of stronger state actors to be more considerate and accommodating, to ensure lasting peace and bring an end to world's miseries. Amongst the group of leading experts who contributed to the Brandt Commission and its reports was the (late) Dr. Mahbub ul Haq an International development theorist and leading economist from Pakistan. Dr. Haq's 1978 study *The Poverty Curtain*³⁶ on allocation of more resources towards poverty alleviation, nutrition, and other social sectors, set the basis of his groundbreaking work on *Human Security* and devising of the *Human Development Index*. Another perspective on Human Security was by Canadian experts and government that spearheaded the *Middle Powers' Initiative*.

Haq in the seminal document, *New Approaches to Human Security*,³⁷ sought a transformation in thinking and changing mindsets from the traditional, classic notion of security to a more humane and person-centric approach which would be much broader, comprehensive, and universalistic in approach.

“The concept of security has for too long been interpreted narrowly: as security of territory from external aggression, or as protection of national interests in foreign policy or as global security from the threat of a nuclear holocaust. It has been related more to nation-states than to people.

In the final analysis, human security is a child who did not die, a disease that did not spread, a job that was not cut, an ethnic tension that did not explode in violence, a dissident who was not silenced. Human security is not a concern with weapons — it is a concern with human life and dignity.”³⁸

³⁶ Mahbub ul Haq, *The Poverty Curtain: Choices for the Third World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976).

³⁷ United Nations Development Programme, “New Dimensions of Human Security,” *Human Development Report 1994* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): 22-44.

³⁸ Haq, *Human Development Report*, 22.

As per this perspective, the emphasis was on prioritising the alternative vision of security, investing human capital and resource in realising this perspective, in order to ensure the safety and well-being of “all the people everywhere — in their homes, in their jobs, in their streets, in their communities, in their environment.”³⁹ For Haq, to reach this purpose, five fundamentals needed to be realised: an equity-based sustainable human development conception that entails major restructuring of world’s income, consumption, and lifestyle patterns, reduction in military expenditure, with conversion of military aid to economic, a just and equitable relationship between the developed, developing to the underdeveloped and underprivileged states, restructuring of global economic and development institutions, that would deal with every aspect confronting humanity and lastly, the evolution of a global civil society, based on democratic norms and grassroots participation.⁴⁰

Haq’s proposal seemed idealistic and even after a quarter of a century has still not been fruited. Amongst few of the reasons for this perpetuity is the stronghold of *state* as the fundamental actor in global political order which has withstood and managed to resist an institutionally dominated system as well as a human centric society. As a result, the *middle powers’ approach* led by Canada although similar to the UNDP’s approach, evolved more pragmatically, as where it stressed on “the safety of the individual — that is, human has become a new measure of global security,... where in “[S]ecurity between states remains a necessary condition for the security of people.”⁴¹

Covid 19 and Revisiting Security Discourse

The end of the Cold War could have brought about a change in international politics, from a traditional security dominated state-based

³⁹ Mahbub ul Haq, “New Imperatives of Human Security,” *RGICS Paper No. 17*, Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies (RGICS), Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, New Delhi, 1994, 1.

⁴⁰ Haq, *New Imperatives*, 3-17.

⁴¹ “Human Security: Safety for People in a Changing World,” a paper prepared by the *Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade*, (DFAIT) Government of Canada. <http://www.dfait.maeci.gc.ca/foreignp/HumanSecurity/secur-e.htm>, p. 1.

system and discourse to a more humane institution' dominated people centric system. Yet as stated earlier the *New World Order* also saw the state asserting itself more powerfully as a dominant actor. Despite the fact that state still remains the main referent object, the Covid 19 global pandemic and overarching effects of climate change has brought forth several such changes:

- Firstly, despite a well-articulated and incorporated alternative perspective, the world in its feverish pursuit of traditional means of security has grossly overlooked and disregarded the most immediate and personal, i.e., security of the common citizen.
- Secondly, despite having globally pledged to introduce and institutionalise better and humane governance parameters, the latest being the *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*,⁴² in the face of the pandemic not a single country can today confidently claim strong and viable health care and health security indicators. As the number of deaths as well as diseased surged by the day, the pandemic laid bare the lack of focus, preparedness as well as investment by every country on healthcare, individual security and well being.
- Thirdly, it also gave rise to a poignant reality, that any amount of traditional military preparedness today stands insufficient and irrelevant in the face of such nontraditional threats to mankind, which are increasingly becoming a reality and not a work of fiction. Issues such as this pandemic or effects of climate change

⁴² After intense deliberation in September 2015 the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* was adopted by all United Nations Member States at the UN Sustainable Development Summit, as a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. The agenda consists of *17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, to be adopted and implemented by all member states, binding them in a global partnership, to 1. end poverty, 2. Hunger, 3. Promote good health and wellbeing, 4 Quality Education, 5. Gender Equality, 6. Clean Water, Sanitation, 7. Clean, Affordable Energy, 8. Decent work and Economic Growth, 9. Industrial, infrastructural growth and innovation, 10. Reduced Inequalities, 11. Sustainable communities and cities, 12. Responsible Consumption, 13. Climate change, 14/15. Quality of Life, 16. Peace & justice, and lastly, sustainable partnership. Source: "Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform," *United Nations Organisation*, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

have a global impact, regardless of their point of initiation, or the level of industrial and fiscal progression of a country.

- Most importantly, being *Polycrises* — these threats may not be considered *mutually exclusive*, as there is a greater threat *convergence* between these rising human insecurities. Climate change, pandemics and disease outbreaks, locust infestation, along with challenges of terrorism, civil war, state authoritarianism is putting greater pressure on the states' capacity to face and respond and for many, these multiple threats are leading from state fragility to failure.
- Furthermore, such occurrences test the resilience, limits, and degree to which the contemporary state can respond, mobilize, and deal with multiplicity of threats. These threats require a totally different set of tools and means to preempt and prevent. The fundamental challenge before the contemporary state is to ascertain the critical components required to respond to this threat convergence.
- The question thus arises, should the state respond to these rising challenges individually or seek a collective route? Much of this depends on the capabilities, technical advancement, socio-economic and governance profile of the countries concerned. Are the respondent states sufficiently self-reliant? Are they equipped with early warning systems and means to preempt and protect themselves from these rising threats? Belonging to different political cultures and societal attitudes, do they possess adeptness for change, scientific progression, the mindset, and the ability to mate tradition with science to explore new boundaries, or conveniently remain wedded to conspiracies and faith-based explanations.
- Unfortunately, while the pandemic has been indiscriminate in its spread and countries worldwide have been drastically affected despite their state of development, the *differential* between how individual states is impacted by the pandemic remains wide and will worsen with time. Giving rise to new *Global Haves and Have-nots*, where countries such as Australia and New Zealand with scarce population managed to completely control the virus (though, there is

a resurgence and setback for them), for densely populated countries, living under abject poverty such as many African states, where getting water for daily consumption is a struggle, maintaining social distance, or extreme hygiene protocols are fantasy talk. The reason many have shown low exposure rates to the pandemic is attributed to the fact that they don't have access to testing kits and apparatus for the pandemic. Furthermore, for countries facing conflict, there is little choice available to the war affected people — death by violent means or from the pandemic.

- Furthermore, this *global divide* is also manifest in the availability provision and acceptability of the 'Anti-Covid Vaccine.' A deep divide between the U.S.-led Western lobby and China-Russia bloc had become an unnecessary moot point,⁴³ which affected the wellbeing of global citizens.
- Lastly, for countries such as Pakistan, which ordinarily have a modest to low performance indicators, on human development or governance indices,⁴⁴ these non-traditional threats imply multilayered challenges that span from the immediate to long term consequences.

Pandemic & Threat Convergence: Challenges for Pakistan's State Capacity

Pakistan stands at the middle tier in terms of human development globally, with a *Human Development Index (HDI)* valued at 0.560 for

⁴³Yen Nee Lee, "The U.S. Will be a 'Formidable Competitor' to China in Covid Vaccine Diplomacy," *CNBC*, Thursday June 10, 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/06/10/covid-expert-on-us-china-competition-in-vaccine-diplomacy.html>

⁴⁴ Pakistan ranks 152 out of 189 countries and territories on the Human Development Index for the year 2018, with an *HDI value* as 0.560 — it places the country in the medium human development category. As per the year 2019 Annual Human Development Report, Pakistan's HDI value increased by 38.6 % from 0.404 to 0.560 between the years 1990 and 2018. Source: United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2019. Beyond Income, Beyond Averages, Beyond Today: Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century*, New York: UNDP, 2019, 352.

the year 2018 to 0.540 for the year 2024.⁴⁵ Slipping from a ranking of 152 out of 189 countries and territories in 2018 to 161.⁴⁶ In case of Pakistan, where governments past and present have sought to focus on human security, sustainable development, and governance — these have been generally relegated as low priority given the country's pre-occupation with traditional security challenges emanating from its immediate neighborhood. When the Sustainable Development *Goals* (SDGs) came into force, the government of the time immediately incorporated them in the country's National Development Agenda 2030, through a unanimous National Assembly Resolution in 2016. Thereby, becoming the first in the region to be much ahead of other countries and regional actors joining the programme. However, despite this early promising start, Pakistan's performance can at best be rated between stagnant to moderate paced. It scored 57.7 under SDGs' global index against a better regional average of 65.7 and stood 129 out of 165 countries in the overall performance ranking for the year 2021.⁴⁷ A slightly better performance than the previous years, however, except for Afghanistan, whose score was 53.9, all the other regional countries, showed better performance indicators.⁴⁸

The government of the day held health and nutrition as one of the key agenda during its election campaign. Once elected, this election promise was actualised through several institutional measures, which alongside reforms in the health sector, led to nationwide health coverage for the under privileged through what has been labelled as the *Sehat Sahulat* scheme. There has also been incorporated, a centralised integrated disease surveillance system and strong inter-provincial information sharing mechanism.⁴⁹ These measures and the commitment to fulfil the SDGs

⁴⁵ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2023-24. Breaking the Gridlock: Reimagining Cooperation in a Polarized World*, New York: UNDP, 2024.

⁴⁶ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2023-24*.

⁴⁷ Jeffrey D. Sachs et al., *The Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals: Sustainable Development Report 2021*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

⁴⁸ Jeffrey D. Sachs et al., *The Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals*.

⁴⁹ Government of Pakistan & WHO, *SDG 03 Localisation in Pakistan, Ministry of National Health Services Regulations and Coordination*, 2018, <https://phkh.nhsrsrc.pk/sites/default/files/2021->

places the government under considerable pressure, as alongside the SDGs, the unfinished goalposts of the *Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)* also need to be realised. Despite originating from the same source, unlike the SDGs, the MDGs were considered by many as a “UN-driven initiative only to be complied with by four-yearly progress reports, prepared by consultants, without any implementation mechanism in place to actually deliver.”

To have a well-coordinated and realistic implementation, the SDGs were synced in with seven pillars of the 2018 *National Vision Document 2025*,⁵⁰ which included, a people first approach, growth, governance, security, entrepreneurship, knowledge economy and connectivity. Furthermore, inclusion and implementation of the SDGs have been made integral in the five-year fiscal plan, provincial growth strategies and development plans at grass root and local bodies’ level. *Pakistan Development Alliance* as a consortium of hundred plus organisations spread over national, provincial and district level is engaged in implementing the SDGs at civil society level, to bring coherence and coordination. For a more accountable and transparent system, the consortium has also carried out *Citizens’ Led Mechanism for the Voluntary National Review of SDGs*⁵¹ in the country. Given a mandate to raise awareness, set the policies and institutional and financial scope for implementation, identify impediments and challenges as well as evaluate and monitor the progress, this report and several others carried out by the key stakeholders where on the one hand have identified the level of progress, they have also brought forth the challenges faced. The rationale behind this entire effort was to create a space for establishing multi-sectoral linkages and collaboration and sectoral linkages to achieve the 2030 sustainable development agenda.

Despite these measures, successive governments have been faced by several challenges. Firstly, owing to the passage of the *18th Amendment* to the Constitution devolved healthcare policy and rulemaking to the

04/Implementation%20of%20the%202030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20Pakistan%20WHO%202019.pdf, 10.

⁵⁰ Government of Pakistan, *Pakistan 2025 One Nation One Vision*, Ministry of Planning, Development & Reform, 2018.

⁵¹ Awaz CDS-Pakistan & Pakistan Development Alliance, *Citizens Voice on Volunteer National Review and Status of SDGs in Pakistan*, March 2019, <https://awazcads.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Citizens-Voices-Report-2019.pdf>

provincial level, a step undertaken to empower provinces to carry out their needs specific health policies and requirements. However, the results have not been adequately met. Secondly, despite the establishment of special SDG units, there is a lack of internal interface for policy coordination. There also exists a lack of financial transparency, besides poor data reporting analysis and lastly, despite the involvement of grass root leadership, there was not only an absence of administrative and financial empowerment but also lack of awareness with regards the criticality of the SDGs. Foremost amongst the challenges has been data collection and availability. Financial constraints, devolution of administrative and financial power to local governments, which remain dysfunctional and lack training to comprehend as well as implement these goal posts and poor capacity building of legislators are issues that have further been an impediment in better implementation.⁵² Lastly, given the pandemic, accessibility to concerned stakeholders, engagement at grass roots level and a lack of capacity at the hands of federal as well as provincial governments to handle such complex and multilayered health challenges remained a major issue.

Prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, Pakistan's total allocation to healthcare in its GDP was less than 2 per cent. A dismal figure, which was not even sufficient to fulfil the SDGs let alone be able to handle this monumental health crisis. With a population of 220 million people, Pakistan is the sixth most populous country in the world. Although Pakistan's population growth rate declined from 3.5 per cent per annum in 1980s to the present estimated level of 1.9 per cent per annum it is still an alarmingly high figure, which coupled with devolution woes, places additional burden on the country to handle the challenges. Malnutrition indicators and its impact on health and well-being gets adversely affected by an increasing population.

Outbreak of COVID-19 in Pakistan

Given the above cited indicators and challenges for Pakistan the Covid-19 pandemic came as a major health emergency, with multipronged impact. Described as “the most serious threat we have faced in living

⁵² Awaz CDS-Pakistan & Pakistan Development Alliance, *Citizens Voice on Volunteer National Review and Status of SDGs in Pakistan*, 08-12.

memory,” by Pakistan’s military spokesperson,⁵³ human lives have not been the only casualty of the pandemic. With no plan or preparedness for such complex emergencies, once the virus hit the country and was also declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Pakistani state authorities scrambled to respond in terms of a centralised response centre, infrastructure development, identification, quarantine and isolation facilities, testing and triage facilities as well medicines, ventilators, *Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)*, as well as pharmaceutical production of the vaccine, as and when developed.

The worst effect Pakistan has faced is in terms of the economic fallout. With poor and unequal health care, low literacy rate, poverty, seasonal disease outbreaks, environmental and climate change effects, locust attacks and poor social safety networks becoming additional threat multipliers. Bordering the two hotbeds of COVID-19, Iran and China, Pakistan could not have escaped the pandemic and its associated disastrous effects. Pakistan’s response to COVID-19 channelled through the *National Coordination Committee (NCC)* and the *National Command and Operation Center (NCOC)* has been akin to walking a tightrope between saving lives and livelihoods. Other than increasing capacity in healthcare to deal with COVID-19, the federal government unveiled a 900 billion-Rupee economic stimulus package, launched a social-protection program, *Ehsaas*, and attained debt relief through timely and assiduous diplomacy.

The first incident of Pakistanis testing positive to the *novel coronavirus* was in late January 2020 amongst four students studying in China.⁵⁴ Despite the foreknowledge of Coronavirus being declared as the sixth public health emergency of international concern and a global outbreak by the WHO as early as January 30, 2020,⁵⁵ there appeared to be insignificant preemptive or precautionary measures undertaken by

⁵³ Khurram Husain, “The Coronavirus Economy,” *Dawn*, March 29, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1544172>

⁵⁴ Sohail Inayatullah, Purush Chaudhary, Syed Sami Raza and Umar Sheraz, “COVID-19 and the Futures of Pakistan: Inclusive Foresight and Innovation,” *Journal of Futures Studies*, April 29, 2020. <https://jfsdigital.org/2020/04/29/covid-19-and-the-futures-of-pakistan-inclusiveforesight-and-innovation/>

⁵⁵ “Naming the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the virus that causes it,” *World Health Organisation*, [https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/naming-the-coronavirusdisease-\(covid-2019\)-and-the-virus-that-causes-it](https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/naming-the-coronavirusdisease-(covid-2019)-and-the-virus-that-causes-it)

either the federal or provincial governments. Measures such as border closures, health certifications, testing kits for the identification of virus affected individuals were neither fully implemented nor followed up.

With Iran becoming the first country in the region to report an increasing number of COVID-19 positive cases, in fact the highest after China, several neighbouring countries including Turkey and Pakistan closed their borders before February 23rd, 2020.⁵⁶ Till the closure, the border remained open for *Zairean's* (pilgrims) and trading community, without implementing any testing or quarantine facilities.⁵⁷ However, once the provincial government of Balochistan implemented the closure, it had to be relaxed amidst fears of a rising humanitarian crisis as thousands of Pakistani pilgrims and traders became stranded at the border areas.⁵⁸ Setting screenings at entry points, requirement of mandatory health certification by the Iranian government quarantine facilities at the border.⁵⁹

As the federal and provincial governments strived to improve facilities, an additional pressure was to allow Pakistani nationals returning home from international travel, or being sent back by the host countries, as the panic regarding the pandemic finally started to take hold. Initially, except for China,⁶⁰ students, migrant workers and travellers from the Middle East, Europe and the U.S. returned to the country without restriction which contributed to the spread of the virus. As mentioned earlier, due to the initial slippage and lack of early detection and preemption mechanisms, many cases went undetected and by March 26th, 2020 i.e. a month after the two initial cases had been detected, the total number of confirmed cases countrywide reached a

⁵⁶ Patrick Wintour, "Turkey and Pakistan Close Borders with Iran over Coronavirus Deaths," *Guardian*, February 23, 2020.

⁵⁷ Amna Bajwa, "Defying the Odds: Pakistan's coronavirus story," *Observer Research Forum*, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/defying-odds-pakistan-coronavirus-story/> September 29, 2020.

⁵⁸ Michael Lipin et al., "Iran Coronavirus Outbreak Strands Pakistani Visitors, Fuels Fear of Prison Contagions," *Voice of America*, <https://www.voanews.com/science-health/coronavirus-outbreak/iran-coronavirus-outbreak-strands-pakistanivisitort-fuels-fear>, February 26, 2020.

⁵⁹ B. Faiz, "Health and healthcare in Balochistan," *Friday Times*, January 06, 2020.

⁶⁰ "Pakistan Halts All Flights to And From China Amid Coronavirus Fears," *Radio Free Europe*, <https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-halts-all-flights-toand-from-china-amid-coronavirus-fears/30409783.html>, January 31, 2020.

figure of 1179 and at least 09 deaths were reported, which was in stark contrast to the initial 02 cases reported.⁶¹

Given the provincial autonomy, the federating units were allowed flexibility in deciding whether to implement a lockdown or not and that, too, within a limited or indefinite timeframe, however, by the end of March 2020 the country moved towards a blanket lockdown, which was appreciated as well as criticised by the public, as many still did not realise the severity of the pandemic. With the establishment of the NCOG, guidelines and standard operating procedures were streamlined and implemented nationwide which helped in further prevention of the spread.

Challenges and Government's Response Strategy

The overworked medical staff was even deficient in medical protective equipment and special protective face masks, a situation which was faced both by the federal as well as provincial administrations. Gradually the government, through the data collected and under a singular command structure started to devise means of tackling the problem. Using the *Trace, Test and Quarantine (TTQ) Strategy*,⁶² COVID positive cases were traced using cellular technology, smart apps and text alerts were sent out to all those who had come into their close contact. Through mobile testing units, those exposed and infected were tested at home, and depending on the severity of their exposure, they were either advised to home-isolate or taken to quarantine facilities. The TTQ was initially launched on a two-week pilot basis, but then adopted and implemented countrywide as it brought forth very positive results. However, an additional problems was with susceptible cases and general attitude of the public towards not getting tested at any of the government designated facilities. This under-reporting has not only led to a lack of accuracy in data collation but also put people in general at higher risk of catching the infection.

The government had to face several setbacks, such as opening of commercial facilities, business centers and mosques owing to immense

⁶¹ Noreen et al., "COVID 19 Pandemic and Pakistan; Limitations and Gaps," Global Biosecurity, <https://jglobalbiosecurity.com/articles/10.31646/gbio.63/>

⁶² Amina Bajwa, "defying the ODDS: Pakistan's Coronavirus Story," Expert Speak, Observers Research Foundation, <http://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/defying-odds-pakistan-coronavirus-story>

economic compulsions and pressure by the religious clergy. The initial success through containment, also fell through once commercial activities resumed leading to sudden spikes already riddled with poor economic indicators and working on an overstretched budget, within the initial few months, the Pakistani government faced a loss of three trillion Pakistani rupees.⁶³ Despite the challenged fiscal profile, the government announced onetime cash transfer to twelve million poor households. The Five-Year *National Action Plan for Health Security (NAPHS)* Published in August 2017⁶⁴ after its expiry in 2022 stands in oblivion.

The government not only had to deal with the medical side of the pandemic, but besides the economic challenges, it had to and still is continuously sensitising people with regards the dangers of the pandemic. The public attitude towards the pandemic remained casual which has resulted in repeated surges, similar attitude was witnessed with regards the Covid vaccine. The governments both federal and provincial have set up vaccination camps both permanent and mobile, ran awareness campaigns, and even tried to force compliance, but the result has been varied. Of the several urban centres where the vaccination culture is better, Islamabad capital territory was one city with more than 50 per cent population being vaccinated.

A well-structured IT based *Resource Management System* to map health resources, spanning more than 4000 COVID/ non-COVID hospitals of the entire country, e-system facilitated decision making in terms of the establishment of correct need assessment and capacity enhancement. By using smart applications such as *Pak Neghayban*, *COVID-19 Telehealth Portal*, *Sehat Tahaffuz Helpline*, and many other initiatives, including the *Integrated Disease Information Management System (IDIMS)*. *Education Institutes Monitoring System (EIMS)*, *National Helpline & WhatsApp Chatbot for Healthcare Workers*, *Community Mobilization* initiatives at district level under the aegis of Rural Support Program (RSP), youth volunteer *Tiger Force* assisting government in food and ration distribution

⁶³ Kaleeq Kiani, "Hafeez Blames Covid-19 for Rs. 3 Trillion GDP Loss," *Dawn*, June 12, 2020.

⁶⁴ National Action Plan for Health Security, <https://phkh.nhsrsc.pk/sites/default/files/2022-07/National%20Action%20Plan%20for%20Health%20Security%20Updated%20Federal%20Level%20Costing%20Pakistan%202021.pdf>

to the poor and create awareness about COVID-19. To *Ehsaas Emergency Cash Program*, as well as *Prime Minister's Relief Fund* in the context of economic hardship being experienced by the vulnerable due to the ongoing coronavirus crisis.

As mentioned earlier, for countries such as Pakistan, the fight against the pandemic has been extremely arduous. In addition to the multiple challenges, the biggest impediment was to convince the population as to the reality and severity of this outbreak. From outright denial to seeking refuge behind conspiracies, hearsay, and faith, there has been a slow acceptance and recognition of the pandemic as a real threat to life. Similar attitude prevails with regards the administration of the Covid vaccine. One of the most powerful arguments put forth has been faith based. That being Muslims, death, disease, and health are all predetermined and unavoidable, and the true test of one's faith is to have unflinching belief in destiny. Muslims do not fear death, and such occurrences should not take precedence over one's fundamental belief systems. The government had to convince faith leaders in sensitising people to the dangers of the pandemic and now the necessity to administer the vaccine.

Besides the devastating impact of the pandemic on human lives and health, the worst hit area both globally as well as specific to Pakistan has been the economic sector and its negative impact on average peoples' livelihoods. Due to drastic drop in various segments of the services sector, according to the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) assessment, the initial loss incurred by Pakistan was five billion rupees.⁶⁵ Correspondingly the expected loss to the GDP was 10 per cent, which is an additional 1.1 trillion rupees.⁶⁶ Prior to the global lockdown owing to the pandemic, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had projected a positive per capita income growth for more than 160 countries including Pakistan. However, this trend totally reversed as after six months of economic shutdown the countries concerned were exhibiting negative per capita income growth. Closure of industries big or small had a drastic impact on the livelihood of people. If shutting down of small or medium range enterprises affected modest to daily wage employees and persons whose livelihood is attached to the domestic industry, the closure of big industries further eroded the growth of domestic product, as service industries such as airlines, hotels,

⁶⁵ Noreen and et al., "Covid 19 Pandemic and Pakistan."

⁶⁶ Noreen and et al., "Covid 19 Pandemic and Pakistan."

big industries, trade, and commerce have come to a sudden halt, impacting revenue generation.

The dilemma therefore has been double edged — choosing between saving lives or livelihoods. Lagging severely behind in the *Human Development Index*, the federal government opted for smart lockdowns, as the possibility of further slipping down the poverty line became a real time risk. Having more than 24.3 per cent of the country's population living below the poverty line,⁶⁷ the daily wagers small scale vendors and labor class has been the most vulnerable economic group during the lockdown. Linked to this are the *Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)* which are highly dependent on and driven by market demand, supply chains, export orders, raw material, and uninterrupted transportation system. In Pakistan's case, the MSMEs form the proverbial backbone of the country's economy as they contribute collectively towards 40 per cent of the GDP with over 40 per cent to export earnings and constitute over 90 per cent of the estimated 3.2 million business enterprises.⁶⁸ The volume of economy linked to the MSMEs, implies that they also are a major source of employment and income generation and any disruption driven by domestic or external factors has a drastic impact on this sector and the overall economic profile.

For this reason, the government from the onset of the pandemic was in a quandary whether to impose a complete lockdown or not. To support the daily wagers and vulnerable economic groups, not only were the social welfare programmes already in place, such as the Zakat and *Baitul Maal, Ehssas program, Langar Khanas* were used, relief packages, and relaxation on utility bills and subsidies were provided especially to lower income groups. With regards to the industry, the government announced a Rs. 1.2 trillion economic relief packages with Rs. 150 billion allotted

⁶⁷ World Bank Global Poverty Working Group, "Poverty Headcount Ratio at National Poverty Lines (% of Population)," The World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC>.

⁶⁸ Mohsin Shafi, Junrong Liu, Wenju Ren, "Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises Operating in Pakistan," *Research in Globalization*, vol 02, 2020, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590051X20300071>

specifically to low-income groups, and Rs. 100 billion assigned to support small industries and the agriculture sector.⁶⁹

An important aspect has been the stalling of routine immunisation drives such as against polio or measles. Plus given the surge in pandemic effected patients, hospitals had very little capacity to accommodate any other patients. With already poor access to quality health care, the country has evolved an extensive infrastructure, but with uneven distribution. As per WHO assessment, health care delivery is negatively impacted by key issues such as high population growth, uneven distribution of health professionals, insufficient funding and limited access to quality healthcare.⁷⁰ To redress these problems, the government is working with international partner and donor organisations towards a viable and sustainable primary health care system with sustainable health financing in Pakistan.

The key challenges remain resource allocation, decentralisation, lack of political ownership and prioritising, extremely fragile and corrupt health care system which needs a major reappraisal. Absence of local governments and lack of grass root awareness, participation or ownership, absence of information and data collection. A critical baseline requirement without which no planning or implementation can take place. Lastly but most importantly the role of faith leaders and opinion makers. After facing initial resistance and passionate speeches in which the pandemic was dismissed as a global conspiracy against Muslims and the fact that as true Muslims, it would never affect us. The government ultimately used these agencies to motivate and convince people to observe pandemic related precautions.

Conclusion

Security in the contemporary world is not restricted to physical domain alone. It is envisioned comprehensively through the lens of human

⁶⁹ Government of Pakistan, "COVID-19 and Pakistan," *Board of Investment*, November 09, 2020, <https://www.flandersinvestmentandtrade.com/export/nieuws/coronavirus-situation-pakistan>.

⁷⁰ Introduction, Health Service Delivery in Pakistan, WHO, <http://www.emro.who.int/pak/programmes/service-delivery.html>

security that guarantees a safe, sustainable, and healthy society. Although the novel coronavirus outbreak has indiscriminately affected people worldwide, it has also brought to light the glaring reality, that every country regardless of its global power potential has struggled to face this challenge, and health care facilities remain questionable.

With new geo-strategic and economic configurations developing at the world theatre, and a possibility of a massive humanitarian crisis shaping up in neighbouring Afghanistan, Pakistan cannot afford to have compound crisis of a nature and magnitude beyond its capacity and comprehension. To preempt and prevent a major fallout the need is to aim for a comprehensive preparedness and response as well as joining hands with regional and extra-regional partners to tackle the challenges. To address its own set of polycrises, Pakistan needs to develop a sustained approach to address these challenges with all stakeholders on board. Despite the challenges faced by the health sector and the poor international indices, Pakistan fared well in combatting the 'Pandemic.' Specially at a time when multipronged challenges including domestic militancy, cross border unrest and terrorism, a grey zone war with India and economic challenges were proving to be a crippling factor for the government. Confronting simultaneously climate change and its impact unless the state does not develop an indigenous preemptive and preventive system of its own, it will remain dependent on external elements to tackle with the challenges. However, to preempt, such polycrises in future, the need is for a sustainable approach, that transcends political and ideological divide and remains human centric.