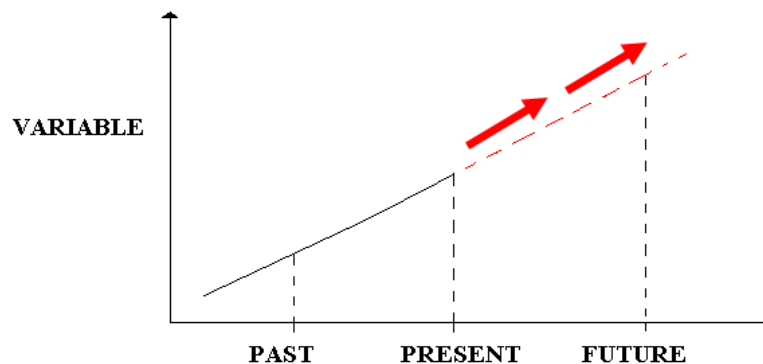


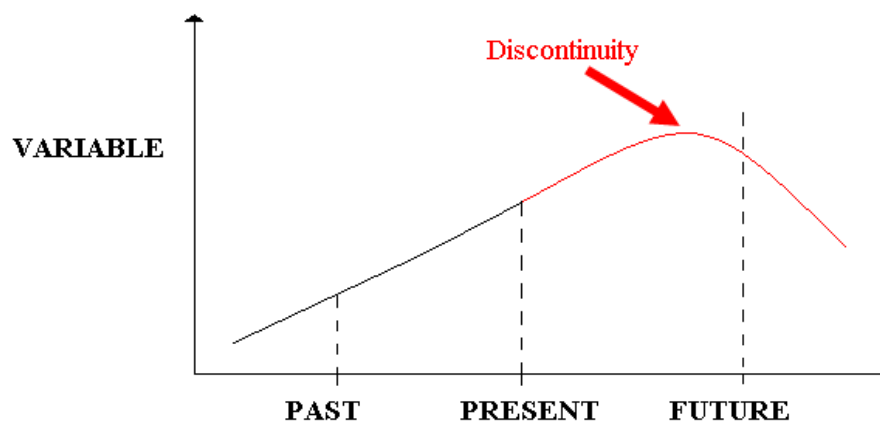
'Futuring'*

'Futuring,'¹ or anticipating the future, is something that all people do. We look at the state of affairs and try to project what might happen at a later date, so that we're not caught off guard. When leaving the house, we look at the weather to see if it might rain and if we should dress appropriately. When deciding on a career today, we think about what might be most lucrative tomorrow.

In the social sciences, we do the same. Economists try to predict recessions, strategists try to predict wars, and other analysts try to predict other social or political changes. When extrapolating about future events, we tend to think in *linear* terms. We project past and present performance into the future; how it was in the past is added to how it is today, to get what it will be in the future—trends in history are largely expected to continue unabated.



But the real world is very rarely this neat and predictable. Discontinuities, interactions, feedback, and *Black Swans*—perceived impossibilities that actually come to bear²—prevail. For example, the level of global communication between World War II may have increased at a steady rate, but when the internet and mobile technologies came about, the level of global communication skyrocketed. Conversely, the Soviet Union's power was thought to be expanding continuously at the time, but few even anticipated—nor were prepared for the effects of—its sudden collapse in 1991.³



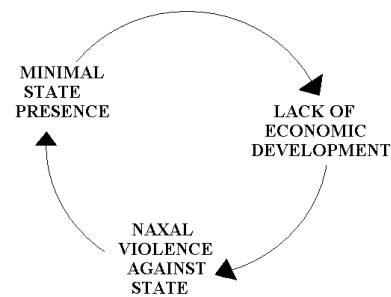
If we think of futures in which *nonlinear* change takes precedent, we can perhaps get a clearer picture. Understanding nonlinearity requires a view of:

- Continuities and Trends
- Discontinuities & disruptions
- The interactivity of trends from various *disciplines*
- The interaction of phenomena at different *scales* of activity
- Wildcards, contingencies and scenarios

In trying to anticipate the future, we have little choice but to focus on *current* trends and drivers. Even when we look at wildcards and discontinuities, we are ultimately influenced by our understandings of the *current* state of affairs. But to anticipate the status of these trends and events in the future, understanding their *sustainability* is seminal.

The sustainability of current resources and phenomena is based around self-reinforcing structures, one of which is the *feedback loop*. We tend to think that simple causes have a single, direct effect—If A, and B, then C; again a linear perspective.

But in feedback loops, *circular* causality makes it such that two or more variables can reinforce themselves: variable A causes B, which causes B, which ultimately contributes to the continuation of A. One of the biggest challenges India faces today in Naxal-affected regions of eastern India is caused by a feedback loop: A lack of economic development was closely linked to a deficit in state presence throughout the eastern corridor of India. This lack of development provoked a rise in Maoist backlashes against the state. Now, breaking the cycle by increasing state presence is difficult because of the very violence that was brought about by a lack of economic development.



If we understand sustainability and feedback, we can understand how to intervene as necessary, whether by interfering in harmful feedback cycles (vicious cycles) that hamper development and progress, or by taking advantage of increasing returns (virtuous cycles) from which India can benefit.

As you respond to the questions in the survey, keep in mind the *sustainability* of some of the factors and variables you'll be thinking about, in order to anticipate how they might be into the future.

* This document samples from a forthcoming piece by Neil Padukone, Visiting Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation

¹ The term 'futuring' was first used by Edward Cornish, *Futuring: The Exploration of the Future*, World Future Society, 2004

² "Black swans" refer to high-impact, hard-to-predict, and rare events beyond the realm of normal expectation. The term comes from the 17th century European assumption, based on historically observed empirical evidence, that 'all swans are white'. In the 18th Century, black swans were discovered in Australia. In this context, a *black swan* was thought to be something that was impossible or could not exist. Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, Random House, 2007

³ John Mueller was a prominent exception who did in fact anticipate its collapse. See John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War*, Basic Books, 1989