

SCENARIO PLANNING AND STRATEGY IN THE PENTAGON

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Students and practitioners of national security policy have long understood that uncertainty about the future is a central challenge of strategy. Scenario planning should be one of the Department of Defense's (DoD) most important tools for developing strategy under uncertainty. Since 2002, the DoD has employed a formalized, joint scenario planning process to support strategy and force development, but that process has proven less influential than intended for strategic decision-making.

Explaining the challenges facing scenario planning and analysis in the Pentagon is the main purpose of this monograph. After presenting a brief history of the DoD's scenario planning experiences, this monograph argues that the formalized, joint scenario planning process has been most effective in supporting capability and program development, where its emphasis on detailed data development and bureaucratic pedigree has proven most valuable. Where the approach has fallen short is in shaping strategy and force structure, in part because of those same areas of emphasis. Detailed data, bureaucratic pedigree, and the mechanics of formal processes more generally fit poorly with the way senior officials deliberate, debate, bargain, and reason about their strategic choices. The monograph shows that the reasons for this are numerous and are rooted in intrinsic, structural characteristics of decision-making in large organizations, especially the DoD.

The monograph concludes with recommendations for rejuvenating scenario planning that aim to build

on the real achievements of the current process; separate the functions of decision support relevant to strategy and force structure development and capability and program development; and rebalance analytic resources toward less emphasis on scenario and data development and greater emphasis on strategic analysis.

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