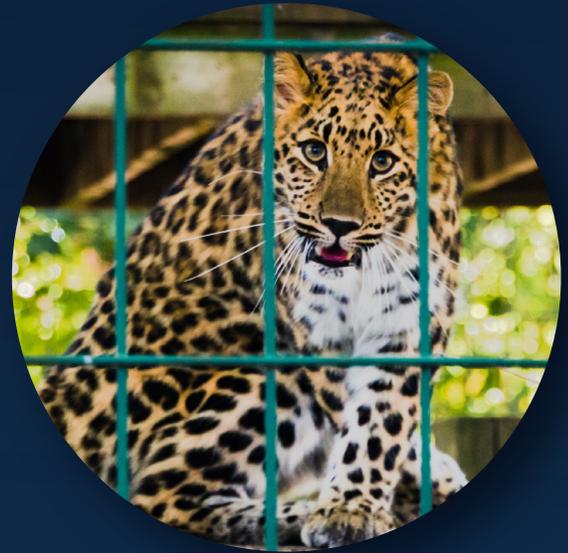


WILDLIFE AND ITS IMPACT ON NATIONAL SECURITY



COUNCIL
ON
STRATEGIC
RISKS

The relationship between humans and animals has existed throughout our evolutionary history, but has been fundamentally changed through developmental inventions like agriculture, domestication, and industrialization. As a result, dramatic numbers of habitats have been transformed to meet the needs of growing human populations, putting humans and wildlife in greater proximity.



The Threat

Increased globalization and levels of prosperity have helped fuel high demands for wildlife and its products. Profiteers exploit this demand through the trafficking of wildlife and wildlife products and are in turn helping finance transnational organized crime and extremist groups and exacerbating zoonotic disease spillover.

- An immensely damaging consequence of modern human activities is the high rate of animal and species extinction, driven by habitat loss, invasive species, pollution, overexploitation, and legal and illegal wildlife trade. High rates of species extinction cause irreversible loss of evolutionary history to the planet.
- Humans are encroaching into regions inhabited by wildlife, which is causing an increase in the interface between human and wildlife populations that comes with implications for both. Human and economic security are affected both by impacts on global health and human-wildlife conflict. As illustrated by COVID-19, pandemics can cause social disruption and fatalities that rival or surpass armed conflict. Since the 1970s, at least three dozen infectious diseases have emerged from human contact with animals.
- Wildlife trafficking has direct implications for global political and economic stability. Wildlife crime undercuts the global economy, causing \$7 to \$23 billion in losses per year. Illegal trade threatens local food security and the livelihoods of many local people and communities who depend on wildlife. It also contributes to a greater risk of political instability by undermining government effectiveness, degrading the economic base, and providing resources for insurgent groups.

The Solution

- **Increasing protected areas:** Well-managed protected areas are known to reduce rates of habitat loss and help maintain levels of species and populations. However, despite the expansion of protected areas, catastrophic ecological declines continue, indicating that the current total protected area is far below what is necessary. Robust science is needed to help international policymakers land on an appropriate increase for global security.
- **Stabilizing protected areas:** Beyond expanding the acreage of protected areas, we need to ensure this land is better managed and protected. The U.S. security community has a vested interest in stabilizing protected areas because of their sometimes enabling role in conflict and heightened opportunities for peacebuilding. The intelligence community could be tasked with collecting and sharing information on bad actors who threaten the integrity of critical protected areas. U.S. security forces could better protect conservation organizations operating in conflict zones.
- **Enhanced surveillance:** In addition to aggressively combating illegal wildlife trade, the United States needs to enhance monitoring and surveillance of wildlife imports to the country in the legal wildlife trade. Towards this end, Congress should consider wildlife health legislation to close pathways for the spread of zoonotic pathogens. Targeted bans on trade in particular species or from high-risk markets and supply chains are probably justifiable. A blanket ban on legal wildlife trade needs to be balanced by unintended consequences on human and animal welfare, including driving more trade underground into black markets.

