



**Multiple Futures Project:
Trends and Challenges in Global Security to 2030**

27 May 2008, RUSI, Whitehall, London

The Multiple Futures roundtable held at the Royal United Services Institute was the first in a series of events organized by the Allied Command Transformation (ACT). The difficult task for the participants of the joint RUSI-ACT initiative was identifying future trends and challenges that will dominate the security environment of 2030. Academics, civilians and military NATO representatives and policy practitioners brought their expertise to Whitehall to brainstorm future security challenges for the Alliance. Heeding the advice of the convenors, participants demonstrated restraint by maintaining focus in what often can often be an excessively broad spectrum of future speculations. The group was not there to predict the future, but rather to concretely assess drivers and futures that will challenge NATO in the coming decades.

The morning session began after a brief look at the theoretical underpinnings of potential future scenarios. The group considered the potential return to great powers, neo-medievalism, and the tiered model, and as well as the chaos model. Presentations from chosen participants helped to set the scene and facilitate discussion about the current and future trends dominating the security environment. Speakers were careful to highlight issues associated with rate of change. On a global scale change happens incrementally, and very often we cannot see factors coming until they are not only at our doorstep, but in our very own foyer. Amidst these incremental changes, so-called Black Swan events like 9/11 remind us of the element of strategic, or as some choose to call it, tactical surprise. While it is easy to wax philosophical about these events and the role of humanity, practical consideration turned the group's focus back to NATO role and actual trends that can be extrapolated into the future. Data and predictive diagrams presented identified particular trends, focusing

on globalization, global inequality and climate change. These among other trends were then located globally, and projected over the next 25 years. Comments demonstrated that the Euro-Atlantic region may not face the direct force of future trends, such as globalization, increased urbanization, food scarcity, lack of energy resources or climate change, but increased interdependence of the globe is such that challenges can seamlessly move from one region to the next. Our next speaker highlighted the importance of developing an intellectual framework that supports concrete recommendations for military capabilities. A lively discussion followed the presentations, as the group began to flesh out ideas so as to better understand the task at hand. During this deliberation, an interesting and important dichotomy arose: the difference between actionable intelligence and organizational knowledge/learning. The group had to recognize that while the former category would be welcome, the pragmatic goal for this session was the latter.

The afternoon session provided an opportunity for participants to engage with these trends, or drivers, and hypothesize what the worst potential future conditions would look like for NATO, circa 2030. The first part focused on identifying drivers and the potential impact and uncertainty of each of these drivers. Using their personal expertise, each individual brought their suggestions of the ten drivers that they felt to be the most important to discuss in four small groups. Following the brief discussions, each group presented their findings to the others. While there were some new additions to the nine drivers - globalisation, demographics, urbanisation, environment, energy, national & international governance, networks & communications, terrorism & religious extremism and technology (which were presented by ACT in the pre-roundtable reading materials) there were some notable contributions in the form of geo-political restructuring, international law, and culture. This group work brought on a number of semantic disagreements over primary and secondary drivers, the nature of drivers, what constitutes terrorism among others.

Using small group work once again, the second part of the afternoon session requested that participants mix NATO a toxic cocktail, i.e. worst possible conditions for the year 2030. Once individuals put forward their suggestions to the small groups, and subsequently presented them to the group at large, it was clear that there were some overlaps within the group. Amid the possibilities of the 288 different permutations it was clear that forms of governance, energy & resources, demographics, terrorism, the environment and networks were all of high importance to the participants. The next big challenge remains, which is to link these drivers and futures to context of NATO's role in international security. This may seem to be an abstraction beyond utility, but a simple suspension of disbelief helps the participant look towards the broader strategic picture. The session and the day was wrapped up with a demonstration of how ACT will amalgamate the information obtained throughout these series of workshops, and apply it to potential future scenarios.

Questions regarding the methodological soundness of the project arose continuously throughout the day, marking security sector ambivalence towards futures projects and the potential value they could add to NATO transformation. However, by the end of the workshop, enthusiasm for the project was clear, and a welcome addition to the transformation process at NATO. As the Multiple Futures Project progresses and begins look at not only external, but internal drivers of the Alliance, productive strides should be made in helping NATO to sketch the future security environment as well as the role it will play in that environment.

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