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ASSOCIATES

FUTURE STATES  
FORUM

The Future of National Security

**SEPTEMBER 12, 2012**

**DINNER DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS**

We discussed the **future of national security** and how organizations can prepare today for the uncertainty of tomorrow.

As the world becomes more socially, economically, and culturally connected, national security issues and threats will evolve at an ever increasing pace. The abilities of adversaries to conduct attacks will become progressively more complex and difficult to predict. The face of our adversaries has changed, and continues to change, from what we have historically seen as state actors to the face of the future adversary – non-state actors.

We explored questions such as:

“What is the true nature of state versus non-state actor and how will that shape national security in the future?”

“How does the United States leverage its non-state actors (businesses) to reach strategic goals?”

“How does a state actor respond to non-state threats in a timely, accurate, and effective manner in the information age?”

“How does the United States mitigate effects and synthesize efforts in the fields of counter-terrorism, cyber threats, and competing economic interests to produce a national strategy?”

On September 12, 2012, Toffler Associates hosted a dinner with leaders from both public and private sectors to discuss the future of National Security. This report is a summary of our discussion. Please note that it is not a transcript, but rather a “rendering” that condenses, eliminates, expands, and combines some areas of discussion to illuminate themes that emerged. Any errors in the interpretation or nuances are ours.

We posed several questions to spark the conversation:

- What is the true nature of state versus non-state actors and how will that shape national security in the future?
- How does the United States work with and leverage non-state actors, such as businesses, to forward strategic goals and interests?
- How has widespread access to information and connectivity shifted power to non-state actors and how do state actors (such as the US) respond to emerging threats from such entities?
- How does the United States mitigate effects and synthesize efforts in competing economic interests, counter-terrorism, and cyber threats to produce a national strategy?

Participants shared a wide range of views on multiple aspects of threats, security, and the potential ways for US public and private entities to cooperate in support of a national strategy. Over the course of the evening, several primary themes emerged depicting how conventional ways of thinking about national security have changed:

- One of the largest threats facing the US is the increasing powerful of non-state actors seeking to disrupt and destroy US interests worldwide.
- The US lacks a clear and coherent national security strategy; rather we operate from one national security crisis to the next without true long-term planning. We seem to focus on the ‘urgent’ of the day to day versus the ‘important’ of long term strategic goals.
- As conventional national security posture transforms across the globe, the US must find a way to continue to project power abroad in the absence of a large static footprint.
- Both legitimate and illicit non-state actors have growing power bases – a synchronization of efforts between state and non-state actors can yield greater results for US national interests and mitigate the effects of illicit non-state actors.
- Real time information cannot be adjudicated by a reactionary and cumbersome decision cycle. The ability to access information or promote misinformation, in real time has forced traditional decision cycles to shorten drastically and lead to a significant challenge for the US.

The evening's discussions explored the myriad of concepts, facets, and aspects that constitute national security in the 21st Century. The fundamental question we tried to answer was, "**What are the issues that will drive national security?**" The answers highlighted the ever changing world in which we live and the changing concepts of what security means to the nation. They included not only the means by which national security can be threatened, but also the type of effects such acts can have on the nation as well as the type of actors that pose a threat to national security. The world has changed significantly and how we are able to adapt our policies, strategies, and develop global relationships will be the key to our ability to ensure our national security.

The timing of the dinner provided a common point of discussion for the evening, as it took place immediately following the September 11, 2012, terror attack on the US Consulate in Benghazi, Libya. We talked about the proactive and reactive nature of the use of force to quell a threat, as well as how this situation and the events surrounding it impact the decision to respond in accordance with our national security interests. Some dinner participants noted that the perception of an action has a much more significant impact throughout modern societies than the tangible effect an act achieves. This concept was highlighted through discussion of the additional deployment of US troops as a part of the "surge" strategy, the self immolation of a street vendor in Tunisia a year ago, or the political response to a particular event. The myriad of activities occurring throughout the world on a daily basis are enhanced by the ease and speed at which information flows from the most remote to the most populated or culturally diverse areas of the world.

Participants discussed the notion that we are in a time where the amount of information is growing at an increasingly rapid pace in a global environment at a speed that has made null and void the traditional variables of distance and time. A clear example is that "... [governments] can't control information anymore; these populations are more awakened, therefore the **governments are going to have to be more responsive and inclusive.**" While generally viewed as a positive change, awakened citizenries which require rapid and effective responsiveness from their governments can lead to an additional threat. This threat is the use of information (or misinformation) by an adversary to conduct deception operations in order to threaten a government's legitimacy or conduct cyber attacks. Governments must balance the needs of their respective populations with the inherent risk associated with free information flow and shorter response times. Therefore, a government's ability to shape the global environment utilizing the mass of information will become a powerful tool in maintaining national security.

A significant threat highlighted by participants was the cyber and economic threat posed by China. The nature of cyber threats allows adversarial actors to deliver immense harm almost instantly, and in ways very different than traditional physical threats. Targets of attack are no

longer just brick and mortar infrastructure—they increasingly include our economic markets. There are countless methods our adversaries use to influence, disrupt, and destroy markets and financial institutions, critical infrastructure networks and data centers, and information flow. The same techniques are used to steal intellectual property. Given our current environment, we have comparatively less experience in the cyber domain than we have at conventional warfare and combating terrorism. Our adversaries have become proficient in cyber warfare and we are still learning how to operate in a cyber environment where a single individual is capable of conducting an attack against a state or industry.

Dinner participants discussed how we can better prepare our nation to understand who our adversaries are. At the crux of this discussion was the topic of state versus non-state actors. The dialogue between these two types of entities, their interaction, and the impact of that exchange on foreign policy will become a significant driver for planning the future of national security. As we begin to understand our non-state adversaries, the question arose: “How can personal and business interests impact wider geopolitical issues?” Non-state actors may be able to align strategically with US national interests and thus help promote national security. In an example of Google, which is a multi-national non-state actor, questions arose as to how it can leverage its immense power base and to what end. If Google were to align its interests abroad with those of the US, nation building and other traditional state to state actions could be conducted, or at least aided by non-state entities. Similarly, there could be **alliances or convergences of interests of both state and non-state actors like a potential “Google-NATO” nexus**, or the ability for a company to carry out traditional business operations under the auspices of the United States Government.

Another aspect of non-state actors discussed was the threat they can pose to US national security; the most popular example being Al Qaeda. As participants noted, we refer to Al Qaeda as a non-state actor, which begs the question: “Are they only a non-state actor because they have not yet had the opportunity to establish an official state?” This alternative perspective was posed with the question: “What right does a state have to kill for the advancement of their idea, and if a state can commit those activities, why couldn't a non-state actor do the same?” Thus, it might benefit our national interest and strategy to view non-state actors in terms of the ideas they espouse so as to make more informed national security decisions regarding our actions and reactions towards them. The government must rely on its relationships with both other state actors and with non-state actors to mitigate such potential threats.

We have seen non-state actors conduct acts against a state actor, as in the case of Al Q'aeda. Participants questioned how state actors will respond when corporations develop a separate foreign policy. Participants noted that this is already occurring today where multi-national corporations have region-specific policies throughout the world. Could, for example,

a situation emerge where multinational, non-state actors gain such influence and power that, when citizens have a problem, they rely on these organizations for assistance instead of locally elected officials? This concept could be expanded not only to corporations, but also to such entities as environmental groups. These groups have been seen to act against corporations, other non-state actors, and even state actors. Can and will these organizations compliment the national interests of the states they are associated with? Do these organizations have natural symmetries with other state organizations and can they be advocates of national security? The US must understand the commercial and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) landscape across diverse geographical and cultural environments; this will enable us to understand opportunities and risks in order to make informed and timely decisions across the globe.

Participants noted that addressing national security in the future will require the US to consider this state versus non-state problem set. One participant posited was that we could view the problem set through three lenses: response of the government, response of the markets, and the response of social media. Comprehending these three views could give decision makers a more holistic grasp on what impacts could shape national security. As society moves further into the Knowledge Age, the processes by which decisions are made are changing, requiring us to consider how our adversaries are changing themselves. Each of these factors will play an increasingly important role in how the global population perceives any act.

As a nation, we must look at the aforementioned factors through the lens of the actor in order to make those decisions which are best for the security of our national interests. We must determine **the intersections of the interests of national security and those of corporations and social groups**. The diverse stakeholders of these groups have more opportunities to directly impact their economic interests by conducting immediate transactions to, for example, either buy or sell shares of a corporation that does or does not satisfy their personal objectives. Stakeholders, however, do not have the same ability to impact national security since the opportunity to do so, through elections, only arises every two, four, or six years. This results in citizens becoming more short-sighted in their decision making since impacts are seen immediately. This then leads to the nation being hampered by short-sighted goals and an inability to make a clear, concise, and comprehensive long-term national strategy.

The ability of the United States to maintain National Security today requires a strategy with a vision for the future. The current method of developing strategy by the method of ends, ways, and means does not provide the nation a true azimuth for which difficult decisions are made and provide the critical guidance for the future. The current methods by which strategy is developed are, as stated by one participant, "intellectually bankrupt" and must be evaluated

if we want to improve the ability to develop sound strategy. The environment has changed; therefore how we develop our strategy must change so as well.



## Conclusion:

We are faced with an increasingly complex future, and for the United States to continue to be a leader among nations we must realize that success hinges on the integration of national, economic, social, and cultural interests. It is at the convergence of these interests that the United States can shape the future and establish a national security strategy that can address the issues facing the world. That national strategy will align each actor's needs to move society forward and provide security in the national interest. The often short-sighted mindset of populations must be balanced by a longer-term perspective with the ability to grasp significant factors impacting national security. It will be **important to maintain our national values, while ensuring we do not impose those values on nations or populations that have their own strong but differing values.** National security will rely on our understanding of these other cultures, and our ability to work with them to create a level playing field that is interconnected through a sharing of information. This cooperation and information sharing will enable us to meet each need as it arises in a timely manner with an eye to the long-term strategy of national security.

We concluded the evening by agreeing that the key to the United States' future and a successful national security strategy will be partnering with state actors and non-state actors alike, and building relationships with their populations and organizations.



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## TOFFLER ASSOCIATES

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Toffler Associates is a strategy consultancy, helping leaders build the extraordinary organizations of tomorrow. We serve as a catalyst for change for clients with tough problems to solve, creating impact through knowledge of the forces of change that will shape the future.

To accomplish this, we employ a collaborative approach to guide clients in the development of Knowledge Age business strategies. Our **Future Proof<sup>SM</sup>** business consulting service provides clarity by identifying the risks and opportunities that may lie ahead, enabling leaders to implement the changes necessary to create value, to sustain growth and to succeed in future operating environments.

We work with public-sector clients, such as federal agencies, the intelligence community, associations and educational institutions, to develop and implement ways to use resources more effectively and to build lasting public trust. We also work with private-sector clients, like those in the transportation, aerospace, chemical, advanced materials, information technology and defense markets, to create and execute strategies that drive top-line growth.

We find daily inspiration in working with commercial enterprises and government agencies that are creating something that really matters to people; clients who are trying to make a difference in all of our lives. Our purpose is to help them achieve that and it is the passion that unites our firm as one community.



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