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## The Compound Security Dilemma: Threats at the Nexus of War and Peace

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## The Compound Security Dilemma: Threats at the Nexus of War and Peace

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Isaiah Wilson III and Scott A. Smitson

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**ABSTRACT:** The United States faces compound security threats today reflecting a paradigm shift in the character of global geopolitical competition. Arraying these threats against liabilities in strategic and policy frameworks poses a significant, unacknowledged challenge: a new *compound security dilemma*. This compound security dilemma demands compound solutions that recognize, adapt, and embrace the multipolar ecosystem and its global political, cultural, economic, health, and competitive dynamics.

Today's tumultuous global security environment is best characterized as one of contagious, disruptive change—converging, transregional, compound security threats, a pathological weakening of nation-states, and arguably a breakdown of the Western liberal order itself. A variety of security threats driven by cultural, political, and historical forces have combined in ways that have fundamentally altered the character of threat and the environment of global geopolitical competition, confronting US policymakers with a compound security dilemma heretofore unacknowledged. Traditional security concerns have now merged with human health and security issues due to the interconnected nature of our twenty-first century world, as painfully exemplified by the current pandemic. Foreign policy concerns have acquired a keen domestic focus while domestic policy concerns have received global attention.

The policies of a revanchist Russia, continuing conflicts in Syria and Iraq, and instability in Venezuela all provide compelling, geographically diverse, and comprehensive examples of the compound security threats faced by the United States today. Accordingly, US strategists need a theory and analytics-informed network model that can highlight the *nexes* between drivers of instability, horizontally and vertically and between ecosystems. By describing compound security threats, the underlying compound security dilemma that generates these threats, the resulting policy puzzles, and by providing several examples, we offer the requisite foundations for a theory with significant utility for military strategy and force planning today and tomorrow. This special commentary is prerequisite and preamble to a larger, subsequent research theory-building project focused on further development and testing of the general governing dynamics of the compound security dilemma.

## Compound Security Threats, Defined

The coronavirus provides a window into understanding the compound threats of today. At the time of this writing, the United States still confronts this deadly adversary, one that flouts accepted international laws and conventions regarding warfare and human security protections. This adversary has already achieved mass societal disruption at an alarming speed. Within three months this enemy inflicted over 152,000 casualties (confirmed cases) resulting in over 5,700 deaths globally.<sup>1</sup> Worldwide economic market disruptions now threaten a global recession, and national publics now question the responsiveness of their governments' capacity and even willingness to contain and mitigate the adversary. The second-, third-, and nth-order damage across all sectors—political, economic, societal, foreign and domestic—are as yet incalculable. The potential for a global paradigm shift in the way we perceive these threats is real.

Some readers may ask, why choose to speak of COVID-19 in terms more appropriate to traditional warfare—why speak of a global pandemic as a global, epoch-changing war? This moment is beyond the metaphorical: we are, in fact, at war against this virus, or at least we should be because COVID-19 is indicative of the changed nature of many of today's threats.<sup>2</sup>

Many contemporary threats have become compounded largely because their root causes and underlying conditions (or currents) have been allowed to persist unaddressed or under-addressed (see figure 1). These causes and conditions include economic imbalances; sectarian conflict; massive and sudden demographic shifts due to regional conflict, climate change, and insecurity; loss of trust in governing institutions; and border concerns inextricably tied to identity. The repercussions of these compound threats follow a multiplicative—or exponentially contagious—progression as opposed to an additive, linearly sequential one typical of traditional threats. Hence these repercussions dramatically alter the risk calculus, risk reward, and benefits-to-costs factors so critical to strategy planning and policy decision-making.

The combination—or more accurately compounding—of global dynamics such as wealth disparities, widening wealth and inequality gaps, instabilities and unpredictabilities in the global economic market, and global climate change (to varying degrees, artifacts of globalization) have resulted in what strategic forecasters have described as an environment of “constant tension between greater interdependence and intensifying competition” for increasingly scarce material and high-value resources.<sup>3</sup>

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1. “Trump Tests Negative; World Lockdown Takes Hold,” *Bloomberg News*, March 14, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-14/widespread-clampdown-takes-hold-spanish-emergency-virus-update>.

2. Katie Glueck and Sydney Ember, “Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders Rebuke Trump Over Virus: ‘The Clock Is Ticking,’” *New York Times*, March 12, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/12/us/politics/joe-biden-coronavirus.html>.

3. Development Concepts and Doctrine Center (DCDC), *The DCDC Global Strategic Trends Programme: 2007-2036*, 3rd ed. (London: UK Ministry of Defence DCDC, January 2007), [https://www.cuttingthroughthetmatrix.com/articles/strat\\_trends\\_23jan07.pdf](https://www.cuttingthroughthetmatrix.com/articles/strat_trends_23jan07.pdf).

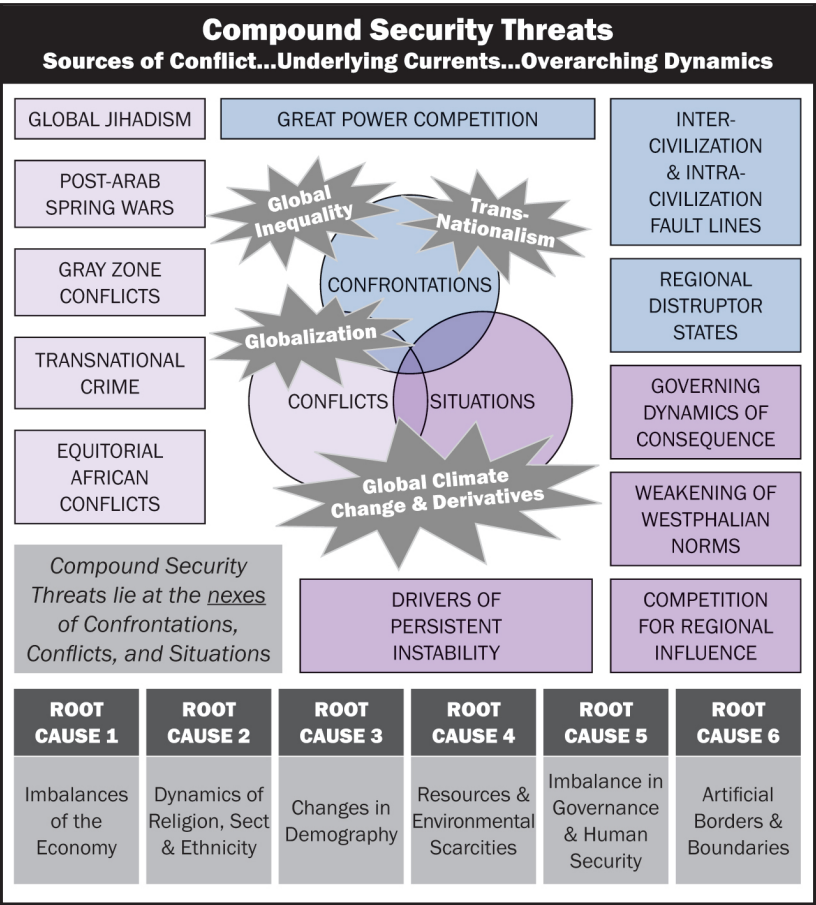


Figure 1. The compound security threat

In combination these environmental dynamics are the first, most fundamental and consequential of the major drivers of disruptive change shaping today’s global security environment and place new stresses on the long-standing liberal international system. Behavioral changes in international relations caused by these changes reflect an ongoing shift from a balance-of-power model of geopolitical competition to one of instability and unpredictability. In essence this shift marks a return to pre-World War I geo-mercantilism with “beggar-thy-neighbor” behaviors that foster go-it-alone and do-it-your-own-way approaches to solving security dilemmas.<sup>4</sup>

Veteran US National Security Council and State Department senior policy adviser Ambassador Richard Haass has dubbed this development a return to a “self-help” system of international competition.<sup>5</sup> This system

4. See *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Beggar-thy-neighbor policy” by Peter Bondarenko, August 18, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/beggar-thy-neighbor-policy>.

5. Richard Haass, *A World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017).

makes forming and norming—holding together capable and willing coalitions for collective security and defense—more difficult while also making the formation of such coalitions more essential. As nation-states drift toward their own self-help solutions to solve security dilemmas, they are less likely to treat such dilemmas as collective problems.

This brings us to the issue of the threats themselves. In many respects these threats are more daunting than those of the Cold War. Historian Walter Russell Mead described the changed character of geopolitical competition in this way:

Sometime in 2013, we reached a new stage in world history. A coalition of great powers has long sought to overturn the post-Cold War Eurasian settlement that the United States and its allies imposed after 1990; in the second half of 2013 that coalition began to gain ground. . . . The big three challengers—Russia, China and Iran—all hate, fear and resent the current state of Eurasia. The balance of power it enshrines thwarts their ambitions; the norms and values it promotes pose deadly threats to their current regimes. . . . increasingly, they think they have found a way to challenge and ultimately to change the way global politics work.<sup>6</sup>

The major nation-state challengers (China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran) identified in the 2018 National Defense Strategy share common denominators as emerging threats: all represent illiberal states led by despots driven by anachronistic-world-order motives and hypernationalist and statist philosophies and ideologies. The hard choices of the global system's leading power, the United States, regarding whether and, perhaps more importantly, how to intervene in world affairs will matter most. This behavioral driver of change, also known as American Interventionism, is the second major driver of disruptive change for the future global security environment. Since compound threats demand nothing less than compound solutions, only by developing an understanding of the compound security dilemma posed by compound security threats can we open the door to lasting, compound solutions.

### **Compound Security Threats under a “New” Compound Security Dilemma**

The term compounded refers to the increased interaction—interconnectedness and collision—of otherwise once separate policy issues, reflecting a new, post-Cold War (and now post-9/11) international security environment.<sup>7</sup> Where there was once a brighter line dividing policy issues of a limited domestic context and scope of impact and consequence from broader international policy concerns, the division between the national and the international is less relevant and less viable today.

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6. Walter Russell Mead, “The End of History Ends,” *American Interest*, December 2, 2013, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2013/12/02/2013-the-end-of-history-ends-2/>.

7. See Hugh Liebert, John Griswold, and Isaiah Wilson III, eds., *Thinking beyond Boundaries: Transnational Challenges to U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); and Isaiah Wilson III and James J. F. Forest, eds., *Handbook of Defence Politics: International and Comparative Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, July 1, 2009).

The security dilemma of the twentieth century international environment—defined primarily by physical, material-based security threats of a military (martial) nature—has now given way to a new twenty-first century security dilemma, the compound security dilemma.<sup>8</sup> Traditional security concerns over material resources are less and less divorceable from issues of human security. Matters of health and biological contagion, once easily and accurately recognized and not considered domestic security issues, today are merely parts of a larger and more complicated “global health security” whole in a compound security dilemma world. The novel coronavirus global pandemic could not be a more accurate example.

### *Core Governing Dynamics*

A number of core dynamics govern this compound security dilemma. First, shocks in one traditionally distinct public policy sector such as economics have cascading effects on other sectors also related to human security. With little or no warning, a matter of oil supply and demand can turn into a regional or worldwide security concern, even predatory conflict. The competition for energy is a clear example of this compound security dilemma. Competition for energy supplies will continue to dominate the economic landscape during the next 30 years and growth in world energy demand is likely to rise annually by between 1.5 and 3.1 percent. This trend is likely to result in highly competitive pricing and the continued enrichment and economic progress, as well as predation, of producer countries including Russia and Iran.<sup>9</sup> Concepts of domestic politics and policies such as energy policy and migration policy now take on a global context: we now must think of these policy issues and concerns in a security context.

The new compound security dilemma questions the foundational logic of the traditional security dilemma while also calling for an entirely new governing logic. It thus raises central questions of scale and legitimacy regarding preferred unilateral policy approaches over multilateral options (from an instrumental solvency as well as ideational sovereignty standpoint).

Another governing dynamic of the compound security dilemma is the tragedy of scales problem. In the past, policy treatment approaches to planning, decision-making, and implementation were designed and optimized toward efficiency metrics, calibrated around response-mitigate-recovery public policy standard operating processes and procedures. The contagion qualities of compound security threats, however, outgrow and outpace traditional policy prescriptions given their exponential growth characteristics.

An additional feature of the compound security dilemma is the interaction effect at play between simultaneous and overlapping

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8. John H. Herz, “Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics* 2, no. 2 (1950): 157–180, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009187>.

9. DCD, *Global Strategic Trends*.

sources of instability. The manifestations of these threats derive their character from this interaction between variables; the effect is (at least) multiplicative not additive in nature (see table 1). This tendency of the compound security threat to outpace the capacity of policy response options is just as apt to the COVID-19 pandemic as it is to the rise of ISIS, the Afghanistan War, the crises in the Middle East, the compound threat in Venezuela, and numerous other *nexes* of conflict that manifest at geopolitical flashpoints.

Table 1. Comparison of security paradigms

	Conventional Paradigm	Compound Security Paradigm
Threat Calculation	$A + B + C$	$A \times B \times C$
Threat Manifestation	Divergent or Convergent	Convergent

The compound security dilemma, similar to the paradox of the wicked problem, features poorly and undertimed treatments to threats that do not solve or mitigate but rather metastasize those threats at accelerative rates. This effect heightens the risks of miscalculation, mis-signaling, and runaway crisis escalation. Further, the actions of our adversaries generate and exploit compound security threats deliberately and strategically along the gaps and seams of traditional geographic combatant command boundaries. The geography of compound threats is an essential calculus in strategic planning, force planning, and risk management and mitigation.

### *The Russia Compound Security Threat*

Russia now leads a systematic assault on Western democracies and the international system founded on Western liberal values. Putin's Russia aims to subvert Western democracies internally, spread anti-NATO and anti-European Union sentiment, and undermine the rules-based liberal international order.

Russia's revanchist tendencies and expansionism are most easily seen in its physical military presence along the traditional and historically vital nexus of its territorial and ethno-cultural near abroad. As the 1990s and 2000s witnessed a Western liberal states' expansionism in various forms, including an expanded NATO eastward and southward, the 2010s and teens watched a precipitous spread of a Russian sphere of influence westward and southward. Russia's recent involvement in the Syrian conflict can be seen as a continuance of this trajectory. The two geostrategic pathways are clearly moving in counterpoising directions leading to an inevitable, though not necessarily obvious, clash, possibly an epochal one.

For years, Russia has worked to gain influence in southeast Europe, first and foremost using Serbia, later Kosovo, and more recently Bosnia, as footholds to establish friendly pockets on a hostile continent at a historical geopolitical pivot that sits along a major civilizational fault line. Russia has violated the borders of nearby nations and seeks to shatter



NATO and change European and Middle East security and economic structures to its favor. The use of emerging technologies to discredit and subvert democratic processes is concern enough but when this behavior is coupled with Russia's expanding and modernizing nuclear arsenal, the challenge is clear.<sup>10</sup>

At present, Russian activity is aggressive, focused, and directed. Russia is also engaging in expeditions far beyond its historic near abroad, bringing even broader geostrategic implications. Russian involvement in Syria should be viewed as expanding anti-access/area-denial posture in the eastern Mediterranean, greater Levant, and the Sinai Peninsula. Russian gray-zone warfare activities in Syria are complicating and strangling European attempts at pressure on Russia regarding the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine. Finally, Russia's cybermanipulations of elections threaten the legitimacy and viability of electoral systems in democratic and democratizing countries, including the leading and guaranteeing power of the Western liberal community of democratic states, the United States.

### *The ISIL and "Syraq" Compound Security Threat*

On June 9, 2014, the self-declared Islamic State breached and erased the international boundary separating Syria and Iraq, making the crises in Syria and in Iraq compound into one so-called Syraq. The vital national security interests of the United States did not necessarily fall within one or both nation-states, rather it fell across their nexus. Syraq as such is not simply a civil war. It is a compound war—a composite of at least three wars and possibly a fourth. The first is the Syrian Civil War in which Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, using primarily conventional forces, has brutally murdered hundreds of thousands of Syrian people.<sup>11</sup> The second is the Syrian insurgency against the Assad regime. In this part of the conflict, insurgents have been trained and resourced by a multitude of different countries anxious to see Assad removed from power. The third is the international war against the Islamic State and other transregional terrorist organizations.

Arguably there is a fourth war in which the major combatants are weaponizing refugees by causing mass migration into southern Europe, metastasizing a threat to NATO member states in southern Europe and to the internal stability of the EU. This crisis is a form of war that many still fail to see as such; it is precisely a continuation of politics by other means with vectored, forced migrations aimed at overburdening and

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10. James Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2018), <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

11. "Syria: Events of 2018," Human Rights Watch, accessed May 5, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/syria>.



eventually “breaking the nations” of Europe.<sup>12</sup> And it is part of Russia’s deliberate strategy of disruption.<sup>13</sup>

### *The Venezuela Compound Security Threat*

Even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Venezuela experienced increased deterioration of the rule of law and an expansion of illicit activities, especially narcotics. Additionally, Venezuela continues to face a worsening humanitarian crisis, the continued collapse of its health sector, and greater food insecurity.

Venezuela is also faced with a worsening economic crisis beyond the effects being created by the current US sanctions regime. As the COVID-19 pandemic has taken hold bringing economic activity to a halt across the globe, an oil price war has unfolded—a byproduct of the failure by Saudi Arabia and Russia to come to a mutual collective agreement on supply cuts, resulting in an oversupplied market. The resulting drop in oil prices carries potentially dire implications for oil-exporting Latin American economies, several of which rely on oil revenues for substantial shares of their budgets.

The crisis in Venezuela is driving the largest exodus of refugees in recent history in Latin America—almost 4.5 million as accounted for by the United Nations in May.<sup>14</sup> Additional projections estimate that by mid-2020, Venezuela will surpass Syria as the largest humanitarian crisis in the world.<sup>15</sup> While numerous organizations like the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the US Agency for International Development are attempting to mitigate the effects of this crisis, neighbor states like Colombia and Brazil (two major US strategic partners) are at risk of exceeding their ability to absorb and support this mass exodus. This challenge will only be compounded as the effects of COVID-19 impact the region.

Finally, the instability of Venezuela also has geostrategic implications for the United States. Already a major platform of influence prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, Venezuela is the lens through which Russia and China continue to prioritize their efforts in Latin America.

While China continues to use its Belt and Road Initiative to gain access and influence throughout the region, China has also heavily invested in critical infrastructure, establishing “dual use” ports at key geostrategic

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12. Robert Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003).

13. Geoff Dyer, “NATO Accuses Russia of ‘Weaponising’ Immigrants,” *Financial Times*, March 1, 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/76a52430-dfe1-11e5-b67fa61732c1d025>.

14. “Venezuela Situation,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, accessed May 4, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/venezuela-emergency.html>.

15. Dany Bahar and Meagan Dooley, *Venezuela Refugee Crisis to Become the Largest and Most Underfunded in Modern History*, Brookings, December 9, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2019/12/09/venezuela-refugee-crisis-to-become-the-largest-and-most-underfunded-in-modern-history/>.

choke points including Panama.<sup>16</sup> These actions as well as the significant influence that China retains on the future of Venezuela is demonstrative of a broader pattern across the Western Hemisphere as stated by the US Southern Command Commander, Admiral Craig Faller, in a January 2020 testimony to the US Senate Armed Services Committee:

I look around the region and I see China working on multiple port deals, IT infrastructure, dams, mining, logging, fishing, including a significant illegal fishing, illegal mining and illegal logging. And I look at the port access that they're pursuing in El Salvador, Jamaica, Bahamas. I ask myself the question why would China want to buy an island and lock up a 99-year lease for most of the coast of El Salvador, right here within a two-hour flight of the continental United States. They are trying to achieve positional advantage right here in our neighborhood and that is alarming and concerning to me. It drives the sense of urgency with which I look at this competition.<sup>17</sup>

Whereas as Chinese interests in Venezuela are a blend of geoeconomics-meets-geostrategy, Russia's interests in Venezuela are weighted toward its increased role and visibility within the military dimension of its power.

Given Havana's outsized role and influence in Caracas, Venezuela is a major fulcrum for Russia's approach to Latin America. Venezuela and Cuba are two of Russia's three key allies in the Western Hemisphere, and Venezuela accounts for 80 percent of Russia's foreign military sales program. Venezuela has been a frequent end point for Russian long-range bomber sorties into and out of the Western Hemisphere; it hosts Russian navy port visits and exercises; and it serves as a major platform for Russia's ongoing information warfare campaign across Latin America. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia has signaled its solidarity (in word and action) with President Nicolás Maduro and remains the external state actor most relevant to the trajectory of the Maduro regime.<sup>18</sup>

## Compound Security Threats and the Limits of American Unilateral Power

Our current systems and methods of calculating risks and force requirements do not fully nor adequately account for these "compounding" dynamics. As a result, our determinations of risk and force requirements are anemic, setting conditions for a "too little . . . too

16. Don Giolzetti, "China's Front Door to America's Backyard: China's Rising Influence in Panama is a Case Study of Its Ambitions in Latin America," *Diplomat*, June 28, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/chinas-front-door-to-americas-backyard/>.

17. *Hearing to Receive Testimony on United States Africa Command and United States Southern Command in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2021 and the Future Years Defense Program: Hearing before the Senate Committee on Armed Services*, 116th Cong. (January 30, 2020) (Testimony of Admiral Craig S. Faller, Commander, US Southern Command), [https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/20-02\\_01-30-2020.pdf](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/20-02_01-30-2020.pdf).

18. "Russia to Boost Venezuela Ties amid US Pressure," BBC, February 8, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-51423110>; and John E. Herbst and Jason Marczak, *Russia's Intervention in Venezuela: What's at Stake?*, Atlantic Council, September 12, 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/russias-intervention-in-venezuela-whats-at-stake/>.

late . . . and not enough for long enough” approach to global transregional threats to national and hegemonic interests.<sup>19</sup> Certainly the convergence of threats at key geographic locations presents the United States with additional challenges, but it also presents opportunities to sharpen our focus and apply our resources in more precise and economical ways, at decisive locations, through simultaneously executed named operations and enduring efforts, creating the possibility of achieving overmatching compound wins.

In short America can no longer go it alone, nor should it. As the cases discussed illustrate, the United States has a power problem consisting of three components: (1) insufficient power, type, and kind; (2) insufficient capacity to produce, maintain, and sustain the power required to meet contemporary missions; and (3) insufficient capability to convert power available (on hand or in production) into effective policies and strategies. Again, the anemic public policy handling of the COVID-19 pandemic is a sad testimonial to these facts. The United States has reached the limits of its fungible power, at least from a perspective of single-select instrumental or unilateral choice.

America remains an exceptional nation in terms of its relative capabilities and capacity to rival nation-states and in its ability to project power globally. But like a boxer replete with years of experience and a reach that outdistances younger, less-experienced competitors, the “tale of the tape” for the United States today might read: “great reach, but poor endurance in the latter rounds.” America retains the ability to reach anywhere and everywhere, but frequently with the wrong kind of instrument and too little of the right-fitting solution set. America often arrives too late to prevent, contain, or mitigate today’s compound security threats or does not sustain the longevity needed for effective regimens. All told, this is a worrisome combination. There is a point of diminishing returns that all great powers must face in relation to their ability to expand, manage, and govern imperial dominions. As historian Paul Kennedy noted:

Nations project their military power according to their economic resources and in defense of their broad economic interests. But, the cost of projecting that military power is more than even the largest economies can afford indefinitely, especially when new technologies and new centers of production shift economic power away from established Great Powers—hence the rise and fall of nations.<sup>20</sup>

We still live an international relations paradigm that privileges the sovereignty of individual nation-states, within which states retain the right to make their own policy choices. But exercising the sovereign right to determine one’s own art of the possible independently does not change the nature of threats nor the character of change in global geopolitical, geo-economic, and geostrategic competition. If the policy

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19. See Isaiah Wilson III, “Introduction to the Politics of Defence Planning,” in Wilson and Forrest, *Handbook of Defence Politics*, 9.

20. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), jacket.

choice is unilateralism and self-help, the risk calculations of such choices must be measured against the changed and changing environment. In an era where that environment—foreign and domestic—is governed more by a new compound security dilemma, the risk of continuing to choose public policies of unilateral self-help will prove beyond the calculus of risks itself—more the stuff of a gamble.

So what might come of an “America First” foreign policy? History provides examples of the consequences of adopting purely transactional approaches: uncertainty, strategic mis-signals and misreads, and illiberal solutions and outcomes that while perhaps instrumentally beneficial and successful in achieving and securing short-range strategic goals, wind up being devoid of a moral footing of the kind needed to secure lasting, durable, legitimate peace and stability in the longer run.

### Implications for Military Strategy and Force Planning

Compound security threats represent a change in the character, scope, and scale of challenges to our common defense and public welfare. While hybridity is certainly part of the equation, it is not all of it. The compounded nature of today’s and tomorrow’s threats dramatically alters our public policy and force planning, sizing, and shaping calculations and algorithms.

As former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, speaking to US troops in Kuwait in December 2004 said, “you go to war with the army you have, not the army you might want or wish to have at a later time.”<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, these remarks echo our reality today, a reality largely of our own making. At the same time, we too often hear this expression offered as an epiphenomenal excuse for failures of imagination, anticipation, forecasting, and planning, and for our underpreparedness for the fullness of contemporary public policy puzzles.

Addressing these failures will require our entire national security enterprise to come to grips with a recurring set of behaviors that cuts across our checkered performance against compound threats:

- The phenomenon and paradox within the social constructions of the meanings of war and peace, the issues of security and nonsecurity, and the tendency to win a war but to lose the intended peace, as evidenced by our decades-long anabasis in Iraq
- The false distinction between national security and human security issues, as demonstrated by US-led military-humanitarian interventions in the 1990s, which addressed only symptoms but not root causes (Somalia, Kosovo, Haiti)
- The persistence of chronic, civil-societal, government-society structural inequalities that go un- or under-addressed for many reasons yet remain the common denominator of rebellions,

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21. Eric Schmitt, “Iraq-Bound Troops Confront Rumsfeld over Lack of Armor,” *New York Times*, December 8, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/08/international/middleeast/iraqbound-troops-confront-rumsfeld-over-lack-of.html>.

insurrections, and insurgencies (Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, the Arab Spring)

- The tendency to declare false or premature victories while a conflict is evolving, not ending; the “mission accomplished” paradox results in undercounts in risk assessments and capability requirements calculations (Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, COVID-19)

Furthermore, as Amitai Etzioni, author of *From Empire to Community: A New Approach to International Relations* (2004), once reminded us, “Whether one is highly critical of the American global projection of power or celebrates that the United States has accepted that it is destined to bring order and liberty to the world. . . . [The question is:] Where do we go from here?”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, we need to think and move in more comprehensive, multilateral, and communitarian ways and directions. If our power equation can neither muster nor sustain the type, quality, and quantities of force we need or dispatch it in ways and according to timelines necessary to achieve overmatch of compound threats as they form, or at least before they compound, then we need a whole new equation.

Our new equation will require novel frameworks and mental models by which the United States, as part of a global effort, can plan, lead, and organize solutions to compound security threats. A theory and an analytics-informed, multilayer, network model (see figure 2) capable of capturing the interactions of the drivers behind compound problems, both horizontally and vertically, between separate ecosystems, could have significant utility.

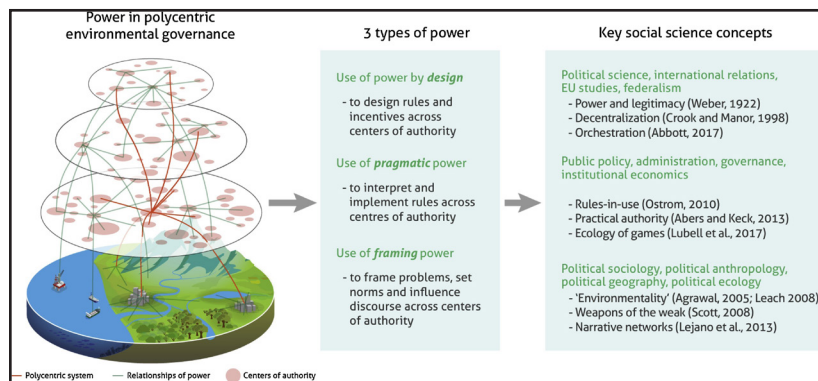


Figure 2. “Key concepts and dominant interpretations of power relevant to polycentric environmental governance” by T. H. Morrison et al., is licensed under CC BY 4.0<sup>23</sup>

22. Amitai Etzioni, *From Empire to Community: A New Approach to International Relations* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 1.

23. See T. H. Morrison et al., “The Black Box of Power in Polycentric Environmental Governance,” *Global Environmental Change* 57 (July 2019): art. 101934, fig. 2, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2019.101934>.

Such an approach might just be the moment of paradigm shift that many within military, public policy, and public affairs circles have debated, even promoted, for at least the last three decades. The 2020 novel coronavirus pandemic may be its herald. If so, will we recognize it and heed its call for the whole-cloth change it requires?

#### Isaiah Wilson III

Dr. Isaiah (Ike) Wilson III, outgoing director of the Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, and fellow with New America, is a recognized expert in the areas of grand strategy and strategic planning, military and security studies, and civil-military affairs.

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