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To: "Dr. Baruch Fischhoff - Chair, National Academy Committee on Improving Intelligence" <baruch@cmu.edu>

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

Subject: 204. A Triple Interpretation Method for Foreign Policy Breakdowns? Fwd: Ricks on Bergen and 9/11 Re-Analysis

Dear Dr. Fischhoff and Colleagues:

A Triple Interpretation Method to Draw Lessons

I write to make a brief conceptual suggestion: Rather than assessing blame to single actors, it would accelerate rapid learning about foreign policy breakdowns and intelligence failures for the National Academy of Sciences to recommend thinking about the causal equations involved as having variables in three categories.

In principle, we can imagine that changes within any of these three categories could have changed the outcome enough to have caused, or prevented, the breakdowns. Similarly, lessons can be drawn to prevent future problems by compensatory changes in any of the three categories, regardless of where the original problem was thought to have originated.

Thus, to add to Alexander George's foundational work re drawing lessons from case studies, the task shifts from testing *the* theory that explains one case to the cumulative causal list of variables, in three categories, that might be changed massively (or tweaked) to improve performance in future cases.

Although there is more (integrated) complexity in the cumulative analysis, the domain of new and useful policy ideas may be greater than they conventionally seem.

An Example: Ricks on Bergen and 9/11

Take the 9/11 intelligence breakdown as an example. The three categories for interpretation/causal analysis are: 1.) Variables related to American policy, intelligence and decision making; 2.) Variables related to al-Qaeda policies, intelligence and decision making; and 3.) Similar variables involving *third parties.*

Thus, for example, Ricks' review (attached) of Peter Bergen's The Longest War in yesterday's NYTimes Book Review The book is traditional in that it assigns blame to various US actors. It also discusses added causal variables and mistakes related to the misperceptions and miscalculations of Osama bin Laden that - alongside failures in Washington identified in our early 9/11 reports and hearings - also were causal in the 9/11 attacks. These include egregious and superficial misperceptions of American foreign policy and mistaken forecasts of the American response to a successful 9/11 attack. [And, self-reflectively, Bergen's analysis now brings us back to add variables and causes on the American side: - e.g., the failure of the US government and its intelligence agencies in the Clinton years to recognize the growth of dangerous misperceptions by al-Qaeda leadership, the (unmet) new requirements for US deterrence, and the steps that the Clinton and early Bush Administrations might have taken.

The Under-Developed Analysis of Third Party Variables

In this message I want to underscore the new classification of Third Party variables - a diagnostic/systemic, scientific realm that is not yet highly developed [and mostly absent from Bergen's book, too] and where additional work is needed. For example, we could point to universities at which Osama bin Laden studied, and professional diplomats in the Arab world with access to him, or journalists upon whom he relied, who had not yet learned the relevant lessons, or who failed to warn Osama about the US traditions of very strong responses to surprise attacks on American territory (e,g., Pearl Harbor). And we can look at other actors who could have understood his plans and stopped him. For example, Saudi Arabia:

- **Saudi Arabia as an example**. Some of the most interesting Third Party variables that the National Academy of Sciences could identify involve the Saudi government: Osama is the indulged son of a 10th wife of a prominent family,. who has become highly troublesome and

expensive to many of Saudi Arabia's best customers. And who has a high priority to challenge and change the control of culture and power in Saudi Arabia and the wider Islamic world. Saudi intelligence services, perhaps more than anyone else, have the comparative advantages (surely, compared to America's DNI system) to understand relevant languages and cultures and relationships, to penetrate al-Qaeda, monitor developments and plans, send corrective warnings about misperceptions, and - perhaps now, and in the future - know how to obtain information and cooperation across the Islamic world to end his threat of violence and challenge to regional stability.

Thus, the "Third Party causal variables" focus on Saudi Arabia may lead to useful lines of new thinking about (for example) divisions of labor and comparative advantages for effective intelligence and other operations in Pakistan. A useful, newly-highlighted, Third Party variable for the US and NATO may be for the Saudi government to "step up." It is a new (equation-based) lesson from 9/11.

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January 14, 2011. NYT Book Review.
Determined to Strike
By THOMAS E. RICKS

THE LONGEST WAR
The Enduring Conflict Between America and Al-Qaeda
By Peter L. Bergen
Illustrated. 473 pp. Free Press. $28.

For years, I tried to read every new novel about how 9/11 affected our lives. Some were very thoughtful, but I always came away unsatisfied, feeling that the authors had worked hard but had somehow fallen short. As I read the stunning first section of Peter L. Bergen's new book on the war between the United States and Al Qaeda, I realized I had been looking in the wrong genre. None of the novels were as effective or moving as “The Longest War,” which is a history of our

time.

Bergen, a national security analyst for CNN, impressively covers it all: Al Qaeda's aspirations and its 9/11 attack, the Bush administration's panicky response, the subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the crucial and continuing unhelpful role of Pakistan, and the terrorist episodes in London and Madrid. Other books, most notably Bob Woodward's series on the wars as viewed from Washington, have bitten off big chunks of this story, but Bergen's, to my knowledge, is the first to credibly cover the global sweep of events over the last 10 years, exploring not just American views but also Al Qaeda's.

He begins by emphasizing the subtle long-term costs of early Western victories: how the 1967 war between Israel and its Arab neighbors undercut socialist Arab nationalism and instead spurred the rise of Islamic extremism; how the Persian Gulf war deployments of 1990-91 humiliated Arabs and intensified the anti-Americanism of Osama bin Laden and others. We did not notice it, but the war began back then. The first Qaeda attack against Americans came a year later, in Yemen. And the year after that, Bergen reports, Al Qaeda may have been involved in the "Black Hawk Down" battles in Mogadishu, Somalia.

Bergen is a gifted if occasionally breezy writer, with an ability to find narrative perspectives and reach strong conclusions. (Like me, Bergen writes a blog for Foreign Policy magazine, but he and I have never worked together there nor had any other contact through the magazine.) He relates the events of 9/11 through the eyes of the intelligence specialists in the American government who had been studying Al Qaeda for years. As the aircraft struck the World Trade Center, Barbara Sude, who had completed a doctorate at Princeton in medieval Arabic thought and had more recently written a secret memorandum titled "Bin Laden Determined to Strike in U.S.," remained at her desk at the C.I.A., intent on working on a response, even though she knew a third hijacked plane was heading toward Washington and possibly targeting the building in which she sat.

Bergen is at his best in exploring the miscalculations and misunderstandings of both sides in 2001. Bin Laden naïvely believed that the West was as weak as the Soviet bloc, and thought it

could be defeated relatively easily. He expected the response to the 9/11 attacks to be either a Western withdrawal from the Mideast or an ineffectual round of cruise missile strikes. But, Bergen also observes, the terrorist leader never showed much interest in the ways of Western culture. His beef with the West was not "our freedoms," as President Bush would contend, but Western actions in the Middle East.

Bergen is evenhanded but ferocious in reviewing the failures of the Bush administration, noting that in the wake of the worst security failure in American history, no one was fired, no one resigned and no one took responsibility. It's widely understood that the White House ceded the moral high ground by embracing torture and secret prisons, but Bergen highlights how flatly unprofessional these actions were: seasoned interrogators were shunted aside in favor of eager amateurs who thought the facts could be physically wrung from detainees. Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the mastermind of 9/11, was waterboarded 183 times, yet told his torturers nothing more about the 9/11 attacks than he had already voluntarily spilled two years earlier to an interviewer from Al Jazeera. Similarly, Ahmed Chalabi, the Iraqi exile, learned to bypass intelligence professionals and inject his fictions directly into the offices of his less knowledgeable allies in the Pentagon and White House.

Colin Powell comes off as a chump who should have resigned in November 2001, when he learned about the administration's new policy on detainees from a news broadcast on television, and long before he delivered one of the most misleading speeches in American history, his rallying cry for war at the United Nations. Dick Cheney appears less a brooding presence and more a red-faced buffoon, which may well be how history comes to regard him. I was surprised, however, at how badly Condoleezza Rice appears in this historical record. Bergen makes it clear that she was at best misleading about the actions of the administration. For example, she testified that the White House was on high alert before 9/11, but, he dryly notes, "the historical record does not reflect this." As secretary of state, Rice reassured us that "the United States has not transported anyone, and will not transport anyone, to a country when we believe he will be tortured" n a statement that Bergen says we now know to have been "demonstrably false."

Yet Rice hardly stands out in an administration that confected the rationale for the invasion of

Iraq out of a few stray rumors, stale leads and discredited reports. The only evidence Bush ever offered for a nexus between Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and Al Qaeda was based on information obtained though the interrogation of a Libyan militant that both the Defense Intelligence Agency and the C.I.A. had separately concluded was fabricated n well before the president used that information publicly.

Bergen's treatment of the Afghan and Iraq wars is necessarily brief, given the scope of his subject. But even here he makes insightful points. He explains why Tora Bora, late in 2001, was the most important battle in the entire war on terror. And in his overview of the Iraq war, he shows how Al Qaeda and its allies were able to take advantage of modern communications. “If Vietnam had been the first television war, and the 1991 war to liberate Kuwait from Saddam Hussein's armies had been the first cable news war, Iraq was the first Web war,” he notes in an aside that a smart graduate student could expand into a good doctoral dissertation.

The book sometimes slows, especially when Bergen does what reporters call a notebook dump and walks us through his on-scene interviews with various participants. He also lapses occasionally into jarring usages, like “this was no longer your father's Taliban.” But such flaws are minor, and are far outweighed by this ambitious book's many strengths. “The Longest War” is one of the most important accounts on the subject to appear in years. But be warned: You will read it and weep.

Thomas E. Ricks, a fellow at the Center for a New American Security and the author of four books on the United States military, writes a blog for ForeignPolicy.com.

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