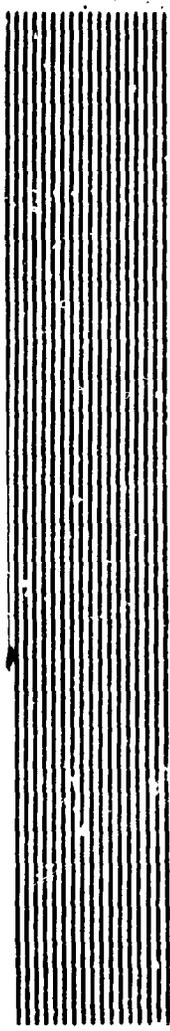


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# FUTURE STUDIES AND CONFLICT: REFLECTIONS ON DROR

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BY  
G.D. KAYE and K.E. SOLEM



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ABSTRACT

↙ A paper by Professor Yehezkel Dror states that there are some serious contradictions in futures studies which may lead to the exclusion of a realistic concern with the futures of war and violence.

This memorandum analyzes the Dror thesis and its subordinate claims, and puts forward an alternative/complementary view. ↗

RESUME

Le professeur Yehezkel Dror déclare dans une thèse que les études en futurologie renferment certaines graves contradictions qui pourraient mener à l'avenir de la guerre et de la violence.

Ce mémoire analyse la thèse du professeur Dror et ses affirmations secondaires, en plus de proposer un autre position.

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FOREWORD

Several transcripts by Professor Yehezkel Dror are available in the ORAE Library as well as in D Strat A.

A revised version of this paper will be published by FUTURES, IPC Press.

This memorandum is issued under Project 96108 - Impact of Scientific and Technological Advances on National Strategy, Doctrine and Security Policy.

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FUTURE STUDIES AND CONFLICT:  
REFLECTIONS ON DROR

Introduction

1. It is now four and half years since Yehezkel Dror, the well-known Israeli political scientist and futurist wrote his editorial in FUTURES in which he identified what he considered some serious internal contradictions in futures studies.\* Professor Dror is, as people may or may not know, a former senior policy analysis adviser to the Israeli Ministry of Defence, now Professor of Political Science and Wolfson Professor of Public Administration at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem as well as a member of the Editorial Board of FUTURES.
2. Those who are familiar with his book Crazy States\*\*as well as previous and subsequent writings in the fields of strategy and futures may have no difficulty following the argument, as well as probably sharing his concerns.
3. It is due time to reconsider the claims made by Yehezkel Dror and to determine what, if anything, has taken place since he originally put them forward and, if so, which of his arguments could, and should, be revised.
4. Our own interest in this topic is a greater concern than the purely intellectual components of Professor Dror's stated case. As Western strategic analysts, we would like to know the answers to the following points:

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\* See Yehezkel Dror, "War, Violence and Futures Studies", in FUTURES, February 1974.

\*\* Yehezkel Dror, Crazy States: A Counter-Conventional Strategic Problem, Lexington, Massachusetts: Heath, 1971.

- a) Are we on the right lines in our analysis of conflict or at least are we avoiding the various pitfalls which Professor Dror mentions?
- b) Is what we are doing futurology, and, if so, can we get any help from studying other futurologists, or can we help them?
- c) Is the vast amount of study now devoted to peace research, conflict research, arms control, etc., worthy of our attention or not?
- d) Has Professor Dror come up with some basic truths relating to futures studies which we should take account of in any of our studies concerned with the future, and if so, what are they?

It seems to us that there are important lessons to be drawn here, and we should like to demonstrate what these lessons are.

#### The Dror Thesis

5. Professor Dror's main argument goes as follows: Futures studies are now exhibiting a serious internal contradiction, inasmuch as a great deal of attention is devoted to predictions of catastrophe, whereas some real doomsday possibilities are in fact neglected. What Professor Dror has in mind, as stated in his FUTURES article, is the extensive discussion of possible ecological disequilibria compared to what he judges to be very few serious analyses of the futures of war as well as other forms of violence.

6. His argument is based upon his study of the proceedings and papers from five large international Futures Conferences,

namely Oslo, Kyoto, Washington, Bucharest and Rome, as well as on concurrent and subsequent articles in various futures studies periodicals.

7. What explains this somewhat curious phenomenon? Professor Dror finds five major reasons. First, futures studies as a field of endeavour are, according to him, weak in paradigms, methods, methodologies and analytical skills. Since there are no accepted search patterns or selection criteria as far as subjects for study are concerned, the result has been a domination by subjective taste as well as personal concerns. Hence, as Professor Dror sees it, there is little or no correlation between the amount and quality of attention given to a subject and that particular subject's significance for the future of mankind.

8. Secondly, there has been a very strong (Dror describes it as intense) desire for cross-ideological bridge-building as well as a deeply felt need for the maintenance of intergroup harmony. This has led to an avoidance of potentially controversial and divisive topics of study, including what Professor Dror refers to as realistic studies of the futures of war and violence.

9. Thirdly, as Dror sees it, there is much wishful thinking in futures studies. Since everyone dislikes war and violence, there is a tendency to neglect these in our choice of topics. Correspondingly, to Professor Dror's mind, since many futures students seemingly dislike big cities and large technologies, their sympathy lies in the direction of ecological subjects. This does not imply that Dror finds ecological problems unimportant. He feels, and he states this explicitly, that these problems are important and should be studied. However they should not be made substitutes for even more important subjects such as war and violence.

10. Fourthly, the problem of contradiction in futures studies seems to go deeper than any of the above statements. The specific

form for wishful thinking, according to Dror, 'is a kind of tacit trust in the adjustment capacity of the human species (our emphasis). For example, nuclear war endangers human survival, hence no such war will happen. Interestingly enough there is, Dror finds, no identifiably similar trust in built-in human wisdom with regard to ecological issues.

11. Finally, Dror argues, there is among futurists an emerging culture which rejects war and violence as a legitimate (our emphasis) or essential subject of study. Here Professor Dror mentions the examples of 'This sounds too much like Herman Kahn' or references to the 'Military-industrial complex', as standard rejection-slogans.

#### Critical Comments and an Alternative/Complementary View

12. The major function of futures studies, from a strategic point of view, includes an awareness of critical problems which would enable us to assist their handling through anticipatory recognition, analysis as well as prescriptive action. Professor Dror explicitly recognizes this.\*

13. As Yehezkel Dror and others have shown us, the future is basically rich in potential war and violence. Future conflicts include not only those between East and West, haves and have-nots, new and old ideologies, new and old groupings and alliances, but also a myriad of extra-territorial issue areas. The continuous introduction of new technologies and their socio-political impacts may, and in all likelihood will, lead to an increase in potential conflict, war and violence to the point of possibly endangering humanity itself. When, how and under which conditions the above

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\* See Dror, "War, Violence and Futures Studies". op.cit.

mentioned may take place remains to be seen. By the latter statement we do not imply that we can only wait and see. Surely, if futurology has any use at all we must try it on exactly these types of problems.

14. Let us return for a moment to the central part of Dror's initial argument, namely the 'contradiction' which he found in futures studies. Surely if this is taken seriously it is more a 'shortcoming' rather than an internal contradiction. The essential part of futures studies is that there is a future. Consequently a dedicated futurologist will avoid "doomsday" possibilities unless he is in no position of avoiding them. This, in a sense, divides the professionals from the public (informed or otherwise) who are unwilling to contemplate it.

15. It is true that there has been relatively little analysis of the future of conflict. The professional accepts it as a reality to be prevented or occasionally to be used in the pursuit of some goal. Most of the academic studies regard it as something which occurs because the means (of violence) exists, hence devote their major attention to impractical proposals for removing the means. It seems to us that the weakness of methodologies has little to do with this split, although, of course, it is serious for futurology in general.

16. Cross-ideological bridge-building is all very well but not at the expense of ignoring real differences in outlook. There is no difficulty in finding topics which all ideologies perceive as important. The difficulty is in finding an approach that does not suffer from ideological bias. In other words politics (like conflict) is an ingredient in most studies whether or not it is explicitly stated. Even if we accept as criterion 'the good of mankind as a whole' each individual will give his interpretation a political content, if not flavour.

17. The suggestion of 'wishful thinking' does not impress us. The feeling that futurologists (as any other group of academics) have an axe to grind is perhaps nearer to the mark. It is just not true that the future of large cities has been ignored as a subject of study, although it may be true they have been given a more ecological flavour than is justified for something which is an artifact.

18. As for the propensity for wishful thinking among futurologists concerning the capacity for the inbuilt human wisdom to exert itself, the picture painted seems somewhat incomplete. What we find in much of the futures literatures, and this concerns us, is a thrust that rules should be imposed upon people to save them from themselves, i.e., to adapt people rather than the system.

19. There is a widespread rejection of war but there is no rejection of conflict, indeed there is an increased tolerance of militant pressure groups and even of violence as a justifiable means of attaining their ends. We would speculate that objection to war is as much, or more, an objection to state control over human lifestyles than it is an objection to violence.

20. Dror, in Crazy States\* states that in the future, a number of nations may go 'insane' hence governments should prepare for that contingency. However, as was proven in concurrent and subsequent writings, he is not simply a doomsday prophet. Instead, Dror describes in some detail a concrete operational approach to policy sciences through explanation of selected control concepts and their applications to actual economic, political and social situations.\*\*

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\*Dror, Crazy States, op.cit.

\*\*See, for example, Dror's Ventures in Policy Sciences: Concepts and Applications, New York; American Elsevier, 1971, as well as "Policy Analysis and Foreign Policy Decisions" in Israel Law Review, Volume 13, Number 2, April 1978.

21. As far as the main criticisms are concerned, Dror's argument still holds. It is true, for example, that futures studies as a field do not as yet have any agreed upon single 'search pattern' or unified methodology. Quite often the tendency has been for one particular method to be championed by one or more exponent(s). Consequently, the emphasis has frequently tended to fall on one or more particular methodologies often determined by easy access and availability of particular types of data. This, then, could have been at the expense of a more comprehensive, hence, possibly more conceptually 'mature' overview.

22. On the other hand, as we have previously demonstrated there are available, during most recent years, an array of promising and partly already successfully realized approaches which could contribute - in some cases substantially - to the solution of specific futures problems.\* Whereas not all of them are equally well fitted for any and all problems, critical use of selected techniques could greatly contribute to at least their partial solution.

23. Why should futurology have a "unified methodology"? It is true that there is only one future and hence only one problem. But since we cannot solve it, all we can do is to try different approximations until it appears satisfactory for its intended purpose. We will get nowhere by arbitrarily deciding that this method is right whereas that one is wrong.

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\* See Erik Solem, "Some Future Uses of Analytic Forecasting", in Environmental Assessment of Socioeconomic Systems (edited by D.F. Burkhardt and W.H. Ittelson), NATO Conference Series II: Systems Science, Plenum Press, New York & London, 1978.

24. Certain methods and techniques, for example scenarios and gaming, seem to be particularly applicable to the evaluation of military hardware in simulated combat situations and are, in certain cases, used extensively. As have been shown, methods such as the Delphi technique, trend analysis, linear projection, dynamic programming, cross-impact analysis, etc., are probably of a more indirect usefulness from a strategic or defence point of view.

25. However, the important point is that, contrary to Dror's criticism, such methodologies and techniques as these do exist although so far they have not been utilized to their fullest potential.

26. The second part of this first critical point, namely the lack of a single agreed-upon 'search pattern' criterion of selection or a single unified methodology, is a bit trickier. Forecasting and the political process are, to a large extent, inseparable. Techniques and methods may often be used, deliberately or not, in such a way that they may mislead even relatively sophisticated audiences. Hence, in the sense that the methods used are unrepresentative, they may add to the underestimation of the true range of options. This means that, in the long run, they could lead to insufficiently flexible choices. This argument, in fact, underlines the argument in favour of analytic forecasting. It is important to note that strategies which leave options open have the essential purpose of making better use of information about the short term while working within comprehensive, yet still relatively flexible long term goals. Theory aside, the evidence would seem to indicate that in recent years there has been a trend towards this type of incremental planning, in spite of the apparent increase in long term issues.

27. The second point of criticism, namely the very strong desire for cross-ideological bridge-building is, in reality, now possibly in decline. The failure of the SALT and MBFR negotiations, the stagnancy connected with the Human Rights talks and the basic 'non-event' nature of the U.N. Disarmament Conference all testify that, in real terms, the ideological bridge-building is in fact somewhat lacking. This, however, may not seriously affect the wishful thinking on behalf of several, often quite prominent 'futurists'. But then, nor does it seriously affect or detract from essentially useless and self-serving bureaucratic activity surrounding some of these issues.

28. Now, the so-called failure of SALT and the MBFR negotiations, it should be stressed, is really the failure of participants to reach agreement which certain outsiders are hoping for. In our view the talks and negotiations are the bridge. It is the existence of the bridge rather than the precise point at which the parties approaching from each end meet on it which is important. A bridge exists to facilitate intercommunication, not to allow everyone to move to the same side.

29. It must be suspected that Yehezkel Dror has unrooted a very central issue, and incidentally touched a central nerve, when he complains about the specific form of wishful thinking, i.e., the tacit trust of the adjustment capacity of the human species. It would be nice if reason always, or at least always in the end, reigned supreme. However, much ongoing and probably also future social and political activity suggests otherwise. It is outside the confines of the paper to examine this problem in greater detail. Suffice it to say that the deeply ingrained cultural optimism, which Dror has identified in some futurists but which permeates much wider than that group, is deeply suspicious in and of itself. Why is it, for example, that we so often at one and the same time tend to underestimate the resilience of the socio-political system of the adversary and over-

estimate his inclination or desire to be like us? Dror's argument carries a lot of weight on this point.

30. The final critical comment concerning the all too frequent references to some 'military-industrial complex' is probably receding somewhat, although it would be a mistake to assume that it could not surface again, within a different climate, albeit one of false optimism.

### Conclusion

31. Since Dror's critical comments on his contemporary fellow futurists appeared in FUTURES less than half a decade ago certain events and developments have, as has been shown here, taken place. Some of his critical comments have been refuted or are no longer urgently relevant. However, in one or two instances his 'hunches' have proven possibly alarmingly correct. The avoidance of potentially controversial and decisive topics, including realistic studies of the future of war and violence, is now being rectified but only slowly. Much more must be done in this area.

32. Conflict, war and violence may be deplorable from a humanistic, indeed from any, point of view. But it is only through careful analysis and study of them as phenomena and processes that their occurrence could be kept to an absolute minimum and our own interests and survival be safeguarded.

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5. Erik Solem, "Some Future Uses of Analytic Forecasting", in Environmental Assessment of Socioeconomic Systems (D.F. Burkhardt and W.H. Ittelson, Eds.), NATO Conference Series II: Systems Science, Plenum Press, New York and London, 1978.

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