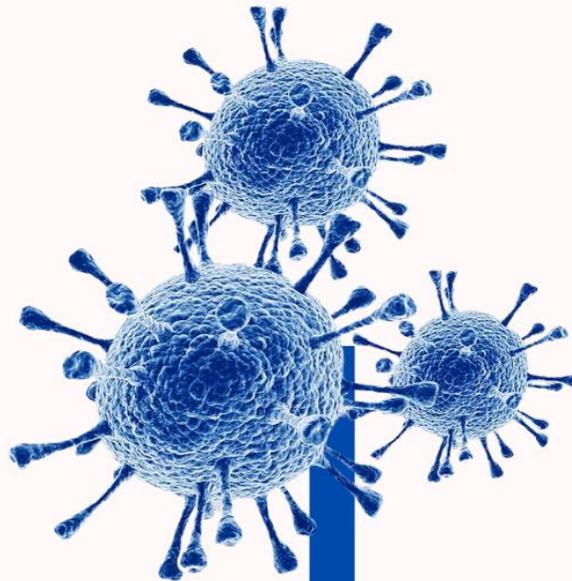


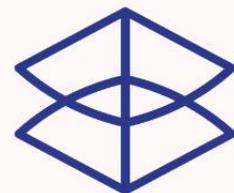
A Systemic Overview:

# Implications of the Coronavirus on Issues regarding Israel's National Resilience



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קבוצת ראות  
Reut Group

## Systemic Overview

# **Corona's impact on Israel's resilience, relationship with world Jewry and regional national security challenges**

This paper's goal is to map out systemic links between the coronavirus and selected issues facing Israel's resilience, relationship with world Jewry and national security challenges in the Middle East. The purpose of this paper is to provide initial insights along with a basic conceptual framework to help Israelis in position of leadership, authority and influence better prepare for the potential implications and opportunities of the crisis in regards to these issues.

The Reut Group is a non-profit organization dedicated to tackling challenges regarding the resilience and prosperity of the State of Israel, Israeli society and the Jewish people. Reut uses a unique methodological package to identify challenges and opportunities facing these groups and then works to create new knowledge and strategies around them. Reut then harnesses key players in the field to generate the required systemic changes. For several years, the Reut Group has been promoting the concept of a "Civil Resilience Network" to strengthen national and local resilience in Israel.

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## **Characterizing the Challenge**

The coronavirus pandemic is rapidly spreading throughout the world, sharply changing the daily routine, personal security and well-being of individuals, households and organizations. Below are the unique characteristics presented by this crisis:

1. **Extreme uncertainty** from the complexities of the disease to the duration of the global economic decline to social isolation measures. There is also great uncertainty regarding "the day after." A post-corona world will require a rethinking of the working assumptions, lifestyles, perceptions and attitudes which previously dictated our world's social order.
2. **Deep and paralyzing economic recession** - Preventive measures being taken all over the world regarding "social distancing" is causing a serious and escalating blow to the economy, paralyzing the labor market in a way that is expected to bring the entire world into a deep

global recession and social crisis. No sector is immune to the effects of the crisis, putting a heavy huge burden on vital economic systems, most importantly the global health system.

3. **Each country for itself** - Countries all over the world are closing their borders and dealing with the pandemic on their own terms. Corona is challenging effective governance in all countries, and their ability to prioritize and balance considerations of health, economy, individual freedoms and national security.
4. **Merging the coronavirus with an unprecedented Israeli political-constitutional crisis** - The political paralysis in Israel and the conduct of political actors on both sides undermine trust in leadership and social solidarity, both of which are vital in building social resilience.

## National Resilience in the Time of Corona

National resilience is the ability to transcend a crisis by adapting to dramatically changed conditions, minimizing casualties, securing basic quality of life for individuals and communities, and preserving core values and identity. The components of resilience in the context of this crisis are:

5. **Governance** - An important component of national resilience is maintaining the ability to set and execute policies during a crisis. Israel's political-constitutional crisis will make it additionally difficult to cope with the challenge.
6. **Community<sup>1</sup> and Social Solidarity** - A community's social resilience is developed through its ability to help its members both individually and collectively in coping with challenges. During this crisis, despite the required social isolation, the community has the greatest potential to address the needs of the more vulnerable groups and individuals.
7. **Essential nonprofits** - Nonprofits that provide basic services such as welfare and health services, are a key component of a civic resilience network and should continue to operate during a crisis.
8. **Public trust in the leadership and system** - The building of national and social resilience is based on the public's trust in national and community leadership during a crisis, along with ongoing access to reliable, real-time information and knowledge.
9. **Cross-sector collaboration** - Various actors and agencies are required to work together in order to address the challenges of the crisis. This requires close and ongoing coordination, acknowledging the unique value of each sector and the setting aside of ego and organizational rivalries.
10. **Maintaining functional continuity and developing a crisis routine** - National resilience will strengthen as state and service providers develop a crisis routine that minimizes uncertainty while maintaining functional continuity through the provision of essential services.
11. **Strategizing for "The Day After"** - Despite the priorities of the current crisis, the more that policies are built to preserve economic and social assets and the core values of society, the faster society is likely to recover from the crisis.
12. **Local authorities as a fundamental pillar of support in time of emergency** - The crisis in Israel has been largely managed on a national level. Developing a crisis routine will require

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this document, a community is defined as a geographical place, sometimes a neighbourhood or group of neighbourhoods, where individuals and families live who develop a set of collaborative relationships and mechanisms through an array of public institutions and informal connections between their members.

local authorities to contribute to the national effort by taking advantage of their direct access to residents.

### Communities as the engine for national, economic and social strength

13. **The “community approach” has the potential to provide the optimal social and economic safety net during the crisis, and more so, during the expected extended recovery period.** The array of community institutions across the State of Israel form the foundation for community and national prosperity and inclusion. A community maximizes social capital based on a sense of a common fate and social solidarity.
14. **Perhaps one positive outcome of the crisis might be the reorganization of the Israeli social community.** According to Reut’s analysis, a communal framework is vital in achieving prosperity, inclusion and resilience, and plays a crucial role in elevating the quality of life of its members. Institutions form the backbone of the community and are key to building social resilience.
15. **The community has the greatest potential to provide effective and innovative support to its members, including addressing the needs of senior citizens who are most at risk.** A community that is required to respond to its members operates without bureaucratic constraints or a defined mandate from state institutions. As such, there is greater potential for innovation within this structure.
16. **The “community approach” provides an opportunity for Israel to strengthen its relationship with world Jewry through systematically integrating the entirety of Jewish people into its community building within Israel.** While many Jews worldwide are already organized in a communal framework, this concept is only now gaining some momentum in Israel.

### Israel-World Jewry Relations

17. **The Reut Group promotes the notion that the relationship between Israel and world Jewry is a matter of Israeli national security based on Israel’s mission to serve as the nation-state of the entire Jewish people. Israel-world Jewry relations has an impact on Israel’s international standing and soft power.<sup>2</sup>**

### A global crisis with unique implications for the Jewish world

18. **The coronavirus is not only a physical health threat to Jewish people around the world; the crisis provides a significant challenge for Jewish identity and continuity.** Jewish communities invest significant time and resources in maintaining communal, social and educational frameworks based on ensuring Jewish continuity. Physical participation in these initiatives is a central component of the formative experiences which Jewish communities are striving to create (such as through Jewish day schools, summer camps and delegations to Israel). These outlets are not currently available as the global shutdown continues. This is of particular concern as summer break approaches, a crucial time for Jewish engagement, activities and trips.
19. **Putting the brakes on the spread of “Jewish peoplehood” within Israel -** In the last two years there has been a tremendous increase in Israeli leadership’s understanding regarding the need to mend the relationship between Israel and world Jewry through measures which aim to actively educate and connect Israeli society to world Jewry. Grassroots activities matched with top-down policy changes have led to the creation of mechanisms and

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<sup>2</sup> Reut Group, **Israel’s Relationship with World Jewry: Heading towards a Yom Kippur’s Surprise**, June 2019 (Hebrew)

frameworks that, within a few years, are set to significantly combat Israeli society's ignorance towards world Jewry.

### The Jewish community<sup>3</sup> as a model for a global response to the coronavirus

20. **The Jewish People's "community's model" has the potential to be exported to other communities and nations.** Despite the Jewish people's vulnerability in this time (see above), the communal framework serves as a social and economic safety net for its members which could compensate for the limitations of state institutions during this time of crisis.
21. **The challenge presented by the coronavirus requires community institutions to adapt and access their network's platforms. Community centers in the 21st century must invest and allow access of community services to its members through online platforms. Especially now, the challenge is to create a virtual local community space that encourages the involvement of its members and contributes to community cohesion. During and after this crisis, families will be looking to strengthen their affiliation with the community. At the moment, the only way to do so is through connecting and accessing resources online.**
22. **In this context, the current crisis also presents an unmatched opportunity to generate online Jewish resources.** Forced social isolation is generating a wealth of new and accessible online Jewish educational materials in all languages, subjects and levels. Longterm, if organized and promoted properly, these resources will be beneficial for Jewish organizations looking to engage with young people where they already are; online.
23. **Moreover, all Jewish community organizations will have to reframe their missions in light of the crisis.** Their current focus on online engagement can allow for meaningful connections to be formed and sustained within the Jewish world moving forward.
24. **An opportunity to reach new audiences and unite factions: The Haredim -** As a result of this crisis, the Haredi sector is "discovering" and engaging with the internet in a new way. Due to the ban on gatherings in public spaces, there is a growing understanding that the only way to maintain communication is by going online. This awakening could potentially serve as an opportunity to bring the ultra-Orthodox community closer to other Jewish streams.

## Regional Security Challenges

### The Middle East: A Year of Corona in the place of a Regional Military Escalation?

25. **Rethinking projections of regional escalation in 2020 -** According to Israel's defense establishment and research bodies, 2020 was expected to be a year of widespread regional escalation that could culminate in a multi-military clash between Israel and Iran and its proxies, including in the Gaza Strip. At this moment, the coronavirus seems to have stolen the attention of the region's major players.
26. **Iran: The ideal of spreading the Islamic Revolution turned into the reality of spreading a plague**
  - **One of the key elements of the Khomeini ideology is the advancement of the Islamic Revolution, first and foremost in the Middle East countries within the Shia Crescent.** The Quds Force was established within Iran's Revolutionary Guard to

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<sup>3</sup> The Reut Group identified the community model as a cornerstone of an effective organization that creates a robust society: 1) Reut Group, [Israel's New Social Contract for Growth, Inclusiveness and Community Building](#), August 2011 and 2) Reut Group, [Israel 15 Vision: Leapfrogging the Periphery](#), December 2011

promote this goal. Although it's premature to assess Corona's impact, the combination of Israel and Turkey's growing activity in the region and the killing of Quds Force commander Qasem Suleimani in January 2020 has halted the momentum of Iran's regional expansion and infrastructure building between Yemen to Lebanon.

- **In the background, Iran is experiencing an unprecedented economic, health and political crisis.** Iran has experienced public backlash for shooting down the Ukrainian passenger plane (January 2020), the successful elimination of Suleimani by the US (January 2020), ongoing US sanctions, the International Atomic Energy Commission's negative report, an ongoing water crisis, the recent oil crisis in the region (as a result of Saudi-Russian tensions), and rising fuel prices in Iran.
- **Spread of the coronavirus in the Shiite crescent** - Relations between Revolutionary Guards in Lebanon, Iraq, Oman, Afghanistan and Syria played a key role in spreading the virus among Iran's supporters. Many within Hezbollah's leadership in Lebanon have caught the virus..
- **However, Corona also stopped the "Shiite Spring."** Protests in Iran against the regime and in Lebanon, against the government and Hezbollah, have subsided due to fears of public gathering.

## 27. The Palestinians: Corona's Calming Effect

- **The required coordination between the Palestinian Authority and Israel is stopping the virus from spreading through the West Bank.** Among other measures, Israel's Civil Administration is working with Palestinian health agencies; Israel has passed along hundreds of virus test kits and even trained Palestinian medical teams on how to respond to the coronavirus. Israel has not imposed a general closure of the territories and is allowing approximately 50,000 Palestinians to remain in Israel in order to prevent the collapse of the Israeli construction industry and the Palestinian economy.
- **Despite the failure of the regulation efforts thus far, the Gaza Strip remains relatively quiet following the Corona outbreak.** Israel has also provided Gaza with hundreds of test kits.

28. **All players are expected to come out weaker** - All Middle Eastern actors are expected to be significantly affected by this crisis. This event seems to have the potential to create a fundamental shift in Middle Eastern dynamics, undermining the existing order.

29. **The return of the Middle East's refugee problem** - although this issue seemingly dropped from the headlines, refugee camps, characterized by their dilapidated infrastructure, could be fruitful spreading grounds for the virus, leading to an unprecedented regional humanitarian crisis. In such a scenario, the acceleration of refugees fleeing to Europe is also expected. This has already begun in light of the crisis between Europe, Russia and Turkey.

## [The International Arena: Superpowers' Middle Eastern Game of Thrones](#)

### 30. The coronavirus has become an informal test of governance and ideology:

- **Between China's centralized response** – which included, among other components, complete paralysis of the economy, denial of personal liberties and the use of technology as a means of monitoring and enforcement.
- **To America's delayed reaction to the virus** which is having difficulty being as effective due to American free market culture and the value placed on individual freedoms.
- **How will Russia exploit the crisis to further its Middle East agenda?** According to official reports, the coronavirus outbreak in Russia is marginal, but the regime is likely

to hide the real extent of the damage. Russia tends to exploit the international community's attention deficit in order to advance its interests, and may make aggressive moves in the Middle East to strengthen its hegemony in the region.

- **China and Russia have a vested interest in confronting the US-led global order, and this pandemic may provide them an opportunity to do so.** Indeed, China seems to be starting to emerge from the crisis and is working diligently to shape the international narrative about the crisis.
31. **A fall in America's global position following the crisis could also jeopardize Israel's global and regional position.** Any significant shift in America's foreign policy approach may also affect Israel's national security
  32. **European Exit from the Middle East?** - The combination of an older population, open borders and probably ideal weather for the epidemic spread, makes Europe particularly vulnerable to the virus. With Brexit still fresh, European involvement in the Middle East is likely to be severely decreased.