

Date: Wed, 06 Jan 2010 12:59:41 -0500

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: The Merit of Scientific Boldness; Fwd: Walter Pincus

Dear Dr. Fischhoff and Colleagues:

I urge your National Academy Report to make its constructive criticisms in a bold, straightforward, spirit. There are lives at stake. And, in some sense - especially in advising Admiral Blair and the US government - the future of the world.

I am forwarding to your attention, and for the public record, a copy of a news report by Walter Pincus in this morning's Washington Post ("Coalition Urged to Revamp Intelligence Gathering, Distribution, in Afghanistan") and the related (and more useful) story with a more candid title ("US Intelligence Accused of 'Cluelessness'") carried in this morning's Financial Times. As you may recall, my first message concerned a social science theory of American foreign policy - to which I have contributed - about *hubris*, learning/non-learning, and the Rory Stewart problem. And social scientists have raised other (apparently relevant) warnings and predictions - for example, from Moynihan about the effects of secrecy on performance. Thus now - nine years into a war in Afghanistan - you might be interested in the enclosed expression of outrage from the NATO coalition's top military intelligence officer about America's (systemic) reality-connection problem.

<1>

Thus, I hope that you will be bold: These national problems do not occur in isolation. One meta-lesson which I draw is that our country is very poorly served by the kind of culture of deference - the "not unless asked to do so" style of social science advice/agenda-setting - that gained ascendancy at the National Academy of Sciences under Republicans, Presidents Albers/Cicerone and Richard Atkinson. <2> Atkinson's views about political deference and the place of university-based social science are expressed in the attached letter (a *.pdf file), widely circulated in the U of CA system before his appointment to a mostly-deferential National Academy system of agenda-setting advice for national research priorities. The bat-

ties to strengthen a more honest, straight-shooting, independent, and useful role for American universities and a culture/ethic of evidence-based government policy are detailed on the www.policyscience.net Website. *De facto*, Richard Atkinson would have lost his effectiveness and legitimacy as the head of the CIA if he had signed and circulated such a bureaucratic, servile, morale-damaging, and embarrassing letter.]

Lloyd Etheredge

<1> Including suggestive comments about relying upon sophisticated software, connections between higher and higher bureaucratic levels and reality, and personnel issues.

<2> Even members of the Executive branch who want the government to do a better job need allies.

US intelligence accused of 'cluelessness'

By Matthew Green in Islamabad

Published: January 6 2010 02:00 | Last updated: January 6 2010 02:00

Nato's top intelligence officer in Afghanistan has issued a scathing critique of US military intelligence-gathering, warning that a failure to understand local communities has deprived commanders of the information needed to contain the Taliban.

Warning that the intelligence community was only "marginally relevant" to strategy, Major General Michael Flynn, a veteran US intelligence officer, depicted commanders safely cocooned in bases surrounded by analysts with only a hazy grasp of the concerns of the people the west had vowed to protect.

"Moving up through levels of hierarchy is normally a journey into greater degrees of cluelessness," wrote Maj Gen Flynn and his co-authors in a report released yesterday.

"US intelligence officers and analysts can do little but shrug in response to high-level decision-makers seeking the knowledge, analysis and information they need to wage a successful counterinsurgency."

He said analysts often felt their jobs were "more like fortune-telling than serious detective work".

The report will renew concerns over the capability of US intelligence, in the wake of a suicide attack that killed seven Central Intelligence Agency personnel in Afghanistan last week and the alleged attempt by a Nigerian student to blow up a US airliner over Detroit on Christmas day using an explosive hidden in his underwear.

Maj Gen Flynn used the report to issue a directive to international forces to undertake a rapid overhaul of the way information is gathered and processed within the US force and among its allies in Afghanistan.

The report was published as officials sought to ascertain how a Jordanian man reported to be an al-Qaeda double agent was last week able to infiltrate a military base in eastern Afghanistan last week and inflict the biggest death toll on the CIA in one day in more than 25 years.

Commissioned by the Center for a New American Security, a US think-tank, before the latest incidents, the report focuses on the US military and civilian analysts employed by the department of defence.

Maj Gen Flynn's bleak assessment echoes a similarly blunt report that was prepared late last year by Stanley McChrystal, the commander of Nato forces in Afghanistan, who warned that the US risked losing the war without a change in strategy.

Maj Gen Flynn has worked closely with General McChrystal in various military missions during the past seven years and is considered to be one of his closest advisers.

The frankness of the report's language reflects the sense of urgency pervading the US command in a year that could prove decisive in the Obama administration's attempts to stave off defeat by the Taliban with efforts including a fresh troop surge.

Written in a tone nearing exasperation, the report quotes a US officer as saying: "I don't want to say we're clueless, but we are. We're no more than fingernail-deep in our understanding of the environment."

The report said intelligence officials and analysts were "ignorant of local economics and landowners, hazy about who the powerbrokers are and how they might be influenced, incurious about the correlations between various development projects and disengaged from people in the best position to find answers".

He was similarly candid about the lack of analytical skills in the military, quoting research showing that, in an intelligence staff of 250 people, only four or five personnel had the aptitude necessary to put pieces of information together to form a conclusion.

Maj Gen Flynn's report is a departure from the traditional approach to military intelligence as primarily a means to discern the intent of opposing forces, instead stressing the need for officers to understand the cultural and social complexities of their hosts.

For example, the report says that international forces who constructed a well were confronted by protests from local women angry that they had been deprived of a rare chance to socialise in their conservative village during their daily walk to draw water from a river.

Out-of-touch, complacent and cloaked in secrecy

For anyone working at a company burdened by out-of-touch leaders, complacent middle managers and a corrosive culture of secrecy, the report on the US intelligence community in Afghanistan will make for comforting reading.

In a 28-page dressing down, Michael Flynn, a US major general and long-serving intelligence officer, likens his operation to a corporation churning out goods without realising they are useless to consumers. "It is a culture that is strangely oblivious of how little its analytical products, as they now exist, actually influence commanders," he wrote.

Acknowledging the lack of trained information-sifters, a footnote suggests that the Department of Defense might consider hiring journalists to work as analysts.

He reserved greatest bile for officers who rely on sophisticated software to hide a lack of understanding of Afghanistan's elusive realities. "Sufficient knowledge will not come from slides with little more text than a comic strip," Maj Gen Flynn wrote. "Commanders who think PowerPoint storyboards and colour-coded spreadsheets are adequate for describing the Afghan conflict and its complexities have some soul searching to do."

Coalition urged to revamp intelligence gathering, distribution in Afghanistan

By Walter Pincus
Washington Post Staff Writer
Wednesday, January 6, 2010; A08

The highest-ranking U.S. military intelligence officer in Afghanistan has called for a major restructuring of the intelligence gathering and distribution in that country, arguing that the

present system "is only marginally relevant to the overall strategy."

Maj. Gen. Michael Flynn, the deputy chief of staff for intelligence for the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, called for a shift from collecting information to help with capturing or killing insurgents, and said more resources should go toward gathering facts about the political, economic and cultural environment of the population that supports the insurgency.

"Lethal targeting alone will not help U.S. and allied forces win in Afghanistan," Flynn wrote in a published report. He said that although the insurgents are worthy objectives, "relying on them exclusively baits intel shops into reacting to enemy tactics at the expense of finding ways to strike at the very heart of the insurgency."

He said little is being done to fully understand the support for insurgents, declaring that U.S. intelligence efforts are "ignorant of local economics and landowners, hazy about who the power brokers are and how they might be influenced, incurious about the correlations between various development projects . . . and disengaged from people in the best position to find answers."

Too often, Flynn said, intelligence analysts are assigned at the regimental and brigade levels, away from the grass roots, where the most valuable information can be gathered. As a result, there are not enough intelligence officers in units close to the population who can accurately assess critical information such as census data.

Flynn praised some Afghanistan-based units that bucked his overall conclusions. He cited a Marine battalion in the Nawa district of Helmand province whose commander used regular riflemen when he lacked enough ground-level intelligence

analysts, because he "decided that understanding the people in their zone of influence was a top priority" and was able to create an effective information network.

But such instances have been rare. Criticizing the tendency for intelligence to flow from the top down in wartime, Flynn said the process should be reversed in a counterinsurgency. "The soldier or development worker on the ground is usually the person best informed about the environment and the enemy," he wrote.

Flynn reported that when President Obama made his request in the fall for an analysis of pivotal Afghan districts, "analysts could barely scrape together enough information to formulate rudimentary assessments."

He described many intelligence analysts in Kabul, at U.S. Central Command headquarters in Tampa and at the Pentagon as so starved for information from the field that they say their jobs "feel more like fortune telling than serious detective work."

The report focused on Defense Department intelligence activities and was unrelated to other U.S. agencies, such as the CIA, which lost seven employees last week in a suicide bombing by an al-Qaeda double agent who breached a secret intelligence facility in Afghanistan.

Flynn took the unusual step of publishing his report, "Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan," through the Center for a New American Security, a think tank co-founded by Michèle A. Flournoy, who is now undersecretary of defense for policy.

Flynn said he did so to reach "not only officers in his command but also other intelligence officials and instructors in the field, including those outside of Afghanistan."

He also directly addressed some of the military intelligence community's shortcomings.

"The secretiveness of the intelligence community has allowed it to escape the scrutiny of customers and the supervision of commanders," Flynn wrote. "Too often, when an S-2 [intelligence] officer fails to deliver, he is merely ignored rather than fired. . . . Except in rare cases, ineffective intel officers are allowed to stick around."

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March 20, 1996

Dr. Lloyd S. Etheredge
7106 Bells Mill Road
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Dear Dr. Etheredge:

Thank you for your letter of January 13 and for sharing your concerns about efforts to establish an empirical foundation for the nation's social and economic policy choices. I appreciate your taking the time to keep us informed of your progress.

I have shared your letter with colleagues here in the Office of the President. It is clear from your correspondence with the President's Council of Advisers on Science and Technology (PCAST) that the potential for ideological bias in the process of policy development is widely acknowledged, but that PCAST has decided not to devote its limited resources to support new research into the issue at this time. While I understand your concerns, PCAST is free to establish its own agenda and the University of California is not in a position to involve itself.

Sincerely,

Richard C. Atkinson
President

cc: Provost King
Associate Vice Provost Poppe
Associate Vice Chancellor Hittelman
Dean Sears
Director Polsby
Coordinator McClain