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**Subject: 182. Blowing a Sufficiently Loud Whistle: Failures of President Obama's Appointees to Connect the Dots; Fwd: Friedman, "Long Live Lady Luck" (11/6/2010)**

Dear Dr. Fischhoff and Colleagues:

### **Blowing a Loud Whistle and Effectiveness**

I hope that the tradition of political circumspection and evasion, which has grown at the National Academy of Sciences and NSF since the Reagan years, will not keep our nation's behavioral scientists from suggesting the possibility that the forecast of Thomas Friedman (the following column) is alarmingly right.

Across a wide underlying range of different causal models and statistical assumptions [including "luck"], the increased N of near-successful violent attacks on Americans and inside the American homeland suggests - at least to me - an \$80.1 billion/year system that is vastly outspending, but still falling behind, its enemies and - *de facto* - ours.

### **A Stunning Inability to Connect the Dots and Take Effective Action**

President Obama has warned that he "will fault" his appointees and their subordinates if they fail to connect the dots and take timely action when the required information already is in the system.

However, as you know, the Global 2025 behavioral science forecast already established that high youth unemployment countries in the Islamic world - like Yemen - could be likely sites for expanding terrorist recruitment.

The Obama Administration has been in office 22 months and I am not aware of any initiatives in Yemen and other countries in the same circumstances that connect the dots with the leadership, resources, and imagination required to be successful. The Administration has a

system-level problem. It would be a mistake for the National Academy of Sciences to imply that better behavioral science, more databases, and better analysis methods about potential terrorists are the primary missing ingredient. Behavioral science has important contributions to make, but also at a higher level.

It is worth noting - given the uneasy nature of American domestic politics these days - that a single successful, dramatic attack could be consequential for the political future, probably in many unfortunate ways. Thus, it would be especially useful if the National Academy can recommend how to make the link from evidence-based thinking to collective rationality/wisdom. There are only a small number of relatively poor countries involved, like Yemen, and the behavioral/administrative theory that putting one man in charge with a huge (\$80.1 billion/year) budget would be sufficient does not seem to have worked yet for a full-court prevention strategy.

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November 6, 2010, The New York Times

### **Long Live Lady Luck**

By THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

One of the most striking things about our recent midterm elections is that foreign policy played absolutely no part in the voting and for that we have Lady Luck, and some good intelligence work, to thank. In fact, in the past year we've won the lottery five times in row. How often does that happen?

Let's review: We got incredibly lucky that the Al Qaeda-inspired Nigerian, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, was unable to detonate the explosives sewn into his underpants, as his Delta airliner, with 278 passengers, was approaching the Detroit airport last Christmas Day. Ditto for Faisal Shahzad, whose homemade bomb packed into a 1993 Nissan Pathfinder failed to go off after he detonated it in a crowded Times Square on May 1. In February, thanks to good intelligence work, Najibullah Zazi, an Afghan immigrant, pleaded guilty in a New York courtroom to plotting with Al Qaeda to kill himself and as many other people as possible by setting off a bomb in a New York City subway near the anniversary of 9/11.

Then, last week, security teams removed packages from cargo planes in Britain and the United Arab Emirates bound for Chicago. Inside, they found bombs wired to cellphones and hidden in the toner cartridges of computer printers. The bombs, timed to go off when the planes were over

America, were believed to have been built by the same Saudi jihadist, Ibrahim Hassan al-Asiri, who designed the Christmas Day underwear bomb. An intelligence tip from the Saudis upset that plan.

Imagine if all five had gone off? We would be checking the underwear of every airline passenger, you would have to pass through metal detectors to walk into Times Square or take the subway, and the global air cargo industry would be in turmoil, as every package would have to be sniffed by a bomb-detecting dog.

So, yes, we won the lottery five times in a row and that's just the attempts we know about. But one of these days, our luck is going to run out because the savage madness emanating from Al Qaeda, from single individuals it inspires over the Web and from its different franchisees like the branches in Yemen and Iraq is only increasing.

A week ago, a Baghdad church was attacked. Here is how The Associated Press described it: Seven or eight Al Qaeda-linked Muslim militants "charged through the front doors of the church, interrupting the evening Mass service. They rushed down the aisle, brandishing their machine guns and spraying the room with bullets. They ordered the priest to call the Vatican to demand the release of Muslim women who they claimed were being held captive by the Coptic Church in Egypt. When the priest said he could not do that, the gunmen shot him and turned their guns on the congregation, killing most of those in the front pew." When the Iraqi police moved in to rescue the worshipers, scores more were killed in the shootout. Last Friday, pro-Taliban bombers blew up two moderate mosques during Friday prayer in northwestern Pakistan, killing more than 60 worshipers.

When Muslim jihadists are ready to just gun down or blow up unarmed men, women and children in the midst of prayer Muslim or Christian it means there are no moral, cultural or religious restraints left on the Islamic fringe. It's anything goes. And it's becoming routine.

What to do? So many, but not all, of the suicide bombers come from failing, humiliated societies that generate huge numbers of "sitting-around people," who are easy prey for recruiters offering martyrdom and significance in the next life. We need to do what we can to eliminate their sources of energy. That means finishing our business in Afghanistan and Iraq, and settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and getting our military out of that region. But these will never be sufficient. There is a civil war in Islam today between the forces of decency and modernism and the suicidal jihadists. This stuff only stops when the Muslim forces of decency triumph and

delegitimize and crush the barbarism of Al Qaeda. It takes a village, and it's going to take a while.

Meanwhile, we need to focus on the things we can control. For starters, we're going to have to learn to live with more insecurity. Terrorism is awful, but it is not yet an existential threat. And we can't let our response to it be to shut down our open society or tear ourselves apart with recriminations. Like the Israelis and Brits, we need to keep up our guard, learn from our mistakes, but also learn to bury our dead and move on.

Finally, we need to dry up the funding for terrorist groups, and the mosques, schools and charities that support them. And that means working to end our addiction to oil. It is disgusting to listen to Republican politicians lecturing President Obama about how he has to stay the course in Afghanistan while they don't have an ounce of courage to vote to increase the gasoline tax or renewable energy standards that would reduce the money we're sending to the people our soldiers are fighting.

I know. None of this seems very relevant right now. But it will n the day our luck runs out.

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