

Creating Intelligent Countries through Forward Engagement

By Wendy McGuinness

Leon Fuerth is a man who does not like surprises. A former National Security Adviser to Vice President Al Gore, he explained how during the Clinton/Gore era he noticed a significant change in the landscape, not only in terms of velocity and trajectory, but also in terms of complexity. He noted, for example, how no one in the United States had foreseen the debate about genetically modified food, and as a consequence the United States was unprepared for the European Union response.

He wondered, "Did Moore's law also relate to the compilation and handling of data?" In which case, does the United States need a new form of intelligent system to cater for this new environment?

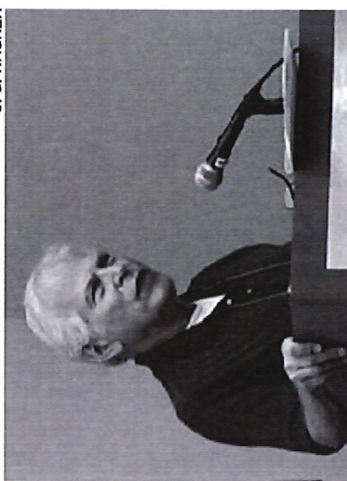
Fuerth had been impressed by the application of "forward deployment" by the military, and questioned whether this concept could form part of the solution when applied to the nonmilitary sector. "Forward engagement" seemed to fit the job description—

using a combination of soft and hard power to respond to emerging issues early, thus delivering big results for emerging issues at low costs.

But this was not the whole solution. Fuerth noted that the previous approach was based on at least three broad assumptions: that issues could be assessed in isolation, along linear lines, and that a clear end point did exist. Today, the contrary view exists. Issues tend to have a deeper context, are more uncertain (small changes can have big effects), are more integrated, and, rather than disappear from view, their importance tends to ebb and flow over time.

Fuerth puts forward three components necessary to create an intelligent system. First, there needs to be a formal foresight system for the whole of government; national security can no longer be seen in isolation. Second, there must be a networked approach to the formulation and execution of the policy; in other words, a flatter and faster

C. G. WAGNER



Leon Fuerth, former adviser to Vice President Al Gore, describes the need for "forward engagement" in governance.

response by delegating decision making further down the ranks. Lastly, and most importantly, countries need formal feedback loops, so that decision makers can learn from both their successes and their failures. See www.forwardengagement.org.

Wendy McGuinness is the founder of the Sustainable Future Institute, Wellington, New Zealand, www.sustainablefuture.info.

The Futurist (US), Interview with Leon Fuerth (2010)