

*Message from notional President to the Spring 2003 Panel:*

When I began my term as president, I felt a deep concern that with increasing frequency, events of major importance were catching the government of the United States by surprise, even though these developments – upon reflection after the fact – always had origins far in advance of the moment when their full impact registered. Even though the United States enjoys great reserves of power and influence, it troubled me that if we were not to do a better job of thinking “forward,” there might come a moment when our capacities for response would be exceeded in a disastrous way: essentially, because we would not have had time enough as a democratic system to reflect, debate and consider alternatives.

Therefore, I directed that a panel of experts be formed, to look at the more distant future in terms of four general categories: economics, security, governance, and science and technology. I also asked that this panel consider ways to improve the capacity of the executive branch to think in the longer term, and to consider possible lines of response to major potential developments. The response from that first panel was very useful, but also gave rise to new questions, which encouraged me to repeat the process, and with the panel that preceded yours, to try to institutionalize this forward-scanning process in the form of an Office for Technological and Strategic Assessment (OTSA). In sum, there have been four total panel cycles – each more useful than the last – and I writing to you to enlist your help in the fifth exercise of this type.

Your most recent predecessors submitted a report to me in December 2002, which contained some striking insights. Looking at all the work done before their own, they concluded that my original four-part division of the world was too artificial, in view of the increasingly complex interactions between these four categories. Indeed, they appear to have concluded that the interactions themselves may be the most important phenomena to identify. Therefore, the group concluded that all subjects previously considered ought best be aggregated into two great clusters of issues: one having to do with humankind and the biosphere; the other, with human organization. The group also gave special emphasis to two observations received from their predecessors: first, having to do with the impact of modern information networking on the depth and velocity of change in all domains; and second, the need to take account of different rates of change.

Overall, with respect to the first cluster, the panel concluded that the challenge is to “successfully create a self-sustaining world, where humans, the environment, and technology all positively interact with each other to further American interests.” With respect to the second cluster, the panel emphasized the need to “reconcile the tension between security and freedom.” With respect to OTSA, the recommendation was that it be used to “analyze these issues with greater insight into a complex future that leads to precise and actionable policies.”

Having got this far, however, the time of the last panel expired and it disbanded. I am therefore asking you to pick up where the process has left off. Specifically, that you attempt the following:

- To review findings of the last two panels dealing with the original four-category construct.
- To reorganize OTSA to correspond to the “two-cluster” construct advocated by your predecessors. Determine whether this “two-cluster” construct is in accord with your view of how to understand and divide the subject matter.
- To identify the most important inter-actions within and between these clusters, from the point of view of finding those that have the biggest potential consequences for the United States, whether positive or negative.
- To make recommendations relating to policies that respond to these clusters of issues.
- To incorporate the concept of differential speed of events in your findings.
- To continue to study the implications of networking in terms of its impact on the pace and nature of events in the world, and in terms of advisable adjustments in the structure of government itself, as it seeks to deal with events.