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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: 217. Tunisia + Egypt + ? : Intelligence Failure or Brilliant Success?**

Dear Dr. Fischhoff and Colleagues:

**Is Reality What It Seems?**

The National Academy of Sciences' forthcoming Report is likely to face questions about its relevance to the CIA's failure to warn the US government about events in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere in the Islamic world. [The following article from the Times - Mark Mazzetti, "Obama Said to Fault Spy Agencies' Mideast Forecasting" - 2/4/2011) illustrates the criticism.] I write, as a political scientist, to caution against premature scientific judgments concerning events that could, behind a veil of disguise, be very different than they seem.

**Traditions of Overthrowing Governments and Disinformation**

It is important to note that media-disseminated "disinformation" is part of the CIA's tradecraft. Henry Kissinger voiced this experienced suspicion when he asked rhetorically, during a recent Charlie Rose show, "Who is behind . . . ?" providing and using so much politically disruptive technology to young people and organizers in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere in the Islamic world? [The popular mythology of Tunisia and Egypt as spontaneous, pro-democratic mass uprisings of the young against autocrats is a Hollywood/media version of history and of revolutions that arouses Kissinger's professional (political science) suspicion. It also is true that, after almost every major international public surprise, the CIA and the US government professionally orchestrate news stories that the CIA was, again, somewhat a stumblebum - when the last thing that you would want to reveal, or crow about, was that the CIA knew the exact second of the Chinese or Indian nuclear tests or that it knows more about what is happening in Egypt - and why and how - than the current President.] <1>

Adding to suspicion is the fact that creating political disruptions and toppling governments - mostly of the political Left, to be sure - has been an engaging CIA specialty since the early days of the Cold War. In earlier cycles of technology, the USGOV provided short wave radios behind the Iron Curtain so that Voice of America and Radio Free Europe /Radio Liberty broadcasts could stir opposition to Soviet rule. [The technologies helped to ignite the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.] And there is a long Left tradition, complete with manuals, on developing the "myth" of the general strike - e.g., Sorel's classic, On Violence - and a 19th and 20th century European history of trained cadres to steer the street marches and demonstrations with pre-planned sequences of slogans and chants - : "Bread! Bread!" morphing into "His Head! His Head!" Luttwak's historical/strategic study (Coup d'Etat: A Practical Handbook) emphasizes the seizure of mass communications technology - earlier, the radio and television channels - as key to toppling regimes.) . . . These are exciting times to be teaching students about political behavior - there are many teachable moments.]

### **But are Current American Officials Smart Enough to Do This?**

However - today - we do not normally expect high levels of intellectual competence and Grand Strategy + execution from the US government. These days: the DEA gets tens of thousands of Mexicans killed without notably changing the US drug problem; two very costly wars have taken many years and have proven to be based on inaccurate initial beliefs; there were catastrophic failures of more than a dozen major institutions (including the National Science Foundation) implicated in the global financial crisis and failures of the major reality-connected (and science-based) forecasting models. . . .

Thus: Are Secretary Clinton and President Obama really smart enough to do this - to grasp the potentials of new technologies, plan, and execute a breathtakingly bold, multi-year Grand Strategy to ignite historic political change across the Islamic world? Is President Obama really running for public office on a wider stage - and, in the spirit of a New Realpolitik, taking the offense to enroll Islamic youth generation across the entire region to defeat Osama bin-Laden et al. and win the future? Are several smart paradigm shifts re world politics and upgrades coming together at the State Department?

## **Could Israel be Playing Hardball?**

An alternative answer to Henry Kissinger's question might be "Israel." Or even - via its likely ties to British intelligence - al Jazeera, which has, with its audiences, laid the groundwork for Arab "street" opposition to dictatorial governments. And - is there a coalition? - the Grand Strategy momentum may be building for a return engagement in Tehran.

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<1> Tunisia may have triggered early, with the original plan being to target Egypt's election. [If this is true, the earlier Iran election protests (with emerging use of new communications technology) were a first test of the model..And the model will continue to be applied and refined until the US wins.]

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February 4, 2011. NYT.

## **Obama Said to Fault Spy Agencies' Mideast Forecasting**

By MARK MAZZETTI

WASHINGTON n President Obama has criticized American spy agencies over their performance in predicting and analyzing the spreading unrest in the Middle East, according to current and former American officials.

The president was specifically critical of intelligence agencies for misjudging how quickly the unrest in Tunisia would lead to the downfall of the country's authoritarian government, the officials said.

The officials offered few details about the president's concerns, but said that Mr. Obama had

not ordered any major changes inside the intelligence community, which has a budget of more than \$80 billion a year. On Friday, a White House spokesman said spy agencies had given Mr. Obama “relevant, timely and accurate analysis” throughout the crisis in the Middle East.

But questions about the recent performance of spy agencies expose a tension that has played out since the C.I.A.’s founding in 1947: how to balance the task of analyzing events overseas to warn officials in Washington about looming crises with the mission of carrying out covert operations around the globe.

Some officials have focused their criticism on intelligence assessments last month that concluded, despite demonstrations in Tunisia, that the security forces of President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali would defend his government. Instead, the military and the police did not, and Mr. Ben Ali and his family fled to Saudi Arabia.

One American official familiar with classified intelligence assessments defended the spy agencies’ Tunisia analysis.

“Everyone recognized the demonstrations in Tunisia as serious,” said the official, speaking on the condition of anonymity because he was discussing classified intelligence reports. “What wasn’t clear even to President Ben Ali was that his security forces would quickly choose not to support him.”

One former American official said that in recent weeks Mr. Obama urged intelligence officials to ensure that spy agencies were devoting as much effort to “long-term analysis” as they were to carrying out operations against Al Qaeda, including the C.I.A.’s bombing campaign using armed drone aircraft.

On Thursday, senior lawmakers pressed a top C.I.A. official on Capitol Hill about whether Mr. Obama had been given enough warning about the perils of the growing demonstrations in Cairo, and whether spy agencies had monitored social networking sites to gauge the extent of

the uprising.

The same day, America's senior military officer said in a television interview that officials in Washington had been surprised by how rapidly unrest had spread from Tunisia to Egypt.

"It has taken not just us, but many people, by surprise," said Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, during an appearance on "The Daily Show."

Several American officials said that after Tunisia's government collapsed, intelligence analysts renewed their focus on gauging the impact that the chaos could have on Egypt, America's most important ally in the Arab world.

Some C.I.A. veterans said it was wrong to conclude that because the spy agency had stepped up paramilitary operations in recent years, it had lost focus on the job of analyzing global events for the White House and Congress.

"The Egypt analysts in the C.I.A. aren't picking targets in Pakistan; that's just not the way the agency operates," said Mark M. Lowenthal, a former C.I.A. assistant director for analysis.

Still, Mr. Lowenthal said that intelligence officials for decades had to endure the wrath of American presidents who blamed them for misjudging the events of the day and that it was their obligation to accept the criticism.

"If you are an intelligence officer, you say, 'Yes sir, thank you very much, sir,' " he said.

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