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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>

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

Subject: Revenge Cultures and US/Civilized Behavior

Dear Dr. Fischhoff and Colleagues:

After the release of the Abu Ghraib photographs my impression is that there were discussions in Washington with the Saudi Ambassador, and others, about the appropriate forms of civilized behavior, expected in the Arab world, when there have been unjust injuries or insults to honor. At the time, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld discussed the possibility of cash payments, as an expression of apology, in testimony before Congress.

America is partly involved, in the Arab world, with honor/revenge cultures and the payment of cash can be a recognized settlement in cases of wrongful death - and, for example, remove obligations for revenge killings by relatives. . . . And this is about the extent of my knowledge, and I am referring the question to you.

Specifically, I was struck by the legal coolness of Secretary Clinton's public remarks in Pakistan: She was asked, in her televised and Webcast press conference, how the use of American drones to attack targets in Pakistan and killing civilians [including women and children] was any different or better than the use of 9/11 planes against NYC targets and civilians? The question raised an important point in my mind: If wrongful deaths occur - and given that the US can always emphasize that we regret them, and seek to minimize them, and that we are fighting a legally justified war - are there further steps, expected in Arab cultures, that would be a mark of civilized behavior? Should the American government, at least privately, make monetary compensation? <1>

The Department of Defense has contacted anthropologists to build a Human Terrain System for US troops operating in this region. You might want to check what it says about this subject, and what other experts say.

Revenge Obligations?

In addition to being ethical and civilized and conveying that America is ethical and civilized, there could be a strong US self-interest to understand these aspects of other cultures. Traditionally, honor/revenge cultures characterize nomadic peoples and the fierce dangers and collective obligations for assured retaliation are functional for security and survival for these peoples. [With established places of physical settlement, especially in urban areas, cultures of honor/revenge can evolve to cultures of law and specialized law enforcement by government agencies.]

However, since American troops and drone aircraft are operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan in rural areas with nomadic peoples we might be bringing further danger on American troops or Americans elsewhere if we violate codes of war and civilized behavior. The saying: "Revenge is a dish best served cold" was not invented by the script writers of Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan: Reportedly it was adapted by British writers of the late 19th century from the Pashtun tribesmen of Afghanistan.

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<1> Or could countries differ and would this be an insult?

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