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

Subject: 263. Red Team: Methods That Can Identify U.S. Misperception Quickly; Applying Gawande to Libya

Dear Dr. Fischhoff, Dr. Hauser, Bob Jervis and Colleagues:

It is challenging - worthy of a Red Team/National Academy of Sciences project - to develop systematic and reliable methods for rapid learning and to identify and correct one's own misperceptions. Thus, I suggest such a project be organized to brainstorm, identify, and create a systematic inventory of the methods that the DNI's \$80 billion/year system can use to identify US misperceptions quickly. The Report should produce, for General Clapper's oversight review of his system's work, the kind of algorithm that Gawande describes for hospital surgery and other professions in The Checklist Manifesto (2011).

Here are a couple of mental notes for this kind of project that I have made over the years:

- Are Psychologists “Experts”?

There are continuing disagreements and tensions, within academic Departments and across disciplines, about the benefits and cautions of using formal scientific methods to understand and predict human behavior. An unexpected result from the early “person perception” field was that engineers actually were better at predicting behavior than psychology majors: the psychologists tended to “over-empathize” and predict future emotions whereas engineers had more balance about recognizing the effects of situations on the actual behavior.

The needed capacities to answer questions about using American-based social science theories to predict political behavior in other cultures have not yet [i.e., after 4+ decades of recommendations] been organized and funded by NSF (e.g., # 12 archived at www.policyscience.net at II.D).

- Perceiving Ambivalence and Political Opportunities

Democratic politicians - Lyndon Johnson is an example - can have superb social skills and abilities to “read” people, using human brain capacities (e.g., “mirror neurons” for empathy) independent of scientific methods. These abilities can be a lot harder to develop and refine - and require many more years of applied experience and coaching/mentoring - than taking two graduate seminars on statistics, data analysis, and research methods. But they can achieve a deeper and useful human understanding when they are combined with sustained dialogue and the task of negotiating futures, beyond making impersonal, technocratic predictions.

For example, the late Alexander George and I once discussed processes of learning that could contribute to the end of the Cold War. Alex thought that it was important, in practice, to move beyond the standard Realist soundbite summaries and to be perceptive about ambivalences. People can be motivated by survival or power or status, but they also may want to make a recognized contribution to others, to create a legacy, to build a better world and future for their children and grandchildren . . . The problem of misperception,

then, is not “right” v. “wrong” but recognizing a greater complexity of elements that might eventually be fashioned, by a gifted US leader, into a deal.

Thus: Perhaps one of the deepest barriers to developing a negotiated settlement with the Taliban in Afghanistan is that President Obama and Secretary Clinton need to know more about its leaders, and to recognize motives and values on the other side that they can honor and - then - begin to craft into a settlement that is a better future for everyone. Another way to phrase this task for a Gawande checklist is political opportunity analysis (# 4, September 2009 archived at www.policyscience.net at II. D).

- How America is perceived.

President Reagan’s greatest strength in ending the Cold War was not his scientific methods or statistical training but his natural and unassailable conviction that Russian hostility and the nuclear arms race just reflected their peculiar misunderstandings of America. And he was an actor who knew how to read people: He recognized in Gorbachev a genuine human being who, if he got past his misperceptions, could be a trustworthy partner in writing a better future. Secretary Shultz (Alexander George's former colleague at Stanford) shared the same focus on Russian misperceptions of America, and he made it a practice to meet weekly, after 5PM, with the Russian Ambassador to talk with him broadly about America and American politics, about capitalism, and America’s intentions.

The “their misperceptions of us” American perceptions/misperceptions may be the most valuable Gawande checklist section, because we might be able to do something about their misperceptions, even if it takes time. (e.g., # 6, archived at www.policyscience.net at II.D).

- Another example, from former Ambassador Holbrooke. Holbrooke, after negotiating the Dayton Accords, seated President Clinton across from Milosevic at a dinner. He told Clinton: “Milosevic thinks he’s a tough guy. He’s going to sign these accords and then he will try to violate them. But if he sits across from you for thirty minutes, and talks to you,

he will recognize that you will never let him get away with cheating. And the accords will hold.”

A Test: Applying Gawande to Libya

Libya would be a good case for a Red Team/National Academy project to apply a full set of methods using a systematic Gawande checklist. The checklist may not get General Clapper and the DNI system assuredly in contact with current reality but - one of the meta-lessons that now shapes the writing of the Shell Global Scenarios for forecasting and similar professional methods - knowing the range of uncertainty should inform different approaches, further investigations, and monitoring systems to respond nimbly to events as more is revealed.

- It might be useful to cross-check perceptions with the Islamic world intelligence networks of the major oil companies. US Ambassadors and FSOs - including, postings to Libya - are rotated every several years, but the major oil companies have deep and long-standing experience and, often, an intimate inside knowledge of political actors and calculations in countries like Libya.

In Libya, I suspect that they will dismiss, entirely, the Hollywood scenario of people fighting for freedom and democracy against repressive dictators. Instead, they will probably think about the revolt as an opportunity of tribal leaders in the East (where most of the oil is located) to get control of this huge windfall of free oil revenue for themselves and their people and supporters. And they would see NATO's greatest leverage, aside from bombing, being its ability to control the markets to purchase Libyan oil and, also, the ability to “award” part of the \$30 billion+ of “frozen” Libyan assets in foreign banks to whatever coalition of tribal and military leaders, now supporting Gaddafi, who will change sides as the battlefield tide begins to turn. . . . These perceptions might miss today's genuine idealism and youth-generation forces, and even - by analogy to the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 - the (causal) inspiring words of American leaders who foreign rebels believed were a promise of assistance and victory if they joined the new tide of history. However they will offer a valuable stimulus for further thinking

and analysis.

In Libya, none of the rebel “leaders” has yet appeared on television - few have even been mentioned by name - and it is impossible, even impressionistically, to offer advice and save the US government from errors and another protracted war if the DNI system’s methods give misperceptions to President Obama without recognizing them to be misperceptions.

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