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To: "Dr. Baruch Fischhoff - Chair, National Academy Committee on Improving Intelligence" <baruch@cmu.edu>, "Dr. Richard Atkinson - Chair - NRC/DBASSE" <rcatkinson@ucsd.edu>, "Dr. Kenneth Prewitt" <kp2058@columbia.edu>

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

Subject: 165. Post-Woodward Analysis: Afghanistan, the Obama Administration, and Behavioral Science? Applying President Reagan's Hypothesis?

Dear Dr. Fischhoff and Colleagues:

The National Academy of Sciences might want to invite specialists in behavioral science and national security decision making to suggest observations based on Bob Woodward's Obama's War.

Specifically: In responding to the invitation from the DNI, the National Academy of Sciences now has a remarkable and exciting opportunity, unique in US & world history. Woodward's book is a current *in media res* account of highly secret decision processes, setting policies for an Afghanistan/Pakistan War that is not going well; in the midst of a GWOT [Global War on Terror] that is now running at \$1 trillion+/decade (US + others) for intelligence alone and that is not being won; and with both wars being fought on the basis of behavioral science assumptions. Is there anything that a fresh and independent look, by the members of the US National Academy of Sciences could suggest? <1> Now would be a good time.

Applying President Reagan's Capacity for Empathy. Misperception by the Taliban?

“. . . and no man be longer deemed an enemy , than while his sword is drawn against us.”

- Samuel Johnson (1760).

For example, it is possible that Mullah Omar, the head of the Taliban, could be in the same early psychological position of misperception that President Ronald Reagan later acknowledged in his own diary entries about Russia [cited in # 150] <2> Mullah Omar might have deep misperceptions of America, its vivid and genuine fears of a new terrorist attack, and the causes of its war against the Taliban. He may believe the “narrative” of his own side that America wants to

rule the world, destroy and humiliate Islam, install puppet governments, and control and exploit the nature resources of the Islamic world [e.g., # 151]. Thus, because of misperception, he may not recognize that a realistic, trustworthy, and lasting political settlement with the Obama Administration could be achieved quickly.

The “misperception” problem - if accepted as a working hypothesis - could require a massive US strategic effort to change. But the aggressive (direct + third party) diplomacy would only be a small fraction of the resources devoted to the military components that are the prominent feature of Woodward’s account.

- Mullah Omar probably *is* embedded in the so-called “narrative” of his own side about America’s inherent evil. Some people have talked about negotiations, but Mullah Omar has publicly threatened to kill anyone who meets with the King of Saudi Arabia or President Karzai’s people, or other intermediaries. Given his background and limited experience of the foreign world [# 52], it might be difficult for him to understand that the US wants friendly relations: It destroyed the Taliban government which he headed and it has killed many of his followers; the US has had a \$25 million price on his head for a decade, and the CIA - as Woodward’s book now affirms - has authority to assassinate him quickly by drone attack as soon as his physical location is known. And there are 3,000 CIA-trained men in hunter/killer teams probably deployed in Pakistan in the vicinity of the city of Quetta where the CIA (according to Woodward) believes he is located.<1> Mullah Omar may not correctly interpret this as an indicator of the intensity of motivation and urgency of the Obama Administration’s desire to reach a political deal. Which, in one sense, it is.

Archetypes and the Enemy Image: A Hopeful Message

If - in the psychology of simple archetypes and Enemy images - Mullah Omar (in his own mind) is Luke Skywalker, allied with the virtuous spiritual Force of the universe and facing the high-tech evil Empire, with its “fear and awe” weaponry and skies filled with its spy drones, the Obama Administration has an extraordinary psychological/diplomatic challenge [# 3]. But the hopeful possibility that behavioral scientists might suggest - and which is understated in Woodward’s account of decision making and strategy - is that the anti-Taliban component of the war is about misperception. And this could be *very* hopeful.

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<1> One of the remarkable achievements of American behavioral scientists, during the Cold War, was a set of alert and thoughtful theories of mistakes in perception and decision making. Academic specialists, surveyed by your Study Group and the National Academy, might see applications of earlier work, or they might suggest new hypotheses. Alternatively, the invitations might be issued in Open Forum reviews of the National Academy Report in leading professional journals with abstracts and a briefing for the DNI senior staff via the National Academy of Sciences staff.

<2> Archived on www.policyscience.net at II. D.

Dr. Lloyd S. Etheredge
Policy Sciences Center
URL: www.policyscience.net
301-365-5241 (v); lloyd.etheredge@policyscience.net
lloyd.etheredge@aya.yale.edu (email)

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