

Date: Thu, 27 Jan 2011 00:23:41 -0500

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: 213. Red Team: Can the State Department Outsmart al-Qaeda? The "Living in Imaginationland" Education Strategy**

Dear Dr. Fischhoff and Colleagues:

A Red Team/National Academy of Sciences project should challenge the State Department's psychological assumptions in the war against new youth recruitment to al-Qaeda. The State Department - under three Secretaries (Powell, Rice, and now Clinton) - has not been winning. And it should be winning.

**Needed: An Instinct for Teaching Students**

Happily, the State Department may not need to rely upon psychoanalysis. My point, in this message, is that a Red Team might find it worthwhile to recognize the limited and insular nature of the educational systems from which potential (youth generation) al-Qaeda recruits are drawn. There probably are many networks of influence - using 21st century communication and networking technology - that can slowly erode the charismatic excitement and recruiting power of al-Qaeda by new corrective information that helps Islamic youth to begin to think about the difference between Imaginationland and reality. The Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy needs an instinct for teaching students.

The new corrective information is suggested by Michael Scheuer's Osama Bin Laden (Oxford UP, 2010). He summarizes the three-part strategic plan that al-Qaeda has promoted across the past decade to persuade and encourage supporters. But whatever Osama's admirers believe and respect about his piety, courage, and sincerity, he is "living in Imaginationland" and there is no future for people to devote their lives to these strategies, which are not working.

## **Living in Imaginationland: The al-Qaeda Grand Strategy**

Scheuer (in his Preface) says that Osama bases his political leadership on the future success of three tactics:

- “1.) Helping to bleed America into bankruptcy.
- 2.) Spreading out U.S. military and intelligence forces to the point where they have little reserves or flexibility.
- 3.) Stripping away American allies and creating as much political divisiveness as possible in the United States.”

Each of these “Imaginationland” ideas about America and reality can be countered, and by evidence that youth networks in the Islamic world can check for themselves. For example, 1.) Yes, America is sending \$100+ billion/year in Afghanistan & Pakistan, but what percentage is this of America's GDP? With a recovery underway, and a \$15 trillion+ GDP (est. 2011), the US can afford the current small expenditure of less than 1% of its huge GDP, if necessary, to bottle-up al-Qaeda and threaten its existence. The al-Qaeda movement isn't able to bankrupt anybody; 2.) The US and NATO did not stretch their capabilities too thin. They responded to the 9/11 attack by huge increases in their intelligence services and technology - with global communications surveillance and computer systems - to \$80 billion+/year for the US alone. And the military capabilities have been vastly increased by training local armies in Iraq and Afghanistan and supplying added weapons to Pakistan. The US has added new military technologies (like drone aircraft) to substitute for manpower and attack enemies while keeping its own casualties low. . . .3.) It would be worthwhile to check the total population of the US (310 million), of NATO countries, etc. and to ask how much political divisiveness and sympathetic enrollments and how many attacks actually have arisen across a decade, and to look at al-Qaeda-produced incidents using numerators and denominators: Etc.

The message will have to be repeated, in different ways, for several years. But the “Whatever you think of his motives, it's not going to work. He is living in Imaginationland” framing should

stick, because it is true. And the State Department should be able to win because the US and the Obama Administration really aren't enemies of Islam, either.

### **An Example of Corrective Information: Grounds for Hope?**

- I can offer one example in which reality-checking may have worked in the Islamic world. In the late Bush years I played a minor role to help organize a flow of accurate information to respond to Iranian Revolutionary Guard leaders who were loudly claiming that Iran could safely and aggressively develop nuclear weapons. Their political claim was the "oil weapon" - i.e., that Iran could cripple the West by cutting off Iran's oil sales and aggressively closing the Strait of Hormuz.

But their bravado was living in Imaginationland. They were too young to remember the earlier Arab oil embargo of 1973-74. The earlier Arab threat of "the oil weapon" produced a remarkably rational, quiet, and disciplined response by all major countries, including the US. The world has built major strategic petroleum reserves, pursued and found new oil reserves in other regions (Canada's proven reserves exceed those in Iran), and has added extra surge capacity and reduced the use of oil tankers by networks of pipelines.<1>.All of this could be checked online. Corrective and educational information may have gotten through: at least, people stopped making the bravado claims.

### **Youth Audiences and the Competing Focus of Attention**

I have discussed IT, public diplomacy, and "youth demographic" opportunities in several submissions (www.policyscience.net at II. D.). We may be about to realize that youth audiences, and potential recruits, in the Islamic world can shift attention to newer appeals, issues, and causes that directly affect their own lives and futures (e.g., Tunisia, Egypt). It would be helpful to have the content analysis tools, that I wrote about 15+ months ago, online soon so that behavioral scientists can help to suggest new, independent Red Team studies about a range of useful issues in a changing world.<2>

.

LE

-----  
<1> The Strait of Hormuz route now accounts for only about 20% of global supply, and there is even less vulnerability if one counts the surge capacities of the world's other oil fields and the pipelines. Iran can create a very significant short-term problem, but that's all. Also, the US Navy knows about the potential use of an oil weapon and has deployed capacities and technologies (which also can be checked on Wikipedia and elsewhere on the Internet), to counter Iranian air power and re-open the Strait, with full protection, quickly. If the world's countries with oil-based economies believe that Iran's development of nuclear weapons threatens them, and that the threat must be removed, Iran does not have a deterrent.

<2> There has been speculation that WikiLeaks and the Obama Administration helped to encourage the Tunisia student/public movement - e.g., by releasing a State Department cable that called Tunisia a "police state." These are the kinds of possible causal routes that also suggest the need for better data systems and analysis tools.

Dr. Lloyd S. Etheredge - Director, Government Learning Project

Fellow, World Academy of Art & Science

Policy Sciences Center

Bethesda, MD 20817-1204

URL: [www.policyscience.net](http://www.policyscience.net)

301-365-5241 (v); [lloyd.etheredge@policyscience.net](mailto:lloyd.etheredge@policyscience.net) (email)

[The Policy Sciences Center, Inc. is a public foundation that develops and integrates knowledge and practice to advance human dignity. Its headquarters are 127 Wall St., Room 322 PO Box 208215 in New Haven, CT 06520-8215. It may be contacted at the office of its Chair, Michael Reisman ([michael.reisman@yale.edu](mailto:michael.reisman@yale.edu)), 203-432-1993. Further information about the Policy Sciences Center and its projects, Society, and journal is available at [www.policysciences.org](http://www.policysciences.org).]