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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: 166. Beyond the usual Fairy Godmother List of solutions?;

Fwd: Kaiser on Leebaert

Dear Dr. Fischhoff and Colleagues:

I am forwarding a review from yesterday's Washington Post. The reviewer, Robert Kaiser, is Associate Editor of the Washington Post and has many years of experience in foreign affairs reporting. The review raises issues that you may wish to address in the forthcoming National Academy of Sciences Report concerning behavioral science and improving the \$75 billion/year US national intelligence system.

About Leebaert's book *per se*. I have thought (e.g., Can Governments Learn?) about *hubris* and imagination/ psychodrama processes (v. rational analytic brain mechanisms) and about non-learning across a series of US return engagements. And a member of your panel (Philip Tetlock) co-edited the leading volume of papers on learning in US-Russia relations, where (ultimately) remarkable learning - and even wisdom - did occur. I disagree with many parts of Leebaert's book, but I think he has got two questions right: 1.) Evaluating performance (including non-learning) across sixty years - and not just the most recent, alarming decade; 2.) Focusing on problems of *hubris* + imagining.

What the National Academy of Sciences can say, and how you can direct our attention, in both areas can be historically important. Especially since \$75 billion/year in intelligence investment + professional expertise is supposed to overcome baseline problems and Establishment/institutional limitations.

- Former Secretary Lehman, a member of the 9/11 Commission, praised Leebaert for going beyond "the usual fairy godmother list of solutions." I think that there could be a receptive audience if the National Academy of Sciences makes bold and creative recommendations of its own [e.g., neuroscience, hierarchical psychodramas, and enemy images in forecasting the political behavior of teenage males [#3 and # 121 on www.policyscience.net at II. D]; the Global Content Analysis System; connecting the dots between the high youth unemployment and terrorist recruitment links identified in Global 2025 and fast, CCC-style prevention experiments [# 40 and # 99], etc. And there are bolder lines of work and experimentation/lesson-learning concerning further initiatives for shared humanitarian concerns and cultures of peace that the Hamburg Commission and theorists like de Rivera (ed., Handbook of Building Cultures of Peace, 2008) have pioneered. Kaiser's prominent Washington Post review indicates the new level of questions that are arising and the influential and thoughtful audiences that may be receptive to whatever our nation's leading behavioral scientists, via the National Academy of Sciences, will recommend.

best regards,

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Book review: 'Magic and Mayhem: The Delusions of American Foreign Policy From Korea to Afghanistan' by Derek Leebaert

By Robert G. Kaiser

Sunday, October 10, 2010; B06

MAGIC AND MAYHEM

The Delusions of American Foreign Policy From Korea to Afghanistan

By Derek Leebaert

Simon & Schuster. 336 pp. \$26

How refreshing to read a smart, polemical book that is deliciously rude to many grand poohbahs of our time while making good sense about the mess the United States now finds itself in across the globe. On these grounds alone Derek Leebaert deserves our gratitude. But with "Magic and Mayhem," he performs a greater service by ringing a persuasive alarm bell about the dangers inherent in our repeated attempts to put things right in countries we don't really understand and

cannot control, from Korea six decades ago to Afghanistan right now. And he does it without any of the ideological tendentiousness so typical of our public debate these days.

The magical thinking of Leebaert's title is the recurring American self-deception that we have what it takes to persuade the peoples of foreign lands whose histories, cultures and traditions have little in common with ours to see and do things our way. So Dick Cheney, one of the poohbahs whom Leebaert gleefully eviscerates, promised us that "the [Iraqi] people will be so happy with their freedoms [after a U.S. invasion] that we'll probably back ourselves out of there within a month or two." Magical thinking.

The mayhem of Leebaert's title is what happens, like proverbial clockwork, when we allow magical thinking to take us into another far-flung adventure that doesn't pan out. So the lessons of Vietnam do not help us avoid the fiasco of Iraq, and the failures in Iraq somehow convince us to double down in Afghanistan. Leebaert doesn't dwell on the point, but these three unsuccessful American enterprises share one attribute: "Success" for the United States in all of them would require leadership from local politicians in the country we are "helping," who will conduct themselves intelligently, honorably, effectively and in ways that fulfill American aspirations. Good luck with that.

Leebaert builds on the category described by David Halberstam more than four decades ago, the best and the brightest. They were the wizards of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations who took us into Vietnam and whom Halberstam skewered in his book of that name. Leebaert sees that Robert McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, Maxwell Taylor and the rest were early examples of what has become a permanent feature of our national security elite: "emergency men," eager to show their strength and resolve by launching new foreign adventures. Typically, he writes, they succumb to "the illusion that America as Lone Ranger can set the world right." He adds: "Emergency men regard themselves as personally wearing the badge." So Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Cheney and the hapless Jerry Bremmer, who presided with dizzying incompetence over the initial American occupation of Iraq, are members of a long chain of similar figures, our masters of mayhem. Leebaert worries that Gen. David Petraeus, now our commander in Afghanistan, will fall into this category as well.

"We can safely conclude," Leebaert writes, after making the case convincingly, "that the American foreign policy establishment is not up to the task of world leadership as posed by the country's far-flung political and military involvements." Who could refute this judgment? What evidence do we have to the contrary? Leebaert's idea of a better approach would combine fewer global commitments and a larger, smarter professional foreign service and civil service, with fewer political appointees to pursue new global enthusiasms every four or eight years. No architect of the Iraq war spoke Arabic or had experienced life in the Middle East, he notes -- a pattern evident in our earlier disasters. Neither McNamara nor Bundy knew anything about Asia, let alone Vietnam. Instead of pretending we know it all, Leebaert argues, why not develop a cadre of real specialists who will know enough to keep us out of trouble?

This book is lively and engaging, in no way a policy wonk's tome. Some readers will be annoyed by the author's presumption to know it all. This can be simultaneously very entertaining, as when he slices Henry Kissinger into ribbons, but frustrating when he passes a definitive judgment that seems dead wrong. This reader was exasperated by repeated references to the Soviet Union that seemed far wide of the mark. For example, Leebaert calls the U.S.S.R. of the 1980s "the same rigid monolith as in the 1930s," though the U.S.S.R. of the '80s, when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power, was the very antithesis of a "rigid monolith" and ended with the Soviet Union falling apart.

So you won't agree with Leebaert about everything -- no matter. If you can't disprove his large thesis, then you confront this painful conclusion: We have squandered tens of thousands of lives and hundreds of billions of dollars on foolish attempts to remake a world we simply cannot guide. And we're still doing it.

Robert G. Kaiser, associate editor of The Washington Post, covered the Vietnam War and the Soviet Union for this newspaper.

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