Date: Fri, 02 Oct 2009 15:43:49 -0400
To: "Dr. Baruch Fischhoff - Chair, National Academy of Sciences panel on Improving Intelligence" <baruch@cmu.edu>

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Subject: 2. The scientific audit of Bueno de Mesquita's work

Dear Dr. Fischhoff and Colleagues:

Would you, as part of your pending report on methods to improve US intelligence, commission an outside panel to conduct a rigorous, thorough, and independent scientific audit of Bueno de Mesquita's work and claims?

Admiral Blair and his senior staff are sophisticated people. The audit is unusually important because, unexpectedly, Bueno de Mesquita has a brilliant publicist and is receiving national media attention for his new book (The Predictioneer's Game) and claims about his forecasting methods. And he owns a for-profit consulting company that stands to make many millions of dollars from new business with almost every major institution as a result of his publicized references to a CIA endorsement of his 90% success rate and a book illustrating prowess and sophisticated insight into everything - our major war/peace decisions, financial fraud by major companies, political strategy and consulting, etc. Thus, *without* an independent audit, my forecast is that Admiral Blair et al. will be suspicious - including about the work of your Commission and anything favorable that it says, since Bueno de Mesquita is a member.

You should know that the impressive 90% CIA-certified success rate, currently cited to national television audiences, is (using the footnote in Bueno de Mesquita's just-published book) a single, declassified 1987 article [from Westerfield's 1995 collection] - so it is 22 years old, and the limited N of cases ("The situations in which it has been utilized") were 20-30 years ago. Bueno de Mesquita's other citation is Ray and Russett's classic article (from 1996), including the CIA number. Ray & Russett add (they were strongly in favor of developing the model) that there were (in 1996) a claimed N=2,000+ forecasting cases - most by the Decision Insights/Policon consulting company. By now, there should be *many* thousands . . . and Bueno de Mesquita should be able to give additional and better accuracy numbers to auditors - which,

even though they might be lower than 90% - should be the scientific basis for your National Academy of Sciences audit to judge what we have in IR, and the work ahead.

[Your members, who are not political scientists should know, that (as Ray & Russett note) the Bueno de Mesquita tradition is viewed by some distinguished political scientists (e.g., the late Gabriel Almond, a member of the US National Academy) as brilliantly playing a "shell game" of grandiose claims of superior brilliance and astute insight and scientific rigor. But when you try to nail it down - like the CIA-validated 90% number with which Bueno de Mesquita and his publicist are leaving current media audiences, reporters, and potential clients - the truths that were implied get elusive: the 1987 source was accurately cited in a footnote & you somehow got a mistaken impression about a CIA-endorsed current rate [in forecasting 9/11 or Iraq, or the Middle East peace process, or the global financial crisis], most of our predictive work is proprietary and can't be disclosed in detail. etc. A lot of political scientists probably agree that it's time for a rigorous audit, before the National Academy of Sciences puts its scientific reputation behind an assessment of national importance based on second-best evidence.]

A Unified Theory of War/Peace?

I suggest - as you might guess from an earlier message - that we could have an unrecognized and exciting breakthrough (for IR theory and professional diplomacy) at hand. Bueno de Mesquita-One said that he was an expected utility/rational choice theorist of IR. But Bueno de Mesquita-Two is suggesting that the world's baselines for prediction accuracy - even by the US government, with the largest intelligence budget - has been 45%. . . . 45% for reality-based/expected utility/rational choice now puts us into a conversation with my Lasswell, Deutsch, political psychology tradition.

Deutsch's famous quotation, from my tradition (re 1914-1964): "When a hungry cat devotes its attention to a mousehole there usually is a mouse in it. But when the government of some major power . . . " estimated 50%+ error rates of perception and forecasting for the major cases of beginning or expanding a war. [And the US rate since 1964 may not be much improved]. So we can have rational utility maximization calculation applying, *but within the context of a 50%+ error rate* affecting the major decisions, to be explained by political psychology - hubris, Jervis-tradition misperceptions, leader personality/irrationality, stress-and crisis-induced degrading of

rational decisions (Holsti, George, Lebow), enemy image group irrationality, deficient training in Bueno de Mesquita methodology, etc.

An interesting possibility/victory for Tetlock's integrated complexity theory of success?

This is exciting, and if I was teaching (I am not) I would be pointing my graduate students toward research topics and the possibility of a (in the language of physics) Grand Unified Theory. . . . But our real traction actually depends upon you, and what your National Academy group can shake loose from the CIA and from Bueno de Mesquita's tradition.

best regards,
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