

OPINION

Joseph I's Coronavirus Solution

By A. Wess Mitchell
And Charles Ingrao

As countries around the world frantically erect barriers against the spread of the novel coronavirus, it might be helpful to look at one of the most successful quarantine systems ever created. In 1710 Emperor Joseph I decided to block the chronic spread of diseases from the Balkans by creating a continuous "sanitary cordon" along the Habsburg monarchy's southern frontier with the Ottoman Empire. His action failed to save him; he died of smallpox in April 1711 after he huddled with his prime minister, who was unaware that his daughter had just contracted the disease. No one then knew much about "social distancing." Nonetheless, the empire's sanitary cordon outlived him by a century and a half.

Before modern medicine, the Habsburg monarchy kept epidemics at bay for more than 150 years.

The system Joseph created had several strengths. In an age when most international borders were defined only by overlapping feudal jurisdictions, the Habsburg-Ottoman frontier was a visibly delineated thousand-mile line of rivers, mountain peaks and border markers posted by a bilateral peace commission. It was already a military zone with extensive fortresses and army garrisons, which not only defended against Turkish raids but enforced customs and the processing of Christian refugees fleeing Ottoman rule.

A sense of the scale of this operation can be seen by comparing it with the American border today. Whereas we rely on 21,000 U.S. Border Patrol agents stretched tenuously across the long Mexican and Canadian frontiers, as many as 100,000 fierce, colorfully clad Serb and Croat infantrymen were available to guard a southern Habsburg border zone that was typically

dozens of miles deep.

By the middle of the 18th century, 2,000 fortified watchtowers stood every half mile, punctuated by 19 border crossings with facilities that registered, housed and isolated everyone entering for at least 21 days before granting them passports to enter the empire's territory. Quarters were disinfected daily with sulfur or vinegar and trade goods graded on their susceptibility to transmitting germs. Habsburg agents posted to Ottoman territory provided intelligence that enabled officials to adjust quarantine times—or even temporarily suspend them.

The rules were strictly enforced. One English observer noted: "If you dare to break the laws of the quarantine, you will be tried with military haste; the court will scream out a sentence to you from a tribunal some fifty yards off, and after that you will find yourself carefully shot and carelessly buried."

Until 1818 the Habsburg Military Frontier played many roles, acting as a barrier to illegal immigration, an early warning system against Ottoman raids, and a source of superb irregulars to fight Austria's wars. But it was in fighting epidemics that it arguably made its greatest, largely unheralded contribution. In the century and a half before the frontier's permanent establishment, the plague alone had entered Europe from the Near East on at least eight occasions; afterward, no major outbreaks occurred. At least five times, epidemics in the Ottoman and Russian empires were stopped cold at the empire's border.

The cordon became a place where epidemics could be systematically studied. One admirer was Napoleon. Best known for destroying his enemies and their institutions, he adopted it during his occupation of Egypt (1798) then ordered that it "be preserved in its entirety" following



Emperor Joseph I (1678-1711)

France's annexation of Croatia (1810-13).

The reasons for the cordon's demise would be recognizable in our own time. It was assaulted by both liberals (because it impeded trade) and nationalists in Hungary and Croatia (because it gave control of the border to the government in Vienna). After the empire split into Austrian and Hungarian halves, Hungary abolished the institution.

The Habsburg experience holds insights for our time. One is the need to foresee rather than react to threats. Another is that physical space matters in fighting epidemics. Hard as it is to swallow for Western publics habituated to globalization, well-regulated, rational borders contribute substantially to the public good. Early critics of the Trump administration's travel restrictions failed to appreciate the urgent medical rationale. As Anthony Fauci testified to Congress, no public-health strategy can contain a contagion already inside the country without stopping the influx of new carriers.

Another is that epidemics are not only about public health; they are also about geopolitics. For the Habsburg authorities, their management

was also a security issue.

The monarchy's position vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire parallels the West's current relationship with China insofar as the world's worst contagions—SARS (2002-03), avian flu (2005) and now Covid-19—originate from a power that is also a strategic rival. It is no accident that Italy, the first and hardest hit European country, is also one of Beijing's closest partners in the European Union, with some of the heaviest China-bound air traffic in Europe. In the aftermath of this crisis, epidemics must be taken more seriously as a security threat, even as the West looks for the right balance in a trade relationship that must involve less reliance on Chinese supply chains.

Finally, the Habsburg experience shows that fighting epidemics does not have to come at the expense of alliances, international trade or civilization in the broadest sense, as some fear. Long before airport quarantines and the seamless passage of containerized cargo, the Habsburgs effectively fought irruptions of the plague from the east while maintaining an orderly system of trade with the Ottomans, keeping largely open borders within their own empire (a kind of proto-Schengen zone), managing a well-regulated system of trade and diplomacy with their western neighbors, and developing one of the most cosmopolitan civilizations in history.

We should have a similar aim today, even as we prioritize getting a handle on the immediate, deadly impact of Covid-19.

Mr. Mitchell served as assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, 2017-19, and is author of "The Grand Strategy of the Habsburg Empire." Mr. Ingrao is a professor emeritus of history at Purdue University and author of "The Habsburg Monarchy 1618-1815."

The Fed's New Mission To Save the Economy

By Gary Cohn
And Glenn Hutchins

Congress as part of its Cares Act has tapped the Federal Reserve as a partner in the fiscal response to the coronavirus pandemic. The Fed will be operating at an unprecedented scale, reportedly lending as much as \$5 trillion, which is more than its entire balance sheet before the crisis. It will also be engaging in a practice in which it has little experience: targeting capital to individual companies in commercial industries. This is an important and complex task that requires great care and speed.

The Fed's ability to identify and implement appropriate tools will be critical to its success in this new role. It is vital that the central bank succeeds in mitigating the pandemic's damage to the economy. It is also important the Fed avoids the stigma that followed the 2008 "bailouts." This will require a thoughtful approach to staffing, process and disclosure that ideally would be implemented at the outset.

The central bank's lending programs will need top-shelf staff and rigorous disclosure.

Already, the Fed has mounted an enormous and effective response to this national health-care crisis, drawing on its considerable institutional strengths. It pulled off the shelf initiatives designed and perfected during the crisis of 2008. Some examples: injections of liquidity into the Treasury, repo, agency-mortgage and overseas markets, plus the rapid deployment of facilities that enable access to financing for commercial paper and money-market funds.

The Fed also invented new facilities—targeted at corporate and municipal bond markets—whose operation is similar to existing tools. It moved quickly to relax reserve requirements, freeing up liquidity at the largest banks. The Fed has even borrowed the European Central Bank's nuclear-strength "whatever it takes" approach to forward guidance.

But now Congress has asked the Fed to enter uncharted territory: extending loans directly to large and small companies across a broad range of industries and geographies. Practices forged over decades at sovereign-wealth funds offer lessons. Their model combines rigorous disclosure, independent oversight boards, and investment decision-making by professional staffs. These practices generate investment portfolios that are commercially sound and faithful to the legislative mandate. Transparency helps win the trust of elected officials and the general public.

The Cares Act temporary lending authority is unique in many ways. Most notably, this new authority is meant to be short-lived and to go out of business. The purpose is to extend loans that help businesses preserve employment and weather the pandemic until financing can be replaced with lending in the private market. Given the crunch for time, professional staff will have to be small and rely on an army of outside experts, though the staff will need to be skilled in structuring corporate securities and pricing that risk.

Since time is so limited, perhaps an oversight group could be selected from regional Federal Reserve Bank presidents and directors, whose counterintuitive and conflicts have already been vetted. Further, the Federal Reserve's new lending operations should be transparent to the public, with a regularly updated website that includes audited financial statements. These will be supplemented with filings at the Securities and Exchange Commission required of the public companies that receive loans.

This health crisis has the potential to create an economic catastrophe of historic magnitude. The country cannot afford to add a crisis of trust to that mix. The Fed's massive lending authority is a powerful tool for limiting the economic damage. Best practices for staffing, governance and disclosure would help create the conditions for success and a prosperous future.

Mr. Cohn was director of the National Economic Council, 2017-18. Mr. Hutchins served as a special adviser in the Clinton White House and is co-chairman of the Brookings Institution.

A Failure of Discipline Under Capt. Crozier's Command

By William J. Toti

Acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly relieved Capt. Edward Crozier of command last week after the press published a letter about a Covid-19 outbreak on the nuclear aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt. I agonize for Capt. Crozier, who has tested positive for Covid himself. I too once commanded a warship, and I once took a controversial position at risk to my own career.

Yet I regret his decision. The video of the crew paying respects to Capt. Crozier as he leaves the Roosevelt demonstrates his popularity. But it leaves me with grave concern over the feelings-first zeitgeist on display, and it causes me concern that the crew's actions will make the ship's situation much worse.

This event gives a worrisome peek into the fraying of America's military command structure. That structure relies on aggregated wisdom and dispersed power. It replaces emotion with cold logic. It reins in impulse with carefully considered protocol and procedures. None of those virtues are evident in how the Roosevelt incident played out.

No doubt Capt. Crozier was concerned about the Covid crisis and wanted to escalate the issue to protect his crew. That desire is to be commended. But the crew's welfare is only part of a Navy captain's responsibilities, which are global in scope. Capt. Crozier's letter effectively recommended that the Navy take an operational, forward-deployed nuclear-powered aircraft carrier offline, an event that would be classified and carry significant strategic implications world-wide, hence would have to be escalated to the president. From that standpoint, the

Roosevelt was not Capt. Crozier's ship, it was America's. But to shotgun that kind of recommendation in a letter via an unclassified email is a violation of the highest order.

Capt. Crozier's defenders have said he was speaking truth to power. But he could have done so directly. He could have generated serious action with a properly classified, immediate-precedence "Personal for" naval message to any of at least five

He should have spoken truth to power privately. His crew risked infection by gathering to cheer him.

operational commanders in his chain of command. He could have reached out directly to the Navy secretary. Instead, according to Mr. Modly, Capt. Crozier shotgunned, thereby losing control of, an email containing classified details reflecting the state of readiness of one of America's most important ships. The upshot is that the Chinese received Capt. Crozier's letter at the same time as the Pentagon.

The Navy doesn't always get it right. I spent more than a decade defending Capt. Charles McVay III. He commanded the heavy cruiser USS Indianapolis which was sunk in July 1945, the worst at-sea disaster in U.S. naval history. Like Capt. Crozier, McVay's story captured national headlines. McVay's surviving crew rallied around him, fighting to vindicate him even after his 1968 suicide.

McVay was convicted by a court-martial for "hazarding his vessel" by failing to take action the Navy believed would have spared his ship from a Japanese submarine attack.

For more than 50 years his crew fought for his exoneration. In 1998 they recruited me—then captain of the submarine that bears the same name as their sunken cruiser—to aid their case. My role was to demonstrate through computer modeling that even if McVay had taken the recommended action, the Japanese attack would likely have succeeded. The Navy dug in and insisted it had acted properly 53 years earlier. I was warned that for the good of my future I needed to learn how to become a "company man," but I pressed on. Congress passed a resolution exonerating McVay in 2000, and the Navy secretary officially cleared his record in 2001.

Which brings me back to the video of Capt. Crozier leaving his ship. McVay's crew exhibited more discipline for the greater good of the ship than we saw in the Roosevelt video.

In today's culture, even in the military, the "right" side of an issue tends increasingly to start with feelings. Social media posts—"We stand with Captain Crozier"—don't merely reflect attitudes; they drive behavior among the public and, more troubling, among young sailors. The Journal reports that some sailors say they won't re-enlist over the way they perceive the incident to have been handled. Imagine if this trend

Poetry for a Pandemic

By Gregg Opelka

In times of calamity, some people turn for solace to faith, family or the government. I turn to my favorite poets.

In 1934, Edna St. Vincent Millay published a sequence of 18 sonnets titled "Epitaph for the Race of Man." The poet who had encapsulated the insouciance of the Roaring '20s in a four-line epicurean lyric, "First Fig," turned into a lugubrious doomsayer. The hedonist who had recently boasted "My candle burns at both ends; / It will not last the night; / But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends— / It gives a lovely light" now dedicated 252 lines to the proposition that it was over for mankind.

Millay—whom a friend of mine once called "Edna St. Vincent Millay"—proved a better poet than prophet. Yet there are flashes of optimism, which can both comfort and inspire us in our current peril. In the sequence's eighth sonnet, Millay describes how a Japanese farmer who lost everything in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 waits days for the ashes to cool, then "builds again / His paper house upon oblivion's brim / And plants the purple iris in its roof."

Several of the sonnets invoked the irrepressible human tendency to resilience in the face of adversity. "Sweeter was loss than silver coins to spend," begins the 11th sonnet. That seems counterintuitive until Millay observes a few lines later that "for then it was his neighbor was his friend."

Anecdotal reports abound of neighbors looking out for neighbors. On my own block it's no different. "How are you doing?" is no longer a perfunctory greeting but a sincere expression of concern. The private sector has collaborated with government in unprecedented ways. No matter your profession, color, creed or age, it's all hands on deck.

It's unfortunate that it requires a disaster to elicit our caring side, but in these detached, distracted, disjointed times, so is it. Maybe when the smoke clears and normal life returns, we'll remember that a neighbor must also be a friend.

There will be a day when the ashes cool. There will be a day when again we plant the purple iris in our roof.

Mr. Opelka is a musical theater composer-lyricist.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

PUBLISHED SINCE 1889 BY DOW JONES & COMPANY

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