



Ministry
of Defence



SMA & UK MoD Present the “COVID-19: Second- and Third-Order Effects—System Shocks, Disruption, and Emergence” Speaker Series

Series Description

The US Joint Staff Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) and the UK Defence Science Technology Laboratory (Dstl; part of the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence [UK MoD])¹ have partnered to create the “COVID-19: Second- and Third-order Effects—System Shocks, Disruption, and Emergence” speaker series. With all of the focus on the very important tactical aspects of arresting the infectious disease and preserving life in response to the novel coronavirus (first-order effects), the aim of this series is to elevate the conversation to a more strategic level and consider the second- and third-order effects across global systems. In this context, it is perhaps helpful to view COVID-19 as a *Gray Rhino*,² one of many highly probable, high-impact, yet underappreciated threats that could present similar patterns of systemic shocks and disruption in the future.

Our approach in this series is to ask gifted thinkers to apply a combination of foresighting and sensemaking for the SMA and the UK MoD communities. Speakers will explain what they are watching, communicate how they are making sense of these observations and patterns (analytic approaches), and give us a hint of what we should be keeping an eye on (e.g., Are there historical patterns? Should we expect transformative changes to the global order and who might be advantaged by them? Where do the speakers see fragility, anti-fragility, adaption, and even perhaps emergent behaviors that may have consequences?). Our goals are to reach beyond monitoring; to actively understanding the breadth, complexity, and impact on national defense and security with the clear aim of working towards mitigation, resilience, and sustainability; and to turn thought into action.

What do the second- and third-order impacts from the Gray Rhino that is COVID-19 teach us about future Gray Rhinos beyond infectious disease? What does this Gray Rhino reveal about the often underappreciated relationships between national security, economic and financial systems, governance, populations and the social contract, and political stability throughout the globe? How might this understanding shape our decisions going forward? The future global world order, technology and COVID, the health and security nexus, societal resilience, and the utility of the systems thinking, and net assessment are just a few of the issues that we hope to explore in this series.

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² Popularized by Michele Wucker, a *gray rhino* is a highly probable, high impact yet neglected threat: kin to both the elephant in the room and the improbable and unforeseeable black swan. Gray rhinos are not random surprises but occur after a series of warnings and visible evidence.