

“KHANDAQ”

A COVID-19 STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

In 627 AD, the Muslims of Madinah faced an overwhelming enemy both in size and strength. Instead of confronting the enemy head-on in open warfare outside the city limits or inside the city in close combat, Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) adopted a grand strategy of *isolation*, *containment* and *deferment* at strategic advice of Hazrat Salman Farisi (R.A).

KHANDAQ or trenches were dug around the city to protect and isolate/lockdown the population of Madinah from the enemy invasion. Preparations were made for the lockdown by reaping early harvest, with stored stocks. The enemy encamped at the city limits, fought skirmishes but was unable to infiltrate and break the isolation of the KHANDAQ. Attrition, weather and other natural factors held off the enemy, who eventually retreated, with limited loss of lives in the city.

In this lockdown, Muslims faced famine and harsh restrictions with good grace, though were victorious due to the KHANDAQ strategy. **This historical strategy has valuable lessons for us that isolation, containment and deferment can counter an overwhelming force of COVID-19.** If executed with unity and preparation it can block, avoid and eventually repel the full force of COVID-19 impacting our citizens. Isolation/protective zones need not be by a physically dug KHANDAQ but can be a hypothetical barrier or boundary around an existing economic or social unit. For example, a community or a factory, and fortified by standard operating procedures (SOPs) and other means to protect those inside.

COVID-19 – An Overwhelming Enemy

A situation analysis in Pakistan tells us:

1. Straining government's ability to co-ordinate national isolation and response, e.g. testing at a mass national level.
2. Weak healthcare system which does not have healthcare professionals or equipment to deal with any influx of patients.
 - Shortage: Pakistan ventilators: 1/10th of OECD average – Nurses shortage: 1/6th of WHO recommended levels
3. Frontline medical professionals are vulnerable to the virus which puts them at risk but also depletes the state's capacity to respond to the crisis – i.e. 9% of COVID-19 patients in Italy are healthcare professionals.
4. Business shutdown costs Pakistan PKR 40-50 BN per day. Loss from COVID-19 can cost \$15 billion.
5. Approximately 12 million jobs can be lost; some may never be recovered resulting in permanent loss of economic activity and financial drain of social security and additional despair leading to public unrest.

The KHANDAQ Strategy

Taking lessons from the Battle of KHANDAQ, the following principles can deliver victory against the overwhelming, unseen enemy in the form of COVID-19:

1. Creating a KHANDAQ around an isolatable economic or social unit

I. Identify the smallest cohesive unit where a defensive “trench” can be raised to isolate and protect a population from COVID-19. This could be around a company, organization or a well-organized community which has:

- a. Financial resources to test and screen a threshold (say 50%) of its constituent members for COVID-19
- b. Can maintain segregation of such persons within the confines of the boundary or “trenches” around the unit
- ii. Companies, industrial zones or community (like the housing societies) pay for a minimum threshold of employees, members and their households (say 50%) to have COVID-19 tests to confirm those not infected, thereby creating a safe isolation unit or protective zone – within “trench” walls of companies and their homes.
- iii. Businesses can undertake this expense willingly as a business continuity measure or even CSR, if upon certification they are allowed to operate with tested/ cleared staff, under a mechanism of testing and monitoring SOPs. Cost of testing is much lower than cost of shutdown of operations. If this strategy helps partially kick-start the national economy, and avoid a complete shut-down, the economic benefits far outweighing the cost.

2. Safe passage between the trenches at work and home

- I. This can be achieved through organizational services such as Airlift, Careem, Uber, and Bykea to allow for safe transit and passage between the safe isolation units which have been created.
- ii. These transportation companies would also need to adopt the KHANDAQ policy of testing to make themselves into isolation units, and thus getting permission to operate only with and between other isolation units.

3. Central command to coordinate the creation of isolation zones

- I. Testing and isolation of companies/ communities will need to be coordinated under a short complete lockdown of 3-5 days for each city, with inter-city/ inter-provincial movement limited until city-wise rollouts are complete.
- ii. By having the trench strategy implemented in a synchronized manner, concentric circles of safe isolation/protective zones can be created which will organically increase the coverage area of COVID free zones.

4. Safety and containment within the isolation zones

- I. Inside the KHANDAQ isolation unit, each employee and his family will receive bi-weekly safety kits comprising of masks, sanitizers, thermometers and gloves to be used in accordance with SOPs developed to protect from and contain any potential COVID-19 contamination.
- ii. The kits will be funded and distributed by businesses/ communities, alongside their implementation of the SOPs for the benefit of businesses so that they can operate at reduced capacity, instead of complete shutdown.
- iii. Open source Bluetooth enabled tracer apps can be used in conjunction with these kits and SOPs to enable tracing of established cases and those at risk of COVID-19 contamination so the isolation units can be maintained.
- iv. The following box summarises the requirements and the body/authority responsible for it to implement the strategy.

Governance Requirements	Operational Resource Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Co-ordination & Monitoring:</i> Provincial or national through the offices of the CMs/PDMAs and PM/NDMA• <i>Central Nervous System:</i> NADRA, provincial ITBs, health departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Importing Kits:</i> Either government procures and then companies purchase, or companies' source directly• <i>Performing Tests:</i> Train current medical students and lady health workers for COVID-19 testing• <i>3-5 Day Lockdown Enforcement:</i> LEAs and rangers• <i>Logistics:</i> NLC, healthcare and other logistics providers, i.e. AirLift, Swivl, Careem, Uber, Bykea

Islamic history provides us this classic example to emulate while fighting the COVID-19 enemy confronting us these days. Let us keep ourselves safe in the KHANDAQ by not letting the enemy enter.