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Security Nexus Research

PLAGUES, PANDEMICS, AND GLOBAL POLITICAL CHANGE IN A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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A Doric War Shall Fall, And a Great Plague Withall.

Oracle Prophecy, Quoted in Thucydides, Peloponnesian War¹

"...suddenly, without any apparent cause preceding and being in perfect health, they were taken first with an extreme ache in their heads, redness and inflammation of the eyes; and then inwardly, their throats and tongues grew presently bloody and their breath noisome and unsavoury. Upon this followed a sneezing and hoarseness, and not long after the pain, together with a mighty cough, came down into the breast."

The Athenian Plague from *The History of the Peloponnesian War of Thucydides*, trans. David Grene, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp.115-118.

"More lethal than firearms, viruses and bacteria, have accompanied soldiers and traders and the epidemics they have caused has changed the course of the world."

Plagues and its Peoples, p. 24, from *National Geographic Almanac of World History*, Volume 10, by Patricia S. Daniels and Stephen Garrison Hyslop, National Geographic; 2 edition (November 1, 2011)

There is reference to the plague in *Book of I Samuel*, which documents the devastation caused by plague roughly between 1320 to 1000 BCE on the Philistines.² The Hittite Empire, the Bronze Age in the Near East, and later the Carthaginian Empire may have ended because of bubonic plague and smallpox.³ It is estimated the *Athenian Plague*, which struck during the second year of the

¹ The Athenian Plague from *The History of the Peloponnesian War of Thucydides*, trans. David Grene, University of Chicago Press, 1989, p.119.

² B. Lee Ligon, "Plague: A Review of its History and Potential as a Biological Weapon," *Seminar on Pediatric Infectious Diseases*, 17 (2006):161-170.

³ Philip Norrie, *A History of Disease in Ancient Times More Lethal than War*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2016.

Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE), documented by Thucydides, might have wiped out more than one-third of the population of Athens. So virulent was this plague that it felled all those who tended to the ill including physicians and healers in the walled cities.⁴ Pericles, who symbolized Athenian values, was the strategist of Athens' meteoric rise to power. He led the early war efforts against the Spartans, but as the war dragged and the losses mounted and the plague ravaged Athens, Pericles was accused of embezzlement and stripped of his power and he succumbed to the plague in 430 BCE.⁵ This lethal plague took the lives of prominent Athenians, including Pericles' sons, Xanthippus and his favorite son Paralus, in 430 BCE. His third son—Pericles the Younger, a General—was executed by the Athenians even after victory at the *Sea Battle of Arginusae* (406 BCE).⁶ Pericles the Younger and other naval commanders did not rescue the crews of broken Athenian boats that were crippled during the sea battle and due to the rough weather conditions. This angered the Athenian citizens and it resulted in the execution of six other commanders along with Pericles the Younger.⁷ Combination of the *Athenian Plague* and the Spartan siege of Athens during the *Peloponnesian War* forced Athens to surrender, which spelled the end of the great Athenian democracy and it gave rise to the Thirty Tyrants (a pro-Spartan oligarchy, Table 1).

Researchers believe that the *Athenian Plague* might have originated in Ethiopia made its way through the Port of Piraeus, which was a primary source for food and supplies to Athens.⁸ The Spartans burned the fields around the city walls within which the Athenian population was sheltering, hence Athens had to depend on sea routes for its food supply opening up a channel for the plague contagion.⁹ Collapse of the Greek city state system was triggered by war and the plague, which ravaged the region and it caused famine and drought, and reset the political balance in the Mediterranean by ultimately elevating the Spartans to power (Table. 1).

In 165-180 CE, the *Antonine Plague* or the *Plague of Galen* killed the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Versus, who governed along with Marcus Aurelius.¹⁰ This plague was trekked in by Roman soldiers returning from the battle against the Parthian Empire (161-166 CE).¹¹ The *Antonine Plague* is identified as one of the causative factors for the dissolution of the mighty Roman Empire and contributing factor in the rise of monotheistic Christianity (Table 1). This plague decimated the Roman armies because the soldiers were living in close quarters and the disease jumped rapidly in the camps.¹² Historians believe that the soldiers returning back from military campaigns spread the disease along the way making it one of the largest pandemics. It became

⁴ Philip A. Mackowiak, *Post Mortem: Solving History's Great Medical Mysteries*, American College of Physicians, April 2007, pp: 22-33.

⁵ Evelyn Abbott, *Pericles and the Golden Age of Athens*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1891.

⁶ Stephen V. Tracy, *Pericles: A Sourcebook and Reader*, University of California Press, May 2009.

⁷ Debra Hamel, *The Battle of Arginusae: Victory at Sea and Its Tragic Aftermath in the Final Years of the Peloponnesian War*, Johns Hopkins University, 2015.

⁸ Robert J. Littman, "The Plague of Athens: Epidemiology and Paleopathology," *Mount Sinai Journal of Medicine*, 76 (2009): 456-467, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19787658>

⁹ Victor Davis Hanson, *A War Like No Other: How the Athenians and Spartans Fought the Peloponnesian War*, Random House, 2005, pp-35-38.

¹⁰ *Antonine Plague* is also referred to as the Plague of Galen, named after the doctor, healer, and surgeon who documented the effects of the plague on Rome.

¹¹ R. J. Littman and M. L. Littman, "Galen and the Antonine Plague," *The American Journal of Philology*, 94 (3), (Autumn 1973):243-255.

¹² R. P. Duncan-Jones, "The Antonine Plague Revisited," *Arctos*, 52 (2018):41-72.

doubly-hard for Rome to pursue its military campaigns because they could not field an army.¹³ Major demographic shifts also occurred because the plague killed more than one-third of the population in Roman cities and the remaining people attempted to flee or they died of hunger and starvation.¹⁴ One estimate suggests that at least 2,000 people were dying every day in Rome in the year 189.¹⁵ More importantly, the sudden deaths reduced the tax base for the empire making it difficult to administer and raise an army. Due to the spread of the plague and the decimation of the city population and the ruling class, Marcus Aurelius lowered entry requirements for joining the *Areopagus*—the Ruling Council—in 174/175 CE that was only open to landed aristocrats and those of high birth.¹⁶

Table 1: Pandemics, time periods, causes, death rates, and political impact

	Pandemic	Time Period	Cause/Origins*	Death Rate**	Political and Economic Impact*****
1	Athenian Plague Athens, Ancient Greece	430-425 BCE	Typhus/Plague/Small pox Ethiopia/North Africa Spread via Port of Piraeus	25,000-100,000 25% City Population	Athens loses the War to Sparta, Thirty Tyrants Take Over End of Athenian Democracy Death of Pericles due to Plague
2	Antonine Plague Plague of Galen, Rome, Roman Empire	161-180 CE, 1st Outbreak 251-266 CE, 2nd Outbreak	Typhus/Plague/Small pox Hemorrhagic Fever	65-75 Million 25% or 30% of the Population	Start of the Decline of the Roman Empire Prosecutions of Christians for Disobeying Old Gods. Christianity gained new followers Death of Marcus Aurelius, co-Roman Emperor due to plague
3	Plague of Cyprian Roman Empire	250-270 CE	Plague, Typhus, Cholera, Ebola Smallpox, Measles, Anthrax Ethiopia/North Africa	5,000 per day 50-60% of the Population Unavailable	Continued Decline of the Roman Empire Civil War, Famine, Drought, Floods Christianity grew as Official Religion
4	Justinianic Plague	541 to 750 CE	Plague (Yersinia pestis) China/Egypt/East Africa	25-50 Million 25% of the Population	Dissolution of the Eastern Roman Empire Weakening of Political, Economic, & Administrative Capacity

¹³ Rebecca M. Seaman, *Epidemics and War: The Impact of Disease on Major Conflicts in History*, eds., ABC-CLIO, 2018, p. 20.

¹⁴ Sarah K. Yeomans, "Classical Corner: The Antonine Plague and the Spread of Christianity," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 43:2, March/April 2017, <https://www.baslibrary.org/biblical-archaeology-review/43/2/18>

¹⁵ Sarah K. Yeomans, "Classical Corner: The Antonine Plague and the Spread of Christianity," March/April 2017, https://www.libs.uga.edu/reserves/docs/scanner%20pc%20shelter/ill%20scans/michael/antonine_plague_and_the_spread_of_christianity.pdf

¹⁶ J. Rufus Fears, "The Plague under Marcus Aurelius and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," *Infectious Disease Clinics of North America*, 18 (1), (March 2004): 65-77; R. P. Duncan-Jones, "The Antonine Plague Revisited," *Arctos*, 52 (2018): 41-72.

Plagues, Pandemics, and Global Political Change in a Historical Context

			N. Africa/Constantinople Land/Silk/Maritime Route		Gave Rise to Several Regional Challenger States
5	Black Death Plague	1343-1346- 1353 CE Black Death persisted till 18th Century. Agent exists in nature	Bubonic Plague (Yersinia pestis) Viral Hemorrhagic Fever Inner Asia/Mongolia/China Land/Silk/Maritime Route	25-75 Mil 100 Mil	Stopped the Westward march of the Golden Horde Mongols Killed the Nobility and Feudal aristocrats in Europe Collapse of Political, Economic, & Social Systems Rise of Peasantry & Laboring Class, Rise of Anti-Semitism
6	Spanish Flu La Grippe	1918-1920	Source Unknown	50-100 Million	Economic Shock, Food Shortages, & Labor Shortages Overwhelmed the Ability of Hospitals to Respond Mass Social Disruption, Political Uncertainty, Depression
7	HIV-AIDS	1981-	Central Africa HIV-1, HIV-2**** Viral Immunodeficiency	32 Million	Targeted Intolerance Against LGBTQ Ostracization and Social Panic early in the disease history Impacted the Health Care early in the disease history
8	Ebola***** Zaire Ebola Ebolavirus (EVD)	2014-2016	Central Africa	11,325	Impact localized to East and Central Africa Effective Global Response of CDC and WHO
9	(SARS- CoV)***	2003-	China Air Travel	Under 1,000	Localized Economic Impact on China, Hong Kong & other parts of North and Southeast Asia
10	COVID- 19**** N-COV	2019-	Wuhan, China Air Travel	94,850**** Infected 1,595,350	Global Economic Shutdown, Recession, & Cities in Lockdown USA vs. China blame game on the Origins/Spread of Virus

* Cause and/or Origins based on Historical Estimates No
Certifiable Epidemiological Proof Available

** Death Rates for early historical pandemics (including Spanish Flu) are general estimates based on historical and
scientific studies, No Certifiable Numbers Available

***HIV-AIDS death rates and origins established by the World Health
Organization (WHO), Source: <https://www.who.int/gho/hiv/en/>

****SARS-COV death rates and origins established by the WHO and Centers for Disease Control, Source:
<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5228a4.htm>

*****COVID-19/n-COV, Death and Infection Rates (Dynamic Updates): Johns Hopkins University, Source:
<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html> (Data accessed, 1:33HST, 04/09/20)

*****Ebola data source: Centers for Disease Control (CDC):
<https://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/history/2014-2016-outbreak/index.html>

*****Political and Economic Impact is drawn from various historical and
contemporary sources, and based on the author's assessment

Some centuries later the *Justinianic Plague or the Plague of Justinian* (541 to 750 CE) may have
wiped out half of the population of the Mediterranean sinking the Eastern Roman Empire and then

the plague spread across the Persian Empire (see Table 1).¹⁷ Much like the previous pandemics it wreaked havoc on the urban population, reduced the ability of the empires to control their far-flung regions, and impacted commerce and socioeconomic life. The *Justinianic Plague* weakened the Eastern Roman Empire's military capability by causing rapid population loss and paved the way for the rise of Islam.¹⁸ There were several other outbreaks between the 8th and 13th centuries, but nothing compared to the scale of the Black Death (1346-1353 CE). This pestilence was a game changer not only in terms of its virulence, but also because of its demographic, socio-political, and economic impact. It was truly a global pandemic. Recent studies show that there is strong evidence pointing to the spread of the Black Death plague through the old Silk Route that connected Nanjing and Beijing to Rome and Constantinople (Figure 1). Scientific evidence from recent pathogenic and epidemiological studies strongly suggest that the plague originated in China and that it was a zoonotic disease that spread from the rats to humans through flea bites.¹⁹

Figure 1: Old Silk Road Pathway of Black Death Plague



Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Silk Road Trade \(c.1200 CE\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Silk_Road_Trade_(c.1200_CE).jpg)

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¹⁷ One study puts the effect of the Justinian plague might have lasted for a period of 50 or 60 years. R. Pollitzer, "Plague Studies. 1. A summary of the History and Survey of the Present Distribution of the Disease." *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 4 (4), (1951): 475-533, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/14925809>

¹⁸ Sabbatani Sergio, Manfredi Roberto, and Fiorino Sirio, "The Justinian plague (part two). The Influence of the Epidemic on the Islamic Empire Evolution," *Infections in Medicine*, September 2012, 20 (3): 7-32, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22992565#>; William Rosen, *Justinian's Flea: The First Great Plague and the End of the Roman Empire*, Penguin Publishing, 3 May 2007.

¹⁹ Morelli, G., Song, Y., Mazzoni, C. et al. "Yersinia Pestis Genome Sequencing Identifies Patterns of Global Phylogenetic Diversity," *Natural Genetics*, 42 (2010): 1140–1143, <https://doi.org/10.1038/ng.705>

Black Death caused immense economic damage as harvests weren't made, cross-border trade disappeared, and food shortages accompanied by inflation and price gouging became rampant.²⁰ Economists argue that this plague delivered simultaneous blows both on the demand and supply side shrinking the economy. It engulfed every segment of the society—nobles and commoners, rich and poor, adults and children, and men and women—no one was spared.²¹ Preventive measures were not put in place, as it was unknown. There is no available evidence to suggest that quarantine, social distancing, and hygiene measures were either understood or practiced, except maybe among some plague doctors (Figure 2). Although there was recognition that the same disease reoccurred on multiple occasions, no identification of the specific causes for these sudden outbreaks were made.²² As a result, the fear of the next outbreak paralyzed the population.

Black Death caused a “pure population shock” and it is estimated to have killed anywhere between 25-75 million or by some estimates 100 million over the course of its repeated recurrence (Table 1).²³ Also this sprawling plague may have stalled the advance of the Mongols further west after the sustained siege of Caffa in Crimea.²⁴ Additionally, Black Death was the primary factor in the break-up of feudal social organization of Europe because it destabilized the landed aristocracy and empowered the working class and peasantry through rapid demographic shifts. The plague continues to plague human societies through the centuries; the same strain that impacted continental Europe in 1346 caused the Great Plague of London from 1665 to 1666. Another wave of the plague, which erupted in China's Yunnan province in 1894 reached the mainland of United States. A ship carrying the infection from Hong Kong first docked at Hawaii and the plague broke out in December 1899 and from there it spread to San Francisco, where the epidemic began in March 1900.”²⁵

The world did not witness another explosive global pandemic until the *Spanish Flu* or the “*La Grippe*” of 1918, which is said to have infected 500 million and caused 50 million deaths worldwide and at least 675,000 deaths in the United States (Table 1). This flu pandemic was caused by a



Figure 2: Plague Doctor: Black Death Plague 17th Century. Dr. Schnabel of Rome, a Plague Doctor in 1656 Paul Fuerst Copper engraving (Stock Photo 1443-1112), Public Domain: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15695681>

²⁰ The British Library, “Chronicle of the Black Death,” <https://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item103973.html>

²¹ Ole JøRgen Benedictow, *The Black Death 1346–1353: The Complete History*, Woodbridge, UK, The Boydell Press, 2004.

²² Ole JøRgen Benedictow, *The Black Death 1346–1353: The Complete History*, p. 6.

²³ Mark Koyama, Remi Jedwab, & Noel Johnson, “Pandemics, Places, and Populations: Evidence from the Black Death,” *Centre for Economic Policy Research*, London, UK, https://economics.yale.edu/sites/default/files/cepr-dp13523_adans.pdf

²⁴ Hans Ditrich, The Transmission of the Black Death to Western Europe: A Critical Review of the Existing Evidence, *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 32 (1), (2017): 25-39, DOI: 10.1080/09518967.2017.1314920

²⁵ Nicholas Wade, “Europe’s Plagues Came From China, Study Finds,” *New York Times*, 31 October 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/01/health/01plague.html>

variant of what we now know as the H1N1 Avian Flu.²⁶ It is believed that the soldiers returning from World War-I were the primary vectors for the spread of this virus.²⁷ Even President Woodrow Wilson, who was actively negotiating the *Treaty of Versailles* to end World War-1 and attempting to establish the *League of the Nations*, became violently ill with the influenza.²⁸ Effects of the Spanish Flu debilitated President Wilson and he passed away in 1924 due to several underlying health conditions. Some years after President Wilson's death the *League of Nations* started slowing collapsing and by 1933 Japan withdrew from the League paving the way for the Second World War.

It was not until 1981 when another global pandemic hit the world—Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS)—caused by the HIV-1 and HIV-2 variants of the lentivirus (with long incubation periods) rattled the world.²⁹ HIV-AIDS also produced widespread panic, social distancing, and quarantining of high-risk groups was demanded. Wild conspiracy theories on the origins of AIDS persist to this day.³⁰ The AIDS pandemic was a slow-burning crisis and in many ways it is still a crisis because the HIV virus lingers on in patients and the medications only force the virus into hiding within human body and it returns when the medications lose efficacy.

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) coronavirus (SARS-CoV) identified in 2003 spread from animals, perhaps bats or civet cats, and it first infected humans in the Guangdong province of Southern China in 2002.³¹ In 2012, the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), an illness triggered by a coronavirus (MERS-CoV) triggered respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough, and shortness of breath.³² MERS made its first appearance in Saudi Arabia in 2012 and it rapidly spread to other parts of the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Again, this disease spread through modern air travel routes in which humans carried the disease from one city to another.³³

The Ebola virus, named after the Ebola River in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), causes serious illness with an extremely high fatality rate. It first was identified in Central Africa and other parts of the Sub-Saharan Africa.³⁴ There were two major outbreaks of the Ebola recently. The first outbreak was in 2014–2016, which began in Guinea and then spread to Sierra Leone and Liberia.

²⁶ Centers for Disease Control (CDC), "1918 Pandemic (H1N1 virus)," <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-pandemic-h1n1.html>

²⁷ Thomas A. Garrett, Economic Effects of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic: Implications for a Modern-day Pandemic," Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, November 2007, https://www.stlouisfed.org/~media/files/pdfs/community-development/research-reports/pandemic_flu_report.pdf

²⁸ Sarah Fling, "Spanish Influenza in the President's Neighborhood," White House Historical Association, 2 October 2019, <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/spanish-influenza-in-the-presidents-neighborhood>

²⁹ James W. Curran and Harold W. Jaffe, "AIDS: the Early Years and CDC's Response," *Centers for Disease Control*, 7 October, 60(04), (2011):64-69, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/su6004a11.htm>

³⁰ Heller, Jacob. "Rumors and Realities: Making Sense of HIV/AIDS Conspiracy Narratives and Contemporary Legends." *American Journal of Public Health*, 105 (1), (2015): e43-e50, [doi:10.2105/AJPH.2014.302284](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2014.302284)

³¹ SARS-CoV, World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/ith/diseases/sars/en/>; SARS-COV, Centers for Disease Control, <https://www.cdc.gov/sars/about/fs-sars.html#outbreak>

³² MERS-CoV, Centers for Disease Control, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/mers/about/index.html>

³³ MERS-CoV, World Health Organization, [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/middle-east-respiratory-syndrome-coronavirus-\(mers-cov\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/middle-east-respiratory-syndrome-coronavirus-(mers-cov))

³⁴ World Health Organization (WHO), Ebola Virus Disease, 10 February 2020, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ebola-virus-disease>; Centers for Disease Control (CDC), What is Ebola Virus Disease? <https://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/about.html>

The 2018-2019 outbreak occurred in Eastern DRC is still ongoing, but effective international response from the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control prevented contagion of the Ebola virus beyond the initial outbreak area. During the 2014-2016 outbreak, Ebola is estimated to have caused the deaths of more than eleven thousand people (Table 1) largely in East and Central Africa.

As the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) spreads across the world and ravages population much like the plagues, smallpox, and influenza outbreaks from the previous centuries, the question before us is what will be the effect on domestic and international politics. The effect of the COVID-19 is self-evident and observable in terms of the global lockdown it is initiating, but will COVID-19 instigate a political change and reorganize economic life as we know it? What is important to note is how countries have responded and mobilized in response to this outbreak. There are at least two authoritarian regimes in the cross-hairs of COVID-19: China and Iran.

The Italian Renaissance writer Giovanni Boccaccio's book, the *Decameron*, which is becoming popular again in the age of COVID-19, was published as the plague broke out in Florence in 1348.³⁵ Boccaccio writes in the *Decameron* that the people "dropped dead in open streets, both by day and by night, whilst a great many others, though dying in their own houses, drew their neighbours' attention to the fact more by the smell of their rotting corpses."³⁶ He paints an apocalyptic picture during the spread of the Black Death plague during which social bonds were frayed and some people retreated to their homes and while others wandered the empty cities. A similar phenomenon was observed in the early days of COVID-19 spread, as Chinese and Iranian citizens collapsed on the streets and convulsed to death.³⁷

Subsequently China instituted a blanket lockdown of key provinces such as the Hubei Province to stop the contagion, whereas Iran's response has been lackadaisical and lethargic. The Iranian leadership dismissed the disease as not serious, blamed other countries for its present conditions, especially the international sanctions, and it has bowed to pressure from the religious authorities and has kept places of worship open for group prayers.³⁸ The Iranian regime has been slow in organizing a coordinated strategy for controlling the COVID-19 outbreak because the regime did not take the pandemic threat very seriously during the early days. The Chinese Communist Party seems to be secure in its control of the country and it has in fact increased its surveillance power by combining digital technologies, such as drones and facial recognition with traditional police

³⁵ Giovanni Boccaccio, G. H. McWilliam (Editor, Translator, Introduction), *The Decameron*, Penguin Classics, 2nd Edition, 2003.

³⁶ Andre Spicer, "The Decameron – the 14th-Century Italian Book that Shows us How to Survive Coronavirus," *The New Statesman*, 9 March 2020, <https://www.newstatesman.com/2020/03/coronavirus-survive-italy-wellbeing-stories-decameron>; Mark Hodge, "Disaster Zone: Coronavirus leaves Wuhan a 'Zombieland' with People Collapsing in Streets and Medics Patrolling in Hazmat Suits," *The Sun*, 24 January 2020, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/10808633/coronavirus-wuhan-zombieland/>

³⁷ Chris Pleasance, "Do these videos show people collapsing in the streets of Wuhan?" Daily MailOnline, 24 January 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7923981/Coronavirus-Disturbing-videos-claim-people-collapsing-Wuhan.html>

³⁸ Borzou Daragahi, "Separating Fact from Fiction and Fate: Assessing Iran's Response to COVID-19," *Atlantic Council*, 2 April 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/separating-fact-from-fiction-and-fate-assessing-irans-response-to-covid-19/>

power.³⁹ The Chinese government expects to come out of this experience successfully and establish its crisis management credentials. The Iranian regime might very well hang to power, but the impact of the virus has clearly exposed the limits of the regime's capacity.

The *Athenian Plague*, the *Antonine Plague*, *Plague of Galen Rome*, *Justinianic Plague*, the *Black Death Plague*, and the *Spanish Flu* were history altering pandemics. They changed the course of empires and history in unpredictable ways by decimating the leadership, weakening the military, and impacting economics and governance. In all of these ancient plagues, including the influenza outbreak in 1918, the world was completely unprepared. However, modern medicine and public health since the end of the WWII have responded far more effectively in confronting outbreaks of small pox, measles, malaria, dengue fever, HIV-AIDS, Ebola, SARS-CoV, and MERS. They were able to contain and limit the spread of these diseases, effective remedies were developed, vaccines for some quickly arrived on the market, and public health became an integral part of government response. However, COVID-19 has completely upended everything. It has spread far too quickly with unpredictable effects. Governments and citizens alike initially enormously underestimated the virulence of the novel coronavirus. The ability of this virus to mutate, survive for long periods of time outside of the human body, and spread through the air and surface contact has stunned citizens and governments. It remains to be seen how COVID-19 will impact and alter the path of our history, but it is clear that it has viciously struck at the heart of human economic and social enterprise in decisive ways. The domino impact of the COVID-19 crisis will surely cause economic depression and political turmoil in every corner of the world.

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³⁹ The Economist, "To Curb Covid-19, China is Using its High-Tech Surveillance Tools," 29 February 2020, <https://www.economist.com/china/2020/02/29/to-curb-covid-19-china-is-using-its-high-tech-surveillance-tools>