



## Essential Reading

### Important New Strategic Literature

# Future Imperfect

*2013-14 State of the Future.* By Jerome C. Glenn, Theodore J. Gordon, and Elizabeth Florescu. Washington, DC, 2014: The Millennium Project, 4421 Garrison St. NW, Washington, DC 20016-4055, USA. ISBN: 978-0-9882639-1-8. 247pp, soft cover and ebook. Paperback: \$39.95. E-pub: \$29.95.

**S**TRATEGICALLY — AND GLOBALLY — COMPREHENSIVE TREND ANALYSIS is rare, and for this reason alone the *2013-14 State of the Future* study is important, and a welcome continuation of the series produced by the Millennium Project. It is an attempt to peer into the future, using all the models of trend analysis available to divine the trajectory of human and natural events.

This is a task fraught with conjecture, but, then, controversy and debate may be the primary benefit of such stimulation; at least someone is thinking about where the juggernaut of human activity is leading.

Inevitably, modeling of trends produces somewhat linear projections, and if history — at its macro-level — teaches anything, it is that linear paths are rarely long sustained. But before discussing any specific aspect of *2013-14 State of the Future*, it is worth commenting that the study is absolutely worth the reader's time just in the assemblage of research data alone. It raises so much detail that a serious reader can ponder outcomes without necessarily buying into all the analysis and recommendations of the writers of the study. But the study does indeed make many extremely insightful linkages which provide a view of where, in many respects, human society has reached.

As the writers themselves note: "Futures research is the systematic exploration of assumptions about the future; unfortunately, its work has not been systematically evaluated and applied to improve its quality in decisionmaking. Instead, the tyranny of the moment tends to overrule long-term global perspectives. Short-term, selfish, economic decisionmaking can [for example] be blamed for the 2008 global financial crisis, continued environmental degradation, and widening income disparities. The long-term goal to land on the moon accelerated technological innovations, economic growth, and lifted the human spirit. The long-term goal to eradicate smallpox inspired many people to cooperate across cultural and political divides."

In some respects, the authors themselves are prisoners of the moment, with the consequence that their perspectives tend to be based around current — often fashionable — priorities, such as the fixation on a perception that broadening income disparity *per se* is a cause of concern to humanity (as populist pundits today portray it). In the longer-term, income disparity, to this reviewer, is certainly a creator of a revived sense of social *envy* (and therefore political disquiet) in a world where average wealth has — as the study acknowledges — risen substantially and progressively in recent decades. A more worthy phenomenon for ex-

amination, then, might perhaps have been how the growth of wealth at its broadest level of distribution has not created a stable world, but rather one riven with envy.

Such rising wealth and easing social strictures have been the basis for social unrest leading to major revolutions throughout history, and particularly in the 20th Century: Iran (1979), Russia (1917), and so on. Can we foresee such dislocation in Europe and the United States in the near future, and perhaps the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the foreseeable future?

A very positive highlight of the book is that it documents that a number of governments have developed specific organizations to examine, and plan for, future contextual issues. The book discusses how these organizations can be beneficial, noting — as an example — that "the futurist Herman Kahn had about 20 discussions with the President of South Korea over a 10-year period that led to that country's economic miracle. This was an excellent example how decisionmaking can be improved by global foresight." It goes on to note: "A successful Global Future Intelligence System [GFIS] should help policymaking become more sensitive to global long-term perspectives."

The book highlights the ongoing scientific progress which, in many areas, spurs great hope that the future will merely be a more efficient, healthier, better communicating version of today. It does not discuss the growing confluence of trends which — because of that confluence — are already becoming disruptive in the negative sense.

The study correctly highlights the trend of increasing connectivity of the global human population and its access to an almost human-integrated computing capability. But it does not see this as a vulnerability, neither as an intrinsic weakening of the innate need for human education (as opposed to computer-based archiving of data) and the accretion of wisdom based on accumulated experience. Nor does it highlight the reality that the dependence of these artificial extra-human synapses on constant electrical supply is also its great vulnerability, not only to infrastructural interdiction, but also to decay and stagnation. To what extent, even, do we see the prospect of crises in the artificial neural net emerging from the mat-

uration and decay in the industrial world's infrastructure of water supply and physical transportation links?

The Executive Summary of the *2013-14 State of the Future* report noted: "The world is improving better than most pessimists know and ... future dangers are worse than most optimists indicate." An interesting observation, but perhaps it could have been phrased as: the world is improving better in some respects than most optimists perceive, and future dangers are worse than most pessimists anticipate. The study in some respects fails to capture the most critical element of all history: the issue of whether conditions foster leadership and social responsibility, appropriate to the stimulation of stable societal management, or whether conditions foster a vacuum of leadership and social cohesiveness capable of averting great human disaster.

In other words, the indicators of progress measured could count for naught if systems fail to create the leadership appropriate to the condition. The book talks in terms of ethics as though this was a condition which could be universally agreed and was historically constant; as if logic were universal and immutable (and mirrored the present Western definitions of logic and ethics). For this reason, the behavior of whole societies and of leaders will continue to emerge as illogical and counter-productive in the reasoning of the study. Indeed, this is a study by extremely intelligent people arguing that the future of the world will follow a fundamentally intelligent path, as defined by their logic paradigm. It is tempting to think that this could be the case.

There is great emphasis in the book, as in society at large, on "collective intelligence" and the engines which appear to create it. There is a case to be made that such systems can have a major impact on productivity, but in the aggregate a case can also be made that "collective intelligence" still emerges as the lowest common denominator, and does nothing to actually improve the rate or quality of decisionmaking. We have only to look at the failure of a generation of political leadership almost across the globe, and at the stagnation — in this age of inter-connectivity and "collective intelligence" — of the United Nations, with its repeated failure to actually resolve inter-state crises or even protect the one thing it was created to preserve: the Westphalian-style nation-state.

That is not to say that the book's focus on "the possible" is not valuable. It is extremely valuable and encouraging. There is much great work in the book on the "lone wolf terrorist" phenomenon and the potential dangers occurrences of such activity could create. However, there is little on the reality that it has always been, and will always be, the "lone wolf" leader or disruptive thinker, working in relative isolation, who will change the future. Certainly, with the emerging confluence of strategic mega-trends, it will be the risk-takers, not the "collective thinkers" or the highly-bureaucratized governments, which will prove most nimble in seizing opportunity.

*State of the Future* draws heavily on United Nations-originating data on global

population trends and aspects related to UN-blessed demography or the statistics of the World Economic Forum. That is the Achilles heel of most global trend analysis today, for there are sound reasons to doubt UN statistical orthodoxy, whether on issues of climate or on human population numbers. UN numbers, like the trend analysis in *State of the Future*, are an important starting point for debate, not a flight path for human reality. As a result, *State of the Future* is an important compendium of “the State of Now”. This is no condemnation: the work, by broadly defining the present condition so well in many respects, takes the reader much farther forward than most thinking, which is usually mired in outdated stereotypes posing as a reflection of current frameworks.

*State of the Future* is a very readable and important tool, and essential to any strategic planner. The caveat is that the planner must not necessarily buy in totality the possibilities, or the ethical or ideological bases, or the prescriptions for action, advocated in the book.

The reader of the book must reach its final pages saying “yes, but ...” — *GRC*.

## Books Which Can Change Us, and History

***Baron Mihajlo Mikašinović***. By Djuro Zatezalo. Translated from the Serbian by Marjorie Mikasen. Edited for the English edition by Branko Mikasinovich. February 2014: New Avenue Books. ISBN: 978-0615973432. 142pp, softcover. *Illustrated, indexed. Serbian edition (Baron Mihajlo Mikašinović od Zmijskog Polja)*, 2011. Amazon.com. \$8.10. Kindle vers. \$2.99.

Those who review books, and those who write them, know — or hope in their core — that books can change lives, change entire societies; change worlds. Anyone who covered the decade of conflict in the Balkans in the 1990s, and saw the dismemberment of Yugoslavia and its peoples, knew that the conduct and outcomes of the wars could have — would have — been different ... if only the right people in politics and the media in Europe and North America had read their history. If they had understood the realities of that history.

The 1990s was a heartbreaking period of cruelly ignorant policy, driving punitive injustice. It is easy to blame it all merely on the xenophobia of the hate groups which had re-emerged, particularly in Croatia and what is now Bosnia and Herzegovina following the death of Marshal Tito and then the end of the Cold War. But that the great Western powers — and here we must cite, in particular, Germany, the US’ Clinton Administration, and the United Kingdom’s Blair Administration — should be oblivious to history, and then to side with the hate groups; there lies the tragedy. *J’accuse*.

And that there should be none who had read the books and history of the region? That the media should then become, unapologetically, the lapdog of misguided policy? *J’accuse*.

Those who know that books can change history first know that the books which stir something of an opening of the mind must reach the right readers at the right time. This reviewer had read much on the Balkans when the wars broke out there at the beginning of the 1990s. He wish he had read Baron Mihajlo Mikašinović. It would have made a more nuanced understanding of that “balkanized world” so much more intimate.



The brief and wonderfully readable *Baron Mihajlo Mikašinović*, by Croatian-born Serb Djuro Zatezalo, is one such book which could have helped create more rational and understanding sentiments toward the various peoples of what was to become Yugoslavia. It may seem arcane to suggest that a biography of an 18th Century nobleman, fighting on the marches of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, could have changed 20th Century policy. But so it could. Indeed, the truly noble Baron left a legacy thrusting into the 21st Century for that same area where he was born and became an heroic figure.

Today, the Baron would have been forgotten but for Zatezalo’s dedication, and the dedication of his kinsman, Branko Mikasinovich, and translator Marjorie Mikasen.

It is not too much to say that even now — having gone through the bloody decade of the ‘nineties trying to point out the staggering slander which the then-leaders of Germany, the US, and the UK visited upon the Serbs — this book has had a profound effect on this reviewer. It is a book about a cavalier who became a nobleman of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, even though that Empire poorly treated his people and their Orthodox Christian faith. Mihajlo Mikašinović was the first Serb to reach the nobility and the rank of field marshal-lieutenant (lieutenant-general in the current iteration) in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and he served Empress Maria-Theresa well, winning battle after battle for her. He rose from the ranks by sheer courage and merit. His family the same; some 20 of them died for the Empire. He suffered numerous wounds of battle, was captured and imprisoned until ransomed.

But ultimately his principles and his determination not to sell out the interests of the Serbs of the Empire, or their Orthodoxy, were the cause of his undoing, and he died at the age of 59, a few years after being pensioned off in ignominious fashion. That he died prematurely, in Vienna where he had sought treatment, was unquestionably due to both the injuries he had sustained, to the damage to his health while a prisoner of war, and to the disloyalty which the Empress showed to her most loyal warrior as a result of the extreme Roman Catholic xenophobia in a corner of the Croatian element of the Empire. That same xenophobia festered after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and re-emerged periodically as the *Ustashe (Ustaše)* of the 1941-45 “Independent State of Croatia”, and during the

break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

It is easy to see that this festering extremism, so determined to destroy the Orthodox Serbs who Vienna had courted to save the Empire’s south-eastern marches against the Turks, was less than understood by the Imperial Court in Vienna where a more moderate Catholicism had welcomed Orthodox Serbs and Jews into the aristocracy and nobility. We saw in World War II and in the 1990s break-up of Yugoslavia a similar failure of Bavarian Germans and even the Vatican to comprehend that the zealotry of the *Ustaše* actually betrayed Catholicism, as well as the peoples of the region.

The book on Baron Mihajlo Mikašinović shows clearly the underlying strand of history which destroyed the career of the Baron — to the detriment of the Empire — and also was later to lead to the war in Yugoslavia and cause a modern Croatia to be born in the ignominy of *Ustaše* misdeeds instead of in the natural flowering of independence. Today’s Croatia is attempting to re-balance the society away from the extremists, and the fact that Croatian-born Serb Djuro Zatezalo was able to remain in that territory and write his brief biography of the Baron is testimony to the return of moderation to Zagreb.

The book begins with a preface entitled “Perseverance in the Orthodox Faith”, by Serbian Orthodox Bishop Gerasim of the Upper Karlovac Diocese, and starts:

The Military Border era is an important chapter in the history of the Habsburg monarchy. The Krajina region [of Croatia] played a rôle in defending the [Austro-Hungarian] state’s borders from the beginning of the 16th to the end of the 17th century. The Krajina continued to have a stake in the Austrian wars in the Balkans and in Central and Western Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. This history represents one of the most important themes in Serbian historiography.

The name of Mikašinović was to live on, not only in the residents of at least three hamlets (as the author notes) in Donje and Gornje Dubrave areas, but in a subsequent Lt.-Gen. Mikašinović of the communist Yugoslav People’s Army. And in Branko Mikasinovich, now living in the United States and determined to bring Djuro Zatezalo’s book into an English-speaking world. Branko Mikasinovich worked not only to edit the sensitive translation by Marjorie Mikasen, but also to actually research and bring out the appropriate meanings of the various Austrian ranks and military terms of the period.

This is an easily-digestible book which reaches any reader who recognizes that, in the prosecution of the wars of the 1990s in the Balkans (and, even, in World War II), there was something missing from the international communities’ understanding of the complexities of the area and its people. It is not yet over: the transforming Greater Black Sea region, and the unrest within Turkey (and its present leader’s anti-Atatürk dream of a new Ottomanism), make the Balkans, and therefore Europe, still vulnerable.

So, even now, Zatezalo’s book may find its mark in open minds. — *Gregory R. Copley*