SMA UK MoD
Panel Discussion

Alternative Futures of Geopolitical Competition in a Post-COVID-19 World (Part II of II)

Part of the SMA UK MoD Speaker Series, entitled

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

Wednesday 16 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

Panel Overview: The COVID-19 pandemic sheds an important light on the criticality of futures-based thinking to move us beyond conventional assumptions and positions. In today's chaotic cycle of rapid change, growing complexity, and radical uncertainty, the national security establishment must develop the skills and flexibility to adapt to the unexpected. To be sure, the fallout from COVID-19 has revealed overlooked vulnerabilities for our supply chains, our society, our economy, and—most pertinent for this report— our national security strategy, which relies on all three.

The primary aim of the report upon which this discussion is based is to disrupt how we conceptualize national security futures. Rather than arrive at "definitive" conclusions or prescribe budgetary, policy, or force structure recommendations, this document instead challenges us to consider how the future can defy accepted probabilities to affect the Department of Defense and the Department of the Air Force.

We are living far from "equilibrium system," when novel and even catastrophic change are most likely. However, in every alternative future—no matter how severe or unexpected—there are always winners and losers. The organizations best positioned to seize and incorporate the exploits of the new order will be those with the capability to perceive, learn, and adapt even when the signals from tomorrow may seem utterly ridiculous today.

The Global Futures Report upon which this discussion is based can be found at:
https://www.afwic.af.mil/Portals/72/Documents/AFWIC%20Global%20Futures%20Report_FINAL.pdf?ver=2020-06-18-124149-070.

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.

Speakers: The speakers for this discussion and their topics of discussion are provided below.

- **Lt Col Jake Sotiriadis, PhD** (US Air Force AF/A5AC)
    - Futures Introduction
    - The Future of Transatlantic Relations
- **Ms. Vera Zakem** (Technology for Global Security)
    - The Future of Malign Influence Campaigns
- **Mr. Shannon McGurk** (Air Force Warfighting Integration Capability, Strategic Foresight and Futures Branch)
    - The Future of China's Belt and Road Initiative

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[1] SMA POC: Nicole Peterson, npeterson@nsiteam.com; UK POC: Ella Fleming, efleming@mail.dstl.gov.uk
[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.

Speaker Biographies

Mr. Shannon McGurk (Air Force Warfighting Integration Capability, Strategic Foresight and Futures Branch)

Mr. Shannon McGurk is a retired Army Ground Cavalry China Foreign Area Officer. While on active duty, he commanded at the Troop level and served as an Executive Officer at the Squadron level. He served on the Joint Staff, Army Staff, as the Defense Intelligence Agency China Desk Officer, and as an Assistant Army Attaché at the U.S. Embassy, Beijing. Upon retirement from the U.S. Army, he worked throughout the Intelligence and Operations communities for Northrop Grumman, TASC, ManTech and General Dynamics and throughout the inter-agency community on the Air Staff as an Air Force civilian. Mr. McGurk recently returned from Afghanistan and is currently working as a Long Term Analyst and Futurist consultant for the Air Force Warfighting Integration Capability, Strategic Foresight and Futures Branch. He lives with his wife and children in Virginia.

Lt Col Jake Sotiriadis, PhD (US Air Force AF/A5AC)

Dr. Jake Sotiriadis is the Air Force's senior futurist and chief of strategic foresight. His work spans the nexus of disruptive technology, geopolitical risk analysis, and foresight analytics. He has served as advisor to the U.S. Ambassador to Germany, intelligence briefer to the Secretary and Chief of Staff of the Air Force, and Deputy Chief of the Weapons and Space Division at the National Security Agency. His work as a thought leader has been featured internationally in: The Diplomat, Defense News, C4ISR Journal, China-US Focus, The Daily (Kathimerini), and the Middle East Institute. He holds a Ph.D. in political science and geopolitical futures from the University of Hawaii at Manoa and master's degrees from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, and the Air Command and Staff College. He speaks German, Greek, and Spanish.

Ms. Vera Zakem (Technology for Global Security)

Vera Zakem is a Senior Technology and Policy Advisor with Technology for Global Security. She is a recognized leader, driving strategy at the intersection of global threats, policy, emerging technologies and innovation, and organizational strategy and operations. Vera is a recognized expert on Russian influence and disinformation, the impact that technology plays in society and democracy, terrorism, and human security and stability. Prior to joining as Tech4GS as a Senior Advisor, Vera led strategy and research at Twitter's operations, leading initiatives to continuously serve Twitter's customers globally. Prior, she served as a leader in strategy, partnerships, research, and policy engagement at various think tanks and industry organizations in Washington, DC, including the CNA Corporation, where she spearheaded initiatives on global influence and Russia's indirect approaches. Vera is a Term Member at the Council on Foreign Relations, was selected as a Young Leader (Class of 1999) as part of Swiss-American Foundation, and has been recognized by Working Mother Magazine. She received her M.A. from the Johns Hopkins University, and is fluent in Russian and Spanish.