



INTERNATIONAL WEBINARS AND LIVE EVENTS

The Impact of the Coronavirus Crisis on the Middle East

Geneva Centre for Security Policy – 09 April 2020

Moderator: **Dr Jean-Marc Rickli**, Head of Global Risk, GCSP

Dr Karen E. Young, Resident Scholar, American Enterprise Institute:

There will be big implications for **oil industry**. Oil prices continue to stay quite low. Problem is: there is no more **transport demand**: if **3 billion people are staying at home** you get an idea of the **impact** on the global oil demand.

Impact will be different from one country to another. Consequences will be felt on the long term and will be on a bigger scale than in the Middle East region only.

Dr Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, Baker Institute for Public Policy, Rice University:

This crisis put the Middle Eastern context in perspective. Crisis in GCC region with Qatar or rivalry with Iran may be viewed differently. Overall, the immediate consequences will be more domestic than regional.

It will be interesting to see how the **GCC countries** will come back after this crisis. We may see **widening inequalities** within but also among the GCC states. We may see a situation where governments will try to **find scapegoats** because it failed to respond adequately to the crisis. Maybe **Iran, or the Muslim Brotherhood** could be targeted by GCC countries for example. The crisis may increase the “**blame game**” in the region.

Mr Marc Finaud, Head of Arms Proliferation, GCSP:

Iran had a late reaction which led to the highest rate of infection and death in the region. The healthcare victims are made “martyrs”.

The **economic impact** will be much worse in Iran than in the rest of the region: probably 25-30% decrease in GDP. Regarding **Iran's strategy**: priority will be on **domestic scale**, with focus on healthcare and national economy. There will be **opportunities for de-escalation** or negotiations on **Yemen**. But the risk of **military incidents** will remain high.

Pr. David Des Roches, Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies National Defence University:

Today, the primary cause of **spreading of COVID19 is via airports**. Middle East countries are in the middle of that. **Government's reaction** are a key test for the countries of the region. **Suspension of the Hajj** this year was a big decision.

People are used to a **robust and active American presence** in the region. But this is likely to be **suspended or lowered**.

Prof. Micheline Ishay, Josef Korbel School of International Studies, Denver University:

What can we say about a **post-pandemic future in the Middle East**? 2 perspectives:

- **Authoritarian** leaders to **strengthen their rules** and emerge stronger than before the crisis.
- COVID19 will propel Middle East into **new poverty**. One can expect a **new wave of social protests**. It can lead to a **new beginning** for the region.

Mr Abdulla Ibrahim Erfan, Senior Advisor, Diplomatic Dialogue:

In **Syria**, it is really hard to assess situations, for example in **Idlib**. Will COVID19 come or not? We still don't know how and when. If the outbreak arrives now, no one will be ready. If it arrives in 2 months, **external actors** may be able to help. Implications for Syria are **unclear for now**.