

2013-2014 State of the Future, A publication of The Millennium Project, 2014

Book review by Dr Stanley Rosen

William E. Halal, Professor Emeritus of Management, Technology, and Innovation at George Washington University calls this book “strategic planning for the planet.” Bill Halal is one of the world’s foremost strategic planners and managers. (He once substituted for Peter Drucker in giving a talk to 2000 managers at the Los Angeles Colliseum.) By recognizing the significance of this book, the seventeenth and best in a series of similar reports, Halal has put his finger on its importance to the strategic planning community: It sets the framework for all planners who must enable and enlighten (and even make) decisions in their specific domains. We are all swimming in the sea of global trends.

As Enrique Pena Nieto, President of Mexico, commented, the book is “a must read for any decision maker with a long-term vision.”

Methodologically, the book, and the underlying work it represents, achieves what all strategists attempt: a process to frame a view of the future in the context of what is and what can be. Drawing on what is probably the world’s most comprehensive set of “futuring” tools, the book sets the stage by systematically assessing the current state of fifteen global challenges that have been tracked yearly since 1996, but first published in 1997. Based on the work of the Millennium Project’s “think tank” of fifty globally dispersed operating nodes, each of the challenges is assessed for its global and regional implications. Then this year’s report focuses on three critical global issues (hidden hunger, the vulnerability of urban coastal zones, and the threat posed by lone wolf terrorists) and provides recommendations for addressing them.

The substance that emerges from this process, although surprisingly concise (the book manages all this in 240 pages), provides uniquely integrated insights into factors that will impact the success of all our endeavors. Starting with a report on the 30-variable State of the Future Index that provides a ten-year outlook for the future, the book clearly identifies where we are winning and where we are losing. What is working, and what is not? Where are the biggest challenges and the most promising opportunities? With enough data to undergird the analysis, the book lays out the facts and enough well-based opinions to keep the reader challenged. This year’s book also includes a new, innovative set of info-graphics, to help the reader digest and integrate the vast data collection upon which the work is based.

Finally, this year’s book introduces the Global Futures Intelligence System, which contains the background and data for the research as well as a description of the methodologies used (described as “the largest internationally peer reviewed set of methods to explore future possibilities ever assembled in one source”).

Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, lauded the book for its “invaluable insights into the future for the United Nations, its member states, and civil society.” All strategic planners operate in this context; we should pay attention.

The book's concluding thought is a lesson for us all: "The world needs hardheaded idealists who can look into the worst and best of humanity to create and implement strategies of success." This book is a model and a database for those who seek to meet this standard.

The book will be available at the Annual Conference of the Association for Strategic Planning, and can be ordered online at <http://millennium-project.org/millennium/201314SOF.html>.