

Research Article

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Global Governance V/S COVID-19: A Human Security Approach

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Abstract: After the Cold War, global governance emerged as an umbrella to address transnational challenges. But this concept is still somewhat ambiguous, and so is the contemporary world order, where a significant power shift has occurred from the nation-State to the “new actors.” On the other hand, it is now over a year since a global threat emerged, affecting millions of people. The COVID-19 challenge revealed several flaws in the contemporary world order, the United Nations system, and the international organizations’ role. It is therefore imperative that we ask ourselves about the nation-State’s ability to face the COVID-19 challenge on its own, as an introduction to raise the topic of facing the future transnational challenges. In this setting, the objective of this study is to shed the light on the aforementioned flaws, the contemporary challenges, and the way we tackle new threats as human beings. This study was conducted using a qualitative methodological approach based on analysis of secondary data. Following deductive reasoning, it highlights the importance of global governance in facing contemporary challenges in general before addressing the COVID-19 issue in particular. Study findings show that states, international organizations, and unofficial actors need to update the traditional approach to transnational challenges towards global governance. In this context, international conferences are a necessary tool to tackle new challenges related to human security.

Keywords: COVID-19; Global governance; Human security; Pandemic.

1 Introduction

In early 2020, the world was shocked by the emergence of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), also known as the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic first erupted in Wuhan-China and started to spread quickly, killing hundreds of thousands of people and affecting the lives of billions.

The response to this challenge was slow and somewhat ineffective for various reasons. On the national level, each government took a different approach. Lockdowns were forced, and army troops were deployed, but they could not find the enemy. Only a small number of countries were able to stop or slow down the spread.

At the international level, things got more complicated. The ambiguous world order and the new cold war affected the global measures and policies that were supposed to tackle the pandemic. Besides, many influential countries dealt with this challenge as if it was only a national security issue, and failed to address it as a threat to human security. In this framework, we asked the following questions: “are nation-states able to address the COVID-19 challenge - or any similar challenge - on their own? If not, what is the right approach to solve this problem?”

Answering the first question is simple, while answering the second is way more complex. Therefore, we think that the right approach should take into consideration the concept of global governance and the increasing role of the “new actors.” On the other side, many obstacles have been undermining the efforts made by governments and other actors - like the WHO - on many levels. Therefore, global governance represents the necessary framework to address transnational challenges in general and this challenge in particular.

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2 Global Governance

“The world is now interactive and interdependent. It is also, for the first time, a world in which the problems of human survival have begun to overshadow more traditional international conflicts.” (Brzezinski, 2013, p.1).

Before discussing the reasons that undermined the international efforts to fight the COVID-19 virus, we see the necessity to try to develop a theoretical framework for “global governance” because of the enigmatic nature of this concept, knowing that the global approach to this challenge is also related to the development of another concept: “security.”

Global governance has imposed itself as an “umbrella” in addressing global challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, this concept is still somewhat ambiguous in international relations. “In other words, we say “governance” because we don’t really know what to call what is going on.” (Finkelstein, 1995, p. 368). Therefore, “global governance” is an experience- based network of complex relationships aiming to describe international problems to control and solve the confusing changes in the contemporary world order.

Scholars find it difficult to define the contemporary world order. This vagueness impedes the global effort to address the emerging challenges, whether political, economic, social, or other. “The result is a major shift in the location of authority, and the control and command mechanism throughout the world in economic, political, and social spheres.” (Nehme, 2014). Consequently, in light of the unclear world order and shifts in international relations, “global governance” is emerging as a means of change and development, with the participation of new actors, especially in terms of human security.

3 Globalization

At the end of the last century, the rapid globalization of the economy has increased the interdependence between nation-states. As a result, the concept of global governance was affected by the spread of international values such as democracy and human rights. This notion has encouraged horizontal and vertical cooperation between governments, NGOs, international organizations, transnational corporations, and even individuals. In this context, we realize that contemporary challenges are more globalized, and traditional state sovereignty is reduced.

Global governance had to keep pace with the rapid transformations on the technological, economic, and cultural levels in order to prove its legitimacy while standing up to the contemporary challenges. As a result, geographic boundaries are no longer an obstacle that stands in the way of human cooperation, and the world has new tools to provide necessary medical care – around the globe – in the fight against COVID-19, especially that the distribution of any vaccine represents a heavy logistical burden.

4 Human Security

The traditional security concept was based on relations between nation- states, so military force was considered the best means to assure security. During the Cold War, many security studies revolved around the concept of national security, which used to be defined by military terms. Since then, this concept has evolved to include new economic, social, and medical implications. Thus, researchers see the need to focus on the concept of human security to face contemporary dangers and challenges: climate change, terrorism, nuclear threats, COVID-19, etc. In this setting, the traditional approach assumes that the nation-state might be the only actor on the international stage, while modern definitions are trying to cover a broader range of concepts in the Post-Cold War era, during which the concept of security became linked to multiple factors, such as population growth, economic growth rate, development, and the equitable distribution of resources. As a result, the interactions between transnational corporations, non-governmental organizations, and scientific societies played a major role in establishing a global information system. These dynamics are vital to support international cooperation and assure economic, political, social, environmental, and medical security. At the same time, the State will always form a common space of values and cooperation.

5 Global Governance and the Nation-State

Arguably, the state is losing its sovereignty to other actors and interest groups that arose as a result of economic growth. But the state remains the main actor within global governance, especially in this fight against a global pandemic.

Indeed, the role of non-state actors is constantly increasing because they provide an added value in finding innovative solutions to contemporary problems and challenges, especially since government agencies are – by their nature – bureaucratic, rigid, and slow to deliver. Despite this, the State remains the major actor in light of the unclear boundaries between the public and the private, the official and the unofficial in the current world order. In this context, F. Fukuyama said: “There are certain services and functions – what economists label public goods – that only governments can provide [...] besides clean air and defence, public goods include public safety, a legal system, and the protection of public health.” (Fukuyama, 2014, pp. 54-55).

Therefore, despite the fruitful contribution of new actors in pursuing the goals of human security and their voluntary assumption of responsibilities - that require cooperation between the public and private sector - public services are provided mainly by the state. Last but not least, it is safe to assume that the “Westphalian” state sovereignty has been affected in a manner that “relative sovereignty” is distributed among a large number of actors, whose cooperation is crucial in the fight against COVID-19.

6 New Actors

The emergence of new actors on the international stage played a key role in filling the void caused by the fall of the Soviet Union in the early nineties and the United States’ unwillingness to lead the efforts aimed at solving certain global problems. Consequently, non-governmental organizations and other actors have become *de facto* representatives of the people and entailed moral responsibilities before the international community. This responsibility became clearer today, as we see the people affected by COVID-19 constantly seeking help from multiple actors.

Thus, the limited power shift from the nation-state to new actors helped launch development projects and made effective use of various experiences. So, as a result of the continuous development of the concepts of security and sovereignty, the State is no longer able to address problems and find solutions on its own, and governmental institutions are no longer able to formulate medium and long-term policies without the private sector’s participation, as well as NGOs, influential individuals, major investors, and others. These new actors have imposed themselves as “players” on the international stage, thanks to the vast amount of information they possess and the studies they have carried out in various fields related to human security.

During the Cold War, the two poles were responsible for managing the challenges. Today, in light of the ambiguity surrounding global governance in terms of concept and practice, and the lack of clarity regarding the world order, it becomes more difficult to allocate responsibilities. Consequently, there can be no hierarchy among actors as it attaches almost the same importance to NGOs, transnational companies, international organizations, and governments... For example, the German government and Greenpeace are considered equal actors when it comes to environmental security, hence, while the nation-state has been the only actor facing the traditional security challenges, the new actors are facing the contemporary challenges as equal partners.

In this manner, the new actors represent the drivers and the beneficiaries of global governance. Without them, this concept would not have emerged in the first place. What follows are some of the most influential actors at present:

- Transnational and Multinational Corporations: They are considered a source and an instrument of global governance at the same time as they have played an increasing role in the decision-making process. As a result, the whole world has waited and supported these corporations in developing a vaccine for the novel Coronavirus and finding a solution for this challenge in general.
- Non-governmental Organizations: Within the complex world order, governments and international organizations have been facing difficulties to address contemporary transnational challenges, so NGOs stepped up and directed the efforts to build humanitarian solidarity. These efforts became necessary in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of these organizations were mainly based on individual initiatives - by people who showed interest in certain cross-border issues. Thus, they formed an international civil society, which plays an important role in

raising awareness about the right ways to stop the spread of COVID-19 because of their ability to influence the masses and affect their behavior patterns.

- The World Bank: The World Bank plays an important role in helping countries to face budget deficits through its contribution to economic growth. Developing countries affected by the virus will seek the World Bank's help to boost their fragile economy.
- The International Monetary Fund: Its role will become crucial in helping the affected countries to reduce the balance of payments deficit by allowing them to use its resources with adequate guarantees.
- The G7 and the G20: After the devastating effects of the pandemic on the global economy, the world expects these actors to step up and lead the way in establishing and coordinating economic policies that promote international financial stability because they have the ability and the resources to drive development forward.

To sum up, global governance includes the efforts made by the States, the international organizations (UN, WHO,...), the NGOs, the transnational and multinational corporations, the influential individuals, and other actors to address the complex contemporary challenges such as COVID 19. Besides, the expansion of the concept of security – towards human security – and the emergence of new actors on the international stage led to an inevitable result: “the global governance of contemporary security challenges.” Therefore, in the combat against COVID-19, there is an urgent need for global governance to cover all the aspects of this issue: medical, economic, social, political, and cultural. Such an approach can help in building a platform and addressing future challenges facing the human race.

7 Flaws in the United Nations System

Furthermore, it is important to note that global governance is facing major difficulties - at the international level - which undermine the new actors' efforts to control the virus. In this context, since the interaction between multiple actors is key to tackle this crisis, the complexity of the contemporary world order constitutes a major obstacle.

In addition, global governance and international cooperation assume the existence of certain equality between different actors regardless of their nature and their country of origin. Thereupon, structural and functional democratic reforms in the international organizations became a necessity in order to address pandemics, climate change, nuclear threats, transnational terrorism, and other challenges. Note that the delay in implementing the requested reforms causes international organizations – the United Nations in particular – to lose their legitimacy day after day, in the eyes of billions of people living in developing countries and feeling unrepresented and unheard. Hence, to manage globalization effectively, developments in the international arena underscore the need to reform international and regional organizations.

In this context, the UN is supposed to lead and defend humanity against major threats, such as COVID-19. But this organization no longer seems able to face contemporary challenges for several reasons, the most important of which is that the United Nations system, rules, and regulations were designed to face classic security threats. And while the concept of national security evolved towards the concept of human security, the UN has not kept pace with this development. Therefore, many voices have emerged, calling for radical changes in the decision-making process within the United Nations. In front of several contemporary challenges, this organization has been handcuffed because of conflicts of interest, in light of the new cold war. “It is also reasonably clear that the existing structure of international institutions is inadequate to provide sufficient levels of cooperation.” (Fukuyama, 2014, p. 36).

The emergence of non-state actors has created problems related to the exercise of state power at the international level. Subsequently, in the context of expanding the role of global governance in the fight against COVID-19, another obstacle stands in the way: each state – representing the nation's sovereignty – seeks to guarantee its own higher interests. For example, the European countries failed to support Italy during the first wave of COVID- 19 because each country used its resources to fight the pandemic on the national level. In this manner, it is safe to say that globalization has not become the main framework for international relations, so the State is still the main actor. Thus, the interest of the nation-state – representing its citizens – prevailed over the interest of “global citizens” living in the “global village” in the fight against a global pandemic.

When it comes to health security, over the past few decades, the world has witnessed major developments. From COVID-19 to exorbitant health care costs, global health challenges are of great concern on multiple levels.

Since 2001, the World Health Organization has warned that “increased population movements, growth in international trade, social and environmental changes linked with urbanization, deforestation and alterations in climate, and changes in methods of food processing, distribution, and consumer habits have reaffirmed that infectious disease events in one country are potentially a concern for the entire world.” (World Health Assembly 54, 2001).

These issues were addressed in 2016 at the World Economic Forum: “the number of people on the planet is set to rise to 9.7 billion in 2050 with 2 billion aged over 60. The global health system will need to adjust to this massive population growth[...] This will mean shifting the current focus on treating sick people towards preventing illness and preserving the health of populations.” (Hutt, 2016).

However, when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, the global response was slow, inadequate, and ineffective on almost every level, and it became clear that neither international organizations nor states were ready to face the invisible enemy.

The response to this challenge took a different form in each country. Whilst many countries ordered a total lockdown, “the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was calling for a strategy of herd immunity, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro sneered at what he called a little cold,” (The Associated Press, 2020) and “Belarus’s president Lukashenko suggested saunas and vodka kill the virus.” (Dixon, 2020).

8 COVID-19 and the New Cold War

Most countries, whether rich or poor, had a hard time dealing with the spread of COVID-19. The increasing gap between developing and developed countries emerged as a major problem like never before because developed countries never seemed to learn from another transnational challenge it is facing: terrorism. The globalization of ideas, economy, and technology can lead to the globalization of challenges, which requires cooperation between a wide range of official and unofficial actors, as we already stated. And while the necessary tools for global governance are not available to most developing countries because of the increasing inequality at the international level, the more developed countries are using this pandemic as a weapon in the new cold war.

In 2018, “US diplomats and scientists raised concerns about safety standards and the Wuhan Institute of Virology.” (Borger, 2020). And since the emergence of this virus, the United States has been accusing China of being responsible for this catastrophe. This comes at a time when the two great powers are fighting a “cold war” in the form of a trade war, a cyber war, and a legal war.

The former US President Donald Trump insisted on calling COVID-19 “the Chinese virus,” and his Secretary of State Mike Pompeo claimed that “there is enormous evidence its outbreak originated in a Chinese laboratory.” (Borger, 2020). Furthermore, a war-of-words broke out between France and China after the Chinese embassy in France - on April 12, 2020- published an article “accusing the staff of nursing homes of leaving residents to die.” Another conflict erupted when “a German magazine (Bild) - on April 15 - accused China of being the cause of the Covid-19 outbreak.” (Van Der Made, 2020). The United States and China have been “bickering over Chinese demands to control the COVID-19 testing - possibly gaining access to DNA samples - of returning diplomats who left the country.” (Bloomberg, 2020). On another front, Australia questioned China’s transparency over its handling of the virus, knowing that Chinese-Australian relations have deteriorated “amid Australian accusations of Chinese meddling in domestic affairs and China’s growing influence in the Pacific region.” (Kelly, 2020). Besides, a growing number of voices in Australia have been accusing China of conducting cyberattacks against political and private sector organizations. Hence, “when Australia called for an independent investigation of the coronavirus’s origin and spread, Beijing imposed an 80 percent tariff on Australian barley exports” (O’Brien, 2020) plus other retaliatory measures.

The aforementioned episodes represent a sample of emerging conflicts between countries that were supposed to form a platform to fight the virus. These disputes were jeopardizing the efforts that other actors were making within the framework of global governance.

9 Information Sharing and Misinformation.

To make things worse, the lack of information sharing on a global level had been extremely harmful in this fight against a common enemy. “In the six days after top Chinese officials secretly determined they likely were facing a pandemic, Wuhan hosted a mass banquet for tens of thousands of people.” (The Associated Press, 2020). Furthermore, “Chinese authorities have not allowed foreign experts, including investigators from the WHO, to take part in the investigation into the origins of the virus.” (Borger, 2020). Later, China agreed on an inquiry conducted by the WHO. In this context, better information sharing would have led to a faster and better response.

The spread of misinformation also had the unfortunate effect of increasing the risk of transmission. For example, in a January 14 (2020) tweet, the WHO “noted that preliminary investigation by Chinese authorities had found no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission of the coronavirus.” (Watts & Stracqualursi, 2020). The head of the China CDC’s emergency center said on January 15, 2020, that “the risk of sustained human-to-human transmission is low.” (The Associated Press, 2020). And the WHO claimed in January 2020 that asymptomatic transmission is very rare. Later, the WHO’s COVID-19 technical lead had to clarify: “on asymptomatic transmission: we don’t have the answer yet.” (Boseley, 2020).

The above-mentioned lack of information sharing and misinformation would have been avoided if the various actors - official and unofficial - had recognized the need to cooperate in good faith.

10 The World Health Organization

Since “the Wuhan outbreak” and the global spread that followed, the WHO became the world’s *de facto* center of attention because it has the expertise, the connections, and the resources to lead the fight against any pandemic, or at least that is what a lot of people thought. And despite all the efforts that were made by this respectable organization, it was the target of fierce accusations: spreading and distributing false information, helping China to dismiss any responsibility of creating and spreading the virus, “relying on official Chinese government figures relating to the virus...” (Watts & Stracqualursi, 2020). Its Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus was even accused of “dutifully [repeating] false Chinese talking points on the novel coronavirus outbreak.” (O’Brien, 2020).

In the midst of this chaos, it became clear that the WHO, alone, cannot form a platform for the fight against the novel coronavirus because some of the most influential actors do not trust this organization anymore. In this context, after weeks of accusations against the WHO, President Trump decided to withdraw funding from the organization, claiming that the latter had let COVID-19 spin out of control at the cost of many lives, and describing it as a “puppet of China.” (BBC, 2020). Simultaneously, Australian PM Greg Hunt criticized the WHO, and Australia went against the organization’s advice on February 1 and banned people arriving from China. (Kelly, 2020).

In short, the WHO wasn’t able to lead the efforts in this crucial fight, but it has been a major global actor. Therefore, it might play an important role as part of a wider platform: global governance.

11 Strategies and Policies

In the struggle against this pandemic, no global strategy was implemented for several reasons. First, no major conferences were held to develop such a strategy. Each country has implemented its own strategy depending on the resources and the means it possesses to achieve its objective. As a result, no common objective was set. Second, the gap between developed and developing countries has negatively affected the efforts to address this problem. Some developing countries did not develop the right strategy - or any strategy - and others had bigger concerns due to a shortage of medical resources. Third, whilst developed countries have delivered a number of stimulus packages to help SMEs and workers during multiple lockdowns, many developing countries faced another serious challenge: how would a government persuade or force people to stay home without any financial support?

On a national level, some of the world’s most capable governments could not present the right strategy for various reasons. For example, in the USA, a conflict erupted between the federal government, governors, and even

mayors, around policies and measures to fight the virus. Besides, social inequality has also been a major obstacle in many countries because a significant number of people do not have medical coverage or cannot adhere to lockdown procedures because of severe poverty.

12 Theoretical and Practical Solutions

On a national level, there is a need for integration between human security and state security to achieve cooperation between the citizen and the State in the fight against COVID-19. As experience showed, trying to impose wearing masks and social/physical distancing might not be successful without cooperation, on a personal level, even in developed countries like the USA or the UK.

In this context, the human security approach is the right approach because it covers multiple aspects and sectors and seeks a balance between public health and the economy. This approach makes sure to assign the necessary budget for medical research, even after the containment of COVID-19. At the same time, it works on other fronts related to society and information: restriction of movement, remote work, remote learning, information awareness (against rumors and conspiracy theories), and information sharing.

At the international level, some might argue that the United States might be the only country that can lead a global effort to fight any pandemic because it has “decades of expertise from global immunization campaigns targeting polio, measles, smallpox [...] and Ebola. It also has long-standing partnerships with governments and other actors in the more than 60 countries where thousands of CDC and USAID staff already work.” (Power, 2021). But neither the USA nor any other country can fulfill this role. The COVID-19 experience has shown that strong leadership by one state or an alliance of states is not enough to win a fight against a global pandemic. Therefore, it is imperative to coordinate the efforts within the framework of global governance in order to find the appropriate solutions to fight COVID-19 and any other pandemic that might emerge to the surface in the future.

At present, there is no complete and comprehensive framework to confront this challenge. Rather, there are different strategies and efforts carried out by international organizations, states, and actors at different levels. Consequently, we see the necessity of holding conferences where various actors can coordinate efforts and distribute roles.

The need for cooperation on a global level to beat COVID-19 led to the creation of COVAX, “a 184-nation initiative that is aiming to make two billion vaccine doses available worldwide by the end of 2021.” (Power, 2021). According to the WHO: “the countries which would finance the vaccines, partner with lower-income countries that could be supported through voluntary donations to Gavi’s COVAX Advance Market Commitment (AMC).” (World Health Organization, 2020).

This partnership highlights the importance of global governance, as it can serve as a tool for better collaboration to deliver the vaccine to the largest possible number of people. In this framework, the distribution of these vaccines poses a serious logistic challenge, and health workers - around the globe - need specific training on how to use them correctly. On another front, money is not the only obstacle standing in the way of ensuring equal access to the vaccine. The problem is that the vaccines have already been sold to the richest countries. “The People’s Vaccine Alliance,” said that while the world’s wealthiest nations are snapping up deals, nearly 70 poor countries will only be able to vaccinate one in 10 people at best during 2021.” (McKenzie, 2020).

13 The Need for Conferences to Deal with Future Threats

International conferences encourage cooperation and partnership between the various governmental and non-governmental actors in the international arena. In doing so, they have become a necessary tool to confront the challenges and to develop medium and long-term plans. Their importance derives from the fact that there is no single structure for global governance: it does not resemble a nation-state, it is not composed of specific bodies and institutions, and does not have a constitution whatsoever.

As we have already mentioned, states cannot face today’s challenges on their own. This enhances the need to exchange experiences and information in order to develop plans related to human security. In this context, nation-states and non-state actors sought to hold specialized conferences aiming at finding common ground to deal with

issues of common concern. These conferences represent the culmination of the principles that global governance has been advocating for over a decade: cooperation and integration.

Therefore, to address the coronavirus threat and all the related challenges, we see the necessity to organize conferences to facilitate cooperation between the following actors: the WHO, nation-states, top medical companies, the World Bank, the IMF, shipping companies, media/social media companies... These meetings could become annual events aiming at better integrating “the new actors” and implementing the necessary strategies, in order to optimize the efforts to address any health-related challenge in the future.

14 Conclusion

After the Cold War, global governance emerged as an umbrella to address global and transnational challenges. But this concept is still somewhat ambiguous, and so is the contemporary world order, where a significant power shift has occurred from the nation-State to the “new actors”, for example, NGOs, international organizations, transnational corporations... As a result, state sovereignty has been reduced, but the State is still the main actor on the international stage.

In early 2020, the novel Coronavirus emerged to the surface as a human security issue, but a lot of official and unofficial actors failed to deal with it as such. In this context, during the Cold War, each state faced “classic challenges” labeled as “national security threats.” To address these challenges, the state - as a member of one of the two poles or the Non- Aligned Movement - used to take a military approach. Today, in light of the new cold war, humanity is facing complex challenges related to human security. Consequently, “the new actors” should cooperate in the framework of global governance.

When COVID-19 broke out, the global response was inadequate for the following reasons:

1. The increasing gap between developed and developing countries: Whilst the most powerful countries were using COVID-19 as a weapon in the new cold war, developing countries lacked the resources and the medical tools to face this challenge.
2. The lack of information sharing and the spread of misinformation: As a result, the reaction was too slow, especially in the “money time” - the first week after COVID-19 was discovered.
3. The UN and the WHO: The delay in implementing democratic reforms in the United Nations, and the lack of trust between some of the most influential countries and the WHO, undermined the efforts made by this organization. Hence, the WHO was not able to form the necessary platform in this fight, but it might be able to play an important role with regard to global governance.
4. No global strategy was implemented: For most of the countries, the motto was: “every man for himself.”
5. On a national level: Internal political conflicts and social inequality have been an obstacle, as we already stated.

For all the above reasons, each state should update its tools to deal with human security threats. At the international level, no state has the ability to address the COVID-19 challenge alone. Subsequently, despite the efforts made by various states and international organizations, there is an urgent need for a global strategy. And despite the application of the COVAX initiative, a huge logistical burden is still present.

In summary, to set a platform of cooperation and integration, we see the need to hold international conferences with the participation of states, the WHO, NGOs, international organizations, medical companies, the World Bank, the IMF, shipping companies, media/social media companies, and other actors.

Recently, Russian scientists drilling in the Arctic have “discovered more than twenty previously unknown and possibly dangerous viruses.” (Lourie, 2017, p. 161). In this context, it is clear that COVID-19 won’t be the last challenge related to human security. Therefore, an international approach based on global governance might be able to detect and analyze future threats, implement the right strategies, and take the necessary measures to find the best solutions.

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