BEYOND THE TORNADO: STRENGTHENING SOCIETAL RESILIENCE AGAINST HYBRID WARFARE

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Resilience is not about bouncing back to where you were—it's about bouncing forward to where you should be.

— Andrew Zolli and Ann Marie Healy,
Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back, 2012

Abstract

Societal resilience is crucial in today's interconnected world, but current approaches often focus narrowly on traditional defense measures. This chapter argues for a broader understanding of resilience, encompassing social cohesion, trust in institutions, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Reviewing recent efforts by the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and select member states, it identifies critical gaps and opportunities to balance traditional defense with whole-of-society strategies. By prioritizing the critical foundation of social cohesion, resilience becomes a dynamic process, empowering communities to adapt and thrive. This chapter urges policymakers to broaden resilience efforts beyond traditional defense institutions toward a more comprehensive approach, starting with the resilience of the individual and building up to strengthen the domestic foundation of national defense.

Defining Societal Resilience in a Polycrisis Era

In 2020, Ganesh Sitaraman proposed a Grand Strategy of Resilience to prepare the United States for inevitable crises such as health pandemics, climate disasters, cyberattacks, and geo-economic competition. He argued that these challenges are not battles to win

but realities to endure, highlighting the country's lack of preparedness, as evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. To confront future disruptions—whether they involve droughts, cyberattacks, or other systemic shocks—the United States must build a resilient economy, society, and democracy capable of preventing, withstanding, and recovering from these threats without incurring massive loss of life or widespread unemployment. As Sitaraman noted, "Although Americans tend to think of grand strategy as an overarching foreign policy vision, any true grand strategy requires a solid domestic foundation."[1]

To fully grasp the concept of societal resilience, we must first understand the context in which it operates: the polycrisis. This term, popularized by historian Adam Tooze, describes the convergence of multiple interconnected global crises that create a complex, unpredictable risk landscape.[2] This interconnectedness demands a more holistic and adaptive approach to resilience than traditional crisis response frameworks offer. Unlike conventional resilience, which often focuses on preparing for and recovering from isolated shocks, resilience in a polycrisis era necessitates navigating continuous disruptions and adapting to a constantly shifting environment.

Technological advancements, shifting power dynamics, and fragmented responses by actors pursuing narrow missions further complicate efforts to address these interconnected challenges collectively. This requires a more nuanced approach that considers the interconnectedness of systems and the dynamic interplay of social, economic, and political factors. These dimensions are particularly critical in the context of hybrid warfare,[3] where adversaries leverage unconventional methods and below the threshold of war tactics to attack social, economic, and political elements to weaken a nation from within, much like termites hollowing out the structural integrity of a house.

NATO and the EU:
Pioneering Whole-of-Society Resilience Strategies

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) have emerged as global leaders in developing "whole-of-society" resilience strategies to counter hybrid threats.[4] These efforts were catalyzed by Russia's aggression in Ukraine in 2014, prompting NATO to develop and adopt its Hybrid Warfare Strategy in December 2015 and the European Union to establish its Joint Framework for Addressing Hybrid Threats in early 2016. Both frameworks emphasize the need to strengthen societal resilience, enhance security, ensure continuity of governance, and foster greater NATO-EU cooperation in mitigating hybrid threats.

NATO defines societal resilience as "the ability of a society to resist and recover quickly from major shocks like armed attacks, natural disasters, health crises, or critical infrastructure failures, combining civil and societal preparedness with military capacity."[5] This concept underscores the necessity of complementing military efforts with robust civil preparedness to minimize vulnerabilities and reduce risks during peacetime, crises, and conflict.

Civil preparedness within NATO focuses on three core functions:

1. *CONTINUITY OF GOVERNMENT*: Ensuring that critical governance persists during crises.

2. *CONTINUITY OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES*: Maintaining access to resources and infrastructure essential for the population.

3. *CIVIL SUPPORT TO MILITARY OPERATIONS*: Providing logistical and operational backing to defense activities.

At the Warsaw Summit in 2016, NATO translated these core functions into seven Baseline Requirements for National Resilience, which serves as a benchmark for member states to assess their preparedness.[6] These requirements are also aligned with NATO's

Defense Planning Process to integrate resilience into broader strategic objectives:[7]

1. Assured continuity of government and critical government services.

2. Resilient energy supplies.

3. Ability to manage uncontrolled movement of people.

4. Resilient food and water resources.

5. Capacity to handle mass casualties.

6. Resilient civil communications systems.

7. Resilient civil transportation systems.

These requirements are foundational to NATO's interpretation of Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which emphasizes the importance of civil preparedness as a pillar of resilience and a critical enabler of collective defense.[8] Overseeing these initiatives, NATO's Resilience Committee provides strategic direction, planning guidance, and coordination of resilience activities among member states, reporting to the North Atlantic Council.

While NATO's focus on civil defense capacity is critical for whole-of-society resilience, there is a risk of overemphasizing worst-case scenarios without adequately addressing the below-the-threshold tactics that undermine social cohesion. Hybrid threats—such as disinformation campaigns, economic coercion, and cyberattacks—exploit societal divisions and erode trust, threatening to turn a "house divided" into a national vulnerability.

A 2014 U.S. Institute of Peace report cautions that civil defense mechanisms when designed or implemented without due attention to the social context, may fail to achieve their intended goals—or worse, produce unintended consequences.[9] Therefore, a balanced approach is essential. In an increasingly polarized world, building technical capacity without simultaneously fostering trust, unity, and

shared purpose risks creating systems that lack the social foundations necessary for resilience.

Understanding and Countering Hybrid Threats: Beyond Traditional Structures

In 2021, NATO leaders reaffirmed their commitment to resilience by emphasizing the importance of countering conventional, non-conventional, and hybrid threats. These efforts were further advanced through the NATO 2030 agenda and the 2022 Strategic Concept,[10] which highlighted the evolving threat landscape and the need for adaptive, multidimensional strategies.

Hybrid threats, as defined by the European Union, occur "when state or non-state actors seek to exploit the vulnerabilities of the EU (state/regional governance) to their advantage by using in a coordinated way a mixture of measures (i.e., diplomatic, military, economic, technological) while remaining below the threshold of formal warfare." Hybrid threats exploit societal vulnerabilities using a combination of tactics, including:[11]

- *COGNITIVE WARFARE*: Manipulating public opinion and decision-making through disinformation campaigns.

- *CYBER-ATTACKS*: Targeting critical infrastructure to disrupt governance and erode trust.

- *ECONOMIC COERCION*: Leveraging trade and financial dependencies to achieve political goals.

- *LAWFARE*: Exploiting legal systems to undermine institutional integrity.

To address these threats, NATO and the EU have strengthened cooperation in four key areas: civil-military planning, cyber defense, information-sharing and analysis, and coordinated strategic communications. Since 2016, they have expanded their collaboration to encompass dozens of additional areas of mutual interest, many of which are focused on countering hybrid threats.

The establishment of the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki in 2017 has further bolstered these efforts, providing a platform for research, training, and knowledge-sharing to enhance resilience.[12]

In 2019, Chris Kremidas-Courtney outlined three critical shifts required for NATO to effectively address hybrid threats:[13]

1. *CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION*: Moving from an expeditionary-only mindset to one that prioritizes internal resilience.

2. *ELIMINATING LEGAL GRAY AREAS*: Clarifying legal ambiguities that hinder cohesive responses to hybrid threats.

3. *DEEPENING INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION*: Strengthening trust among allies and partners to enable seamless, collective action.

Courtney argues that acknowledging the existence of hybrid threats and updating traditional institutions is insufficient. Instead, addressing hybrid threats demands a fundamental reorganization of outdated frameworks, which currently bifurcate conceptions of security with a home-and-away game of domestic and international security interests. Resilience requires a 360-degree approach that integrates whole-of-society stakeholder mapping to meet the complex security needs of today. Recent efforts by both NATO and the EU show initial steps in this direction.

The Crucial Role of Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is particularly crucial in countering hybrid threats, which operate "below the threshold of armed attacks" but can still cause widespread disruption. However, without a strong emphasis on community cohesion, whole-of-society frameworks and NATO's baseline requirements risk falling short in protecting populations from the compounding harms of below-the-threshold tactics. Building robust defense and governance structures without

simultaneously strengthening the social bonds that hold communities together leaves these systems vulnerable to exploitation or dysfunction.

At the heart of societal resilience lies the individual, the community, and their collective cohesion. These are not only the foundation of domestic resilience but also the primary targets of hybrid tactics. Hybrid threats often aim to erode trust—both horizontally among citizens and vertically between citizens and institutions. This erosion weakens the unity of effort and undermines the very social fabric required for effective planning, equipping, and training in a resilience framework. Without trust and social cohesion, the effectiveness of whole-of-society resilience strategies is significantly compromised.

NATO's Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence (CCOE) underscores the critical importance of societal resilience:

> A resilient society can be broadly defined as one with strong social bonds, social institutions, and societal trust…Trust between citizens and governmental institutions is crucial for effective crisis management and the improvement of societal resilience, highlighting the need to engage the public in civil preparedness and defence efforts for long-term effectiveness. Citizens' understanding and active contribution are essential for a society's success in resisting and recovering from challenges.[14]

This perspective highlights a vital truth: resilience begins with people—their trust in institutions, their relationships with one another, and their engagement in shaping collective responses to crises. This emphasis on the domestic foundations of resilience echoes Sitaraman's call for a *Grand Strategy of Resilience* built upon a solid domestic foundation to endure modern challenges.[15]

While civil defense plays a crucial role in preparing for and responding to crises, it is essential to recognize that its effectiveness is intrinsically linked to social cohesion. Organizations like NATO

have increasingly emphasized the importance of a civil defense capacity in their resilience frameworks. However, these efforts must be carefully balanced with investments in the social cohesion element to ensure that civil defense mechanisms are rooted in public trust and aligned with social needs.

Social Cohesion:
The Foundation of Societal Resilience

Social cohesion is central to "whole-of-society" resilience, encompassing human security,[16] trust, problem-solving, and communication. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN ECE), in its 2023 report, Social Cohesion: Concept and Measurement, defines social cohesion as the social bonds or "glue" that connects members of society. Societies with higher levels of cohesion are consistently healthier, more resilient to external shocks, and experience greater economic growth.[17]

The report provides an analytical framework for understanding how dimensions of cohesion—such as social inclusion, institutional legitimacy, trust, and a shared sense of belonging—interact and how economic, socio-cultural, and political threats can undermine these dimensions.[18] Similarly, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has developed the *Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions Index* to better understand global trends in trust, which is a critical component of social cohesion. This tool helps policymakers, civil society, and governments to identify the causes of trust erosion and develop targeted strategies to restore confidence in institutions.[19] Such efforts provide a crucial starting point for strengthening domestic resilience at the community level.

Lessons from Sweden and Finland:
Integrating Social Cohesion into Defense Strategies

Sweden and Finland,[20] NATO's newest members, emphasize the role of social cohesion in national resilience. Sweden, in particular,

has made societal security a cornerstone of its national defense strategy.

Recognizing that national security goes beyond territorial integrity, Sweden prioritizes safeguarding the critical functions of society, protecting people,[21] and upholding shared values against a diverse range of threats.[22]

The Swedish approach to societal resilience acknowledges that "antagonistic activities below the threshold of armed attacks" can cause widespread disruption comparable to natural disasters or armed conflict. These hybrid tactics—whether stemming from "ill will (e.g., conflict), nature (e.g., earthquakes), or accidents (e.g., oil spills)[23]—can erode societal trust, disrupt governance, and weaken resilience without activating traditional crisis responses.

To enhance public awareness and preparedness, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) updated its citizen guide *In Case of Crisis or War* in November 2024.[24] The revised guide includes expanded sections on digital and psychological security, reflecting a broadened understanding of societal risks and the need for public engagement in resilience efforts. This proactive strategy underscores the importance of equipping individuals with the tools and knowledge needed to navigate both physical and non-physical threats.

Sweden's perspective is significant because it elevates the potential harm of hybrid tactics—such as disinformation campaigns, economic coercion, and cyber-attacks—to the same level as natural disasters or armed conflict. Sweden's focus on societal security offers a valuable model for resilience strategies worldwide. By prioritizing the protection of critical societal functions and integrating public engagement into its framework, Sweden demonstrates how nations can address the full spectrum of threats—both conventional and unconventional.

"Termites in the House":
Addressing the Global Erosion of Social Cohesion

While the benefits of social cohesion are widely recognized, its role as the essential foundation of whole-of-society resilience is often underappreciated. Social cohesion is a critical precursor to societal resilience, defined as the willingness of diverse members of a society to cooperate, overcome adversity, and thrive.[25] However, global trends indicate a worrying erosion of this essential glue. According to the 2024 World Economic Forum Global Risk Report, societal polarization is one of the top three global risks across economic, environmental, societal, geopolitical, and technological domains.[26] This growing polarization is leading to intractable division,[27] dehumanization, and a recession of democracies,[28] all unfolding in a world where 25% of the global population lives in conflict-affected areas.[29]

The crisis of polarization and societal fragmentation is further amplified by a decline in trust across traditional institutions of governance, including governments, media, civil society, and the private sector.[30] Compounding this distrust is an anger-fueled data economy, where algorithms amplify divisive content, deepen societal rifts, and stoke conflict.[31] In this environment, society's ability to respond or react to any shock is progressively diminished.

When trust erodes, the capacity for cooperation, information-sharing, and collective action diminishes, creating a cascade of vulnerabilities that can undermine resilience at every level.[32] Neglecting social cohesion, therefore, creates a self-reinforcing cycle. As trust declines and polarization increases, societies become more vulnerable to shocks, less capable of adapting to change, and more fragmented in their responses. This fragility undermines resilience, making future crises even harder to navigate.

Breaking this cycle demands a deliberate balance between investments in traditional defense mechanisms and efforts to strengthen social cohesion. Whole-of-society resilience efforts must

move beyond exclusive preparations for worst-case scenarios like war, pandemics, or mass casualty events, and address the ongoing, insidious effects of hybrid threats that exploit societal divisions. Focusing solely on military and civil defense is akin to fortifying a home against a rare tornado while ignoring the termites actively eating away at its foundation. While preparing for the tornado is important, societies must simultaneously confront and repair the structural damage caused by termites—the metaphorical hybrid threats that erode trust, amplify division, and weaken the foundation of resilience.

Rebuilding social cohesion requires skills, partnerships, and capacity-building initiatives that prioritize trust, inclusivity, and countering the forces that fuel division. By addressing these underlying vulnerabilities, societies can restore their ability to adapt, cooperate, and thrive—ensuring that resilience is not just a defensive posture but a proactive strategy for unity and progress.

The Human Dimension of Resilience

While much attention is given to technical and structural measures of resilience, the human dimension is foundational and often overlooked. Social resilience hinges on human security, relationships, problem-solving, communication, and shared understanding. Prioritizing this human-centric approach to resilience building requires asking critical questions:

- *PERCEPTION:* How does the population perceive the world and the threats it faces?

- *PROBLEM SOLVING:* How do communities collaborate to address risks and build a shared capacity for adaptation and recovery?

- *BELONGING:* How can a sense of belonging and shared purpose be fostered to empower individuals and communities to navigate challenges together?

Technical/structural solutions often overshadow these factors, yet the success of these solutions are dependent on community's engagement, trust and buy-in. Without a societal foundation rooted in human security and well-being, even the most sophisticated governance and defense systems risk ineffectiveness. Worse, such systems can be exploited by those seeking to deepen divisions or weaponized against the very populations they are meant to protect. Building resilient institutions without fostering unity and a shared purpose risks leaving them hollow and vulnerable.

Building a Resilient Society:
Lessons from Research

Resilience is not a static outcome but a dynamic and evolving process, requiring adaptability, learning, and continuous improvement to navigate the complexities of today's polycrisis. This perspective underscores the need for societies to anticipate challenges, respond effectively to disruptions, and evolve continually in the face of uncertainty. As Dr. Tom Mitchell and Katie Harris articulated in their 2012 concept note, *Resilience: A Risk Management Approach*, resilience requires societies to "learn, adapt, anticipate, and continuously improve" to thrive in an ever-changing world.[33]

This understanding is complemented by the work of Aditya Bahadur and colleagues, who identified key characteristics of resilient systems that provide a valuable framework for policymakers and practitioners seeking to build societal resilience.[34] These characteristics include:

- *DIVERSITY*: Inclusive systems ensure equitable access to resources, decision-making processes, and economic opportunities. Diversity fosters adaptability by enabling a range of responses to crises and challenges, reducing reliance on single points of failure.

- *CONNECTIVITY*: Strong links between institutions at local, national, and international levels facilitate effective communication and knowledge sharing. These connections enable cohesive responses to disruptions and foster collaborative problem-solving.

- *KNOWLEDGE INTEGRATION*: Resilient societies blend multiple forms of knowledge—scientific, local, and experiential—to manage change effectively. This integration allows for tailored responses to evolving risks, leveraging diverse perspectives and expertise.

- *REDUNDANCY*: Systems designed with backup mechanisms and distributed critical functions can withstand failures without collapsing entirely. Redundancy provides a safety net during crises, ensuring the continuity of essential operations.

- *EQUITY*: Fair distribution of risks and resources across societal systems ensures that resilience-building efforts do not exacerbate existing inequalities. Equity is critical for maintaining trust and fostering societal cohesion.

- *SOCIAL COHESION*: At the core of resilience lies strong community support and embedded social networks. Social cohesion provides the foundation for collective action, enabling communities to navigate disruptions together and rebuild stronger.

These characteristics demonstrate that resilience is about much more than infrastructure or preparedness. It is about building systems and societies that can adapt and thrive amid complexity, addressing not just technical solutions but also the broader social, economic, and institutional dimensions of long-term sustainability.

This holistic approach aligns with the findings of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) in its *2019 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction*. The report calls for

a shift from working on distinct, isolated areas of risk—spatial, geographic, temporal, or disciplinary—to transdisciplinary, multisectoral risk assessment and decision-making.[35] Such integrated approaches reduce duplication, improve efficiency, and facilitate collective action.[36]

Policymakers must not assume a strong domestic foundation of trust and community already exists to support resilience efforts. In many societies, trust and cohesion must first be built. By embedding these principles into resilience strategies, nations can restore trust, strengthen community ties, and create a whole-of-society resilience framework for resilience.

Resilience must be understood not as an endpoint but as an ongoing, integrated, and interdisciplinary process of social adaptation, learning, and improvement. By adopting these principles into strategies and practices, nations can structure the organizational and behavioral changes necessary to protect and strengthen societal resilience with a cohesive and adaptable domestic foundation for future challenges.

Balancing Military and Civil Approaches

The increasing complexity and interconnectedness of global challenges demand a more holistic and integrated approach to national security, which moves beyond relying on traditional institutions of defense for all solutions. For decades, policymakers and academics have debated the merits of a "whole-of-government" approach, emphasizing interagency cooperation to address complex challenges such as disaster response, stabilization efforts, and non-traditional security threats. Despite these discussions, the United States has often defaulted to military-led responses, framing diverse challenges through a security lens to leverage the military's vast resources and capabilities.

This tendency toward over-securitization has drawn criticism from prominent thinkers like Francis Fukuyama,[37] Andrew

Bacevich, Rosa Brooks,[38] and Daniel Drezner,[39] who argue that an overreliance on military solutions undermines the ability of civilian institutions to address issues more effectively and often leads to suboptimal outcomes. This critique underscores the need to balance military and civilian approaches to create a more sustainable and effective strategy for managing global challenges.

To address these concerns, thought leaders and policymakers have advocated for a more balanced and integrated approach to national security. Thomas Barnett, in his 2004 book *The Pentagon's New Map*, highlighted the need for global connectivity and systems thinking to address 21st-century challenges.[40] Similarly, Robert Gates, during his tenure as U.S. Secretary of Defense, emphasized the importance of bolstering civilian instruments of national power, calling for increased investment in diplomacy, foreign assistance, and economic development.[41]

More recently, Sitaraman's "grand strategy of resilience" and the earlier 2008 Armitage-Nye framework of "smart power" have further underscored the need for a call for a comprehensive approach.[42] These frameworks emphasize the importance of leveraging diverse tools, fostering interagency collaboration, and empowering civilian leadership to address root causes of instability and foster long-term solutions.

The current whole-of-society resilience movement represents an opportunity to apply the lessons observed—but not fully learned—from decades of military-dominated approaches to security. This movement must be the final battleground for shifting toward a balanced, integrated strategy that empowers civilian leadership while leveraging the military's unique capabilities as part of a broader collaborative framework.

Historically, resilience planning in the United States has been event-driven, addressing specific hazards through a siloed crisis management cycle: preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery. While this approach has been effective in certain contexts,

today's interconnectedness and systemic risks demand a more dynamic, adaptive framework. Resilience must now be understood as a collaborative, cross-sectoral process that integrates diverse perspectives and capabilities to navigate uncertainty and mitigate systemic risks. This requires the Department of Defense (DOD) to evolve from its traditional role as a primary responder to a more nuanced role as a facilitator and enabler of whole-of-society resilience.

While the DOD has a crucial role to play in fostering resilience, its dominance in this domain presents several challenges. The Pentagon remains the best-trained and best-resourced arm of the federal government, often stepping in to fill voids left by civilian agencies. However, this can lead to an over-securitization of resilience, where military solutions are prioritized even for challenges better addressed through civilian expertise and diplomatic efforts.

This tendency is evident in the disproportionate allocation of resources. For example, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command alone has more troops than the entire combined staff of the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The DOD's budget similarly dwarfs those of these agencies, reflecting a structural imbalance that perpetuates a reliance on military solutions. Even senior DOD officials have argued for greater investment in civilian agencies to address global challenges more comprehensively.[43]

The overemphasis on military-led resilience efforts poses significant risks that can undermine the effectiveness of broader resilience strategies:

- *UNDERMINING CIVILIAN CAPACITY*: When the military takes the lead in all aspects of resilience, it can undermine the capacity of civilian agencies to develop their own expertise and address challenges within their domains.

- *ERODING TRUST AND COLLABORATION*: In a polarized world, where hybrid threats blur the lines between civilian and military domains, unchecked military dominance in resilience planning can erode trust and hinder the collaboration necessary for success.

- *INEFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS*: Relying solely on military solutions for complex challenges like pandemics, climate change, and social unrest can lead to ineffective or even counterproductive outcomes.

- *UNSUSTAINABILITY:* Hybrid warfare exploits all instruments and opportunities to strategically undermine adversaries. An overly defense-centric focus is neither sustainable nor strategically sound. Military forces, already stretched thin with traditional warfighting mandates, are ill-equipped and not trained to address the wide-ranging and compounding effects of hybrid threats. Expecting them to do so diminishes their primary mission effectiveness and leaves significant gaps in comprehensive resilience efforts.

To avoid these pitfalls, a balanced approach is essential—one that empowers civilian agencies, fosters cross-sector collaboration, and integrates military capabilities where they are most effective. Recognizing the limitations of a military-centric approach to resilience, the DOD must embrace a more collaborative framework that leverages its strengths while empowering civilian institutions and fostering cross-sector partnerships. This requires a paradigm shift, moving away from automated bureaucratic processes that apply old tools to new buzzwords and toward a more agile and adaptive approach.

Embracing a Systems Approach in a Polycrisis World

In today's polycrisis—a convergence of overlapping, interconnected crises—traditional, siloed approaches to security are insufficient. Challenges such as climate change, pandemics,

economic instability, social unrest, and geopolitical conflicts are deeply intertwined, requiring a systems thinking approach that recognizes the interconnected nature of these challenges. This shift in mindset demands moving away from linear, reductionist thinking toward a more holistic and adaptive framework capable of navigating complexity.

Recent policy developments underscore the growing recognition of systems thinking in resilience-building. The U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) 2024 *National Resilience Guidance* emphasizes a whole-community approach,[44] promoting a common understanding of resilience and addressing the interplay between chronic stressors and acute shocks. Similarly, USAID's 2024 *Resilience Policy* advocates for integrated risk management and systemic approaches, extending its framework beyond agriculture to include health, education, and governance.[45] The DOD has also elevated climate resilience as a strategic imperative, as evidenced by its Climate Resilience Portal,[46] and ongoing environmental security initiatives.[47]

While these efforts represent progress, they fall short of constituting a comprehensive whole-of-society strategy grounded in systems thinking. A truly integrated framework would map the interrelated nature of societal risks and delineate how technical experts and community members can collaborate across agencies and organizations to strengthen societal resilience.

Learning from International Models

In contrast to the fragmented U.S. approach, the EU and NATO are further along in developing robust models for fostering whole-of-society resilience. Similarly, the UK Government Resilience Framework offers a comprehensive policy guide linking diverse efforts and actors toward a cohesive, cross-sectional resilience strategy.[48] Meanwhile, the UK Integrated Operating Concept for the Ministry of Defense outlines roles, responsibilities, and

coordination mechanisms for engaging all facets of society to address the complex risks posed by polycrisis and hybrid warfare.[49] These frameworks conceptualize a new way of doing business in a world increasingly shaped by interconnected crises.

By leveraging the insights and frameworks developed by allies like the United Kingdom, the United States could operationalize a *Grand Strategy of Resilience* that aligns domestic efforts with international best practices.

The DOD should not be the solution to whole-of-society resilience challenges, but it is uniquely positioned to apply its resources and expertise to facilitate dialogue, training, and innovation efforts to help foster a systems approach to resilience. Its vast resources, training capabilities, and global reach enable it to almost immediately convene stakeholders across sectors to develop the roadmap for new approaches to resilience. Key actions for the DOD include:

1. *EXPANDING SECURITY COOPERATION PROGRAMS*: By broadening international and domestic security cooperation efforts, the DOD can facilitate knowledge exchange, align resilience goals, and strengthen partnerships to counter hybrid threats.

2. *ENHANCING TRAINING AND EDUCATION*: Incorporating systems thinking and resilience frameworks into military schoolhouses and training programs ensures that leaders are prepared to address the interconnected challenges of the polycrisis era.

3. *PROMOTING INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH*: Investing in research that integrates diverse perspectives—spanning social cohesion, climate adaptation, cybersecurity, and hybrid warfare—can generate innovative solutions to emerging threats.

4. *FOSTERING CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION*: Acting as a convener, the DOD can bridge the gaps between civilian agencies, private industry, NGOs, and international allies, creating a unified platform for resilience planning and implementation.

To strengthen domestic resilience, the United States must bridge interagency efforts with models being developed by our partners and allies. The DOD's role as a facilitator of collaboration, adaption, and learning is critical in this effort. This approach not only prepares the nation for future crises but also fosters the collective capacity to navigate an increasingly uncertain world.

Conclusion:
A Collaborative Path to Resilience

The 21st century's interwoven crises—hybrid threats, democratic backsliding, climate change, and the cascading effects of the polycrisis—demand a transformative approach to resilience. Resilience is not a fixed achievement but a dynamic and ongoing process of learning, adaptation, and collective action. It requires recognizing the interconnected nature of today's threats and developing systems that can navigate complexity and uncertainty with agility.

True resilience must go beyond traditional military strategies of civil defense, infrastructure-focused measures around worst-case scenarios. Its foundation lies in the cohesion of communities, the trust between citizens and institutions, and the shared purpose that unites diverse sectors of society. Without these core elements, even the most advanced governance frameworks and defense mechanisms risk being hollow, ineffective, or even counterproductive. A balanced approach integrates military capabilities with civilian leadership, social inclusion, and public trust.

International models from NATO, the European Union, and allies such as the United Kingdom underscore the value of integrated frameworks that align national, regional, and local efforts. By drawing lessons from these examples, the United States has the opportunity to strengthen its domestic resilience while contributing to global security partnerships. However, the effectiveness of any resilience strategy ultimately depends on prioritizing social cohesion, addressing polarization, and countering the hybrid threats that exploit social vulnerabilities and erode trust.

Resilience is about more than withstanding crises—it is about thriving in their aftermath. It is the capacity to transform adversity into an opportunity for innovation, unity, and growth. By embracing systems thinking, fostering cross-sector collaboration, and centering the human dimension, the United States and its allies can build societies that are adaptive, inclusive, and prepared to face the uncertainties of the modern world.

Traditional conceptions of grand strategy have emphasized the role of nation-states in navigating the international arena through diplomacy, military power, and economic influence. However, the rapidly evolving landscape of hybrid warfare—characterized by tactics that exploit societal vulnerabilities below the threshold of conventional war—necessitates a fundamental shift. Grand strategy must now incorporate a robust and integrated focus on building a domestic foundation of societal resilience.

This reimagined approach recognizes that in today's technologically scaled realities, the population itself is both a target and a tool in hybrid warfare. Threat actors exploit divisions, manipulate information, and erode trust within societies to destabilize governance and undermine collective action. As such, societal resilience becomes not just a defensive imperative but a cornerstone of strategic security.

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