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To: "Dr. Baruch Fischhoff - Chair, National Academy of Sciences Study on Social & Behavioral Science and Improving Intelligence for National Security" <baruch@cmu.edu>, "Dr. Myron Gutmann - NSF Assistant Director, SBE" <mgutmann@nsf.gov>

From: Lloyd Etheredge [lloyd.etheredge@policyscience.net](mailto:lloyd.etheredge@policyscience.net)

**Subject: The Upgrading Public Databases chapter; Improving the yield of social science research**

Dear Dr. Fischhoff and Colleagues:

It would be useful for the National Academy of Sciences to recommend an upgrade of the public databases that are available for government-funded research: We passed, many years ago, a point of diminishing returns. For example: Most university-based social science about the urgent political and policy challenges facing the country beyond the water's edge is stagnant and almost useless.

Also, the wrong conclusions can be drawn or the opportunities for timely prevention can be obscured. The federal government is getting a poor return on its research money when data systems are unreliable, when relevant variables are missing or uncontrolled, when data and/or coefficients are too old for good policy decisions.

Here is an example of a state-of-the-art research project that is seriously deficient and outrageous. I send it to you with the expectation that the authors themselves would agree with my criticisms. And would eagerly improve the scientific work if the government data systems available to them were upgraded.

### **Forecasting Violence and Political Instability**

My example is the J. Joseph Hewitt, Jonathan Wilkenfeld, and Ted Robert Gurr, Peace and Conflict 2010 Executive Summary which I have just received from their University of Maryland Center for International Development and Conflict Management research program (their URL is <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu>). Hewitt's first chapter ("The Peace and Conflict Instability Ledger: Ranking States on Future Risks") illustrates the current problems of our university-based research that uses current government data systems in the public domain.

The prediction equation uses five factors: institutional consistency, economic openness, infant mortality rates, militarization, and neighborhood security to compute "risk scores" and generate a color-coded map for 162 countries. It relies upon published time series, computes coefficients from 1950-2003, plugs in 2007 country data ("the last year for which complete data are available for all five factors") to produce a summary forecast of current/2010 instability-probability/risk.

The research would have been state-of-the-art forty years ago. It predicts - probably correctly - the long-established political instability problems in sub-Saharan Africa. But the authors cannot get beyond their summary and proxy measures to reach a well-grounded and refined sensibility about what is going on in each country. To be in contact with current reality we need - for example - the new generation of real-time content analysis that I discussed in my earlier message (# 15 on 9/24/2009); and much richer and better research-quality data systems that actually bring into the public domain what the \$75 billion/year DNI system knows, by now, about political and economic dynamics.

### **Predicting Violence: The Infant Mortality Proxy**

- For example, Hewitt et al. use the World Bank's published time series of infant mortality rates as one of the five predictors. They input it as the "proxy for a country's overall economic development, its level of advancement in social welfare policy, and its capacity to deliver core services to the population." But when there is an urgent need to create US policy, it is pathetic to use a proxy to think about the social, economic, and political dynamics of political instability in 2009-10. For policy, we need to know what to change. For example: The DNI's Global 2025 (citations in my memo # 40 on 11/21/2009) knows and understands research that youth unemployment rates in UDCs (especially in "youth bulge" nations) will predict to political instability, violence, and dangerous increases in Islamic/terrorist recruitment. The variable should be measured directly, included, and we should know how much traction/benefit to expect from USAID (e.g., CCC) projects that target the youth unemployment problem.

### **Predicting Violence: The "Institutional Consistency" Proxy**

- There is a similar problem - the absence of data for a refined, 21st century analysis - with another proxy, "institutional consistency," that actually obscures behavior and urgent options for prevention. The researchers assign a number to measure: "the extent to which the institutions comprising a country's political system are uniformly and consistently autocratic or democratic." [An "inconsistent

mix" predicts to greater political instability.] The measure - and a message to many "inconsistent" countries: "Keep going!" - might predict that Obama Administration initiatives for maximum progress on behalf of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will be one of our best new investments for peace and stability [and this apparently was a powerful belief by Ed Azar, the Center's founder: "peace-building and development-with-justice are two sides of the same coin" [cited, "About CIDCM," inside cover.] But is this what it means, or do we need a more refined analysis and strategic package else we risk increasing political conflict and violence in the process, as has happened in other cases of battles to secure democracy and human rights? Or, how fast could we reduce UDC violence by successful projects to reduce injustice/increase women's rights? The U of MD data analysis project cannot, as it stands, be relied upon for urgent policy or state-of-the-art public discussion. And this is outrageous: The academic world should have the public data systems to do our best work, on government-funded research projects, addressing urgent questions of forecasting and policy. Otherwise, academic social science research remains a Republican-era, dumbed-down, ritual.

### Additional Comments

A couple of additional comments:

1.) The U of MD researchers did not rework their forecasting model and new Report to reflect changes in the world during a new period of global recession. Their older model used "integration into the world economy" as a positive predictor of *stability* [i.e., on average, in many cases, 1950-2003] whereas this degree of integration is likely - in current circumstances - to magnify the backward disruptions. It was the degree of economic integration and effects of the Arab oil embargo in the Carter-Reagan years that drove GDP steeply downward in Central America, in countries with unresponsive oligarchs and without social safety nets, and ignited violence using Marxist ideas and rhetoric.

2.) There are clear indications that Al-Qaeda is shifting operations to countries like Somalia. If the federal government is going to fund university research, it ought to be **Maximum Intelligence** social science - i.e., doing the best job that we can. *A case study of Somalia and options* (with cost-benefit estimates and ideas for experimental methods) would be a valuable and timely addition to U of MD research, even before the full DNI/government research database (N=162) upgrades are available.

3.) At \$75 billion/year there's probably enough money in the DNI system to fund a variety of formal research methods to triangulate on a core set of high-priority cases, like Somalia. If someone has told government funders of the U of MD project that a single method study is known to be reliable social science for Obama Administration policy making, the Fischhoff Committee should blow the whistle.

4.) The U of MD project puts its public domain/government data online for student users. Bringing the new content analysis capabilities and tools online would quickly enrich what student research can do to understand the emerging politics in other countries.

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