



The Self-Defeat of Righteousness: Conflict Farming and the Search for a Sustainable World Order

A White Paper by a Concerned Global Citizen, in dialogue with an AI
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Executive Summary

The 21st-century global order is at a perilous inflection point. The long-standing system of "managed conflict," presided over by a single superpower, has failed. What was once a strategy of containment has devolved into a self-perpetuating cycle of instability, fueled by powerful economic and political incentives. This paper argues that this failure stems from the **"Self-Defeat of Righteousness"**—the process by which the vast apparatus built to defend a nation's values becomes so powerful that it begins to corrupt them, creating a system of **"Conflict Farming"** where tension is more profitable than peace.

This analysis is presented from the perspective of an informed global citizen, deliberately decoupled from the immediate operational pressures of statecraft. Its purpose is not to provide policy prescriptions, but to provoke a candid, foundational discussion among policymakers, academics, and the public about the systemic drivers of global instability.

We will explore this thesis by:

1. **Introducing a new lexicon** to describe the current geopolitical reality.
2. **Analyzing the three most probable pathways** to a future world order: a reformed U.S. leadership, a China-led bloc, and a balancing coalition of "Middle Powers."
3. **Concluding with the most likely outcome:** a messy, chaotic, but potentially more resilient multipolar world.

This paper is a call for a new strategic dialogue. The rules of the global game are broken. It is time to ask the fundamental questions required to write new ones.

Introduction: A New Lexicon for a New Era

To understand our current predicament, we must first have the language to describe it. The traditional terms of international relations—"great power competition," "spheres of influence"—no longer capture the full picture. We propose three concepts to frame this analysis:

- **Conflict Farmers:** Nations, primarily superpowers, whose economic and political



systems have a vested interest in cultivating, managing, and sustaining global conflicts. Their goal is not necessarily outright victory, but the perpetuation of a profitable and strategically advantageous state of tension.

- **The Self-Defeat of Righteousness:** The historical arc by which a nation that rises to power for a just cause (e.g., to defeat fascism or contain communism) finds that the immense military-industrial apparatus it created for that purpose outlives its original mission. This apparatus then develops its own interests, requiring a constant supply of new threats to justify its existence, ultimately undermining the very values it was built to protect.
- **Managed vs. Unmanageable Conflict:** The shift from a state where tensions were carefully governed to prevent escalation (a strategy military analysts have sometimes referred to as "mowing the lawn" to describe periodic, limited military actions designed to degrade capabilities without seeking a final resolution) to the current era, where these same conflicts have boiled over, shattering the illusion of control and threatening wider regional wars.

This analysis is a collaboration between a human—a professional analyst but a layman in geopolitics, representing the "everyperson"—and an AI. This unique authorship is intentional. It seeks to combine human observation and lived experience with the structured analysis of artificial intelligence, creating a perspective that is both grounded and systemic.

Part I: The End of "Managed Conflict" - A System in Crisis

The current state of global affairs did not emerge from a vacuum. It is the logical conclusion of a system that has been breaking down for decades. To understand why, we can ask two fundamental questions.

Question 1: Why does the political narrative of "ending wars" consistently clash with the reality of perpetual conflict?

Answer: Because the system is built on **Conflict Farming**. The United States, the world's preeminent military power, is also the world's largest arms exporter. Its defense industry is a cornerstone of its economy, with supply chains and jobs distributed across nearly every political district. This creates what President Eisenhower first termed the "military-industrial complex"—a powerful, interwoven relationship between the military, the defense industry, and the political establishment.

In this system, a state of managed tension is the ideal business environment. It justifies massive defense budgets, drives allied nations to purchase advanced weaponry, and ensures political support for an interventionist foreign policy. Peace can be, in this specific and powerful sector, "bad for the economy." This explains the paradox of leaders claiming to seek peace while simultaneously approving record arms sales to volatile regions.



Question 2: How did the "righteous" leader of the free world become a primary "farmer"?

Answer: Through the process of **The Self-Defeat of Righteousness**. America's global leadership was forged in the crucible of WWII and the Cold War, a response to clear existential threats. The vast military and intelligence infrastructure it built was, at the time, for a righteous purpose.

However, when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, this apparatus did not disappear. It had become a powerful force in its own right and needed a new mission to justify its existence. It found one in acting as the sole global superpower. The mission shifted from defense to offense—shaping the world in its own image. The tools built to protect democracy began to seek out problems to solve, and in doing so, often created new ones. Righteousness became a justification for action, not its cause, and the cycle of intervention and blowback began to spin on its own momentum.

Part II: Three Pathways to the Future - A Strategic Analysis

If the old order is broken, what comes next? We analyze three potential futures, ranked according to our stated goal: achieving a sustainable global order.

3rd Place: A China-led Bloc ("The New Emperor")

This pathway sees the U.S.-led order replaced by one centered on China and its authoritarian allies like Russia.

- **Disruption Cost: Catastrophic.** ☠️ This path almost certainly leads through a direct superpower war, risking a global economic collapse and nuclear exchange.
- **Long-Term Sustainability: Very Low.** This model replaces one hegemon with another. Its principles are based on authoritarian control and economic coercion (a "modern tribute system"), not a rules-based order. It would create a rigid, repressive, and ultimately unstable world.

2nd Place: A Reformed United States ("The Reluctant Sheriff")

This pathway involves the U.S. retaining leadership but undertaking a massive internal reform to dismantle its "conflict farming" system.

- **Disruption Cost: Lowest.** This path avoids a cataclysmic war for global leadership.
- **Long-Term Sustainability: Low.** This pathway's greatest weakness is its implausibility. It would require the U.S. to act directly against some of its most powerful domestic interests. The political will for such a radical transformation is likely non-existent, making any reform unsustainable in the long run.

1st Place: The "Middle Powers" Pathway ("The Global Council")



This pathway sees the rise of a coalition of influential, independent middle powers (e.g., India, Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa) that act as a balancing force against any single superpower.

- **Disruption Cost: Medium.** This path is not without conflict, but it would manifest as a long, messy process of economic and diplomatic realignment rather than a single world war.
- **Long-Term Sustainability: Highest.** A multipolar world, where power is more evenly distributed, is inherently more stable. It forces a reliance on diplomacy and consensus over unilateral dictate. It is the only model that breaks the cycle of hegemony and offers a foundation for a genuinely collaborative and sustainable future.

Part III: The Probable Outcome - Navigating a Messy Multipolarity

Question: If no single power can "win," what does the future actually look like?

Answer: No single actor will win. The "winner" will be the paradigm of **Multipolarity**, but not the clean, idealistic version of "The Global Council." The most probable future is a messy, chaotic, and more dangerous world for the short-to-medium term, but one that holds the seeds of long-term stability.

In this world:

- The **United States** remains the single most powerful military actor but loses its ability to unilaterally direct global events. It becomes a hugely influential "first among equals."
- **China** becomes a formidable regional hegemon, but its internal demographic and economic problems, combined with the resistance of its neighbours, prevent it from achieving global dominance.
- The **Middle Powers** are the real winners. They gain unprecedented leverage and autonomy by playing the superpowers off each other, forming flexible coalitions based on issues rather than rigid ideology.

This new order will not be peaceful by default. It will be a constant, dynamic struggle for influence. But it is in this struggle—this forced negotiation between multiple power centers—that the chance for a more balanced and sustainable equilibrium lies.

Key Considerations & Unanswered Questions

This analysis leads to a series of difficult questions that must be part of any serious strategic dialogue. We offer them as a challenge to the reader:

- **The Question of Human Nature:** Is the drive for dominance so fundamental that any new system will inevitably revert to a "conflict farming" model? Or can we design systems that are resilient to our worst instincts? A simple reset of the global order may only delay the inevitable. The true challenge is to move forward from our current point, learning



from our mistakes to create a system that channels our nature toward more constructive ends.

- **The Question of Economic Transition:** If a nation were to truly dismantle its military-industrial complex, how could it manage the massive economic disruption and job losses without triggering a domestic crisis?
- **The Question of Legitimacy:** In a world without a single "leader," who arbitrates disputes? Who enforces international law? Can the United Nations be reformed to fill this role, or is a new institution required?
- **The Question of Values:** If the era of a single, dominant value system (liberal democracy) is over, how does the world navigate a future where multiple, often conflicting, value systems must coexist on equal terms?

Conclusion: A Call for a New Strategic Dialogue

The world is at a crossroads. Continuing on our current path—pretending that manageable conflicts can be sustained indefinitely—is a recipe for catastrophe. The machine is broken. The belief that we can simply reset the board and start a new game under a new leader ignores the fundamental lesson of our time: it is the game itself that is flawed.

This paper does not pretend to have the answers. Its purpose is to argue that we are not asking the right questions. We are stuck in a 20th-century mindset while facing 21st-century problems. The challenge for our generation of leaders, thinkers, and citizens is not to choose the next hegemon, but to have the courage to design a world that does not need one. We must forge onward, solving our existing problems with new thinking, or we risk perishing in the unsustainability of our own making.

The conversation must begin now.

Signed,

A Concerned Global Citizen

To continue this dialogue, a dedicated email address has been established: sustainabilitydialogue@healhatred.org. This will allow interested parties to engage directly, fostering the collaborative discussion this paper seeks to initiate, while respecting the need for privacy and security.