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

**Subject: 238. Red Team: "They don't listen to most of what we say . . . " A teachable moment?**

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

Re National Academy of Science recommendations for the DNI's \$80 billion/year system:

Washington think tanks and International Relations textbooks use words like "hegemon" and "superpower" to describe America's place in world politics. American undergraduates typically hear world news (and a construction of global reality) in which the words of an American President or other senior official are among the lead stories.

Against this background, I write to suggest that a Red Team/National Academy project

take an urgent and fresh look at the realities (potential measurements of) American power in today's world politics. There has been an anomalous observation that, once its implications are pursued, could upgrade conventional thinking: Prof. Gary Sick (Columbia, an experienced former diplomat, and a consultant) recently was interviewed in Bahrain about American power: He said, on the PBSNewshour (2/15/2011): "*They [the government of Bahrain] aren't really paying much attention to our words.*"

How could this be? The US Fifth Fleet actually is based in Bahrain, with awesome capabilities to vaporize the country - and many times over. The US news media report that our Secretary of State has - in direct communications and publicly - forcefully characterized events in Bahrain and given the government the defining conceptual framework to guide its actions. Freud once likened political power to a trance - but Prof. Sick does not seem to be detecting its existence.

### **Two Steps Ahead, along Two Dimensions**

The Red Team/National Academy project to conceptualize and measure political power is a deep and more challenging question than normally is raised. We can measure global temperature, and know if it is rising, but we do not have agreed-upon scientific measures of America's political power(s) and whether they are rising, falling, hegemonic, or have disappeared. Without good science, it is difficult to know who is in contact with reality.

The National Academy's recommendation is strengthened if we think two steps ahead: Whatever the first step answer from a Red Team/National Academy project, a Report may take us two steps ahead, along each of two dimensions:

#### **1. The Neuroscience of Political Knowledge and its Implications**

Whatever the Red Team Report says, it is unlikely to have an immediate impact because - as it will help to unconceal - there probably are deep individual differences in human brains that predispose to different *a priori* constructions of political reality. The gap between global psychodrama/hegemon power theorists and those who perceive a world of open space, with nobody listening to distant and foreign (US) voices, may yield only

slowly to one Red Team Report because neither side yet believes that science is necessary for its understanding.

For example: a.) brain differences that have been discovered along the field dependence-independence dimension of cognitive styles (+ personality) appear likely to correlate with differences between hegemonic power theorists and others: Field dependent people [i.e., as established by politically independent measures like the rod-and-frame test] are more ready to experience the surrounding world as a psychodrama with forces that they know and experience directly. They are more susceptible to external, social or political, influences that register and permeate their psyches more readily; b.) imaginative powers probably are much stronger in the young.

The arguments of Kant, Hume et al. about how one knows an external world have a new, 21st century, neuroscience reality: There are likely to be people who have a great difficulty understanding the global political world except through a doorway opened by science.

## **2.) A World with Statistical Distributions, Requiring New Thought and Harder Work?**

Likely, the nature of international power is changing and, today, the gap between the global hegemonic theorists v. the “who’s listening to anybody?” theorists actually mirrors (at this point, unknown) statistical distributions in a global political reality between the same global psychodrama people [who probably are disproportionately represented in institutions like major Foreign Ministries] and everybody else. <1> The second step of the Red Team analysis will be to move beyond the initial question of “Who is right?” to “Who is right about whom?” and - then - to unconceal the policy implications that arise from the statistical distributions that a Red Team helps to discover.

The new statistical distributions of “They don’t listen to most of what we say” is an urgent To Do list for the State Department and think tanks. The Administration’s new G-20 system, for example, looks attractive conceptually but a scientific Red Team, and a

catalytic Report, could lead us to think that it will require deeper thought, more institutions, and much harder work than currently are underway.

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<1> The threat of nuclear annihilation during the Cold War created a strong global psychodrama and united a Western alliance behind the US as a leader and protector. As that governing overlay dissolved, the underlying (still, unknown) distributions emerged.

Field independence may be stronger in cultures that have gone through the individuation-supporting processes of the Protestant Reformation and the (Western) Enlightenment but until the Obama Administration (DNI, NSF, etc.) and research institutions create a system that makes it easy to compare social and political psychology, a scientific theorist can only speculate.

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