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To: "Dr. Baruch Fischhoff - Chair, National Academy Committee on Improving Intelligence" <baruch@cmu.edu>, "Dr. Theda Skocpol - National Academy of Sciences and Past President, APSA" <ts@wjh.harvard.edu>, "Bill Nordhaus - National Academy of Sciences" <william.nordhaus@yale.edu>, "Dr. David Shaw - PCAST" <dshaw@blackpointgroup.com>, "Dr. Karen Cook - Chair, AAAS Section K" <kcook@stanford.edu>, "Dr. Carole Pateman - President, APSA" <pateman@ucla.edu>, "Dr. Robert Keohane - National Academy of Sciences" <rkeohane@princeton.edu>, "Dr. Robert Axelrod - National Academy of Sciences" <axe@umich.edu>, "Dr. Jonathan Cole - CASBS" <jrc5@columbia.edu>, "Dr. Richard Atkinson - Chair - NRC/DBASSE" <rcatkinson@ucsd.edu>, "Dr. G. Bingham Powell, Jr. - APSA Vice President" <gb.powell@rochester.edu>, "Dr. Aletha Huston - COSSA" <achuston@mail.utexas.edu>, "Dr. David Lake - ISA" <dlake@ucsd.edu>, "Dr. Craig Calhoun" <Calhoun@ssrc.org>, "Dr. Kwame Anthony Appiah - Chair, Exec. Committee, American Council of Learned Societies" <kappiah@Princeton.EDU>  
From: Lloyd Etheredge <lloyd.etheredge@policyscience.net>

**Subject: 236. Red Team - A Teachable Moment?: Hubris/Dignity Theory and 50 years of "Usually Getting Everything Wrong"**

Dear Dr. Atkinson, Dr. Fischhoff, Dr. Skocpol, and Colleagues:

The Egyptian reversal of American foreign policy - and David Brooks' public conclusion that for fifty years "the U.S. Usually Got Everything Wrong" (by favoring its loyal autocratic ally) - is a teachable moment.<1>

Brooks is right: This *is* a fundamental change (Henry Kissinger agrees: Mubarak was supported by five Presidents.) Now, the DNI and his National Academy of Science advisers need to think deeply about the implications of America's changing sides. And,

given the new lessons drawn by President Obama and Secretary Clinton, about why the CIA/intelligence community was complicit (if it was) in fifty years of mistaken US judgments.

These fifty years of decisions also have engaged many social scientists. Let us take stock, see where we stand, and ask a Red Team/National Academy of Sciences panel to publish its conclusions. We pay \$80 billion/year for the DNI system and we ought to know - today - what its best analysts think about how these decisions were - and should be, in the future - analyzed. And we have an (often, endowed) academic professoriate that is paid to think, and research, and help us to make - hopefully, wiser - evidence-based decisions. Where do members of the National Academy of Sciences, with the relevant expertise, stand?

### **Three Suggestions**

I have thought about, researched, and taught about these issues. My first memorandum for the Fischhoff study (“Hubris, the Cheney Syndrome, the Rory Stewart Problem”) in September, 2009 was about recurring analytic issues that arise in return engagements with similar decisions and the DNI’s planning to strengthen its analytic and learning capabilities. May I make three suggestions about structuring a professional, scientific review?

#### **1.) Understand decisions on their own terms**

First, the American decisions to support the loyal, autocrat/dictator/strongman - and to overthrow more Left, populist, and progressive governments (and to give military aid and suppress rebellions against the autocrats) - often are called Realist. But it is important to understand each decision and its (often) top-down psychology without assuming that it has the clean logic of academic theorists. In truth, there is nothing in a Realist framework that compels American decisions:to support autocrats. Hans J. Morgenthau, a Realist, opposed American support for the autocratic Diem government in Vietnam (and the Vietnam War) - he thought that it was an irrational waste of money in a geopolitically peripheral and unimportant arena. A Realist colleague recently told me that he agreed with Obama and that it was time to “dump Mubarak” because “Israel is getting America

into a war with 1.5 billion Muslims” and “the US needs a youth strategy.”.

## **2.) Fear and the (psychological) domino theory.**

I have published a (modern) theory of hubris (Can Governments Learn?) that I think is analytically helpful to provide empathy with decision makers. The pro-autocratic decision makers were masterfully rational, cool, and in control - and, under the surface, they also were more fearful of the unstoppable power motivations of others, and the loss of US control and dominance on the global chess board.

This sometimes is called a domino “theory,” but it is not an abstract theory. It is an imagination-encoded sensibility. An individual who is afraid of flying because he/she lives with the present and almost-real (albeit imagined) experience of the worst things that might happen to an airline passenger is using parts of the brain in addition to the neo-cortex and its capacities for language and abstraction. The resulting behaviors are challenges for clinicians even when there are statistical databases that demonstrate “irrationality” and a patient wants to change - and they are starker professional challenges for DNI/CIA analysts when the statistical databases calibrating irrationality (pro or con) are unavailable and some decision makers are not asking help to change what they are doing.

As it discovers and tackles these underlying fears, a Red Team/National Academy of Science study group might find it helpful to make a distinction between a physical v. a *psychological* version of domino theory. When Eisenhower, from his military background and less vivid imagination, used the domino metaphor, he envisioned Communist armies physically moving across borders into newly-contiguous states as they did in WW II or the Korean War. The more typical US fear, across fifty years, was a psychological mechanism that could operate quickly, via communication media, even in a global arena: There was global, messianic competition with Communists (now, jihadists and terrorists) - at least in their minds - and US decision makers feared conveying a perception of weakness and increasing the self-confidence of competitors who would rally supporters to their (now-winning) cause. [And there are scientifically-recognized mechanisms - social learning and role modeling, and contagion - that could predict this impact.]

Also, allowing the first domino to fall could unsettle the public psychology of America's global power and cause American allies to be fearful that American commitments (e.g., to nuclear deterrence and collective security) could be abandoned. The "domino theory" fears included the anticipated attacks of the virulent and aroused Right that would attack the Administration, and especially domestic liberals, as it had in the "Who lost China?" debates and the McCarthy period of the early 1950s.

- Within the arc of the fifty years cited by Brooks, the Cold War cases also were occasions when the American decision makers feared that, without the repressive, autocratic governments, the local Communists might win on the political merits. The US decision makers - as Kissinger has claimed about Mubarak across most of the past thirty years of his power - did not see realistic alternatives: The Kennedy Administration saw Castro as a charismatic competitor who might, with Che Guevara, enroll youthful followers and ignite revolutionary Marxist wars across a continent with great disparities of wealth, and where the poor often were disenfranchised, exploited, ignored, and lacked opportunities. Communists were widely seen as highly disciplined and often led by ruthless and ambitious individuals who would - as they were seen to do in early cases - establish dictatorships (Stalin, Mao) and destroy any democratic Left by violence if necessary.

But other advisers were pro-democratic and, as part of their mindset, they imagined a future that the US could work with - i.e, with self-assurance and without notable fear. Here (today) is the New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman [not a domino theorist] supporting the new, opposite, package of Egyptian and post-Egyptian policies for the new American Grand Strategy:

*"I am not the least bit worried about the Muslim Brotherhoods in Jordan or Egypt hijacking the future. Actually, they should be worried. The Brotherhoods have had it easy in a way. They had no legitimate secular political opponents. The regimes prevented that so they could tell the world it is either "us or the Islamists." As a result, I think, the Islamists have gotten intellectually lazy. All they had to say was "Islam is the answer" or "Hosni Mubarak is a Zionist" and they could win 20 percent of the vote. Now, if Egypt and Jordan can build a new*

*politics, the Muslim Brotherhood will, for the first time, have real competition from the moderate center in both countries and they know it.*"<2>

### **3.) Human dignity v. autocracy as a basis for public order.**

A third challenge for a Red Team/National Academy of Science study is a deep understanding of democracy and how a primary commitment to human dignity [often, this also means democracy and human rights, broadly defined] can become the basis for a progressive and stable public order in nations and the world? America's (democratically-elected) leaders for fifty years were not persuaded (at least for UDCs in the Cold War and the Middle East and other cases like the Greek junta). It could be history-changing if a Red Team and National Academy of Sciences review reaches a tough-minded, evidence-based conclusion that a world commonwealth of human dignity (Lasswell's term) is, now, both the goal and the (practical and wise) stable pathway to a better future for everyone.

Brooks, perhaps writing hastily, said that autocratic regimes are inherently unstable. True, these regimes usually come to abrupt ends. However, they stay around a long time: Mubarak lasted for thirty years in an area of the world that (as Kissinger has noted) is not known for political stability and where his more tolerant predecessor, Sadat, was assassinated. Soviet bloc domination of its own autocratic East European allies lasted for many decades. General Suharto ruled Indonesia for 31 years, General Pinochet ruled Chile for 17 years, the Somoza dynasty ruled Nicaragua for 43 years, Trujillo ruled the Dominican Republic for 30 years, the Shah of Iran ruled for 38 years (with a brief interruption before Operation Ajax in 1953, the CIA/UK coup that removed Prime Minister Mossadegh, after which the Shah ruled for 26 years).

- The question of democracy and stability deserves a scientific answer from the National Academy of Sciences. Social scientists have an obligation both to the past and to the future to understand the dimensions of the question and the range of investments that are needed for democracies to provide dignity and function well as a basis for stability and progress in an (often, still) unjust world.

[Specifically: Democracies are demanding and they are not just about elections and formal rules of one set of institutions. They require higher levels of education, of cognitive and verbal skill and capacities for empathy (and perhaps compassion), patience, courage (to express and live with disagreement), and perhaps more warmth, good-humor, and integrity than does shooting people. Conceptually, the Obama Administration's Grand Strategy may be the right answer, but I am not yet ready to accept Brooks' conclusion without knowing the deeper thinking, and a lot more work, that also should be moving ahead.]

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<1> A reference copy of David Brooks's column, "The Quest for Dignity" is included in # 215 at [www.policyscience.net](http://www.policyscience.net) at II.D.

<2> Friedman's column, "China, Twitter and 20-Year-Olds vs. the Pyramids" is included in # 222, *ibid.*

Dr. Lloyd S. Etheredge - Director, Government Learning Project  
Fellow, World Academy of Art & Science  
Policy Sciences Center  
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).]