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VISIONARIOS

Visionario: Israel at 100

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ABSTRACT

Visionarios are a tool to explore and test assumptions about a system, in this case a small element, and perhaps an optimistic depiction, of Israel at 100. When used in conjunction with functions such as planning or training in an institution, like many that are described in the story, the ability to understand the complex relationships that exist in real world systems or the ability to see unintended consequences of decisions can become more obvious. Typically, visionarios are developed through discussions with subject matter experts. Visionarios, coupled with decision-support tools such as system mapping or complex computer models that simulate reality, enable policymakers and decision makers to think through the ramifications of potential approaches to problem solving and improve system performance. Usually, next steps include the development of a systems map, with its key elements and their interdependencies. Visionarios are usually a part of an overall planning process that includes risk analysis across the entire sociological, technological, economic, environmental, and political spectrum and allows for stress testing of potential solutions to enduring problems institutions and nations are facing.

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Visioning process development

There are many processes that constitute “visioning for the future.” *Israel at 100*, the “visionario” published in this journal, was developed using a U.S. Department of Defense visioning process that was developed by the author at the Institute for Strategic Studies at the U.S. Army War College in the early 1990s in collaboration with the Army’s strategic futurist at the time, Charles Taylor. This particular visioning process tests assumptions. Visioning can be used as an important tool in any organization’s or country’s planning cycle. In this case, nations need to plan just like any organization. It may be more difficult or complex, but the process is probably similar.¹

There are an infinite number of potential futures, so a vision of the future is not a forecast or a prediction but a planning tool to think about events that could happen in the future before they occur. A vision can be defined as a description of a future state and the role an institution or country will play in

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that future. In *Israel at 100*, the year 2048 was chosen to explore what the state of Israel might look like at its centennial, within its regional and global context, and what steps the nation might take to get there.

Visioning should be part of a strategic management process. Done correctly, visioning is a disciplined series of steps that helps decision makers answer the questions they need to ask themselves in order to be prepared for the future. If leadership cannot answer these questions, it is likely that they are unprepared for the future.

Visioning and the development of visionarios, or in-depth stories, can help an organization or country to more effectively be prepared for whatever the future brings. It is a planning tool to learn and think about events that could happen in the future before they occur. There are many different kinds of visioning processes, and they lead to many different kinds of results, depending on what is needed from the process. Some organizations actually do look out 20 years or more to try and see the diversity of contingencies for which they have to be prepared. Some people develop visionarios as a tool to gain consensus or “get to yes,” especially to talk about where their organization should go and what the organization should stand for. Some organizations use the process to determine what their beliefs and values are and what they should become in the future if different from the present.

Every government should be engaged in this kind of thinking with their leadership team. The really important part of visioning is the process of opening the eyes and minds of leadership to things they ordinarily would not consider—literally, to “think the unthinkable.” It is the ultimate learning and planning tool.

With all the work trying to design and implement “learning organizations,” in the Peter Senge sense (Senge, 1990), the truth is that many organizations’ cultures do not value learning or the knowledge it brings. Most organizations and especially countries have not developed processes to share and use new knowledge acquired. Visioning can assist in this process but only if senior leadership is willing to learn and use that knowledge. This requires an attitude that there is a need for new knowledge, that no one has all the answers. And, sometimes, that is very difficult for senior executives or politicians to accept. It is what Senge’s group calls getting out of “knowing” and into “learning.”

This is exactly where the Pentagon was right after World War II, when America believed it knew all the answers, and before the United States lost its first war in Korea, and then a second in Vietnam, and recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today’s visioning processes evolved out of the end of World War II, when Congress asked scientists at the Rand Corporation in California to help sort through the myriad issues surrounding nuclear warfare. They developed a process to force decision makers, many of whom were in denial about nuclear warfare, into “thinking the

unthinkable”—what would really happen if nuclear war became a reality? This thinking ultimately led to the understanding that nuclear war and “mutually assured destruction” were insane. It meant nuclear annihilation, and there could be no winners in a nuclear war, an important lesson to learn (Kahn, 2007).

Concurrent to the development of the Rand Corporation process in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the concept of general systems theory was also emerging. In this work, scientists began to view the world differently—not just using the tools of analysis but also of synthesis, which put the pieces of a system together in order to understand the whole. This created a new way of looking at the world using a discipline called integration, which puts pieces together to understand how their fit makes the “whole” work. Ultimately, this discipline evolved into systems thinking and systems science (Von Bertalanffy, 1969).

At the same time as the development of these theories, there was an increasing awareness that general systems theory applied to all natural systems: physical, biological, ecological, economic, even social, financial, and organizational. It certainly applies to countries as complex systems of systems.

Visioning processes are excellent ways for senior leaders to learn the peculiarities of the complex system they are managing. It is a good way to understand the underlying concepts of systems, too.

All formal social systems are essentially living; without people, they are nothing but concrete, paper, intellectual property, and digital information. As living systems, they are in a constant process of interaction with their environment and their many stakeholders. At first glance, some very large institutions or governments may seem like systems of forbidding complexity. So, to understand a system, it is crucial to understand its elements and their interactions.

What this means for an institution or governmental structure is that each element of the system must rely upon and interact with the rest of the system in order for the system to work. Problems are best solved not necessarily by breaking them up into “functional” bites but by getting into the next larger system and solving them through integrative mechanisms. Visions of the future need to look at the system as it is currently configured and then what it will look like in many different futures.

Looking at the visionario that was developed for the *Israel at 100*, the process began by defining the system that would be worked on. Once the system was determined, the top three assumptions about that system were written down. The author had three assumptions about Israel. They were:

- (1) Israel’s Jewish religious communities will remain at the epicenter of debate about Israel’s political and economic future.

- (2) Because of housing shortages, Jewish settlers have nowhere to re-locate to, thus removing any rational argument to leave.
- (3) Israel's military capabilities will not change.

They say a lot about the authors' biases. But, this process tests assumptions by making the scenario developer come up with plausible scenarios that negate each one. And, that is an integral part of one of the key techniques for visioning: testing assumptions.

In many ways the development of the visionario was a *gedanken* experiment, in the Einstein "thought" experiment sense—not a forecast or a prediction but a way to learn and think about the future so a nation can collectively do something to "shape" the future the way they want it to be. Shaping describes the process of influencing events to create a future.

Israel at 100 will show what a 360-degree look at the future is like and how extensive the work can be. Governments that are systematically thinking about the future using visionarios will be better prepared for the future that is complex, volatile, uncertain, and ambiguous.

Israel at 100

A Visionario by Sheila R. Ronis and Richard J. Chasdi

The year is 2048. Israel is celebrating its centennial anniversary. Many changes have occurred in recent years. For the most part, there has been an improvement in the lives of all Israeli citizens. Israel's economy is strong, led by several technology sectors.

The "community initiative" has been at the center of improving the health, education, and welfare of Israeli Jewish and Arab families. Throughout Israel, within Arab communities as well as border areas, a network of community houses dedicated to improving the health, education, and financial well-being of Arab and Jewish men, women, and children has been shown to impact the demographic changes that have occurred within both communities. The more education women have received, including education regarding birth control and ways to improve both their health, the health of their children, and their financial well being, the fewer children they have had. Concomitantly, the tax incentives the Israeli government has given Jewish families to have more children have been working. While improving the health of all people living within Israel's traditional borders, the community initiative has also changed the balance of numbers of children between Israeli Jews and Arabs. The birth rate among Israeli Jews is now slightly higher than the Israeli Arab rate, and as a democracy, the ability to assure a Jewish State has improved.

Israel's Jewish religious communities are no longer at the epicenter of debate about Israel's political and economic future. Their historical legacy of inordinate political power was a function of Israel's parliamentary political system of proportional presentation. That history of government subsidies and what amounted to a series of governmental protections that included exemption from serving in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) had profound and lasting implications for ultra-Orthodox religious communities that no longer are tolerated. For other Israelis, the personal economic burdens those protections entailed are gone since drags on national economic growth are now understood to be unsustainable. This segment of society dealt with their problems of coping with modernization and globalization such as computer illiteracy when the money supporting them stopped. For Israel to become more competitive across industries world-wide, the adults in the religious families were forced to be educated to work in 21st-century jobs since the aggregate cost of those special protections were no longer viable, not in a situation of enormous spending on national defense.

In addition to the improvements in the demographic situation in Israel, one of the most important changes that has occurred in the country has been the incentive to Jewish settlers to relocate to the new islands that have been reclaimed from the sea in the Mediterranean off the coasts of Haifa and Tel Aviv. Perfecting technologies from Singapore, land reclamation has become big business in Israel. In addition, the new islands have had developers create new communities to improve the desperate housing shortage in Israel. Now, more than two million people live on the new islands reclaimed from the sea. Each of the 8 islands are 15 square kilometers between Haifa and Tel Aviv, providing much needed land for settling and port access, as well as the global heavy-lift capability augmenting the ports logistics hub to Africa.

In 2048, with the addition of the new islands, one of Israel's "new frontiers," namely the sea, has become an intrinsic part of Israel's economic and national security base. Earlier, Israel, worked to capitalize on the earth reclamation design offered by Singapore to address acute housing shortages and, in the process, worked to develop additional living space for secular Israelis and even some former settlers who, unlike others, were originally lured to the West Bank for nationalist and economic reasons rather than for religious convictions. In addition to building ports of entry that served to ease commercial traffic in Haifa, sea reclamation made it possible for Israelis to cooperate with Palestinian-Arabs on the coast, as Israeli ports with greater emphasis on ports of entry abroad were able to coordinate and augment more regionally oriented commercial services offered in Gaza. Israel became the major logistics hub for the importation of Chinese and Indian goods traveling to the emerging markets of Africa. Today, as the various African economies grow and become mature, the shipping and transportation arms of Israel have become even more competitive than the Chinese

transportation companies. The seafaring hub in Israel precluded the Turkish government from turning away completely from Israel, since competition outright between Turkish freight passing through the Bosphorus via ship and an Israeli-Palestinian commercial center was antithetical to Turkish interests.

The “global heavy-lift” capability, based on slightly modified for commercial heavy and outsized air cargo operations Boeing BC-17 Globemaster IVs, resulted from the need to carry cargo to austere areas of Africa, first for humanitarian assistance and then to support the development of those areas of the continent. In 2016, Congress, as part of Sequestration, adopted *Transformational Recapitalization*, a process by which the private sector acquires older weapon systems, starting with the C-17, but for commercial use, and then the revenues are used to buy new equipment for the U.S. Armed Forces. The private sector’s acquisition of C-17 used the aircraft to take control of the heavy and outsize market (HOM), the movement via air of matériel too large or outsized to fit in any door of a 747 or similarly sized freighter. Before then, that market was controlled by the Russians and Ukrainians with their AN-124 Ruslan heavy airlift aircraft, and the Pentagon decided it wasn’t a good strategic move to be dependent on them for surge requirements. In times of national emergency, these privately American-owned C-17 aircraft, by State Department mandate, come under the operational control of the U.S. Air Force.

There were additional concerns that China, following its theft of C-17 and other military platform technology, would try to expand its virtual control of ocean-borne shipping to include capture of the HOM with a Globemaster clone. The stage was set for Boeing, the U.S. Air Force, heavy-lift program initiators, the IDF, and the Israeli economy to get what they all wanted in one move. The Israeli Air Force moved to acquire 10 C-17 s. The U.S. Congress quickly approved the purchase.

Aiding in the accelerated acquisition process was a change in scoring law by the Knesset, coupled with a Boeing-developed alternative financing strategy, that essentially permitted the purchase, operation, and maintenance of the aircraft with virtually zero deduction from the existing defense budget. Israel’s economic and national security strategists, realizing that the country could play a significant role in the launch of a new industry, *Heavylift*, while significantly improving the deployability of its defense forces beyond previous expectations from a time and distance standpoint, allocated five aircraft for the IDF and five for the creation of one of five global air operations epicenters outlined in the business plan of U.S.-based program initiators. As with counterparts operating eventually out of U.S. epicenters on the east and west coast, operation of these dual use BC-17 s came under the control of the Israel Air Force (IAF) in times of national emergency.

The original epicenter, built in 2019, was relocated from Haifa on the mainland to one of eight islands in the land reclamation project by 2018. As

expected, the BC-17s based there quickly captured hemispheric heavy and outsized business while accelerating African continent economic development owing to their ability to move large shipments of manufacturing and sustenance goods even into the most remote areas wherein underprepared or non-existent landing facilities was the norm. The Globemasters proved capable of direct delivery of materials for rapid-build airfields, from which they operated. And, despite strenuous efforts on the part of the Russians and Chinese to challenge Israel's dominance of air, sea, and land transportation logistics, the Israelis have prevailed. In addition, Israel aircraft industries were able to acquire a licensing agreement to produce C-17 parts, thereby in effect contributing to Israel's capacity to increase the volume of deliverables to African states.

Israel has also become the nanotechnology capital of the world, especially in medicine and materials and medical technology specifically designed for rough terrain conditions in places like the developing world in Africa and Asia. Using their new-found knowledge from Russia in the early part of this century, the number of PhDs in various sciences and nanotechnology-related fields soared and, with some assistance from Israeli policy, five centers of excellence were established to reinforce what was already happening. The institutions, now known around the world as the pre-eminent places where nanotechnology innovation is flourishing—Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Technion IIT, the University of Tel Aviv, Bar Ilan University and Ben Gurion University—are now centers of innovation in nanotechnology and other leading edge fields.

The sea has also provided Israel with the space needed to develop a full blown strategic deterrent to Iran, namely “a sea leg” to a fledgling “Triad” system that includes the IAF and Israel's limited land-based missile systems that essentially worked in a “first strike” capacity (FSCF) against military targets. By 2016, both Israeli and American planners understood that Israel was too small a country to absorb a nuclear first strike from Iran and survive, and it became increasingly clear that the prospect of a military strike against Iran, however useful, was no substitute for a multifaceted system of deterrence. What is significant here is that the German submarines that Israel possessed through 2017 were replaced by American-built ones with the necessary firepower and self sufficiency to serve as full-blown secondary strike capability force (SSCF) platforms, designed to eliminate Iranian cities should an Iranian surprise attack against Israel ever materialize. With this new version of mutual assured destruction capability, the Iranians may have nuclear capability but do not possess an ability to launch nuclear weapons at Israel and win, so a nuclear standoff has occurred, providing a semblance of stability similar to the U.S.–Soviet Cold War, which prevented a nuclear strike on either side through deterrence. Although strategic nuclear deterrence apparently kept the peace, many would argue that it was not the

doctrine of mutual assured destruction (MAD) that kept the peace but other factors, especially economics. Nevertheless, MAD did not hurt. It provided a context for soft power to succeed.

This is an example of the kind of visionario research we can experiment with in the Center. In fact, visionario alternatives might involve a series of dummy variables where we could hold aspects of a scenario constant while changing one variable at a time for specific outcome alternatives based on the data.

Note

1. This discussion is based on (Ronis, 2007) and is used with permission of the publisher and author.

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Richard J. Chasdi: Before joining Walsh College as an Associate Professor in September 2013, Dr. Chasdi taught at Wayne State University and the University of Windsor. His B.A. is from Brandeis University, his M.A. is from Boston College, and his Ph.D. is from Purdue University in Political Science. Dr. Chasdi has a long and distinguished career in consulting and international problem solving in the security arena, in particular international conflict resolution and mediation. Dr. Chasdi was a Distinguished Fellow at the Project on National Security Reform (PNSR) in Washington, D.C.

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