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Subject: 241. Red Team: Egypt, Rapid Deployment, NSF & Others

Dear Dr. Fischhoff and Colleagues:

As a Red Team/National Academy project outlines behavioral science research requirements concerning Islamic democracy and related issues, for urgent NSF requests and others, you might be interested in the following perspective by Michael Scheuer. He spoke on a booktv presentation in Philadelphia that was broadcast over the weekend. During the Q&A he said:

"What I take away from the Egypt situation is the utter failure of the American educational system to prepare Americans for how the world is and not how we want it to be.

The idea that any responsible politician in either party or in media would expect a democracy to emerge in Egypt is either a signal that they don't know American history or they have no respect for what we have accomplished, really, in 800 years since Runnymede. And the media of course are cheerleaders for these people. Who do they interview? They interview Egyptians who are Middle Class, educated,

English speakers. So what impression do we get: That they want a secular democracy?

Does it make sense, really? That in a time of turmoil, violence and perhaps instability for a prolonged period that 32 million Muslims in Egypt would reach for an alien ideology, like secular democracy, over a 1,000-year-old faith in Islam? . . .

I was on Fox . . . [T]he host was insisting that Cairo was on the verge of becoming [1776] Philadelphia in terms of governing itself . . . ”

Comment

Scheuer poses extraordinarily important research questions. I have different hypotheses (e.g., earlier discussion papers archived at #229 - 240 at www.policyscience.net at II. D) - for example, I am not persuaded by the traditional references to “1,000 years” or “800” years, especially when the key demographic is youth audiences. After all, 1 billion+ people, worldwide (and with a strong youth demographic), watch the Oscars and the universalism of Hollywood themes and American-culture outcomes suggest that American ideals are not an “alien ideology” for the world’s 21st century politics. And Barack Obama may have a unique standing to capture imaginations and - in effect - run for office and position America as a trusted leader. However, these are empirical questions. Scheuer also rightly points to important intervening variables across the region (e.g., levels of internal violence) that could cause people to find traditional, well-organized, and trustworthy (identity) groups that will defend them.

Scheuer also is perceptive, in other parts of this presentation, in suggesting the possibility of steeply growing security dangers to Israel because, Scheuer believes, very strong and popular anti-Israel sentiments have been kept in check by the autocrats and the autocrat-US alliance. However, an alternative hypothesis is that anti-Israeli sentiment has been created as an in-group/outgroup phenomenon in which autocrats and Islamic fundamentalists (e.g., in Saudi Arabia) sustain the cohesion of their systems by an outside, demonic enemy. Thus, anti-Israeli agendas might also be forecast to *decline* as internal conflicts and legitimate disagreements rise within these new polities. . . .

There are many conflicting theoretical predictions, and the relevant measures should be identified quickly. In a pluralist world, all of the theories may have non-zero partial derivatives and we need to know how to change the strength of coefficients.

In an email exchange a colleague has warned that US research programs will have to be mindful of how Americans are viewed in today's Islamic world, including Egypt. It would have been better if NSF and the National Science Board, in its earlier investment cycles, had accepted - rather than killing without providing reviewer comments - recommendations to include Egypt in a new system of partnership centers in emerging pivotal states. This investment seems even more timely today.

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