

To: "Dr. Baruch Fischhoff - Chair, National Academy Committee on Improving Intelligence" <baruch@cmu.edu>, "Dr. Anne-Marie Slaughter - Director, Policy Planning Staff via Ms. Marisa S. McAuliffe" <mcauliffems@state.gov>,  
From: Lloyd Etheredge <lloyd.etheredge@policyscience.net>

**Subject: 212. Red Team: Calibrating the Domino Theory & the "Reverse" Domino Theory. Scheuer's Prediction, 21st century Media Effects**

Dear Dr. Fischhoff and Colleagues:

A Red Team/National Academy of Science project should evaluate the domino theory. In addition to deciding, scientifically, whether the theory is true, the Red Team/National Academy study should ask how the Obama Administration could, with better planning, manage any domino theory problems that might arise if the US, as a superpower, departs without victory in Afghanistan.

The Administration does not use the Vietnam-era phrases, like "Domino Theory" (or "hearts and minds"), to discuss the Afghan War. However the intelligence community discusses the Domino Theory and DNI Clapper and his staff have an obligation to give the best scientific advice that is available. It is costly to fight a long, expensive, and unwinnable war if the Domino Theory is wrong. Alternatively, it might be dangerous and irresponsible for America to leave Afghanistan, without a perceived victory, if the Domino Theory is right.

**The "Reverse" Domino Theory**

There also are confident analysts who argue for "reverse" domino effects in the Middle East: e.g., the success of human rights anywhere (or, currently, the fall of the Tunisian government) encouraging (probably) youth and progressive movements across the region. Nor is it only the Right that believes in the Domino Theory: Noam Chomsky, for example, thought that a reformulated version would apply in Asia - not that Communism would benefit, *per se*, but that

oppressed people would be inspired to emulate the freedom and self-determination of peoples who liberated themselves from the American imperial empire.<1>

A Red Team/National Academy of Sciences project should organize the best advice, based on literature reviews *and* the best original research, that our nation's behavioral scientists can provide.

### **Michael Scheuer's Forecast**

Here, for example, is Michael Scheuer, a former CIA analyst and Osama bin Laden specialist [from a recent televised interview] about Muslims who will smell blood in the water.

*"When we leave it will be a tremendous defeat for the United States. However we dress it up, if we say that the Afghans had their chance and they couldn't do it; if we say that we have somehow satisfied what we went there to do, we may fool the American people. But we will not fool the Muslim world. When we leave Afghanistan without accomplishing what we said we were going to, it will be viewed as the Mujahideen defeating the second superpower. That can only mean that the Muslim world will be more galvanized against us and more young men will flow to the battlefield wherever they are, and certainly more will take up arms inside the United States."*

### **Comments on Scientific Testing and Redefining the Question**

1.) Testing Psychological Versions. The original version of domino theory - Eisenhower's - would be easy to test. Eisenhower was thinking, from his Army and WWII experience, about large armies and ground forces. His comments about the domino effect in Asia imagined invading armies crossing a national border and then, from a new staging area, invading across the next national border. But the difficult applications are calibrating imaginations concerning effects in the psychological domain - the possibility that Castro could capture imaginations, enroll and inspire on a continent-wide scale and spread revolution across Central and South America. Or - in its domestic version - that the virulence of the "who lost China" debate and McCarthyism will be a perpetual threat: if there is another 9/11 attack and/or Obama is perceived to "show weakness" or "lose" the war in Afghanistan. If the aroused and fearful Right and emergent political competitors have a new club, and accusations to shout over megaphones,

will they use them? And how politically dangerous or costly could they be?

Also, in some cases, the Domino Theory dynamics appear to be true: Sometimes, the psychology of power can change, and formidable authoritarian regimes and empires collapse quickly: the collapse of the Soviet Empire, the fall of the Shah, the fall (recently) of the government of Tunisia. Yet sometimes - e.g., America's slow-motion/"decent interval" defeat in South Vietnam or the complex, partly negotiated, settlements in Central America involving the Carter Center - nothing further seems to happen.

2.) Contingency Planning. The most relevant benefit of a Red Team project may not be to decide whether the domino theory is "true" but to develop sophisticated plans so that the Obama Administration, or another Administration, might look ahead and be equipped to neutralize or manage any effects that do occur. I.e., it is likely that American troops will begin to leave Afghanistan without a military victory or a political settlement. If so what - with proper foresight and monitoring by the DNI system - would mitigate exploitation in the Muslim world and adverse effects?.<2>

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<1> A scientific, large-N analysis of historical cases has not been done. It could become a classic in IR theory. And very useful.

- The anti-Colonial movement after WWII is an example of a quickly spreading political movement, even without one charismatic leader.

- One might include the British imaginings of the necessity to defeat the American Revolution, else their global empire would be ended by insurrections and competing, emboldened major powers. Or that, without reforms (which they did undertake) Napoleon's revolution would inspire domestic revolution in Britain.

- Earlier, the printing press helped to turn the theological points that an unknown priest nailed to a door in Northern Germany into the unexpected Protestant Reformation that ignited wars across Europe.

The Wikipedia entry about the domino theory illustrates how oddly weak and unavailable any scientific evaluation of these ideas has been.

<2> The ability to capture imaginations and enroll people may vary with historical circumstances. Napoleon, to many young people of his country and time, had the charisma of a rock star. And Che Guevara - to some American college students who kept his picture on posters on their dormitory walls - also partly engaged imaginations (from afar). But, today, there may be different media competition for the imaginative space of young people. My own guess is that, with some high visibility US initiatives for IT + global health, and for women's rights/health, and wider circulation of his Philadelphia speech on race and personal responsibility, etc. President Obama could be the winner in the Muslim world. But the DNI system has to recognize the potential competition, and the variables affecting outcomes, and get started.

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