

CREATION OF A NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING

under the direction and guidance of

Leon Fuerth

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INTRODUCTION

Forward Engagement is a technique for melding long-range forecasting and contemporary policy making in government. It is based on a belief that the tempo of major events is increasing, while longer perception and response times have diminished the capacity of government to shape outcomes. The Forward Engagement approach works to identify major potential developments originating further in the future than government normally thinks about, and to assess policy responses quickly, in the belief that it would be more effective to engage the future sooner rather than later. This technique is incorporated into an M.A. course I designed and teach at the Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University. Students are typically in international affairs or disciplines such as science policy.

At the beginning of each semester I ‘set the scene’ to establish the frame of reference—typically through a letter from a notional President of the United States, who addresses the students as if they were members of a Blue Ribbon Panel. The letter refers to work already done by earlier classes, and poses a revised set of questions.

For the students in the Spring 2004 semester, the question required them to complete an assessment of major potential future issues (called Future Contingencies of Interest) and of policy options

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relating to them. The students were also charged with designing a planning system to be established in the government, as a means to put long-range planning (Forward Engagement) on a steady-state basis.

These undertakings can draw on the work of past classes. Each class has access to the work of all its predecessors, but no class is bound by that work. Each class also has access to a number of expert guest speakers who broaden the students' sense of what is happening (or, in the case of long-range planning, *not* happening) in government. Every class works towards a final presentation of conclusions, presented in writing and briefed in person to a guest with significant credentials from the policy world. Reproduced here is a key portion of the report submitted by the students of the Spring semester Class of 2004. The Forward Engagement approach provided the students with a conceptual framework, but the ideas presented here are entirely their own.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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REPORT OF SPRING 2004 FORWARD ENGAGEMENT CLASS

Challenges to the democratic process grow daily as advances in technology and communication shrink both time and space. Democracies have thus far been able to debate the evolution of these technologies and their effects on society. However, the debate often lags behind developments. As changes in the inter-related fields of governance, science and technology, economics, security, and public health continue to accelerate, the United States may find itself increasingly incapacitated by the very democratic process that defines its identity. The US government will face domestic and international governance pressures related to demographic and environmental

changes, globalization, the evolving concept of the social contract, and the age of innovation. Therefore, the United States must improve its own government structure to foster the necessary foresight and flexibility that will enable the country to skillfully cope with the magnitude and velocity of change in the aforementioned fields. Indeed, increased adaptability may be absolutely crucial to preserving America's global leadership role.

The current structure of the US government and of the American political process is not conducive to long-term thinking. Elected officials concerned with pleasing their electorates, highlighting their achievements while in office, and reducing political risks have little incentive to factor long-term implications of policy into their decision-making processes. Moreover, as a whole, the government lacks a common analytic structure for thinking about the future. While some departments within government agencies engage in forecasting (e.g., in the intelligence community), there is no mechanism by which these departments and agencies can share and exchange information with one another. Currently, therefore, the benefit of any long-term strategic planning that takes place in government is not maximized to its potential. Bureaucratic procedures, the political process, and the process by which government agencies secure their funds foster a reactive, instead of a proactive system. A proactive forecasting process will allow the United States to better preserve its liberal democratic system of governance.

An effective government will be able to position itself to anticipate and respond to a wide array of events and trends, or future contingencies of interest (FCIs), that arise. It will have the ability to examine the volatile "nodes" where various FCIs intersect—technology, energy, environment, health, demographics, multipolarity, and the North-South divide—and to shape the path that the future takes. This article proposes a mechanism by which forecasting may be institutionalized in the policymaking process, allowing government officials and representatives to better understand domestic and international changes, providing them with a range of options, and encouraging them to consider the associated costs and benefits of particular courses of action. Such institutionalization will, ideally, make government less risk-averse and will also give future generations a voice in today's policy.

THE CASE FOR A COMMISSION FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING

“Everything is connected, and often with incredible sensitivity.”¹

Planning for the future is essential to good government. It should go without saying that a primary concern of the US government is the future and the long-term impact of policy decisions, yet little such planning takes place on a broad, systematic basis. Isolated groups in certain government agencies may exist, such as those that examine the future of technological developments for the Department of Defense (DoD), but their analysis is perforce limited by the mindset, goals, and culture of the departmental setting.

FCIs are the issues that a wider, deeper governmental planning process needs to study “nodes” provide the context within which these contingencies operate. Speaking of “contingencies” emphasizes that future events are contingent on the actions government takes today. Using the term node, or a connecting point at which several spheres of human interaction and other forms of FCIs meet, is a means to express interconnectedness and complexity. To thoroughly understand FCIs, then, one must be prepared to study them in the context of interconnectedness in which they evolve.

Taking context into account is vital. In today’s world everything and everybody is caught up in a nonlinear web of incentives, constraints, and connections. Recognizing complex system interactions demands understanding that a tiny change in one sphere of activity can have tremendous, transformative effects in another—seemingly slight perturbations and/or isolated circumstances can foster an environment of dynamic interaction and powerful outcomes. These nodes mark the nexus where systems and events collide, resulting in ripple effects that transmogrify into unintended consequences. Interconnection thus dramatically increases the complexity of forecasting and policy creation. Analyzing one of the systems in isolation, therefore, often leads to sub-optimal overall outcomes due to adverse, unintended effects in another system(s). As policymakers attempt to assess and prepare for future contingencies, there is prescience in having deep awareness of this interconnectedness inform their decision making.

Though the existence of nodes is a historical constant, awareness of complex interactions is uniquely important in today's world due to the widening, deepening, and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness over the past several decades.² The infusion of high-speed technology as an everyday infrastructure indicates one way in which contemporary globalization is collapsing time and compounding system interaction. Spheres of activity that might have once been distinguishable are now consistently cross-hatched and events are simultaneously unfolding at an unprecedented velocity.

Following are three examples of nodes that promise to alter the world the United States now leads. As their explanations imply, current and future transformations within these realms present the United States with both promising and foreboding scenarios, which the government must recognize in order to develop comprehensive, robust, and flexible policies. They capture the essence of the challenges that domestic and international governance structures must be able to plan for, absorb, and/or alter.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Changes in population and society can have a profound impact on the dynamics both within and among societies. FCIs such as population surges, declines, spiritual affiliations, national allegiances, and migration will interact with each other and drive trends such as urbanization, resource scarcity/unequal distribution, ethno-religious conflict, poverty, protectionism, infectious disease outbreaks, environmental degradation, and failed states. These, in turn, will contribute to shocks in those areas.³ "Each of these challenges is also a kind of Gordian knot of domestic and international, political and social, economic and security problems."⁴

Domestically, the retirement of the baby boomer generation, the rise of a majority-minority state, and a change in the religious backdrop of society may result in economic upheaval, potential inter-generational strife, and stark sectarian divisions. The shifting composition of US society in turn may shape alliance patterns and trade relationships, while also changing the criteria for international assistance and intervention.

Internationally, demographic shifts might place a higher demand on US military and economic resources in order to maintain global stability. The "youth bulge" in the global South, coupled with the

“graying” of the North, will place an enormous amount of pressure on both national and international institutions. Massive migration will create social and political instability, even as it promises to relieve some of the economic pressures of the aging West.

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental concerns spill over into science and technology, economics, security and governance, irrespective of the boundaries man attempts to impose upon them. Environmental dangers that fester in one region have transnational effects and consequences that affect others—global warming, water scarcity, over-fishing, and species extinction, to name a few. Environmental degradation will change the way people relate to their environment and to each other. It will also increase reliance on government to meet demands for resources that are less and less available. Economically, complete industries and livelihoods could be decimated by environmental shocks that are exacerbated or created by man. Technological innovations will continue to have the combined effect of improving society while straining the environment. Technology might also be the tool that enables societies to take better care of the environment through the development of alternative resources.

TECHNOLOGY

In the last several centuries, technology has been at the core of dramatic transformations in human societies, necessitating new concepts of society, boundaries, governance, etc. As an example, one could point to inventions such as the textile loom and the steam engine that powered the industrial revolution. Another example from the last few decades of the twentieth century has been the information revolution triggered by computers and the Internet.

Technology will continue to be a central factor in the revolutionary changes of the future. Innovations such as nanotechnology will create new economic wealth that could eradicate poverty and obviate resource wars. At the same time, its potential environmental effects are only starting to become known and suggest some challenges ahead. Advances in genetic engineering will also have profound implications for the environment, as well as the health and

well-being of humans. Progress in artificial intelligence, computing, and communications will change the role of human beings in society and alter the relationship between man and machine. The relative importance of machines in society will rise dramatically, which could lead to an eventual fusion of man and machine.

As in the past, the new technologies of the future will raise a number of moral and ethical dilemmas that societies must contend with. How societies and governments resolve these dilemmas will determine what changes will be required in the areas of governance, economics, and security. Self-replicating nanomachines, human cloning, stem cell research and genetically modified foods will continue to generate contentious debates. Greater questions, such as who will own the new technologies, and how the benefits will be shared among societies, are challenges that will require coordinated international action.

Countless other nodes exist, such as health, multipolarity, and energy. The unifying theme among nodes is that they are not isolated to one traditional sphere of human activity, but play out simultaneously across the realms of economics, security, governance, science and technology, and public health. The current era of “hyper-change” requires that policymakers be cognizant of intense system interactions and their far-reaching effects.

Unfortunately, at this time the US government infrastructure is highly segmented among departments, which is not conducive to building the coordinative efforts required to address and institutionalize an appreciation of interconnectivity. As interconnectivity deepens and time collapses, the available window for addressing nodes and their attendant FCIs shrinks and policy becomes more consequential. Therefore, there is prudence in establishing an institution dedicated to coordinative foresight and consequent collaborative policymaking—best accomplished through a national commission that simultaneously informs the policy decisions and direction of the President and the Congress. We suggest the enactment of a National Policy Planning Act such as the following.

THE NATIONAL POLICY PLANNING ACT

For the purpose of preparing the United States to meet the demands posed by an increasingly interconnected world and for the purpose of understanding how future contingencies of interest can

inform today's policy-making environment, the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Congress of the United States of America hereby create the National Commission for Strategic Planning (CSP).

Entrusted leaders and stewards of the United States, the Congress recognizes the importance of working with the Executive branch to assure a free and prosperous society in the United States, not only for today but also for future generations. In order for this to be possible, it is essential that the US government strive to anticipate—not simply react to—societal and technological developments that test our bureaucratic and democratic system of governance. The Congress understands the importance of actively assessing the linkages in policy work across agency and department boundaries in order to make such strategic positioning possible. Harmonizing the US government's various efforts in order to better confront future concerns in an era of rapid change will be a principal goal of the National Commission for Strategic Planning.

The CSP shall be established by the National Policy Planning Act of 2005 (NPP Act), Section 27, which states the need for forward-thinking measures to be taken to interconnect policy considerations within the executive and legislative branches of government. The Act, put forward by the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, must pass through both houses of Congress and be signed into action by the President. The mandate of this Act will be fully enacted by January 1, 2006. Pursuant to the directives of Congress and the President, it will begin full operation within one year from the date of enactment. Operation will entail a nine-member Board of Commissioners, staff, analysis/reporting and policy development capability including: evaluation of current policy to pursue consistency in current and future planning; generation of policy options; collection of industry information and trends related to agriculture, demographics, economy, energy, environment, governance, health, security, science and technology, and other areas of interest; and coordination with government bodies to facilitate the inclusion of industry information in policies pursued by members of Congress and the Executive Office.

The broad scope of the CSP will allow the Commission to utilize public and private experts in order to implement forward-thinking measures into policymakers' daily considerations. The develop-

ment of multifaceted policy options based on analytic and collaborative work will be the foundation of the CSP contribution, leaving policy implementation to the Congress and the President. The Commission, in its advisory role, shall be responsible for monitoring the integration of forecasting into the governance system as well. In this pursuit, the Commission will seek feedback and participation from executive agencies regarding the integration of future contingencies into ongoing US policy work. To complete its objectives, the CSP will utilize existing resources from government and non-government agencies, experts, and academics.

The National Commission for Strategic Planning shall be responsible for identifying future contingencies of interest pertinent to US interests and providing recommendations to the President, Congress, and relevant government agencies in order to coordinate efforts to create a consistent and informed national strategy. CSP shall assist in promoting long-term strategic goals for US policy and work in conjunction with the President and Congress to assure that future dimensions of policy options are taken into consideration by national policymakers across agencies. The CSP shall exist as an independent commission and has the capability to gather data from and provide impartial recommendations to all government committees, agencies, and actors while at the same time drawing considerably from private sector expertise to formulate its policy options. This mandate, in order to best serve the United States, shall renew without procedure every six years from the date of enactment, unless Congress initiates and secures passage of legislation terminating the Commission.

CSP MANDATE

In order to carry out its mandate, the CSP will focus on three main goals:

- Identifying FCIs that could impact US interests and evaluating their short- and long-term consequences. The nodes where FCIs commingle and combust continually create questions that Congress and the Executive should be prepared to address. To assist decisionmakers in recognizing and addressing these questions, the CSP will actively evaluate trends emerging from both the public and private sectors,

decipher their effects on US policy, coordinate solutions to bring consideration of these trends into policy work, and propose policy options attached to potential scenarios when appropriate. Consistent exploration of current trends in security, technology, society, law, and other fields will be a necessary component of the CSP's directives.

- Providing coherence to US policy by advising policy development and encouraging decision makers and policy staff to embrace their role as stewards of the future and excel as forward-engaged leaders. Review of current government efforts to share information and understand future contingencies of interest demonstrates an urgent need for sharing information and building foresight into policy work across inter- and intra-agency lines. The CSP will exist as the official resource and guide for government bodies to evaluate the interconnectivity of developments in multiple fields so they may apply them to their current policy considerations.
- Conducting periodic reviews of prior policy options to incorporate new developments and to allow for mid-course corrections. On a regular basis, the CSP is responsible for reviewing current policies, gauging effects of implementation, carefully reviewing the "unintended consequences" of certain policies, and exploring how they alter prior assumptions and CSP assessments. Based upon its regular findings, the CSP shall work with respective agencies to identify inconsistencies or recommend policy modifications that will enable the government to best adapt to changes in circumstances and potential trends or discontinuities. Such flagging and policy advisements shall be distributed on a case-by-case basis to the appropriate governmental parties and actors to enhance their policy work.

The NPP Act of 2005 grants the CSP, as an independent commission, authority to examine agency work and recommend potential policy modification. Under this directive, the Commission shall initiate its own investigation of trends and policy interactions based on the consensus of the CSP Board of Commissioners. The Commission's task forces, as described in detail below, shall be the first watch for industry, society, and environmental trends and pro-

vide informed initiatives for the Board to pursue. As its mandate states, the CSP shall also serve the Congress and the President directly. Therefore, upon the request of a Congressional committee chairperson or the Executive Office and as determined by its Board of Commissioners, the CSP shall conduct an assessment inquiry into a specified field. The CSP shall then work in conjunction with the appropriate congressional committees, government agencies, and departments to develop suitable policy options.⁵ In addition, within the White House, the CSP shall collaborate closely with the National Security Council (NSC), which according to the National Security Act of 1947 is tasked with “advising the President with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies.”⁶ The NSC shall be the primary receptor of information, findings, and policy options generated by the Commission. The Commission will also work with the President’s National Domestic Council and National Economic Council.

Assessment reports will be generated and delivered to the requesting body or member within a timely manner. All reports initiated by members of Congress shall be made available to other Congressional committees and members, in addition to the requestors. Reports produced by the CSP for the President or other governmental agencies shall be released to the relevant party and will be available for access by the Congress and the public, with the caveat of excluding information that is classified for national security purposes. As a forward-thinking institution that seeks to illuminate and inform the US policymaking process, the CSP will also disseminate findings as “living documents,” meaning they will be circulated for comment by designated congressional committees and among the Principals of the Executive Branch, understood most often as the Principals Committee of the National Security Council. Therefore, the CSP will not only provide advice and counsel on complexity and future-related issues to the US government’s policy-makers, but it will also create a constant feedback loop among agencies and advisory committees, as well as allowing multiple perspectives to permeate the process. It will ultimately be up to the Commissioners to crystallize the issues in such a way as to facilitate consumption by policymakers.

The Commission’s work will be transparent and participatory. CSP findings shall be made available to the public in order to generate public discussion and consideration for future contingencies.

cies of interest. To encourage free participation, the CSP will also at times hold round table discussions involving members of both the private and the public sectors. However, in order to enable all participants to speak freely, statements made during these deliberations and included in Commission findings will not be attributed to specific individuals or released during proceedings, although the names of these participants will be disclosed.

In order to meet its directives, the CSP shall have full access to information and, upon its request, be furnished with any necessary documents (classified or unclassified), statistics, estimates, recommendations, or technical assistance by executive branch departments and government agencies in a timely manner. As is mandated, the CSP shall also actively collaborate with private agencies, firms, associations, and experts to ensure that information is updated regularly and accurately through a survey of the best available knowledge. This will be necessary to carry out the CSP's information-collecting and reporting activities. In addition, the NPP Act mandates that findings of the CSP will be taken under advisement by the Executive in the preparation of the National Security Strategy of the United States.

ROLE IN THE BUDGET PROCESS

To further the goal of integrating CSP's work into all relevant government policy, the Commission will have a mandated role in the Executive's budget process and program review. In order to minimize the budget and staff needed for this additional work, the CSP will only participate at the highest-level working groups on the budget and will participate in annual or semiannual program review processes. This work would be performed by core staff, led by the Deputy Director. Staff work on the budget and program review processes would give the Commission valuable knowledge of current and future government programs and policies, allowing for additional review of inclusion of past FCI-related policy recommendations. Additionally, this will give CSP a voice when important decisions are being made. It will also ensure a greater degree of connection between the CSP and other government agencies. This builds on the Commission's strength of having government agency liaisons by fur-

thering communications and creating a more receptive environment for future CSP data requests, findings, and recommendations.⁷

The CSP would essentially have a role similar to that of other high-level reviewers such as Program Analysis and Evaluation at DoD, but would not be controlled by the department heads.⁸ However, to ensure independence and keep it out of the executive chain of command, it would not have the ability to direct executive branch policy. It could, as mandated above, have access to all relevant program data. The CSP would thus be given the opportunity to respond to budget and program plans in a timely manner during the process rather than making historical observations after the budget has been finalized. It would also have the opportunity to raise concerns when agency plans or assumptions contradict CSP findings.

STRUCTURE

The Commission is composed primarily of two entities, commissioners and task forces. Both include subject and policy experts from the public and private sectors with broad-ranging experience and expertise across several issue areas. While the primary duty of the task forces is to identify and analyze future contingencies of interest with an eye toward potential trajectories of development, it is the responsibility of the Commissioners to metastasize this information into sets of both short- and long-term policy options, which they present to the President and Congress for consideration.

FIGURE 1 - NATIONAL COMMISSION ON STRATEGIC PLANNING

COMMISSIONERS

The National Commission for Strategic Planning is composed of nine commissioners. Commissioners will be selected from among former high-level policymakers in the executive and legislative branches of government as well as the military and intelligence communities, and leaders in the private, non-governmental, and academic sectors. A common thread among these commissioners will be their wide recognition and reputation as experts, visionaries, and policy leaders who are not shy about overturning convention and asking uncomfortable questions that challenge any and every possible preconception.

The President will appoint five commissioners. Of these, only three may be members of the same political party. In addition, at least two of the President's five appointees must be private citizens. The Congress will appoint four commissioners (two selected by the Senate, two by the House of Representatives).⁹ Of the commissioners appointed by Congress, which are selected by House and Senate majority and minority leadership, at least two of the four must be private citizens. In addition, no more than two of the four may be members of the same political party. Therefore, the structure of the Board of Commissioners is such that it is a mix of public and private sector luminaries, offering a broad scope of expertise and opinion and not dominated by one political ideology.

Commissioners are appointed to serve staggered three-year terms.¹⁰ The turnover in commissioners ensures a greater diversity of ideas and reduces the chances of particular interests or ideologies dominating its work.¹¹ Commissioners cannot serve consecutive terms, but can be reappointed to the Commission after they have stepped down provided there has been a six-year gap between appointments. This is to ensure a healthy rotation of commissioners from all backgrounds and a constant mix of new ideas and insights,

while enabling commissioners who were especially beneficial to the Commission to have future opportunities to serve.

One commissioner will be appointed to serve as chairperson by the President. The chair position rotates every two years. The Chair delegates all management and administrative responsibility to the Executive Director of the Commission.

ROLE OF COMMISSIONERS

The Commissioners develop policy options to present to the President and Congress in relation to future contingencies of interest and their multifaceted interactions. Commissioners will maintain iterative long-term policy approaches reflective of new information and FCIs that emerge. Commissioners request and receive reports from the task forces (described below), through which they conduct continuing periodic reviews of policies for effectiveness and suggest mid-course corrections to adjust for new and emerging trends.

STAFF

Permanent commission staff are limited to four managerial positions, a core group of “subject matter experts” (SMEs), and support staff and adjunct researchers as necessary. However, the Commission is also “staffed” by employees rotated in from government agencies for a short-term period, whether for assistance on a specific FCI research project or for a two-year period to work on several issues.

Executive Director

Chosen by the Commissioners, the Executive Director is responsible for all managerial, operational, and administrative aspects of the CSP. This person also serves, together with the Chairperson, as the primary liaison with the White House and Congress. The Executive Director serves for a five-year term, and can serve two consecutive terms.

The Executive Director will ideally have extensive prior government and private sector experience and a comprehensive familiarity with the workings of federal agencies, the Executive Office, and Congress. He or she must qualify for a top-secret clearance

or better, and will preferably have experience in or exposure to forecasting and a strong, broad familiarity with the policy issues involved.

Deputy Director

The Deputy Director serves effectively as “chief of staff” for the Executive Director and directly supervises each of the Subject Matter Expert Task Forces. The Deputy Director represents the Commission in the budget and program review process. As with the Executive Director, the Deputy Director must qualify for a top-secret clearance or better.

Director of External Relations

The Director of External Relations serves under the Deputy Director and is the main point of contact for federal agencies, offices in the executive branch, and the private sector. The Director is also responsible for media relations and public outreach efforts. The Director will work directly with the Commission’s Government Agency Liaisons.

Chief Legal Counsel

The Chief Legal Counsel (CLC) will serve as an advisor to the Executive Director as well as to the Commissioners. The CLC will monitor the functions of the Commission in order to ensure that all operations, and particularly its interactions with Congress and the Executive branch, are conducted within constitutional and legal boundaries. In addition, the CLC will necessarily be involved as an advisor when national security matters require that the Commission receive or generate information classified under relevant federal statutes.

Government Agency Liaisons

The CSP will have a group of government liaisons responsible for coordinating with each federal agency, serving under the Director of External Relations but based primarily at their respective agencies. In conjunction with this, each federal agency will designate a liaison for the Commission who will be based primarily at the

Commission. This “exchange” of liaisons will reinforce efforts to coordinate between the Commission and government agencies.

Congressional Liaisons

Similar to the arrangement with federal agencies, the Commission also has designated congressional affairs liaisons who coordinate with the House and Senate.

TASK FORCES

Composition

At the core of the Commission are task forces staffed by subject matter experts. SMEs include scientists, practitioners, researchers, and government agency experts, some of whom will be rotated into the Commission for a two-year period from their home agency. SMEs will have expertise in a wide variety of areas, including experts in particular fields and people whose specialization lies at the intersection of traditionally separate fields. SMEs should have significant knowledge of and/or experience working with government agencies, Congress, and the political/budgetary process. Each task force will be composed of several SMEs who are permanent employees of the Commission, one of whom will be designated as the lead SME of the task force. It is standard operating procedure for the lead SME on an issue to include on his/her core team a SME for the other sectoral areas, in order to institutionalize the cross-cutting approach.

As noted above, task forces will also be staffed by two to three specialists/experts rotated in from government agencies, depending on the specific FCI projects at hand. These people will be rotated among the task forces, again to reinforce the integrated and crosscutting nature of the tasks at hand.

In addition, each task force will be assigned to organize a study group of outside experts who might come from academia and research institutions, think tanks, NGOs, and industry. The SMEs will have responsibility for devising various forecasting mechanisms that would be appropriate for the subject area.

Role of Task Forces

The role of the task forces is to detect, identify, analyze, and monitor future contingencies of interest, emerging trends, and discontinuities that fall primarily within the realm of their subject area. It is their responsibility to create “signposts” signaling various trends pointing to potential futures, to track the development of these trends over time, and provide potential policy options and responses. Task forces collectively prioritize FCIs based on the velocity of change, depth of consequences, and other relevant factors. They closely coordinate with each other on topics and issues that cut across sectoral lines in order to promote cross-fertilization of ideas and accommodate new information. Each task force is dedicated to a particular sector of potential FCIs and pays particular attention to the complex interaction of FCIs within these areas, while also noting cross-sector interactions among economics, environment, governance, security, science and technology, and public health.

Through their analyses, task forces generate periodic reports—subject to peer review by their external study group—to present to the Commissioners for consideration. These reports present detailed summaries of FCIs, expectations for their evolution, and a broad range of potential policy options having positive, neutral, and negative outcomes. The Commissioners review these reports, officially prioritize FCIs on the basis of their perceived ripeness for policy action, and develop a range of policy options, carefully illuminating their respective trade-offs and potential outcomes. The Commissioners then present this information to the Principals Committee of the NSC, as well as the Governmental Relations Committees and others for integration into current and future policy development and implementation.

FIGURE 2 - CSP ORGANIZATION CHART

TECHNIQUES

The Commission is designed to institutionalize within the government “a new approach for systematic consideration of a multiplicity of plausible futures in a way that will enhance our ability to make good decisions today in the face of deep uncertainty.”¹² Therefore, the activities undertaken by the CSP are designed to enhance the United States’ ability to interpret crosscutting trends and fault lines, anticipate future events, and develop policy alternatives for various contingencies. This will allow the US government maximum flexibility and position the United States as a leader on domestic, international, and transnational issues.

In pursuit of its mandate, the Commission’s task forces will employ various forecasting tools and methods—both qualitative and quantitative—including projection, prediction, scenarios, and Delphi Method to first recognize rapidly approaching systemic changes, then to achieve robust understandings of complex interactions, and finally to generate adaptable policy options that can be implemented in the present to cope with a range of contingencies that may emerge over time.

In developing policy options, task forces will draw from expertise in various think tanks, academic institutions, and forecasting organizations embedded within government agencies. CSP will explore and use cutting-edge forecasting techniques, thereby engaging in the informed “risk-taking” that it encourages throughout the government structure. For example, the task forces can work with the RAND Pardee Center to apply its computer-aided scenario generation tool, which importantly integrates values and policy options.¹³

Pursuant to their tasks explicated in the National Policy Planning Act, task forces will often convene roundtables that explore FCIs and their interactions resulting in comprehensive “findings” that will be fed into policy options presented to Congress and the Executive. Findings will be available to the public for comment. In this vein, part of the role of the CSP will be to interact with the public and serve as a clearinghouse for information. The goal of the CSP Website will be to emerge as a primary resource for cutting

edge information. At the same time, it will provide a network for the public to engage in forecasting and policy discussions.

In the sphere of public relations, CSP will participate in domestic and international conferences across sectors, such as computer/electronics, global warming, and various other social, medical, and scientific conferences. In addition, the CSP will sponsor an annual FCI conference to draw together experts in a public setting. This will infuse discussions and heretofore segmented business and public sectors with robust forecasting information, reinforcing cross-fertilization.¹⁴ As the CSP gains traction, at the Executive Director's discretion, it can attach funding opportunities to research proposal competitions—raising both the Commission's profile and the attention FCI work receives.

FCI CASE STUDY: GENETICS

The objective of this section is to illustrate the functioning of the CSP with the help of a practical example, in this case, genetics. The section will trace genetics from its identification as a potential FCI through its evolution as it is considered by the Commission, until it is finally fed into the policymaking process. The complex interactions within the field of genetics and among genetics and its FCI counterparts is also considered as part of the planning and policymaking processes.

Step 1: Issue Identification

Through the use of roundtables, the Delphi Method, and consultations with public and private sector experts, the Science and Technology Task Force identifies genetic engineering as a new development that could have enormous consequences for the future of human society.

Step 2: Research

Once the issue is identified, the Task Force enlists the cooperation of an appropriate think-tank or research institution to develop a thorough, scientific study of genetics, resulting in a comprehensive report that includes projections, scenarios, and potential wildcards. The report addresses the economic, social, ethical, environmental and security implications of advances in genetics. For example, the

report may identify the enormous potential of genetics to cure many diseases that are currently incurable such as cancer, HIV/AIDS, and diabetes. At the same time, the report raises the possibility of genetics being abused as a tool of discrimination. In addition, the report highlights issues of ethics involved in technologies such as human cloning and germ-line engineering and the social effects of using genetics for human enhancements.

Furthermore, the report details the interplay of genetics with FCIs in other nodes. The report describes new security implications for the United States brought about by the increasing capabilities of genetic engineering to produce powerful biological weapons. On the economic front, the report details the economic potential of advances in biotech field due to genetic engineering. It also considers the impact of increasing the human lifespan on the basic structures of the US economy, and the consequent relative gains experienced by developed countries of the North vis-à-vis their Southern counterparts. On the demographic front, the report considers the societal impact of an increasing percentage of geriatrics in the population. And on the environmental front, the report addresses the potential to create new varieties of genetically enhanced plants and animals. It also details the potential effects of such research on the ecological balance. Scenarios are developed that indicate possible future impacts of genetic engineering on international and domestic societies and governance.

Step 3: Policy Options

The report is returned to the Science and Technology Task Force, which works collaboratively with the other task forces to study the implications of genetic engineering, and to develop sets of policy options and their attendant scenarios. The Commissioners then review the report, the task force findings, and policy option deliberations.

The policy recommendations could include:

- A complete or partial ban on research in technologies such as human cloning and germ-line engineering coordinated and enforced universally.

- The prevention of discrimination based on genetics much like the ban of discrimination based on nationality, sex, race, or ethnicity.
- A recommendation for federal investment in research and educational infrastructure to expedite the developments in genetics and maintain or regain US leadership in science and technology.
- Modification of IPR laws to encourage private investment in genetic research while at the same time making its benefits available to every segment of society.
- A recommendation to reconsider the retirement age, the system of social welfare (social security, medicare, pensions, etc.)
- A recommendation to install regulatory framework to oversee research in genetically enhanced plants and animals to ensure that there is no irreversible danger to the environment.

Step 4: Infusion Into The Policy Process

The Commissioners interact with the government agency and congressional liaisons to discuss results and solicit feedback, allowing them to assess institutional and political constraints. The Commissioners then present the Congress (in this case targeting first the science, health, and foreign relations committees) and the Executive (through the NSC and the Science Council) with a distilled range of options to pursue regarding genetics.

Based on the policy options presented by the Commission, a desirable outcome would be for Congress in conjunction with the Executive Branch to develop forward thinking yet flexible legislation that includes sunset clauses allowing for periodic reevaluation of the issue. Depending on the policy recommendation and Congressional and Executive considerations, this could include laws that ban certain types of research in genetics, laws that make discrimination based on genetics illegal, budgetary changes that provide federal funds for building research and educational infrastructure, changes to the social security system, retirement, system of taxation in anticipation of increasing human longevities, changes to environmental regulatory framework, and legal changes to IPR laws.

In addition, the government agency liaisons, such as the Department of Health and Human Services, bring the report to their respective agencies and begin processes of reviewing policy options and building awareness of future trends and intersections, and thus flexibility, into their processes.

The Office of the President could initiate an international effort to build a treaty to ban certain types of genetic research such as cloning, germ-line engineering and research on genetics based biological weapons throughout the world. This treaty could resemble similar efforts in the areas of nuclear non-proliferation and the environment.

Step 5: Continuous Research

The Science and Technology Task Force at the direction of the Executive Director conducts periodic review of developments in the field of genetics to ensure that policy leads developments instead of reacting to them. The Task Force periodically conducts a review for new developments that either negate previous assumptions or bring new issues into play. It also monitors the effects and unintended consequences of current policies. Such activities could be conducted through the advisory services think tank. Follow-up findings on genetics will be provided periodically, when the Task Force recognizes consequential developments that merit immediate attention. Ongoing monitoring and activity may lead the Commissioners to offer mid-course options for policy modification.

POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS / CHALLENGES

While a National Commission for Strategic Planning would significantly enhance the government's ability to confront problems and threats before they emerge, significant obstacles must be overcome both to obtain policymakers' support for such a commission, and to make this entity an effective forward-engagement arm of government. Given the immediate problems that policymakers must address a publicly funded institution dealing with issues that may emerge in the next 10-20 years may be both portrayed and perceived as a waste of limited valuable resources. Indeed, for the CSP to successfully achieve its objectives, senior level policymakers and the general public must become convinced that the net benefits of the establishment of such a commission will outweigh its costs.

Regardless of the efforts taken, it would be safe to assume that some policymakers will remain both opposed to CSP's creation, and hostile to its mission. Given the Commission's broad mandate (analyzing and generating FCIs, and offering policy options), critics will argue that the Commission has no clearly defined mission. It may be characterized as an entity that is a "jack of all trades, while a master of nothing." Moreover, critics may claim that the Commission's functions do not differ significantly from those of think-tanks, congressional committees, and departments within various government agencies that engage in long-term forecasting. Despite the veracity of the claim that long-term forecasting does take place within certain strata of the government, and that there are many NGOs that engage in long-range analyses, the CSP will differ from these entities in that forward engagement will, for the first time, be systematically institutionalized in government.

Certainly, many will question the need for a governmental institutionalized mechanism to engage the future. Government bureaucracies may feel that the CSP is intruding into their particular areas of expertise, especially when it offers policy options that are contrary to what that particular bureaucracy considers an appropriate course of action. For instance, the CSP may conclude that a certain type of weapon will not address the security needs of the US either now or in the future, and should not, therefore, be developed. On the other hand, the Pentagon may disagree based on its own studies and analyses. In such a scenario, the CSP will be perceived as an obstacle rather than a tool. Indeed, the effectiveness of the CSP is dependent upon the credibility that government bureaucracies give it. As a coordinative commission, the CSP must receive information in good faith from different agencies in order to effectively help these agencies to collaborate in the implementation of a consistent national strategy. Given the interconnectedness of many of the issues and FCIs to be addressed by the CSP, inter-governmental cooperation is of the essence if the ultimate objectives behind the creation of the CSP are to be achieved. If government agencies perceive the Commission as an impediment, rather than a facilitator, to achieving their particular goals, then the credibility and effectiveness of this Commission will be significantly undermined.

Maintaining the leadership of the CSP as nonpartisan (or bipartisan) as possible, and maintaining the functional cohesiveness of

the CSP are further challenges that must be overcome to ensure the Commission's credibility. While necessary efforts have been made to diffuse the influence of politics in the functioning of the Commission (see above section on "structure"), it will be most difficult to make the Commission completely invulnerable to accusations of acting in a partisan manner. In fact, accusations of divisive partisanship may come from within the CSP. Commissioners may accuse SMEs of tailoring the conclusions of a given study to suit a particular political agenda, although this may be averted by the diversity of expertise included in the task forces. Furthermore, the conclusions of one particular task force may contradict the conclusions of another task force analyzing a related issue. Such contradictory conclusions may actually be beneficial, since they will prepare policymakers for alternative plausible futures. However, it is imperative that disagreements do not disintegrate into partisan bickering, since such an overt display of partisanship will be detrimental to the integrity and the credibility of the Commission.

Ultimately, whether the CSP serves its function depends largely on whether policymakers are willing to seriously consider the Commission's research and findings when drafting policy. This carries with it much risk. As stated in the introduction to this report, elected officials tend to consider the immediate, rather than the long-term impact of policy. They seek to minimize political risk, while highlighting their achievements in office. From a political standpoint, therefore, it makes little sense to consider the long-term impact of a policy drafted in the present. The creation of the CSP will probably not significantly minimize the political risk associated with elected officials' long-term thinking; however, it will encourage them to embrace their roles as stewards not only of the government, but of the future. There will always be risk when confronting issues and threats that have yet to materialize, or that may never materialize. However, until the present, this risk has been largely responsible for the lack of long-term thinking in government, a problem that the CSP will, ideally, resolve.

CONCLUSION

Exposure of the structural and bureaucratic roadblocks that kept the CIA and FBI from sharing information related to domestic terrorism through the 9/11 Commission's hearings, has focused

much attention on the interagency process and its deficiencies related to communication and forecasting. Therefore, circumstances may be ripe to introduce legislation that institutionalizes a collaborative, coordinative organization dedicated to responsible analysis and consideration of future contingencies of interest, such that it can feed a more prepared and forward-leaning policymaking process. There is an urgent need, brought home by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, but much farther-reaching in scope, for the United States to be better prepared for the opportunities and challenges that will accompany emerging trends and future discontinuities across the spectrum of security, economic, environmental, health, governance, and science and technology.

The virtue of the National Commission for Strategic Planning is its ability to evaluate the nexus of both threats and opportunities, as well as the multi-faceted interactions of FCIs. It institutionalizes the concept of surveying issues in relation to one another and detecting patterns of interaction, or nodes, that could lead to various futures. Additionally, it is designed to stay ahead of the curve, uncovering potential FCIs, demystifying at least some of their interactions, and making them accessible to policymakers through tying them to policy options and scenarios. The Commission's work will be iterative, and it will expand the inter-agency dialogue to include acknowledgement and integration of rapid change and future uncertainty into the decision-making process. Through its mandate it will encourage forward-engaged policy. And, with a "seat at the table," the Commission will be able to establish itself as a mission-critical, credible advisory institution on the future.

The US political and bureaucratic system currently suffers from its emphasis on segmented and reactive policy development. Yet these structural weaknesses by no means preclude the government's ability to adjust to shifting environmental, societal, and security demands in the current era of rapid change across societal, national, and electronic networks. Drawing on the strength of the United States' participative government, open society and innovative private sector, and building on the intellectual foundations of forecasting organizations embedded in various government agencies, the government can infuse the decision-making process with keen foresight. The CSP will enable the United States to construct flexible, robust policies that take into account the United States' unique na-

tional identity, enhance US leadership, and further global and national security. Recognizing the importance of both presidential and congressional leadership, and the role of elected officials as stewards of the future, the CSP seeks to elevate long-term, complex strategic planning to a level that makes it accessible to both the executive and legislative branches of government, and indeed makes it necessary to their operation. The CSP will provide the means and method for the United States to develop an integrative, forward-engaged approach to policy development and implementation—giving decisionmakers an enhanced ability to recognize and shape opportunity, manage change, and avert disaster.

NOTES

¹. M. Mitchell Waldrop. *Complexity: The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos* (Simon & Schuster: New York), p. 66.

². Held, Goldblatt, McGrew and Perraton. *Global Transformations*, (Stanford University Press), p. 2.

³. Robert Kaplan foresees large states, such as Cote d' Ivoire and Kenya, in sub-Saharan Africa crumbling under the pressures of the "youth bulge," which is expected to be more pronounced in Africa than in the Middle East. Robert Kaplan, "The World in 2005," *The Atlantic* (March 2002). Available at <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2002/03/kaplan.htm>; (28 January 2004).

⁴. David Rothkopf, "The Coming Battle of the Ages," *The Washington Post*, (February 1, 2004), p. B03.

⁵. In many cases, the Commission will work with the US House of Representatives' International Relations, Appropriations, Budget, Education and the Workforce, Science, and Governmental Reform committees and the US Senate's Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, Appropriations, Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, Environment and Public Works, Foreign Relations, Governmental Affairs, and Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions committees.

⁶. US Congress, "The National Security Act of 1947," in Karl F. Inderfurth and Loch K. Johnson, eds. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 24.

⁷. Creating a good work environment between the Commission and government agencies is critical to the CSP's mission. If a cooperative, collaborative relationship does not exist, the agencies can severely hamper the working of the CSP by delaying data requests, only rotating poor performers, and actively lobbying against CSP recommendations with their Congressional committees.

⁸. DoD's Office of Program Analysis and Evaluation: "Analyzes and evaluates plans, programs, and budgets in relation to US defense objectives, projected threats, allied contributions, estimated costs, and resource constraints; reviews, analyzes, and evaluates programs, including classified programs, for executing approved policies; provides leadership in developing and promoting improved analytical tools and methods for analyzing national security planning and the allocation of resources; ensures that the costs of DoD programs, including classified programs, are presented accurately and completely; assesses effects of DoD spending on the US economy, and evaluate alternative policies to ensure that DoD programs can be implemented efficiently." See <http://www.pae.osd.mil/>.

⁹. The advantage of an odd number of Commissioners lies in the fact that, like the Supreme Court, there will be a "tie-breaker." On the other hand, with an even number the Congress and the Executive would have equal clout.

¹⁰. Commissioners will serve full-time for their three-year appointments. The executive, administrative, and expert staff will be completely accessible to the Commissioners to assure rapid and complete exchange of information, i.e., if Commissioners want to talk with specific SMEs they should have that ability, with no bureaucratic barriers so long as the Executive Director is not cut out of the loop.

¹¹. There is some debate about whether Commissioner's terms should be staggered. Staggering could reduce the Commission's cohesiveness and detract from time spent working on FCIs as each new member would have to be brought up to speed. It could also raise more frequent opportunities for partisan bickering over appointments. At the same time, it would be detrimental to the ongoing work of the Commission to have a complete changing of the guard every three years, which would be the outcome if a staggered system were not implemented.

¹². Robert J. Lempert, Steven W. Popper, Steven C. Banks. *Shaping the Next One Hundred Years: New Methods for Quantitative, Long-Term Policy Analysis* (Arlington, VA: RAND, 2003), p. iii.

¹³. Ibid.

¹⁴. The Commission will not have any formal association with international organizations, at least until it is firmly established in the United States, especially politically. The recommendations of

the Commission will affect all branches of government; therefore, those recommendations will migrate out to the international community along already established lines of communication. In addition, the scientific community in the United States—both hard and soft sciences—has frequent exchanges with others around the world and thus will present inclusive insights. Interaction on an international level can take place at various conferences and through interaction with experts, both foreign and domestic.