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

Subject: 201. Followup. "Afghans look at Americans like Americans are from Mars." Advice from National Academy of Science members

Dear Dr. Fischhoff and Colleagues:

The correspondent Dexter Filkins has said, about the cultural chasm between native Afghans and Americans, that "Afghans look at Americans like we are from Mars." In Iraq, by contrast, people smiled and made human contact and knew about America: But look at photographs of Afghans: They are staring with bewilderment at large non-Islamic foreigners, massively equipped with weapons, as if we are from a different planet.

In reviewing behavioral science ideas for data and analysis, at this point in America's longest war, the National Academy of Sciences leadership might want to recommend a followup project by the (interested sub-set of) 79 National Academy of Science members who are anthropologists and other behavioral scientists. Everybody might benefit from a more vigorous, independent, and fresh look at whether the successful Petraeus war strategy is working in the same way in Afghanistan.

- Dr. Petraeus has a social science doctorate from Princeton and Woodward says that the US has upgraded its causal models/measurements in Afghanistan to 500 variables [# 171 at www.policyscience.net II. D]: Are the coefficients the same? <1>

Two-Way Human Connections Across Cultural Divides?

Specifically, there may be (untested) cultural and psychological assumptions in extending the successful Petraeus doctrine from Iraq to Afghanistan. At issue is whether the allegiances and alliances that are necessary, at the local levels throughout the country - the human relationships - are possible if there is only a one-sided ability of the US (based on its Human Terrain system and use of anthropology) to connect across a cultural chasm.

The movie Restrepo illustrates the unbridged chasm. The local American Commander is tasked to build allegiances with local allies (at least enough to secure needed intelligence) and describes, in a meeting with illiterate and poor local village elders, an abstract and complex cognitive map of the security that is needed, so that a road may be built, so that the Afghans can get products to market more easily, so that they can become prosperous, so that the broader threat from the Taliban can be ended (etc.). The reality is that the presence of the Americans, itself, (at this geographic point near the Afghan border) is making part of the local valley a horrific and violent place with huge eruptions of bombing and automatic weapons blasting hilltops several times/day. The body language of the villagers, as Filkins interprets it, seems about right: "Please go away. You endanger our lives just by talking to us."

Yes, Americans *may* be trustworthy about our good intentions, our commitment to their lives and security and economic future, about our morality and honor - but Afghans do not know this. <2> And Americans may not sufficiently recognize that they are foreigners.

I attach a reference copy of the American Anthropological Association's task force Final Report on the Human Terrain System (2009). It shows a highly pragmatic and one-sided investment to give field advice to US commanders. It seems to have helped in Iraq, but at best there may be a greater and different cultural distance that Afghans must travel to make contact, and build human relationships, with Americans.

If so, what are the implications?

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<1> Path coefficients and regression models also are available for the Vietnam War, from the McNamara era: see Jeffrey Milstein, Dynamics of the Vietnam War: A Quantitative Analysis and Preselective Computer Simulation (1974). Since the South Vietnam government eventually lost, the later estimates of effective war-fighting and training of the South Vietnamese Army appear to have been mistaken.

<2> The gap also may be more dangerous than it appears. In Afghan culture, loyalty and alliances probably are face-to-face and based on human relationships. It is entirely possible that supporters or potential supporters of the Taliban are among the troops being "trained" and equipped by America. It may be a purely American legalist fantasy that "trained" Afghan troops will be trustworthy, loyal to government commanders, and used by the Karzai government against the Taliban.

Similarly, the US is dealing with foreign cultures that never went through the Protestant Reformation and the Renaissance. We do not know what this means, and most Afghans probably do not know what this means.

[For example: Is legitimate power - and genuine government control - really being created by American-style democratic elections, as Americans probably assume?]

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