

Date: Sat, 12 Dec 2009 13:24:24 -0500

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>, "Dr. Aletha Huston - President, Consortium of Social Science Associations" <achuston@mail.utexas.edu>,

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

Subject: A Rational Plan: \$75 billion/year and sorting-out R&D responsibilities for the social/behavioral sciences

Dear Dr. Fischhoff, Members of the Fischhoff Commission, Assistant Director Gutmann, and President Huston:

Basic R&D investment belongs to the category that economists call "public goods." A straightforward mathematical theorem shows that competitive market systems - national and worldwide - will under-invest in such public goods. Thus, we need a government or similar institutions (e.g., private foundations) to supply leadership, perform a rational overmind function, and decide the amount to invest and how to allocate the funds.

However relying upon "government" is not, in reality, a straightforward solution, because different government agencies have their own missions and priorities. The President, or someone he designates as accountable, still must be the rational overmind mechanism. And since the same problem of designating/accepting accountability exists for all individual national governments, the default global responsibility for basic R&D strategy - for example, to understand the new global financial system - *de facto* shifts disproportionately to the US President, or to someone he designates as accountable.

This brings us to the role of the new Director of National Intelligence [www.dni.gov, with intellectual and cross-agency oversight of \$75 billion] and the Fischhoff Commission: I suggest a social science-based recommendation that Admiral Blair convene a review to make a rational strategic plan. The plan will designate the level and mechanisms of basic R&D investment in social/behavioral science, and the R&D component from this total, to support the future that President Obama wants to create.

A Further Complication: Steep Deterioration in the Bush years; NSF's pressures and physical science priorities

Reviewing the history of unraveling is less important than making plans for the future. But it is important to bring to Admiral Blair's attention that the National Science Foundation, during the Bush years, began to redefine its higher priorities as R&D for the physical sciences and engineering, to accelerate physical science solutions to urgent problems and lay the basis for new products and the competitiveness and growth of American companies. There is a politics to the science budget. And there are zealous Republicans who believe that the fundamental and simple truths and solutions to national and global challenges are known.

The recent effort by a Republican Senator to eliminate NSF funding for political science underscored the urgent need for DNI-level review. The remaining funds are pathetic - \$19 million, of which a substantial fraction is payable as university overhead and the largest project is a single (and not very innovative) national election study of American voting.

[At one level, Senator Coburn is right: there is little discernible benefit these days, at this level of funding. It also is true that most political science specialties (especially concerning reality beyond the water's edge) can be extinguished in a generation: each generation must compete, inspire, recruit, and secure research funding for its best graduate students and replacements - and by now the decline is underway and the hour is getting late.]

One reason to limit long-term R&D, after 9/11, was the emergency need to add billions of dollars (now, \$75 billion/year) to create the expanded DNI system to face looming threats of terrorism whose size, scope, and degree of penetration inside the US were unknown. Now, with a clearer picture of threats, it is timely to take a fresh look at rebalancing and investments that can increase the yield. [Even a 1% shift for R&D (\$750 million/year) is vastly greater than the academic world has a short-term capacity to spend wisely.]

Needed: A Top-Level Review

We need to recommend that the DNI convene a top-level review of R&D budgets and allocations of responsibility. It has been easy to recommend dozens of ideas to the Fischhoff Commission [reference copies are on the www.policyscience.net Website]: There is a huge backlog, and you also will have

received many others. And if - for example - our nation's social scientists had a hint that cross-national survey research might be fundable, or next-generation content analysis methods, I think there would be a tidal wave of fresh thinking for important projects that would help the DNI, the Obama Administration - and everyone else - to become more intelligent, thoughtful, and farsighted.

May I add, also, that American research universities are becoming increasingly globalized? With minimal publicity Harvard, Yale and other institutions are recruiting more extensively and globally to rebalance undergraduate populations [the graduate rebalancing began many years ago] and bring the world's next generation of leaders to our campuses. We need faculty positions and research projects that enable us to provide our best support for all undergraduates and their needs to understand forces and challenges in many regions of the world.

Re Taking Money from US National Security Agencies

It will be important to respect - and in some cases, strengthen - the institutional and cultural independence of basic R&D in the social and behavioral sciences. There will be better research, and more credible research, and a more energized and enrolling creative process, if the DNI-level strategic planning process can solve this dimension of the problem too.

Lloyd Etheredge

Dr. Lloyd S. Etheredge - Fellow, World Academy of Art & Science
Director, Government Learning Project
Policy Sciences Center Inc.
127 Wall St., Room 322 - Box 208215
New Haven, CT 06520-8215
URL: www.policyscience.net
301-365-5241 (v); lloyd.etheredge@policyscience.net;
lloyd.etheredge@aya.yale.edu (email)