

Date: Thu, 15 Oct 2009 13:36:15 -0400

To: "Dr. Baruch Fischhoff - Chair, NAS Study on improving Intelligence" <baruch@cmu.edu>

From: Lloyd Etheredge <lloyd.etheredge@policyscience.net>

Subject: 12. Cross-Cultural Political Psychology: Corrections & Warnings via Sears and Gergen

Dr. Fischhoff and colleagues:

You should warn USGOV (DNI/CIA) consumers that American social science theories could be biased and misleading. Thirty-six years ago Kenneth Gergen warned ("Social Psychology as History") about biases and distortions from using mostly American college undergraduates as experimental subjects. And, despite the warning, the situation has become worse (a problem discussed in the attached letter of August 21, 2009 for the President's Council of Advisers on Science and Technology.)

David Sears: A Flashing Red Light & non-US political psychology

David Sears' more recent critique (referenced in the 8/21/2009 letter and attached article) establishes a bright, flashing red light concerning many topics. He is one of our premier political/social psychologists. If I was advising the DNI, his hypotheses would be a starting point for a high-priority To Do list to evaluate the vulnerability of American-based models and behavioral predictions.

I hope that you will address this problem straightforwardly, perhaps with a public hearing and testimony from an expert panel including Sears and Gergen. The latest official count is that 85,000+ Iraqis died after the first-step success of the recent invasion.

An Obvious Example: Hierarchical Psychology Abroad

An obvious example is that mainstream US social science has limited empathy with cultures and economic systems with important elements of hierarchical psychology that affect behavior.

For example, our macroeconomic models assume motivation is exogenous. And there is a

too-simple ideological hypothesis, from the political Right and many economists, that high motivation/high growth/animal spirits economies are produced by markets & freedom when the role of government is limited. But it should have been impossible - although it is a testable proposition - for the CIA to use US macroeconomic models & coefficients to forecast the extraordinary rate of Chinese economic growth - i.e., excluding the powerful hierarchical role of government and its authority/leadership in a culture that does not have Enlightenment admixtures.

[Nor could the CIA have successfully understood & forecast the contrasting economic growth of the former Soviet Union while ignoring the dissolution of its hierarchical system. Induced anomie - without (yet, except for the Russian Mafia) the national psychological adjustments predicted by the animal spirits model of macropsychology - affects most of the nation. In political science the Verba style models of voting, based on the US attitude measures & more egalitarian sensibilities here, will appear to describe Russian political life knowledgeably via the best-fit regression equations of computer analysis, but also will miss the psychodrama and backward-link motivational and political effects on individuals. And the potential dangers.]

Suggested: A Fast-Discovery Project

I suggest that you call David Sears for a copy of his paper and current thinking. Even if DNI/CIA cannot fix the US system - likely, this is PCAST's job - it is in their interest to underwrite a fast-discovery project to evaluate David's & other hypotheses about high vulnerability/risks.

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