



Ministry  
of Defence

## **SMA UK MoD Panel Discussion**

### **Harnessing Futures and Foresighting Techniques – Using Methods, Approaches, and Multidisciplinary Teams to Understand the Strategic Implications of COVID**

*Part of the SMA UK MoD Speaker Series, entitled*

*COVID-19: Second- and Third-Order Effects—System  
Shocks, Disruption, and Emergence*

**Tuesday 29 September 2020  
1030-1200 EDT/1530-1700 GMT**

**[Join the Event](#) via MS Teams**

Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment (SMA) provides planning support to Commands with complex operational imperatives requiring multi-agency, multi-disciplinary solutions that are NOT within core Service/Agency competency. Solutions and participants are sought across USG and beyond. SMA is accepted and synchronized by Joint Staff/J-39 DDGO and executed by ASD (EC&P).

# Agenda

**Panelists:** The panelists that will be taking part in this discussion, as well as a brief description of their briefs, are listed below.

- **Mr. Andrew Curry** (Director of Futures, School of International Futures (SOIF))
  - Mr. Curry will talk about predictable surprises, long futures, and learning from patterns of change.
- **Dr. Rebecca Braun** (Professor of Modern Languages and Creative Futures, Lancaster University, UK)
  - Dr. Braun's talk, entitled "Imagining Different Times," will explain the interdisciplinary 'social futures' approach that we have pioneered at Lancaster University, UK, and applied to multiple challenges at local, national, and global levels. After an initial overview of this kind of work, I will invite listeners to explore how Miguel de Cervantes's founding Spanish novel, *Don Quixote*, models an idea of resilience that challenges conventional ideas of time and causality and could be used when thinking through the second- and third-order challenges of Covid-19 today.
- **Mr. Philip Tovey** (Head of Futures and Emerging Technology, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra))
  - During his brief, entitled "Rethinking Temporal Advantage Post-COVID," Mr. Tovey will suggest that Covid-19, or disease X ([Simpson et al, 2020](#)), was not unforeseen. That is to say, it was not a failing of foresight ([Bryce, 2020](#); [Foreign Policy, 2020](#)). Yet many Governments were underprepared. In this talk, I will argue the primary cause of global pandemic unpreparedness was an under conceptualised theory of temporality, not the inability to 'see' things coming ([Crews, 2020](#); [Rohrbeck et al, 2018](#)) through the application of foresight, but the idea that time has a fixed ontology or 'temporal reality' ([Bluedorn, 2020](#)). There is temporal advantage to be gained, however, it has nothing to do with time. Holding firm to a fixed temporal reality then creates a self-imposed 'temporal disadvantage' as to quote Noë ([2004](#)) 'We only perceive what there is; but we only perceive it when it is there, i.e., when it is within reach (p.662). We are putting Covid-19, like all the other Global Catastrophic Risks and distant alternative futures, 'out of reach'. In doing so, they are thus 'unperceivable'. In this rallying cry for temporal pluralism, for 'time rebels' and 7 generation thinkers ([Krznaric](#)), I will suggest that securing temporal advantage is about rethinking our thoughts on the phenomenology of future and conceiving it not of a temporal space, but of an experiential one where fictional cognitive objects (Lampert, 2018) form an enhanced, if not elaborate, anticipatory tapestry laced with futures.

**Speaker 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])<sup>1</sup> 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*,<sup>2</sup> 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,

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

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.

## Speaker Biographies

### **Mr. Andrew Curry (Director of Futures, School of International Futures (SOIF))**

Andrew Curry is an internationally known futurist, and over his 20 years working in the field he has directed scores of projects across the public sector, the not-for-profit sector, and the commercial sector. Much of his work as a futurist has been in the area where social, economic and technology trends interact. Current projects include one on the future of food and food environments, the future of humanitarianism, and a learning project with the US nuclear deproliferation organisation, N Square.

He joined SOIF as its Director of Futures in 2019 from the Futures Practice of Kantar Consulting, where he was until 2018 managing editor of the company's Future Perspectives thought leadership series.



He has published widely on futures subjects, including – with Anthony Hodgson – the first academic paper on the Three Horizons method. He edits the Association of Professional Futurists' newsletter, Compass and is on the advisory board of the World Futures Review.

### **Dr. Rebecca Braun (Professor of Modern Languages and Creative Futures, Lancaster University, UK)**

Rebecca Braun (D.Phil Oxon) is Professor of Modern Languages and Creative Futures at Lancaster University, UK, where she directs the multidisciplinary Institute for Social Futures ([www.lancaster.ac.uk/social-futures](http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/social-futures)). Originally trained in both European literature and German culture and society, she now regularly provides expertise to stakeholders across UK government on how creative techniques can improve high-level visioning and strategic planning in a way that takes full account of people's evolving values, practices, and beliefs.

### **Mr. Phil Tovey (Head of Futures and Emerging Technology, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra))**

**BIO.** Phil is the Head of Futures and Emerging Technology at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in the UK. Phil leads a team in providing strategic foresight on UK Futures Trajectories and Pathways Analysis, Global Catastrophic Risk to the UK's environment, food and rural systems, Futures narratives and Weak Signals Intelligence Gathering. A qualified trainer, assessor and internal quality assurer, Phil is a lead instructor on the UK Futures Development Programme. Phil specialises in the theory-praxis nexus of Futures Studies, with a special interest in cognitive phenomenological approaches to developing methods for strategic decision-making; especially in intergenerational policy-making and the human-nature interface. Before joining Defra, Phil was an embedded researcher and lead on Leadership and Ethics cultural change for Avon and Somerset Police. A former Royal Marines Junior Commander, with operational tours in Northern Ireland, Afghanistan, and Africa specialising in Modern Urban Combat, Phil's futuring is grounded in experiences of operational command. Phil is a serving Army Reservist, working in Information Operations developing Anticipatory StratComms.

**EDUCATION.** Currently completing a MSc by Research in Policing, focusing on the ethics of preventative strategy using cognitive phenomenology and existentialism to examine futurity in UK policing strategy. Holds a Chartered Management Institute Level 7 certificate in Strategic Leadership and an Institute of Leadership and Management Level 7 certificate in Executive Coaching.