



EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

Col (Ret.) Dakar Eilat reveals the importance of effective government intervention in times of crisis

The Coronavirus pandemic has challenged governments to act quickly to protect first the public health and the economy from devastation. With no clear precedent to follow, many leaders have worked to prevent a medical crisis facing them however they aggravated the social and economic impact of this crisis, resulting in increased rates of unemployment and further social and economic harm,

which in turn has fueled crime, violence and organised protests against state authorities.

Examples of government responses to economic crises throughout history typically fall into one of two categories: effective intervention and ineffective, or even counter-productive, intervention. Effective governmental intervention tends to be characterised by a well-managed and direct response from the state to stabilise its economy and ensure public safety, which

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produces a positive outcome. Ineffective governmental intervention is characterised by a lack of clear direction and firm action or poor decision making, which aggravates the situation rather than resolving it.

In light of the current global crisis caused by the Corona pandemic, the author of this article examines the countries' response to past global crises, assessing the immediate and integrated response required by security forces in order to maintain governance stability and public safety.

Prompt action by government is clearly critical in averting any disaster. One only has to look at the events surrounding the Great Depression in the US to understand the consequences of a delay; when the stock market crashed in 1929, resulting in banks collapsing and a massive slump in the economy, reluctance from the US administration to create economic stability compounded the problem. The waves of instability that followed caused a staggering 25 percent unemployment rate and negatively influenced socioeconomic conditions as far away as Europe, which arguably paved the way for Hitler's rise to power.

SWIFT ACTION

Compare this with the US Government's response to the 1982 credit crunch. They promptly announced and implemented a \$50-billion bailout plan in a swift, effective intervention that prevented a social crisis.

However, it is not only necessary to act quickly in the face of crisis; the action taken must be the *right* action. When Asia suffered a financial crisis in 1997, the Government made the mistake of detaching its currency, the baht, from the dollar, leading to its collapse. Similarly, in Argentina in 2002, the Government's response to its massive external debt problem was to attach its peso to the dollar, which succeeded in stabilising inflation, but nevertheless brought the country to a state of insolvency as increased imports damaged local industries, causing a significant increase in unemployment. So, we see that failed governmental intervention resulted in further instability and socio-economic harm.

Contrast this with the global economic crisis of 2008 – the worst global financial crisis the world had seen in 50 years – which was resolved by aggressive measures, in particular by the US and Britain, who directly and indirectly poured trillions of dollars into their economies to avert further crises and instability. This strong governmental intervention was instrumental in getting the global economy back on track.

When economic crises are managed with clear and direct governmental intervention, the assistance of the Central Bank and public outreach and informational programs – as seen in the example above of the US response to the 1982 credit crunch – there tends to be recovery with minimal social-governmental crisis.

In countries where the government does not openly build a solution to the crisis, and there is a lack of transparency and public information, the results tend to include an increase in violent crime and worse. During the Arab Spring of 2011, when the public rose up against their corrupt elitist regimes to protest against high unemployment rates and a rise in food prices, countless violent outbursts across the region culminated in the overthrowing of regimes in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, the outbreak of war in Syria and mass

riots in Jordan. In cases like this, we can foresee increase in: crime for the purpose of obtaining food (and looting against elites and capitalists in the country); violent protests and demonstrations against the government; intentional assault of police officers/guards during and after conducting arrests of citizens; and organised and violent crime.

In times of uncertainty, when governments don't provide stability and clear responses, people become fearful for their future; they become unsettled. Frustrations and anxiety caused by long-term shutdowns and job losses, combined with a lack of information and transparency being provided by authorities may be channeled into demonstrations and protests. When this occurs, governments that instruct their security forces to permit protests freely, thinking they are giving citizens a useful outlet to 'blow off steam', are in fact taking a miscalculated and harmful approach which is perceived by protesters as weakness, and may intensify protests

FAST AND EFFECTIVE CROWD DISPERSAL IS REQUIRED, USING NON-LETHAL MEANS

and violence. On the other hand, banning such events risks further antagonising the public.

In light of all this, security forces must understand that their role is to produce an organised, tactical response that will maintain governmental stability and prevent harm to innocent people, all without substantial political backing. Key strategies that support this approach begin with an analysis of the geographical tension points where protesters intend to congregate, for example government buildings, state symbols and malls, etc. Having carried out this assessment, crowds can then be redirected to alternative protest centres in which security forces have a strategic advantage in terms of control. The safety of law-abiding citizens must be ensured, to mobilise public sympathy.

Massive recruitment of all security forces in the country is required, with units that have unique, specialised training strategically positioned in more violent and problematic hotspots, and less skilled security personnel positioned on the outskirts of events.

A full strategy for crowd control should be built for implementation, where necessary, in the prevention of illegal disturbances, bearing in mind two key factors: there will inevitably be public scrutiny and documentation around actions taken by security forces; and the means available to special forces' personnel to do their job have not changed substantially since the beginning of the last century.

This approach relies on certain factors. The first is integrated intelligence from numerous sources, including constant monitoring of social networks to create continuous situational awareness; the deployment of technology for monitoring field intelligence at a given time (drones, covert forces); and the ability to receive and process information quickly based on cellular technologies.

It is also critical that forces have the ability to take defensive measures to absorb and contain events such as stabbings, throwing of Molotov cocktails and shooting from within the crowd, while also contending with difficult heat and humidity conditions. Fast and effective crowd dispersal is required, using non-lethal means such as OC spray, professional teamwork and tactical psychology, to name a few. It is also crucial to have a targeted arrest capability for demonstration leaders acting illegally, in order to neutralise the driving force behind the demonstration. This requires the use of

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less lethal means, based on specially skilled security forces personnel.

All these capabilities require that security forces receive specialised training in both function and methodology, in order to optimise the speed with which action can be taken, minimise casualties on

both sides and reduce public criticism. Training should focus on: long-term absorption capacity; tactical intelligence gathering during demonstrations; locating and arresting the leading instigators of the protests; documentation capabilities; tactical negotiations during riots; and the development of tactical command capabilities in the management of violent incidents.

Developing a system for working with and informing the media, with an emphasis on instant publication of images from the event, achieves dual aims of deterrence and creating an understanding that the security forces are acting professionally. In cases of violation of the law, the deterrent effect of legal punishment is enhanced by making investigation procedures more robust. Finally, effective searches must be conducted at prisons, to weed out weapons and drugs, while bearing in mind that extensive arrests will lead to escalation of tensions within a prison.

In summary, strong governmental intervention, along with effective deployment of security forces, ensures a well-managed and direct response to social crises, stabilising the state and the economy, while ensuring public safety. The recommendations above can and should be implemented in order to manage the critically destabilising governmental, social and economic impact of the Coronavirus pandemic ●

Col (Ret.) Dakar

Eilat, IWI – Less Lethal Solutions Division Specialist – has a background of 25 years of service in the military, secret service, border patrol, police and prison authority.

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