

“Negative Shadow of the Future”

On May 10, there was a hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the subject of U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan broadcast on C-Span. This is one of those hearings that causes me a great deal of cognitive dissonance because as I listen to the Senators and the expert witnesses, it befuddles me that problems in a foreign country – in this case, Afghanistan, can be discussed in very straightforward language that also describes what is happening in this country, but which doesn't seem to be noticed by our representatives in government. Below I have an excerpt of the hearing that is case in point. What it makes me wonder is if our politicians aren't victims of the neurolinguistic programming that they apply to us in their efforts to be re-elected.

neurolinguistics

[noor'ō·ling·gwis'tiks]

Etymology: Gk, *neuron* + L, *lingua*, tongue

the study of language acquisition, processing, and production at the neurologic level.

Probably the most well known of the political linguistic programmers is Frank Luntz. He made the grapevine iNews last week when following the first presidential debate, he rather obviously tried to swing the perception of the debate winner slot to Herman Cain. He failed – at least with the Internet audience.

Quotes from the [Wiki article](#) on Luntz:

Luntz's specialty is “testing language and finding words that will help his clients sell their product or turn public opinion on an issue or a candidate.”

Luntz' description of his job revolves around exploiting the emotional content of language. "It's all emotion. But there's nothing wrong with emotion. When we are in love, we are not rational; we are emotional." "...my job is to look for the words that trigger the emotion." "We know that words and emotion together are the most powerful force known to mankind.."



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It seems to me that while politicians are paying this parasitic, slimeball, communitarian (some NLP of my own), for language to market messages to you, they are in fact, being neurolinguistically programmed themselves. And that, in a nutshell defines the appeal of Donald Trump. While most of the Republican politicians in Washington DC use the language subset selected for them by people like Luntz, Trump does not and he's not likely to because he's not dependent on the money from a wealthy constituency for campaign donations. But more specifically, relevant to this discussion is the fact that the mindbox built for the Republicans through NLP might be reason for their inability to hear the parallels between the problems of their constituents and the problems as they are defined by experts in Afghanistan and other places in the world.

The complete excerpted version of the transcript can be found below, but for my purposes, this particular section is demonstrable of the disconnect:

[Dr. Stephen Biddle – pertaining to Afghanistan]

At the moment we have this radical disjunction between a paper blueprint for how the country is supposed to be run which assigns almost all governing authorities of any consequence to Kabul and the actual distribution of political power in the country which is mostly in the hands of peripheral war lords and power brokers that tend to tie the hands of Kabul to an important degree. I think the right way forward in terms of thinking about what we can live with as an end state is shifting the nominal powers of governance outward but establishing enforceable limits on the behavior of peripheral authorities such that we can keep them within bounds that don't create radical public dissatisfaction with a predatory form of local governance and I suspect that the key bound or rather the key bounds that we need to pay attention to are first of all, obviously, with respect to our national security interests involved, we have to ensure that local authorities in Afghanistan obey the foreign policy of the state which is designed to prevent them from establishing safe havens for cross border activity by militants, insurgents or terrorists. Secondly, we have to prevent them from preying on their neighbors locally. But third, and importantly, we need to cap the corruption take by local officials in ways that remove what is currently often an existential economic threat directed at local victims by powerful networks of malign officials. And I think a key to doing that is establishing a redline restraint at the taking of land. In an agrarian society, land and it's control represents the ability to feed your family or a threat of starvation. One of the most damaging forms of predatory governance behavior in Afghanistan today is land taking by networks of corrupt officials for the benefit of the network which then drives the victim into the arms of the Taliban.

What do we have in the United States?

[Me]

In the United States, we have this radical disjunction between a paper blueprint (the Constitution) for how the country is supposed to be run which assigns almost all governing authorities of any consequence to the states and the actual distribution of political power in the country which is mostly in the hands of Washington DC agency powerbrokers that tends to tie the hands of the states to an important degree. I think the right way forward in terms of thinking about what we can live with as an end state is shifting the nominal powers of governance inward towards the center, but establishing enforceable limits on the behavior of the central authorities such that we can keep them within bounds that don't create radical public dissatisfaction with a predatory form of centralized governance and I suspect that the key bound or rather the key bounds that we need to pay attention to are first of all, obviously, with respect to our national security interests involved, we have to ensure that federal authorities in Washington DC obey the printed blueprint which was designed to keep them from consolidating power and exerting totalitarian control from the center. Secondly, we have to prevent them from preying on the citizens of the states. But third, and importantly, we need to cap the corruption take by local and federal officials in ways that remove what is currently often an existential economic threat directed at the citizens of the states by powerful networks of malign officials. And I think a key to doing that is establishing a redline restraint at the taking of jobs and the importing of foreign workers. In a modern technological nation, a job represents the ability to feed your family or the threat of starvation. One of the most damaging forms of predatory governance behavior in the United States today is job taking by networks of corrupt officials and corporations for the benefit of the network which then drives the victim into homelessness, despair and ultimately into insurgency. In addition to the trade policies which allow the taking of jobs, malign federal officials and their networks of environment groups engage in the taking of property either directly or indirectly through a variety of methods including zoning and/or regulatory harassment under the color of law. This sort of predation on the citizens of the states is a significant source of radical public dissatisfaction with the federal authorities of the central "governance" structure.

The common point of “dissatisfaction” for the people of Afghanistan and the people of the United States is the predatory activities of a psychotic network of global socialist central planners who are trying to impose their globally centralized command and control systems on the people of disparate nations without regard for the history, customs, social and legal norms of the nation states.

Continuing with the transcript:

[Corker]

Thank you. I know the time is limited. I do... the issue you are talking about – about basically redlining behavior and ... you know... it's... I think all of us who go there are frustrated by the sense... it feels like we are fighting the mafia in many ways. And our soldiers are really fighting criminality mostly – on the ground. I mean that mostly what's happening. But the cultural aspect that you're talking about – about the takings of land and all that. Is that something Taliban bred or is that something that is just part of the Afghanistan culture in general?

[ME]

The economic destabilization of the American people in the export of their jobs, and the import of foreigners to replace American workers – and with the same phenomenon in our schools by the import of foreign students to take the top slots in our universities while asking that we as American citizens pay for it all is not in the American experience for how we treat American citizens on American soil. Has something happened to the culture in Washington DC to turn American politicians into mindlessly predatory criminals who, by their actions are fueling anger and distrust that will in time, rip this country apart?

[Biddle]

I don't think this is cultural. I think this is largely a response to fairly recent events in Afghanistan since 2001 and especially the handing off from the United States to NATO of responsibility for the mission in 2003 and Afghan perceptions in more recent years that the United States lacks the will to bring this to a successful conclusion and is heading for the exit. Those perceptions lead to an expectation of abandonment and create what political scientists sometimes refer to as a negative shadow of the future in which people who believe that although they would prefer it to be otherwise, the government is likely to fall and is likely to fall in a relatively short period of time have powerful disincentives to make positive long term decisions about how they run their province or about how they run their business and create enormous incentives for corruption in the near term – to get while the getting's good and provide for a safe exile after a looming collapse that people worry is on the horizon. That has created powerful incentives for networks of officials to come together in exploitative, predatory ways so as to provide for economic gain for themselves and the members of their network while they still have the opportunity. And the taking of land again, I think is in many ways is the most virulent of these. It's not by any means the only piece of it – but it's the piece that's most threatening to the victims and tends as a result, I think to be the most important accelerant of insurgent activity in the country. I don't see anything in the society, political culture or history of Afghanistan that says that it's an appropriate role for local government officials to throw people off their land and engage in corrupt real estate deals that will enable short term windfalls to the officials involved. I think this is relatively recent in nature and is potentially reversible if we put sufficient effort into it in multiple domains.

[ME]

I don't think this is cultural. I think this is largely a response to fairly recent events in the United States since roughly 1994 with the integration of the global economy, the de facto elimination of borders between the United States, Canada and Mexico, the "reinvention of government" including privatization of government functions and the shredding of laws that restrained financial and other institutions from predatory behavior towards the American people. The globalist orientation of policy contrary to American law, customs and norms gives the perception and expectation of abandonment and creates what political scientists sometimes refer to as a negative shadow of the future in which people who believe that although they would prefer it to be otherwise, the government is likely to fall and is likely to fall in a relatively short period of time have powerful disincentives to make positive long term decisions about how they run their state or about how they run their business and create enormous incentives for corruption in the near term – to get while the getting's good and provide for a safe exile after a looming collapse that people worry is on the horizon. That has created powerful incentives for networks of officials to come together in exploitative, predatory ways so as to provide for economic gain for themselves and the members of their network while they still have the opportunity. And the taking of land and the de facto selling of jobs again, I think is in many ways is the most virulent of these. It's not by any means the only piece of it – but it's the piece that's most threatening to the victims and tends as a result, I think to be the most important accelerant of insurgent activity in the country. I don't see anything in the society, political culture or history of the United States that says that it's an appropriate role for local government officials to throw people off their land, displace them from their profession and engage in corrupt real estate deals that will enable short term windfalls to the officials involved. I think this is relatively recent in nature and is potentially reversible if we put sufficient effort into it in multiple domains.

There is no question for those of us who observe the disconnect between mindless political zombies of Washington DC and the 'on the ground' realities of the effects of their globalist policies as forced on the people via the the corruption of our local public officials facilitated by malign federal officials and their networks, that there is indeed a very negative shadow on the future of America.

Vicky Davis
May 13, 2011

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A case in point where “networks of officials have come together in exploitative, predatory ways so as to provide for economic gain for themselves and the members of their network while they still have the opportunity” is documented in a story I did on the corrupt activities of Boise Mayor Brent Coles. His activities were guided by an official at the Mayor’s Institute and funded by the Environmental Protection Agency.

[Agenda 21 in Idaho](#)

And you can find the same corruption at any location along an international corridor where the opportunity was provided by the intersection of multiple modes of transportation where an intermodal commerce zone for “international trade” could be located.

As for an example in another country, you could watch this hearing on C-Span with the expert witness being Richard Holbrooke as he, in very couched terms, talks about the new location for destabilization. In this case, he was talking about Pakistan and while the topside message is assistance, the dirty underside is destabilization. In this hearing, he has assembled his team of destabilizers for “turnkey democracy” that shreds the country’s social fabric by introducing the corruption of development money along with foreign, foreign policy implemented locally which would lead to destabilization, dissatisfaction and ultimately war.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee
[Afghanistan Issues](#)
Program ID 294538-1
July 14, 2010

<http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/StrategyinAfgh>

U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan
May 10, 2011
Program ID 299433-1

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Afghanistan, 2009-2010

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Senator Bob Corker (R-TN)

Begin transcript excerpt 1:56 into the program

[Biddle]

I think there is an important relationship between the political end state that we seek in Afghanistan and what we can do with respect to negotiations. If we insist on something that looks like the 2001 design that makes it very hard to see what's in it for the Taliban in any possible settlement. The Taliban are not a broad-based popular movement in Afghanistan. If the most they're offered in any prospective settlement negotiation is the opportunity perhaps to run for office on an equal basis with any other candidate in a highly centralized national system where they have to compete on a national basis, their ability to command seats will be very limited and it's hard to see how they would see this as being worth making compromises to accept. I think, almost certainly the direction of change with respect to Afghan political end states is likely to be in the direction of decentralizing nominal authority; but centralizing actual power relative to what it's become by 2011.

At the moment we have this radical disjunction between a paper blueprint for how the country is supposed to be run which assigns almost all governing authorities of any consequence to Kabul and the actual distribution of political power in the country which is mostly in the hands of peripheral war lords and power brokers that tend to tie the hands of Kabul to an important degree. I think the right way forward in terms of thinking about what we can live with as an end state is shifting the nominal powers of governance outward but establishing enforceable limits on the behavior of peripheral authorities such that we can keep them within bounds that don't create radical public dissatisfaction with a predatory form of local governance and I suspect that the key bound or rather the key bounds that we need to pay attention to are first of all, obviously, with respect to our national security interests involved, we have to ensure that local authorities in Afghanistan obey the foreign policy of the state which is designed to prevent them from

establishing safe havens for cross border activity by militants, insurgents or terrorists. Secondly, we have to prevent them from preying on their neighbors locally. But third, and importantly, we need to cap the corruption take by local officials in ways that remove what is currently often an existential economic threat directed at local victims by powerful networks of malign officials. And I think a key to doing that is establishing a redline restraint at the taking of land. In an agrarian society, land and its control represents the ability to feed your family or a threat of starvation. One of the most damaging forms of predatory governance behavior in Afghanistan today is land taking by networks of corrupt officials for the benefit of the network which then drives the victim into the arms of the Taliban. I think if we establish a series of what amount to reconfigurations through deals of the relationship between the periphery and the center that say, as long as you avoid a collection of activities that will yield enforcement action prominently including the illegal taking of land we will allow you a sphere of autonomy to do what you wish in other domains but that if you violate any of the explicit terms of the agreement then you can expect enforcement activity from the center. We then need again to be able to provide the resources to the center to enable them to enforce that deal. If we arrive at a more practically recast bargain between the periphery and the center that in turn opens up opportunities for a reconciliation negotiation with elements of the Taliban in which for example, they could be offered things like seats in parliament, position as a legitimate political actor within the society either as a party or as individuals and you could imagine at least there being the terms for a conversation with different Taliban factions about under what conditions might they be willing to renounce Al Qaeda, lay down arms and come into the government. As a final point with respect to the nature of that conversation with the Taliban, I think it's important that we regard both the prospective political role of the Taliban in a possibly reconfigured Afghanistan state and the military presence of foreign powers as negotiable. At the end of the day, a permanent U.S. military presence in Afghanistan is primarily an instrument or a means to an end of a stable South Asia. It seems to me that if we regard it as a means to an end and not as an end of super ordinate importance because of the consequences for power projection capability of a U.S. base in Afghanistan. If we view it instead as a means to an end, we need to be able to treat it as part of a negotiation with the Taliban especially given the centrality of concerns with long-term foreign military presence in Afghanistan in at least the things that the Taliban have been telling us to date.

[Corker]

Thank you. I know the time is limited. I do... the issue you are talking about – about basically redlining behavior and ... you know... it's... I think all of us who go there are frustrated by the sense... it feels like we are fighting the mafia in many ways. And our soldiers are really fighting criminality mostly – on the ground. I mean that mostly what's happening. But the cultural aspect that you're talking about – about the takings of land and all that. Is that something Taliban bred or is that something that is just part of the Afghanistan culture in general?

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[Corker]

As we've evolved to this sort of 'good enough' vision of Afghanistan that continues to change and I know each of you have talked about how that needs to be defined more fully; you know, it really... when you spend time as you have more than me, I'm sure... President Karzai, I mean it's almost getting back to his vision. I mean I think he wanted to make some accommodations with some of the Warlords early on and wanted us to have less troops on the ground and you're talking about local sheriffs. Our State Department on the other hand was focused on a sort of a western democracy type situation with a judicial system and all types of things happening there; is the State Department in sync with what the military is now envisioning as 'good enough'? Are their activities in concert with that?

[Kilcullen]

I think everybody is looking at me because I used to work in the State Department. Um... I would actually characterize history slightly differently. I think that a lot of the decisions that were made uh... early in the process, about focusing on the central government were international community decisions made in Bonn and enforced through a series of international decisions. I do think that the State Department now is very aligned with what the military is trying to achieve in Afghanistan primarily through the mechanisms of things like district support teams, the original platforms where we have senior civilian representatives out in each regional command, conforming what the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International

Development is doing alongside the military. We're also looking at a very substantial increase in the number State Department Officers and USAID Officers deployed forward from roughly 300 about 18 months ago to nearly 1,200 now. So I think we've seen the State Department aligning and working very closely, hand and glove with the military. The problem in the political environment, I don't think lies with our own civilian agencies, it lies primarily with Afghan officials who as Dr. Biddle said, their interests may be differently aligned from ours. It's just beyond the ability of any foreign intervening actor to really change the calculus that local power elites have towards their own population – certainly in the time that we've been present in the country. So... I think the State Department, to the extent that it matters, is very fully aligned and has put a lot of effort into it's activities but frankly, ultimately that doesn't matter as much as what the Afghans themselves particularly Afghan politicians and Afghan elites at a local level actually decide about the process.

[Jones]

I think the relationship between the military and civilian agencies... I'm speaking from experience here has definitely improved over the past two years on this front – where especially organizations like the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) has and is working actually fairly closely with Special Forces teams on bottom up initiatives. These kinds of initiatives we've talked about. So I think that Dr. Kilcullen is right that this was an international issue for a long time but the military probably moved earliest on it – in around the 2009 period, but I think at this point, most everybody is onboard. The biggest challenge probably is when you get into rural areas of Afghanistan, the military footprint is still the largest by far so if civilian agencies are restrained either because of their presence at the embassy in Kabul or at very finite number of provincial reconstruction teams or other places, it's the military out in the field that is the one that generally executes a lot of these governance, development and military missions just because they are the only ones out there in a range of places.

[Biddle]

I think a great deal of progress has been made in what is famously the hardest part of counterinsurgency – unity of effort even within the military much less across the military and non-military dimensions of the effort is famously difficult in this sort of undertaking. That said, there are still some important challenges that remain and I think they tend to stem in part from the underdevelopment of the government side of the campaign plan for the conduct of operations in the theatre. There are a variety of tradeoffs between different parts of what we seek to do in governance development. Many of the local power brokers that we've been discussing earlier in the hearing for example have militias or other security services that we from time to time rely on to augment our security effort in parts of the country. That creates a short-term security benefit and a long-term governance problem. To resolve these kinds of tradeoffs and most importantly to prioritize and sequence their resolution, we're not going to simultaneously be able to constrain every malign actor in Afghanistan. We need to have a sense of who to start with and in what order to proceed with the others in order to do that and to coordinate the resolution of those dilemmas and tradeoffs with the State Department and with other countries that are

part of the coalition requires I think a degree of explicit planning that at the moment I think is still underdeveloped relative to the planning that we do for the conduct of security operations in the country. I would like to see the governance side of the campaign plan get the degree of detailed development that the security side has had now for some years.

End of Transcript excerpt.