

The Scenario

Forward Engagement Fall 2007

It is the first year of the next Administration. The premises of Forward Engagement have been well enough documented to establish a core of support in the Executive Branch and the Congress, as well as the public. It is widely understood, that something must be done to give the country a chance to act ahead of its greatest developing challenges. The outlines of this change are understood to involve a new way of looking at oncoming issues, and of appreciating the implications of their complexity; combined with a new way of organizing a national response.

There is a sense of urgency. There is a strong movement in Congress to create a special group of experts and to give this group a mandate to draft legislation for a major reorganization billed as the most important renovation since the Goldwater-Nichols Act.

The President, however, wishes to lead this process, rather than to follow in the wake of a Congressional initiative, and so has proposed a counter-initiative: to use the White House as a test-bed for new concepts. The President's initiative is to establish an ad hoc arrangement centered in the White House, with instructions to jump-start the incorporation of new methods. A working group has been established under the White House Chief of Staff to develop this proposal.

The President has asked for the simplest and most direct paths towards the application of complexity analysis for policy issues, and of applied networked systems for policy development and execution. This system is to depend on finding new ways to use established components of the Office of the President; and of the Cabinet. During the design phase, a limited number of "stakeholders" will participate as sources of counsel. Stakeholders are selected NGOs, governors of states (operating through an existing umbrella organization), and members of the Congress. The working group's report should show how their approach would be applied in the case of a specified policy "cluster." It should also show how to create a capacity for learning from error, as a fundamental attribute of the proposed system.

The proposal is to be delivered in writing and as a briefing before a panel of senior public officials prior to its presentation to the President.