



Andrew Krepinevich. *7 Deadly Scenarios: A Military Futurist Explores War in the 21st Century*. New York, NY: Bantam Books, 2009.

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7 *Deadly Scenarios* is about future war scenarios with seven plausible stories highlighting the changing nature of war in the 21st Century. The scenarios' settings are of future events that threaten the United States and world security. Besides the scenarios, principally the book promotes the value of strategic planning to address future security challenges with scenario planning. The author goes on at length to explain that the purpose of scenario planning is not to pinpoint future events but to highlight the forces that push the future in different directions. The essence of scenario planning for the future is about making those forces visible, so that if when certain circumstances occur, the planner and decision makers at least recognise these indicators of the future.

The scenarios range from the collapse of Pakistan, a loose and stolen nuclear weapon, a deadly flu pandemic, Israel versus a Hamas with Iran backing, Chinese civil unrest, Islamist group infiltration, to cyber attacks affecting the global economy. The central theme of the scenarios is that the unfolding future is uncertain and the author emphasizes the need to take uncertainties into account in strategic planning and decision making. The author warns against "business as usual" syndrome and for the importance of recognising and picking up early indicators.

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STRENGTHS

The book provides an introductory chapter highlighting the importance of scenario-based planning with the intention to expand the mindset of executives and planners beyond conventional planning and familiar challenges. The book promotes scenario-based planning and its benefits, in particular to understand how to see the future rather than what to think or do. Such scenarios can be used to help policymakers see how the future might unfold, and in doing so, prompt the decision-makers to

devote time and resources to address change and facilitate better decision making in an uncertain world.¹

The book identifies drivers of change in the international system, the principle forces at work that will shape the world environment, their interaction and the resulting trends. The scenarios are actually assessed for their impact on the United States and the world security environment in general. Hence, a storyline of the future's landscape with a series of outcomes that reflect the plausible futures becomes visible.

The actors in the scenarios highlight the fact that future adversaries will not only be states, but also a wide variety of terrorist groups, transnational criminal organisations and other non-state actors that form various non-traditional threats. In the context of securitisation, the future that states face is a composite threat from different sets of enemies. Readily available technology will enable adversaries, states and non-state actors alike to mount an attack in unexpected ways using a mix of military and non-military means and a blend of conventional and irregular warfare.² The author makes reference to the Second Gulf War as an irregular war, "a long hard slog" that stresses the implications of the "business as usual" mentality. Krepinevich warns about the military being prone to assuming the next war to be an updated version of the last war. Scenario planning can be a powerful tool to abandon previously fixed ideas.³

Despite the value of scenario-based planning, the author mentions the tussle between Pentagon and the military to highlight that the following challenge is still in managing change within an organisation. Organisational change is required to embrace this future thinking in planning.⁴ The obstacles to change everywhere, particularly in large organisations stuck in existing ways of doing business.

¹ P. Schoemaker, "Scenario Planning: A Tool for Strategic Thinking," *Sloan Management Review* 36/2 (Winter 1995): pp. 25-41, and K. van der Heijden *et al.*, *The Sixth Sense: Accelerating Organizational Learning With Scenarios* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2009).

² Alan Collins, ed., *Contemporary Security Studies*, first edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³ K. van der Heijden *et al.*, *The Sixth Sense*.

⁴ P.M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation* (New York, NY: Currency Doubleday, 1990).

WEAKNESSES

Krepinevich's future scenarios are set from 2012 to 2016 and are not far enough into the future even to adequately explore the nature of war in the 21st century. As such, the essence of the future and scenario planning would not be appreciated by the readers as the book's storylines are all too familiar. The scenarios should highlight the unthinkable, yet plausible, uncertainties so as to facilitate the ability to recognise signals from the future as well as to facilitate "out of the box" thinking.⁵

Although the author did caution about the military being prone to assuming the next war will be an updated version of the last war, the book itself is half history and half future. Although the author promotes scenario planning, it is flawed with the same old scene, theatre, actors and storylines. The scenarios in the book seem to be more of an updated version of previous war and conflicts with the narrated events backed up by historical events. The scenarios have been based on earlier historical events with plentiful footnotes, perhaps to validate the storyline. The chains of events are almost expected from the historical event used to set the scene or justify the narrated event that follows in each scenario. The storylines are rather lengthy and monotonous; each examines a familiar concern with the same good and bad actors of contemporary world. In a way, these are almost the same settings that blinded scholars and practitioners in the past from seeing the fall of the Berlin wall, the end of Cold War, and 9/11.⁶ A useful scenario should have a title or theme that enables a quick reflection of the storyline, that in turn enable those planners and decision makers to recognise the faint signal emanating from the futures, thus highlighting the potential eventualities that might follow.⁷ Such an approach by the author tends to frame readers' mindsets based on history and lessons learnt, thus actually directing towards conventional forecasting and planning.⁸ This narrative strategy in fact clouds the actual intent to stimulate thinking towards future uncertainties.

⁵ P. Schoemaker, "Scenario Planning," and K. van der Heijden *et al.*, [The Sixth Sense](#).

⁶ J. Baylis, J. Wirtz, C. S. Gray, and E. Cohen, [Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies](#), 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁷ K. van der Heijden *et al.*, [The Sixth Sense](#).

⁸ Ibid.

The title of the book is not catchy and without an attractive theme that enables readers to capture the essence of the scenarios or future.⁹ “Scenarios” should be the word given emphasis and made to capture the essence of the storyline in order for the book to become a topic of conversation amongst organizational executives.¹⁰

The author did admit the need to keep the number of scenarios “more than a few but fewer than 10.” However, the number and length of the scenario are too much for planners and security makers to comprehend, let alone to grasp the value of thinking about the future through scenario planning. In future similar studies, for practical reasons the recommended number of scenarios is three to four.¹¹

DISCUSSION

The same old story means the same old strategic planning and course of action. In this case, state-centric security planning and strategies seem still to dominate the United States’ policy process. With the US a status quo world power, the author in a way has made deterrence and compellence the most salient features of that country’s future defence policy.¹²

Perhaps due to the author’s service in the military and Pentagon, the scenarios are from a realist perspective as the storylines extrapolate from past historical events that indicate the minute potential for change that the author has imagined. The scenarios are centred on security issues to protect the United States from enemies both foreign and domestic. That relies primarily on the balance of power and deterrence to keep the international system intact and as non-threatening as possible. All the scenarios are consistent with the realist principle, as the courses of action aim towards preserving predominance and the status quo so as to shape a future world that advances American interest.¹³

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ P.M. Senge, The Fifth Discipline, and K. van der Heijden *et al.*, The Sixth Sense.

¹¹ P. Schoemaker, “Scenario Planning,” and K. van der Heijden *et al.*, The Sixth Sense.

¹² Alan Collins, ed., Contemporary Security Studies.

¹³ Ibid.

Overall, *7 Deadly Scenarios* is a good book with a lot of details on historical events. This book gives unique plausible scenarios with realist insight into the future, although much of it resembles the contemporary world. The future scenarios range from a setting dictated by economic and political driving forces, to an evolutionary setting driven by technology and chaos. The book offers the planning map of the future with scenario planning as a strategic planning tool. Significant highlights are that besides globalisation, there are other drivers of change and uncertainty, such as demographic change, climate change, pandemics, terrorism, scarcity of natural resources and others.¹⁴

The author captures the essence of why it is vital for scenario thinking to be cultivated as a natural part of an organisation's analytical culture and to become an accepted aspect of ongoing executive or corporate dialogue.¹⁵ However, storylines that feature more of present day scenarios, with the familiar "fog of war" and built on the basis of the past, confirm the challenges of strategic planning and security in addressing the future.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ P.M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, and K. van der Heijden *et al.*, *The Sixth Sense*.