In May 1994, an informal, spontaneously-created group of intelligence analysts formed the Global Visions Group (GVG) with two goals in mind: to better understand the forces shaping the global environment in the post-Cold War era and to promote an informed debate over how the United States Intelligence Community (IC) could best support the policy process. Participants were drawn from across the Intelligence Community with a few representatives from business and academia. Key leaders in the movement included Randy Pherson, then National Intelligence Officer for Latin America at the National Intelligence Council; Stanley Feder, a senior CIA methodologist; and Carole Dumaine, who subsequently headed the GVG’s follow-on organization, the Global Futures Project.


Initial Focus on the Fundamentals

In the mid-1990’s, the members of the newly formed Global Visions Group believed the Washington bureaucracy was spending far too much time arguing over how to “restructure the boxes” in the intelligence community the wake of the Cold War. They argued that before any such reorganization was launched, the architects should address four fundamental questions:

- How is the world changing?
- How does this affect our definition of national security?
- How is the working environment of the policymakers/decisionmaker changing?
- How can the Intelligence Community best support policymakers in this new environment?
GVG contended that emerging geopolitical realities (including the growing importance of non-state actors, globalization, shifting demographic balances, and the revolutions in communications and technology) required the United States to expand its concept of national security. While national security concerns historically had focused on threats posed by other nation states, new adversaries were emerging who could do just as much harm to US interests (e.g., drug lords, terrorists, computer hackers). In addition, systemic threats to the global system (HIV AIDS, the vulnerability of the global financial system, global warming) demanded serious attention just as new vulnerabilities (information warfare, adverse developments in biotechnology) were surfacing.

GVG members produced a series of monographs attempting to describe the forces that would drive global relations, focusing on such issues as: “Emerging Global Patterns,” “Conducting Foreign Affairs in a World of Non-State Actors,” and “Reassessing US Values in a Changing World.” In a memorandum to the Deputy Director for Intelligence in July 1994, GVG urged him to form matrixed teams to analyze emerging global trends and challenges, recognize the growing impact of non-state actors, and to develop more robust analytic capabilities in such areas as political modeling, long-term forecasting, socio-economic issues, and emerging global vulnerabilities (see Figure 1).

Don’t Restructure, Reinvent!

The conundrum for the group—and the Intelligence Community—was that, in an era of constricting intelligence resources, new threats were emerging but the old threats were not going away. From GVG’s perspective, the solution was to reinvent the intelligence process, not to ask for more resources. The Intelligence Community had to be transformed from a stove-piped consortia of agencies into a well-connected, “neural network” that continuously refocused its priorities based on policymaker demands while reinventing itself. GVG’s vision of the new intelligence community was a network that connected the policymaker and military decisionmaker to virtual “pools of expertise” spanning the entire intelligence community by means of trusted interlocutors who, in turn, were connected to each other, to collectors, and to non-government experts through interactive, multimedia communications systems. Team members tried to capture this concept of a customer-driven, team-based, and highly-networked Intelligence Community in a single graphic which became known as the “spaghetti chart” (see Figure 2).

In GVG’s view, bringing this vision to fruition would require:

- Creating new analytic capabilities to respond to emerging transnational threats and to stimulate more sophisticated global trend analysis, which prompted a series of alternative scenarios workshops on global, functional, and country-specific topics.
- Establishing a robust system of trusted interlocutors (a vision that predated the decision to significantly expand the President’s Daily Briefing (PRB) staff and the network of DCI representatives to various US Government offices).
• Connecting policymakers, analysts, and collectors—and cleared non-governmental experts—in a virtual communications system. A pilot was launched linking officers from 12 US Government entities at the Secret level who worked on a single country, but it ran afoul of security and bureaucratic concerns before being fully deployed.

• Redefining the roles of managers, using them less as intermediaries or gatekeepers who control the flow of information and more as facilitators who direct resources to priority targets.

In the mid-1990s, most of GVG’s energies were focused on two areas: adapting the tool of scenario planning to stimulate creative thinking about the future and launching a US Government-wide pilot collaboration project. In late 1994, GVG received funding from the Office of Research and Development to work in partnership with State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research to host a structured workshop to develop alternative Global Futures for 1996-2005. Dr. Stanley Feder, ORD, directed the effort, entitled: “The Future of Global Relations/Intelligence Futures.” Four distinct scenarios were developed.

A second workshop was held in November 1995 to review and validate the 1994 findings. Over 50 experts in global economics and business, technology, international politics, demographics, telecommunications, national security policy, and the environment participated in each session. The workshops heralded the importance of non-state actors and the emergence of transnational and systemic threats. Terrorism and proliferation were ranked as the issues most likely to head the US national security agenda in the 21st Century.

In April 1997, a Future of Terrorism working group was formed to promote new thinking about the sources of terrorism, policies for dealing with the threat, and the role of intelligence. The group assessed the likely terrorist threat based on the four scenarios of global relations developed previously.

In November 1997, The Project on the Future of Global Relations co-hosted a series of workshops on The Future of Mexico with the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR). About a dozen Intelligence Community and outside experts met at the State Department for a one-day workshop to develop key drivers of Mexico’s future. A month later, a two-day workshop was held where the weights of the selected drivers were varied to generate four distinct scenarios of Mexico’s future. In December, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs hosted a half-day roundtable that explored the implications of each scenario for US policy toward Mexico.

In April 1998, The Project on the Future of Global Relations sponsored a Roundtable on Cuba Futures involving three dozen government and non-government specialists on Latin America and Cuban affairs, international finance and business. They identified several key drivers most likely to have a significant impact on a post-Fidel Castro transition and varied the weights of the drivers to generate four transition scenarios. The NSC hosted a follow-on seminar to explore the policy implications of each scenario.
Institutionalizing the Effort

In late 1997, The Project on the Future of Global Relations/Intelligence Futures encountered a crisis of identity when the Office of Research and Development was abolished and its functions distributed to other components. Fortunately, soon thereafter project leaders learned of a Congressional appropriation earmarked for the continuation of their scenarios workshop experiments. The group, headed by Carol Dumaine, decided to use the funds to support the National Intelligence Council’s new Strategic Estimates program by offering to customize country-specific scenario workshops. A small staff was formed to support the scenarios work and to launch a new initiative—Colloquium on the 21st Century.

With the institutionalization of the scenarios effort in early 1998, most of the core group of GVG founders took on less active roles, with the exception of Randy Pherson who, in his capacity as NIO for Latin America, continued to provide executive leadership for the project to build a pilot collaborative community until its demise in late 1999.

The new team was renamed the Global Futures Project and attached to the Office of Policy Support in the CIA’s Directorate of Intelligence. Two major scenario workshops were also organized in 1999 to provide the conceptual framework underpinning a major NIC initiative: Global Trends 2015. It also organized several scenarios workshops on Pakistan, Indonesia, and Colombia.

In May 1999, the National Intelligence Council (NIC), State Department’s Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, and its Bureau of Intelligence and Research co-hosted a Colombia Futures exercise. The session included 25 nationally acclaimed academic experts on Colombia; 15 policymakers from State, DoD, NSC, and ONDCP; and 20 Intelligence Community analysts. The workshop, and a follow-on policy roundtable in August, broke substantial new ground, laying the analytic framework for Plan Colombia. The results of the conference were later debated and refined by the Schlesinger Working Group and incorporated into their report, Colombia at the Crossroads, published in Spring 2000.

In mid-1999, the Global Futures Project was renamed the Global Futures Partnership and moved to the newly-formed Sherman Kent School for Intelligence Analysis which is responsible for training DI analysts.
Appendix: Complementary GVG Efforts to Refocus Intelligence Analysis

From July 1994 to April 1995, GVG produced a series of monographs that attempted to describe the forces that would drive global relations and the implications of these developments for the intelligence and policy communities. Papers were published on “Meeting the Challenges of the 21st Century,” “Emerging Global Patterns,” “The World as Megalopolis,” Conducting Foreign Affairs in a World of Non-State Actors,” “Pursuing US Interests in a Globalized Economy,” “Reassessing US Values in a Changing World,” and “The Sea Change in Weapons Procurement.” The papers were sent forward under the signatures of core members: Stan Feder (CIA/ORD), Michael Oppenheimer (InterMatrix Group), David Kanin (NIC), Randy Pherson (CIA/ALA and later NIO for Latin America), Constance Rea (CIA/EURA), Ralph Hitchens (DOE), and Ron Pandolfi (CIA/OSWR). Membership was later expanded to include representatives from DoD/OSD, the National Defense University, State/INR, DCI/Community Management Staff, CIA/Directorate of Operations, CIA/Directorate of Administration, and other offices in the DI.

GVG’s Core Concepts

- Policymakers need direct access to the substantive experts. They will increasingly look to the Intelligence Community for:
  - Basic information that is validated, synthesized, put in context, and crisply presented.
  - In-depth analysis that captures the basic forces shaping other people’s behavior.
  - Long range forecasting and trend analysis.
- The role of the IC is to provide information, analytic context, and opportunities for analysis—not just secrets.
- Policymakers need trusted interlocutors “working at their shoulders” to ensure timely and effective policy support.
- Analysts, collectors, and policymakers must have interactive, multimedia computer connectivity to accomplish their missions.
- Line managers should function less as intermediaries and more as facilitators of the process.
- Information security should be based on risk analysis not risk avoidance.

In July 1994, GVG sent the DDI a memo, “Reorganizing the DI to Meet Future Challenges,” urging that any restructuring of the Directorate be driven by a baseline analysis of the changing threat environment. The memo urged the DDI to form matrixed teams to analyze emerging global trends and challenges, recognize the growing impact of non-state actors, do less cable-gisting and more in-depth analysis, and create a Center for Innovation that would facilitate the development and use of analytic tools.
In March 1996, Randy Pherson presented GVG’s vision to the Aspin-Brown Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the US Intelligence Community. He expressed the group’s belief that profound change was needed in the IC to deal with a radically changing world. GVG described the policymaker as facing more demands with fewer resources, increasingly dependent on others to help implement policies, and forced to respond quickly to crises while struggling to develop a strategic vision of what really matters. Key GVG themes were that, in response, the IC needed to provide strategic as well as tactical warning, a global context and trend analysis that incorporated multiple scenarios, access to nontraditional sources of information, tailored products, and timely intelligence support transmitted rapidly over classified and unclassified computer systems. One of the commission members reported that the briefing resonated strongly. The commission’s final report reflected several GVG themes, including the need for senior policymakers to have intelligence aides, to form analytic teams that tapped expertise from within and outside the IC, and to give the highest priority to funding policymakers’ computer connectivity to the IC.

Later in 1996, GVG successfully sought top-level CIA management support to launch its most ambitious project—building a prototype virtual collaborative community linking about 40 officers from 12 different US government organizations (both in Washington DC and the US Embassy) who worked on a country of high-level interest to US policymakers. The concept was to construct a decisionmaker-driven, team-based, flexible, networked community of trusted individuals from the policy, analysis, and collection communities who could exchange information and insights over the computer at the Secret level. The National Intelligence Council (NIC) served as the executive agent for the pilot. The system provided e-mail connectivity, a mechanism for policymakers to request information, collaboration tools that allowed members to share information and coordinate responses, publishing capabilities, and an easily accessible knowledge base. The project did groundbreaking work in several of these arenas but never became fully operational because of security and bureaucratic concerns.