

A People's War:

COVID-19 Response Reveals China's Military Mobilization Strategy

Featuring Elsa Kania



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The COVID-19 pandemic is changing the global order and reshaping the balance of power on the world stage. The lessons that nations and their militaries take from this crisis will shape their capacity to adapt to COVID-19 and enhance their resilience to future crises. Elsa Kania, ISW's Non-Resident Fellow in Indo-Pacific Security, recently published a detailed report examining China's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Chinese state and military's coordinated nationwide response to the COVID-19 pandemic tested their national defense mobilization and civil-military fusion strategies. These are the capabilities China would use to move from peacetime to wartime in response to potential future crises and conflicts, including with the United States and its allies. Elsa discusses her assessment of these newly revealed capabilities and more on this episode of Overwatch.

Jacob Taylor:

This is Overwatch, a podcast brought to you by the Institute for the Study of War. Elsa Kania, ISW's nonresident fellow in Indo-Pacific security recently published a paper examining China's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Her paper is the latest in a series of reports from ISW focusing on military learning and the future of war. Elsa, thanks so much for being with us today.

Elsa Kania:

Thank you. Glad to be here.

Jacob:

Now, your paper is titled People's Warfare Against COVID-19: Testing China's Military, Medical and Defense Mobilization Capabilities. You open this paper with a quote from President Xi Jinping that describes China's response to COVID as, quote, "people's warfare," or a "people's war." What does that term mean in the context of responding to a pandemic?

Elsa:

Great question. It's actually the history behind that concept that I find quite fascinating, insofar as the notion of people's war, was back to the time of Mao Zedong and how the Chinese Communist Party from the start of its history and the People's Liberation Army, the PLA, as its military, thought about a model of mass mobilization as a means of war-fighting, as a means of combating various national challenges and despite the fact that we are entering an era that Chinese leaders believe is one of the fourth industrial revolution with a much more high-tech approach to warfare that is informatized, even intelligentized, with information technology and artificial intelligence, this very traditional conceptualization of people's warfare still carries a lot of salience and continues to be invoked, whether in the framing of China's national defense and military strategy, or in moments of crisis like this. Even seeing the calls for continued innovation in people's war, and the core idea being, to quote the 2019 national defense whitepaper on China's national defense in the new era, "The notion that China's national defense is the responsibility of all Chinese people and trying to give play to the power of people's war, which has been described as a magic weapon."

Essentially, the concept conveys a focus on mass mobilization and national mobilization. This also relates to China's overall national security outlook or concept that Xi Jinping has designed and promoted during his tenure, and this relatively expansive understanding of security and the role of society in protecting and defending security, and the urgency with which these ideas were discussed as Chinese leaders were first starting to grapple with the ramifications of this crisis, the initial outbreak of the epidemic, speaks to the sense that this was a test for the Chinese Communist Party and its leadership. It was a war that must be won, which the stakes were very high, even existential, which the risks of failure were possibly quite grave in terms of the concerns about health and well-being of society, as well as the legitimacy of the CCP itself and its capacity to sustain effective governance, to manage China's growth, and continue development going forward at a moment when its economy was already confronting

headwinds from the trade war and otherwise.

In practice, as the paper discusses, this approach played out through attempts to leverage all available resources, whether that was military or medical personnel or the reserves in militias who were called up, or the companies that contributed to testing or disease surveillance, or scaling up production of new medical equipment, I think is, to some degree, unique to China and speaks to what CCP leaders believe is a strength, even a source of systemic superiority or institutional advantage within their system.

Jacob:

Obviously, COVID has been a big problem for every country, but you mentioned that the CCP, the Chinese Communist Party, viewed the pandemic as, you said, an existential threat. Why did it view the pandemic that way?

Elsa:

From the start of this crisis, as soon as the full gravity and potential lethality and transmissibility of this disease were fully realized, Chinese leaders recognized that this was a major crisis, and also a test or exam, as Xi Jinping described it, for the CCP for its authority and legitimacy, given some of the risks and concerns about social stability, about the fact that a failure to control this pandemic could have serious consequences for the health and wellbeing of Chinese society, and suspect that the memories of the SARS outbreak in 2002 and 2003 were quite salient for Chinese leaders in this moment, given that their response at the time was viewed as, generally speaking, a failure that reflected poor capacity, limited pandemic preparedness, failings of transparency, and an inability to keep track of cases, disclose the correct information, coordinate among institutions. All sorts of issues that had been revealed in SARS, such that it was regarded as the most serious crisis for the party since Tiananmen.

So I think one, certainly, concern was avoiding a repeat of that scenario, trying to incorporate lessons learned from the past crisis, and responding in a manner that was decisive and effective to limit the damage to China's growth and development. It was regarded as a really critical moment for China's trajectory in national rejuvenation, and at a time when China was already facing serious headwinds, whether from the trade war and frictions in U.S.-China relations, or the general economics slowdown entering the middle income trap, as they call it. Yeah, I think that there were serious concerns at home, as well as considerations of China's image on the world stage, given the fact that there was a tendency to look to allocate blame to the Chinese government, not without reason. They were determined to respond in a manner that was commensurate with this challenge. And as, certainly, the sense of urgency that has evoked in all of this talk of people's warfare and a war of blockade and prevention, that galvanized the significant nationwide mobilization that we saw in the weeks and months to come, once the initial frictions in response were overcome.

Jacob:

I'd like to turn the conversation to the details of the Chinese party's mobilization in the context of the pandemic. What is unique about China's approach to national defense mobilization? Your paper says that they viewed this response as a national defense operation.

Elsa:

I guess I'll say, to start, that mobilization isn't something that we've thought about in the United States since World War II, arguably. Or at least not mobilization, at any scale, comparable to how Chinese authorities think about it. And in fact, China established a national commission for defense mobilization as early as 1994 under the State Council and Central Military Commission, which is responsible for coordinating this endeavor. And mobilization is viewed not just as a military activity, but including elements that are economic, political, informational, as

well as transportation and technology.

This is really a whole-of-nation endeavor, and one that is codified by law with the National Defense Mobilization Law that was passed in 2010. And the authorities and framework for this are quite expansive and are continuing to evolve as this effort is really undertaken in earnest, and can see efforts in initiatives in national defense mobilization from this national commission down to provincial, district, or county, and even city-level efforts to, for instance, gather data that relates to the resources available to identify the necessary stockpiles or companies that have production capacity to try to facilitate peacetime coordination among enterprises as a means of preparation for potential conflict of contingencies, and national defense mobilization is seen as applicable either in a crisis scenario or a contingency of conflict. Xi Jinping has emphasized that if a big war, a great war, we might say great-power conflict, were to break out, this complete and comprehensive system for defense mobilization, and people's warfare, which is sometimes described as a magic weapon, could be mobilized to facilitate and bringing to bear all of the available resources to turn a potential capability into actual capability on all fronts. As we think about the trajectory of the U.S.-China rivalry, this system is important to understand, as it's revealing of how Chinese authorities approach not just an emergency, but the mechanisms that would be brought into play in an actual scenario of conflict, if that were to occur.

One of the elements that was significant about this pandemic response is that it was the first test of the system for defense mobilization since the reforms that had been introduced to the Chinese military in the 2015-2020 timeframe. And reforms had tried to centralize and consolidate authorities, including elevating a department for national defense mobilization under the Central Military Commission, which had taken on oversight of reserve and militia forces that we saw leveraged at scale during this crisis. And there have been exercises, there have been these efforts, as I mentioned, to develop databases and try to have the resources more coordinated, but this was the first time we saw elements of the system in action.

And certainly, this report is hardly comprehensive. There is much more work to be done, and mapping out and looking at these initiatives. There's been some great research done in these efforts in the past. And the system, as it continues to take shape, I think, is a moving target analytically, insofar as there have also been efforts to think about smarter approaches to mobilization and bringing to bear technologies like artificial intelligence for that purpose. Even coordinating the development of smart city projects with efforts to have a smarter approach to local-level mobilization and, more speculatively, enthusiasm for ways in which big data analytics, development of 5G systems, and artificial intelligence could enable mobilization in the future. So this has been a priority under the 13th Five-Year Plan, 2016-2020. I think we'll see more efforts on building on this front with the 14th Five-Year Plan.

Yeah, I think this important to keep in mind this backdrop as we look at elements of China's national response to the pandemic that might otherwise be regarded as inexplicable. This was the backbone and both a mechanism for coordination and the framework that will continue to be adjusted based on this experience. Yeah, I definitely think a lot to be done trying to make sense of the system and how it also interacts with or is not fully coordinated with China's approach to emergency response and trying to facilitate more rapid mobilization going forward.

Jacob:

Your paper details several of the strengths and weaknesses of China's system for mobilization. Could you talk a little bit about some of those strengths and weaknesses?

Elsa:

Sure. Some of the most tangible manifestations of this mobilization were the initial purely military mobilization. The fact that, in response to the crisis, a series of waves of military medical personal were dispatched to Wuhan to

be essentially on the front lines of fighting the pandemic, including to staff the large-scale hospitals that were built up very quickly, a point of pride in PRC state media, was emphasized. This speaks to the role, which we discuss later in the paper, of the military medical community as an element of China's national medical capability and the efforts required to coordinate these military medical personnel with local doctors and into the local medical system, at a time when there were serious shortfalls.

Another major element of the military mobilization in particular was the first-ever mobilization of the PLA Joint Logistic Support Force, which was newly created in the course of the PLA reforms and was responsible for logistics and transport of critical supplies and medical materials to Wuhan, including using military transport aircraft, like the Y-20, which was used here for the first time in military operations other than war. And there were several analyses that point to critiques of potential weaknesses and the fact that, arguably, this should've been something of a home game for the Joint Logistic Support Force, given that they have the major center of operations in Wuhan. There appeared to be a slower-than-expected response, given that some of these efforts didn't start until mid to late January, whereas the first cases had been detected in December of 2019, nearly a year ago now, which is staggering, given how strangely time has passed in 2020.

Certainly, this raises questions not just about the Chinese military and national defense, but the underlying, or perhaps overlaying, challenges of coordination and information-sharing between the central and local government, or rather vice versa in this case. Insofar as local officials in Wuhan initially suppressed information related to the outbreak, were unwilling to sound the alarm, as they ought to have at that stage, when it first became apparent to doctors and researchers that this could be a serious outbreak.

And ironically, or tragically, perhaps, in Wuhan, local authorities ought to have been more prepared, because they had recently convened a drill on epidemic readiness ahead of the World Military Games in October, just shortly before the initial cases started to be discovered. Clearly, that was a show of not necessarily a substantive undertaking, and there was not the level of readiness or rapid reaction that you would have hoped or expected to see from local authorities in such a critical window of opportunity where earlier action by weeks, even days, could've dramatically lessened the diffusion of the disease within Wuhan, beyond it, and worldwide. I think, certainly, this was a really serious failing on the part of the local government, and central authorities also, because of that, because of the suppression of information, were slower to start to mobilize a response, and that impacted the capacity of the Chinese military to start to bring in its own forces and resources.

Another challenge and weakness that came into play was also the fact that, very quickly, as the epidemic spread even more rapidly than expected, there were shortfalls of medical personnel within the Chinese military, such that they were actually recalling veterans, some of whom were rather elderly, to active duty to respond, looking for those with experience in prior pandemics. So, certainly, there were elements of this response that are objectively commendable in terms of the relative efficacy that we saw in the end, but certainly, things were off to a rather rough start in the early stages.

Jacob:

I'd like to hone in specifically on military medical capabilities and ask you, how did those capabilities in particular come into play during this crisis? Your paper mentions that Chinese responders relied on experience that they gained in prior disease emergencies. Can you tell us a little bit about how those experiences seemed to affect their response to COVID?

Elsa:

Absolutely. I think this is arguably one of the relative strengths of the PLA's response. The fact that, in recent years, a focus on nontraditional issues in security, including pandemic preparedness, have become more central

to the Chinese military's missions. And there was, of course, the rather painful learning experience of failures in SARS, as well as, in retrospect, quite a drastic breakdown of party-army relations at the time, when the PLA was actively concealing cases from party leadership in the central government.

But one of the interesting things in terms of the personnel involved in the crisis was that many of them were veterans, so to speak, or had the experience of deploying and fighting the pandemic during SARS back in the early 2000s. Or, in particular, during China's deployment to contribute to efforts to combat the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, a time at which there were a series of military medical teams deployed and directed to engage in epidemic prevention and control at the time. And their own assessment of their efforts was that this was relatively successful. They minimized, or reportedly avoided entirely, infections among their own personnel, yet they also had to deal with very practical challenges, such as being on the ground, such as in Liberia or Sierra Leone, and coordinating with local authorities trying to secure medical supplies and protective equipment, trying to manage institutions and local communities.

So, certainly the concentration on pandemic response and the attempts to study lessons learned from some of these prior operations, as well as emergency response in the case of, for instance, the Sichuan earthquake at the time, or the Yushu earthquake later on, do speak to how the PLA, for all that it has been directed to focus on fighting and winning wars, is also a force that has significant attention to military operations other than wars, or wars without gun smoke, as has been described. A question will be how much and how effectively have the lessons learned been institutionalized? Is there sufficient capacity within this community to sort of continue to innovate?

And certainly, there have been some success stories, such as the efforts of Major General Chen Wei, the PLA's leading virologist, who is among those at the forefront of developing China's first vaccine, and also among the first to receive a vaccine in China, even just a couple months after the outbreak. And that's one of the vaccines that China is now prepared to export around the world, and has certain advantages in scaling up vaccine distribution on that front. So, the elements of the medical research undertaken were quite significant as well.

I think when we think about lessons learned from this crisis in its totality, the fact that, as an institution, it's absolutely critical to have the capacity and knowledge to respond to and maintain health in the course of such a crisis or pandemic, and these kinds of threats can have serious implications for readiness if not properly managed. And I think, certainly, the emphasis on military medical research and best practices will likely be sustained going forward.

Jacob:

Your paper mentions that PLA, the People's Liberation Army, reported somewhat significant success in preventing the spread of COVID-19 within its own ranks. Do you believe the Chinese military emerged from the crisis stronger and perhaps more capable at strategic national security responses if they weren't really affected by the disease in terms of readiness?

Elsa:

I tend to be quite skeptical of the official accounts and narrative that the PLA had a track record of zero infections. That seems unlikely and the extreme, including because, as I mentioned, so many military medical experts were essentially frontline workers or on the front lines of fighting against the pandemic nationwide. I think that it's certainly likely that there were some infections, and the question becomes, is the insistence that there were zero an indication of perhaps that, and this would not be unprecedented, certain cases that did occur were concealed or not officially reported to authorities, or that Chinese leaders and military leaders believed that reporting any infections to occur would be a sign of weakness in the sense that may betray a lack of confidence, perhaps, or a degree of anxiety, and, yeah, I think we certainly, we don't know for sure, and we may never know.

But that being said, there is some evidence that the PLA did adhere to best practices in terms of having testing at scale of personnel, as well as their families, enabled through mobile laboratories set up by the Academy for Military Medical Sciences. Units in the PLA focused on hygiene, on social distancing, disinfection, sort of all of the basic best practices that all of us have been following in our own lives, and that anyone in any institution should follow. So sometimes simply having the basics of social distancing do make a difference.

There also were initially some pauses to the PLA's usual lineup of training exercises, and when it was deemed safe to resume training, some of this was carried out at smaller scales with masks and social distancing. But there also, of course, and unsurprisingly, and as has been in the news, has been an emphasis on trying to project this image of combat readiness even at the height of the pandemic of sending an aircraft carrier group through the Miyako Strait, having fairly large-scale exercises in the South China Sea at a moment when, in the news, U.S. aircraft carriers were facing major issues with infections.

So I think, certainly the narrative and the directive for the Chinese military was to balance readiness with continuing to constrain any infections or prevention of any spread of the pandemic within their ranks. Certainly, it is quite possible there were some cases and some impact, but I think that there... Perhaps we shall find out someday if further information is leaked, and I think that is definitely a hazard of analysis on these issues, generally.

Jacob:

Speaking of your skepticism of the information that comes out of China, are there any challenges that you encountered in getting reliable information on the pandemic out of China for this report?

Elsa:

I'd say, as an analyst who focuses on China and uses only open sources in my work, this is always a challenge, especially now that travel to or engagement within China is severely constrained for reasons of the pandemic and geopolitics. But analysis on topics related to the pandemic is particularly concerning, given the, of course, and unsurprisingly quite typically for the system, suppression of unfavorable information, extensive censorship, a promulgation of propaganda with a positive narrative, or spreading positive energy, as Xi Jinping has urged state media and propaganda to do.

That being said, I think that there is value in looking at the reporting and commentaries in state media from Chinese military medical experts themselves, in some of the articles and writings that are starting to come out. Expect we'll see much more in the way of after action reports coming out of this crisis in the years to come. And I think there is value in looking at all of the available information in the open source, including that which is put out through party-state channels, because that does say something about how the system sees itself, the narrative that it wants to present. And I think there are ways to, importance and understanding what that narrative is in its own right. And for instance, the apparent or projected confidence about systemic superiority or institutional advantage that has become a prominent theme in state media, I think that says something about the ways in which the party views the crisis, views its response, views the lessons learned about centralized leadership under Xi Jinping, of course, and this focus on mobilization.

That being said, I try to regard all of this is a critically and skeptically as I can and to include caveats where necessary, including that, certainly, as a researcher, the problem often on China is not lack of information, but volume of it, and sorting through to find the most salient details. And in other respects, there's a lack of information and reliance upon reporting and investigative journalism. Significantly, several leaks of documents that revealed information that would never have been disclosed by the Chinese government itself, such as the files recently obtained by CNN that discuss the mishandling of the pandemic by local authorities in Hubei province and the

misrepresentation of cases, delays in testing at the beginning. I suspect that we may see sort of continued, though perhaps, quite gradual emergence of further details and elements of the story that are not yet known.

Certainly, I think, as an analyst, I'm always prepared to change my mind or change my conclusions in the face of new information, but I tried to do the best that I could with the sources that I had access to, and hope the report provides a reasonable assessment, or at least a framing of some of the themes and elements of the response that I think are significant to understand with regard to the pandemic, as well as some of the contours and elements of this overall focus on mobilization of national defense and military medical capabilities, which I think is significant not just in this crisis, but an important topic to tackle in its own right.

Jacob:

What do you think the COVID-19 crisis has taught us specifically about Chinese military learning? And building on that, are there any lessons that the U.S. could take and adapt to its own strategy-making and military planning? And in fact, I'd like to break this into two parts. Could you first talk about what successes you saw in China's COVID response that the U.S. can learn from?

Elsa:

Sure. Great question. I guess I'll say to start, the theme of military learning is one I'm really excited to be tackling in this project that ISW has launched. And I think that the component of the project that is focused on China is rather unique, perhaps relative to the research on Russia and the United States, because the Chinese military and the Chinese national security apparatus as a whole has the distinct challenge of learning without fighting, so to speak, that they are not learning about or preparing for future warfare based on their experiences fighting active or current conflicts. To the contrary, Chinese military does not have much in the way of recent actual combat experience, despite expansion of the activities under the umbrella of military operations other than war, like counter-piracy patrols or peacekeeping.

So, in some respects, the lessons that China is learning and the ways the Chinese leaders and strategists are studying or attempting to anticipate, even predict, dynamics of future warfare, future conflict across multiple domains, are informed by the study of other militaries' experiences, as well as elements of their own experience that are relevant or comparable. And the metaphor and invocation of people's war in the context of the pandemic, as well as the extensive involvement of the elements of the Chinese military, as well as reserves in militias, is significant as a test of these forces and these mechanisms, this capacity for command, control, and coordination in peacetime, albeit in the fog of crisis, so to speak.

And I suspect that some of the efforts to study and draw lessons from likely weaknesses in this response won't be public or publicized necessarily. Certainly, there are moments when the PLA is quite self-critical in its own writings and descriptions of itself, including its concerns in the past, and still to this day, about the lack of realism of its training in some cases, concerns about the ineffectiveness of its commanders and their poor judgment in some cases. There are some scathing critiques that are openly written and promulgated but I think some of the sensitivities of the situation may mean some of those lessons learned may not be fully disclosed, but we can anticipate and imagine and keep an eye out for continued discussion of what the PLA has learned from the relative successes of this effort, including these efforts and logistics at scale, what this means for the Joint Logistic Support Force as it continues to develop.

And also, look to the efforts, for instance, in scaling up production, including directing companies throughout China to reorient their activities to produce medical equipment, whether masks or ventilators or otherwise, that's enabled China to undertake what's since been called mask diplomacy or this medical diplomacy around the world, and providing these critical products to countries that are on short supply. Interesting to see how these efforts to

tie companies and commercial enterprises into defense mobilization have been starting to gain traction. And even the ways in which, when there were shortfalls in production or not enough workers available, members of militias were brought in, for instance, to scale that up and to enable this expansion of production capability, which of course would be not just important in a crisis scenario but would be an important mechanism to leverage in any conflict.

Certainly, the data that was available to guide this mobilization, including the continued collection, expansion, and efforts to facilitate the integration of such data, were significant. Apparently, there were likely some shortfalls and difficulties, technical and otherwise, in this endeavor. And a dependence upon these systems and data platforms, of course, also implies a potential vulnerability should those mechanisms be disrupted. But I think that there certainly are successes that we should look to as objectively as possible.

And certainly, there is much to critique and condemn about aspects of China's response, but we shouldn't neglect to learn lessons, including from sort of how much of this was informed by scientific expertise, the emphasis on technological innovation, the adherence to very strict procedures in quarantine, and to take these risks very seriously. Because frankly, in the United States, we have not learned lessons we ought to have learned. We had this mentality that this wouldn't happen here, and now it is.

Yeah, I think that the importance of biosecurity to national security is another element and a legacy of this crisis, as Chinese leaders have officially incorporated biosecurity into their national security system, passed a new law on biosecurity, trying to increase resourcing, and improve capacity on this front. These are all important for any country. While we shouldn't try to emulate China's approach in its totality, I think it is important to continue to study this case, given that COVID-19 could've been worse than it was, and I think we have to anticipate the very real risk and possibility of future pandemics. And if we fail to learn the lessons we should from our own experience and those of other countries in this moment of crisis, we may fail to be prepared for risks and threats in the future.

Jacob:

The second part of my question is then, you detailed the successes that U.S. policy-makers could learn from. What about the failures or shortcomings that you saw in the Chinese response? Are there any notables there that we should be looking at?

Elsa:

Great question. Certainly, I think we should continue to explore that question in the months and years to come, as perhaps more clarity may emerge on some of those concealed failures. But some of those that are already quite obvious was that the early warning system that was supposed to be in place and supposed to be effective did not work, and that was because not of technical failings, but of human failings. If you are dependent upon data for early warning and that data is not entered into the system or is not shared with those who need to see it, then you will not have the warning you need. So I think, certainly, the importance of disease surveillance and monitoring of pandemic preparedness as an activity that should be ongoing and does demand robust systems, expertise, and consistent practices in terms of making sure the data is collected and shared and integrated, to have that warning is absolutely critical.

And relatedly, the fact that a rapid response is so critical when weeks, even days, can mean the difference of tens of thousands or more of cases and lives. And certainly, there is much to fault the Chinese government about responding too slowly in early stages of the crisis by some estimates, but even the quickest or most effective response still might've not been enough. That being said, I think that the speed of mobilization, the capacity to go onto a sort of wartime footing, so to speak, for a pandemic response is critical. And certainly, we saw many of those same

failings, though grossly worse, in the United States as well, of failing to take advantage of the time and the warning we had and the warnings we should've heeded after this outbreak first had started and the news first started to come out. I think time is vital here.

Finally, transparency and accountability are important and sorely lacking, unsurprisingly, in the case of elements of the Chinese government. Certainly, very relatively speaking, we saw more transparency from the Chinese government in this crisis than during SARS, at least a selective transparency, but more so than in the past. Significantly, I'd also point to the fact that coronavirus was sequenced and shared internationally in the early stage by scientists involved, and that was important to allow American companies and researchers around the world to start developing a vaccine. So, we some extent, owe the vaccine we have today to the fact that there was an early sharing of the critical information about the disease and its features that enabled those efforts to start.

So, I think that, certainly, perhaps a bright element in these dark times was the international collaboration among scientists and researchers that has continued despite the crisis and the geopolitics of it. Certainly, transparency is critical for any government in terms of having credibility as well, and I think elements of China's response are viewed so negatively around the world because of how aggressively Beijing has attempted to manage the narrative and burnish its response, whereas perhaps a more transparent or credible and straightforward recounting that was more honest in recognizing the failings would've been more accepted or provoked less backlash and negative sentiment about China's response.

Certainly, I think that this is a moment that we may look back on in history as a pivot. And certainly, when Chinese leaders today talk about profound changes unseen in a century, the phrasing that's come into vogue in propaganda and discussions of their assessment of the world as they see it, this pandemic is one of the critical determinants of this shift in the world and the balance of power in the system as we know it. And I think we are all still grappling with making sense of it all and trying to recognize the successes, learn from the failures, and implement those lessons in anticipation of future threats and challenges. So, I think that this report is far from comprehensive and certainly hardly capturing the totality of it all, but hopefully, some of the points raised will be relevant as we continue this national and indeed international conversation on how to view the response to COVID-19 around the world and what we should learn from different cases thereof.

Jacob:

Well, Elsa, I'll say it. I think it's a fabulous report and I want to thank you for being here today and sharing some of your findings with us on the podcast.

Elsa:

Thank you so much. Enjoyed the conversation, and excited to have the report out and looking forward to continuing onward in the project and series, so stay tuned for a couple more reports that should be coming out sometime in the new year.

Jacob:

Looking forward to it. Thanks.

Applications are now open for ISW's Summer 2021 Hertog War Studies Program, a premier program that aims to educate advanced undergraduate students about the theory, practice, organization, and control of war and military forces. Interested applicants should text 22828 to receive more information, or visit hertogfoundation.org to learn more. Elsa, you're an alumna of ISW's Hertog War Studies Program. What did you get out of that program, and why would you recommend it?

Elsa:

When I had the chance to join the summer program in war studies, I was still at a moment where I was quite unsure about the trajectory of my studies and of my career going forward. And having the chance to work with and learn from Fred and Kim, to be exposed to military strategy and history, to be part of a really wonderful intellectual community was quite informative for me, in some respects, in directing me to continue in the study of war and peace, of security, of conflict. Definitely learned a lot at the time, and still in touch with some folks I met from the program, and have stayed in touch with Kim as well, and excited to be back and working with the ISW team now, years later. Definitely would recommend the program to anyone who's interested. It's intense, but it's really a fabulous experience.

Kim Kagan:

Thank you for listening to this episode of Overwatch. We look forward to your feedback on this episode and previous ones. Visit www.understandingwar.org to learn about ISW's work and to sign up for our mailing list.

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