

# Predicting a new era of security

## ASU, New America host 11th annual Future Security Forum, announce Future Security Scenarios Lab

By Raymie Humbert, ASU News  
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For 11 years, the [Future Security Forum](#) has convened elected officials, policymakers, military leaders, academics and policy analysts to discuss the future of the free world. This year, attendees confronted a world where opportunities, and threats, multiply each day.

“National security is not just a military issue, as all of you know; it's a much more complicated set of relationships, partnerships, alliances and economic interactions,” said Arizona State University President [Michael Crow](#) in a video speech welcoming this year's attendees.

Crow clearly outlined the charge to this year's forum: “What we need are more ideas, more creativity, more resilient responses, more ways to react to the environment in a quicker fashion.”

For nine hours, attendees delved into current challenges, threats and the future, stopping only for lunch and to top off their coffee. The event was hosted by ASU and New America, drawing people from across the world to New America's office less than a city block from the White House. This unique partnership is led at ASU by the Future Security Initiative and at New America by its Future Security program, which connect a team of over 80 faculty and fellows, co-directed by ASU professors of practice Peter Bergen and Daniel Rothenberg.

This year, the forum was also co-hosted in collaboration with Security & Defence PLoS, a global partnership between ASU, King's College London and the University of New South Wales.

“The forum shows how a nonpartisan, D.C.-based think tank can partner with a major public research university to address the world's biggest challenges,” said New America CEO [Anne-Marie Slaughter](#) in the forum's opening plenary. “ASU always wins the U.S. News & World Report 'Most Innovative' university ranking, and it deserves it.”

### U.S. relations in key regions

“The really good thing about the economic relationship going for the U.S. and the U.K. is that we've got about a trillion invested in each other's economies,” said [James Roscoe](#), U.K. acting ambassador (chargé d'affaires) to the U.S., in a panel on the future of U.S.-U.K. relations. “One of my favorite stats is, every day in America, about 1.2 million people get up and go and work for a British company, and in the U.K., 1.8 million Brits wake up and work for an American company.”

Throughout the panel, Roscoe and Slaughter discussed the status of this “special relationship,” America’s relationship with Europe and threats to the Atlantic Alliance.

“I think there's a tendency in some parts of Europe — particularly when they look at this government in Washington — to think that Europe now has to do it all alone. And I think that's both dangerous and wrong,” Roscoe said. “We need security to be a North Atlantic security; we need to be as ready to help America, if we need to, as we need America to be ready to help us. And, frankly, that's the only way to really achieve real deterrence from the threats that we face.”

The forum hosted Brett McGurk, a senior national security official during the Bush, Obama, Trump and Biden administrations who led the global campaign to defeat ISIS, to discuss the state of the Middle East.

McGurk recalled how he was tasked with “telling the president the truth in five minutes” every morning — truths that seemingly changed by the minute no matter the administration. In fact, McGurk described how deeply thought-out plans were upended regularly, like when a planned trip for former President Joe Biden to visit Israel the week after the Oct. 7 attacks was changed after a bombing of a Gaza hospital.

“You can think you're on one path walking in the morning at 9 o'clock, or 7:30 in the morning, whatever time, and by 1 o'clock something happens to completely wipe it off the fold,” McGurk said.

The forum also hosted a panel discussing relations with Pakistan — where a main focus was the country’s climate crisis.

“Climate is not an abstract for Pakistan,” said Rizwan Saeed Sheikh, Pakistan ambassador to the United States. “It's a reality that we are living, even now as we speak.”

Floods in the country have included cloudbursts, or sudden, intense downpours that will disperse a year’s worth of rainfall in an hour. And Sheikh shared that the country is anticipating monsoon season earlier than usual. Pakistan needs an estimated \$152 billion to cover climate-related costs.

“It's real, clear and present danger that we are faced with,” Sheikh said.

## **The future of technology and innovation**

AI, including its promise and its many challenges, was discussed at length at the forum — especially how the changing landscape of technology coincides with changing worldwide threats.

In attendance was U.S. Sen. [Mark Kelly](#), who spoke on AI and how the United States needs to focus on staying ahead of the innovation cycle.

“AI has been described as being as disruptive as electricity was in the 20th century,” said Kelly. “It's powerful, it's promising, but we’ve got to get it right. It could be one of the greatest drivers of prosperity across the world. But we could also screw it up.”

And while panels featured speakers that were policymakers, ASU faculty and government officials, panels also included industry leaders like Northrop Grumman corporate chief technology officer

Greg Simer, who discussed the changing nature of conflict given rapidly advancing technology.

“We take for granted connectivity. We take for granted the data that's out there, when you think about long-range use, extended terrain, the tyranny of range,” said Simer. “We need to be able to connect all of our platforms, our spacecraft, undersea, across all domains. Otherwise, all these things that we're talking about with AI and data manipulation and how we pull information of space, is only going to work if we can move that data around.”

## Predicting the future — and how to prepare

Although panelists discussed technology, AI and international relations, the day's through line was how America can best prepare for any threat in an increasingly dangerous world.

For some, like ASU Professor of Practice [Peter Singer](#), this meant paying special attention to the past. Singer presented on how the country can focus on lessons from past conflicts, including rethinking the way the country handles the “math” of war with new factors like generative AI and drones, building cognitive toughness just as much as physical toughness, and learning to win.

For others, this meant looking to younger generations and discussing how older generations can work with them so that today's youth can think critically and develop other essential skills.

“We need to start thinking like our life depends upon it — our survival depends upon our ability to think,” said retired CIA senior analyst Gina Bennett in a panel on predicting future threats.

“Ultimately, where I'm concerned about generative AI and agentic AI is that it feeds on some of the worst traits of humanity — laziness and greed — and we're going to let it think for us, and then we're going to let it decide for us.”

## A new era of security

The forum closed with an announcement: New America's new [Future Security Scenarios Lab](#), a space dedicated to concentrated efforts on planning for a multitude of different scenarios in America's security future.

“The lab grew out of the recognition that the security landscape is changing, and it's changing faster than the systems we've built to keep it secure,” said Amy Nelson, director of the Future Security Scenarios Lab. “What we need is newer ways of thinking if we're going to keep pace.”

The lab will use methods like wargaming, immersive exercises, decision theory and scenario planning to discuss a multitude of different futures.

Nelson explained that the lab's remit “is not to predict the future, but to expand the range of futures we can be prepared for.”

Eleven years wasn't the only anniversary being celebrated. A few speakers noted that America will soon be celebrating its 250th year, making the forum a true moment to reflect.

“Democracy is hard — it's hard to get right, and democracy is constantly disrupted by the fact that we are advanced, innovative economies who come up with new ideas about how things should

work, whether that's, you know, a newspaper, or whether it's an algorithm. We are constantly having to adapt democracy to new realities,” Roscoe said. “I think the reality that we face at the moment is an incredibly disrupted world.”

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## Main image



Heela Rasool-Ayub (left), director of planetary politics at New America, and Rizwan Saeed Sheikh, Pakistan's ambassador to the United States, answer questions from attendees at the 11th annual Future Security Forum. Photo courtesy Hager Sharp/ASU

## Gallery



From left: Gina Bennett, retired CIA senior analyst and adjunct professor at Georgetown Center for Security Studies; Beth Sanner, former deputy director of national intelligence and vice chair of the National Intelligence Council; John T. Lewis, retired CIA senior intelligence service executive expert and co-director of ASU Intelligence Community Center of Academic Excellence; and Karen Greenberg, Future Security Program Fellow at New America, discuss how the U.S. should predict and analyze future threats at the 11th annual Future Security Forum.





From left: Amy Nelson, director of Future Security Scenarios Lab at New America; Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, founder and CEO of ExpertTheory; and Ken Gleiman, director of irregular warfare studies at Future Security Initiative at ASU, explore how wargaming can advance national security at the 11th Annual Future Security Forum.



James Roscoe, acting ambassador, chargé d'affaires, Embassy of the United Kingdom to the United States, and Anne-Marie Slaughter, CEO of New America and former director of policy planning at the U.S. Department of State, field questions from the attendees of the 11th Annual Future Security Forum.



Peter Bergen (left), vice president of New America and professor of practice at ASU, and Brett McGurk, venture partner at Lux Capital and former White House coordinator for the Middle East under former President Joe Biden, explore McGurk's experience in the Middle East in previous administrations at the 11th annual Future Security Forum.



From left: Alicia Ellis, assistant teaching professor and director of the Master of Arts in global security program at ASU; Kyrsten Sinema, former U.S. senator and distinguished professor of practice at ASU; and Matthew Ammel, Future Security Initiative Fellow at ASU, examine how to protect the agricultural supply chain in the U.S. at the 11th annual Future Security Forum.