

SNAFU or PSYOPS?

Van Cleave Continued from Page 2

Yet all their policies are based on (as Teddy Roosevelt put it in a different context) carrying a big stick. Suggest that they require a form of slavery in order to fund their programs, and they'll look at you as though you'd just stepped off a flying saucer.

Both sides exploit psychological *anchoring*. Say you're selling a gizmo, and you stick a price tag on it. That price serves as a psychological anchor for those who might want to buy – it's the place to start negotiations, the "real" price they might want to beat. Yet you set it, perhaps, quite arbitrarily – or deliberately high or low. It may have little to do with the actual value of your gizmo. Politicians do the very same thing. In fact, there's a serious competition to see who can set the anchor for any political issue. And you can bet that a politician will always set the anchor ridiculously high. Are "weapons of mass destruction" AK-47's or hydrogen bombs? What's at stake with our climate – a fraction of a degree more on Saturday's barbecue, or global flooding and desertification? Wherever you set the anchor, the statistical response from people will be either higher or lower, accordingly.

This anchoring heuristic can really take you off the deep end. A good example of this is what is now called "the precautionary principle" – basically the idea that if you can imagine some dire consequence of a course of action, then that action must be avoided at all costs. It is based on setting the anchor at total disaster. Never mind any scientific and logical examination of the situation showing risk to be minimal or nonexistent!

There's a valuable application of anchoring for Libertarians, though. They should be (and the best activists are) setting their anchor in the political debate at 100 percent liberty.

Let's move to "Islamic terrorism"

for the next example, the *actor-observer effect* (the "observer" part of this is basically what psychologists call the *fundamental attribution error*, because it is arguably the most pervasive error people make when attributing motivations to others). First, an example to illustrate the idea: If you're late for an appointment, chances are you'll blame the *external* circumstances. But if someone is late for the same appointment, chances are you'll blame some factor *internal* to them – laziness, inattention, etc. The idea is that two people can behave in exactly the same way, but each will attribute different behavioral influences on self vs. the other. Much of Americans' misunderstanding of what we call "terrorism" is due to this factor. The American revolutionaries were freedom fighters, responding to intolerable circumstances (external factors) visited upon them by King George. Islamic terrorists, though, are motivated simply by an irrational hatred (an internal factor) of those they target.

Yeah, sure. One of the best results of the 2008 presidential primary season has been Ron Paul's discussion of "blowback" – the natural consequences resulting when people respond to intolerable external circumstances. He was simply explaining that Arabs, just like Americans, are motivated by external factors (and when those factors are especially onerous,

they are *strongly* motivated). But Americans caught up in the actor-observer effect couldn't buy such a sensible explanation.

I've just scratched the surface; there are many more psychological traps like these – but I have room to discuss only two more that will be important for you, the jury.

In 1963, psychologist Stanley



Milgram published a report on the disturbing results of his research on obedience. Subjects in his study were told they would administer electric shocks to learners when they made mistakes, in order to assess the effectiveness of this "negative reinforcement" for learning. It turned out that, more often than not, his subjects would continue to follow orders to administer shocks (fake, of course, though the "learners" screamed and begged for mercy very convincingly) even when serious harm appeared imminent.

Similarly, in 1971 Philip Zimbardo conducted the famous Stanford Prison Study, in which ordinary students were assigned roles as prison guards and prisoners. The study had to be shut down prematurely because both "guards" and "prisoners" were showing disturbing psychological changes. Some guards became downright sadistic, while most overstepped the bounds most of us would think appropriate in their role. And many of the prisoners were severely traumatized. Members of both groups required therapy for years afterward to help them recover from what they had learned about themselves.

Fast-forward to today. American military prisons such as Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo are supposed to be loaded with interrogators who are experts in psychology, right? Probably the installation commanders were chosen because of their understanding of how a prison environment can elicit information from its inmates. Is there any way such people could *not* be aware of these experiments, among the most famous in all of psychology?

Why do politicians and generals act surprised when troops in Iraq or Afghanistan are seen abusing innocent civilians?

As police forces in the U.S. are increasingly militarized, we've seen many more instances of cops flying off the handle and abusing their authority. Why hasn't there been a tighter rein to prevent that? In fact, how can one justify the very obvious change in mission overtaking "law enforcement" everywhere: the shift from keeping the peace to *controlling* the people and restricting any opportunities for the commission of crimes?

With those uncomfortable questions I'll now ask for your verdict: Does government simply fail to guard against all these psychological traps, or does it purposefully exploit them?

Driver's Licenses

Albrecht Continued from Page 13

would be enough to transmit the ID number.

Combined, these features of RFID make the technology extremely attractive for anyone interested in surreptitious tracking and surveillance of others. This potential has not been lost on government authorities and corporations, both of whom have become increasingly invasive of individual privacy in recent years. IBM, Phillips Electronics, Bank of America, and American Express have all developed strategies to exploit RFID tags carried by the public in ways that most people would find extremely invasive.

IBM, for example, holds a patent titled "Identification and Tracking of Persons Using RFID-Tagged Items." That patent describes a nightmarish scenario that IBM envisions for the day when members of the public begin

carrying remotely-readable RFID tags. IBM-patented "Person Tracking Units" would be installed in the walls and flooring of public places, including bus stops, train stations, shopping malls, sports arenas, museums, theaters, libraries — even elevators and public restrooms — to secretly identify and track members of the public as they go about their daily business.

In addition to the enormous privacy concerns created if people can be remotely identified and tracked by corporations or governments, there are serious safety issues, as well. The National Network to End Domestic Violence is a vocal opponent of remotely readable RFID cards, pointing out that the decision to carry one could be a matter of life or death for victims of domestic violence.

Finally, it should be noted that placing the RFID tag into a driver's license means that people will carry the remotely-readable devices at virtually all

times, not just at border crossings. People are routinely asked for their driver's licenses to verify their identity at retail stores, when writing checks, at banks, airports, schools, government buildings, and other locations. In addition, the driver's license is required to operate a motor vehicle, so the decision to leave the card at home for is not an option.

In conclusion, while greater security and efficiency at border crossings is an important goal, the use of RFID-tagged driver's licenses is a poor choice of technology to accomplish it. RFID is extremely problematic from a privacy and civil liberties perspective. Because RFID-tagged driver's licenses would pose an enormous threat to the privacy and safety of the nation's residents, I urge the legislatures of the various states involved in this project to rescind their agreements with the Department of Homeland Security, and decline further participation in the program.

Dr. Katherine Albrecht is widely recognized as one of the world's leading experts on RFID. She holds a Doctorate in Education from Harvard University and is the director of CASPIAN, a 15,000 member consumer privacy organization. Katherine hosts a daily radio program on We the People Radio Network (WTPRN.com) and co-authored the award-winning book "Spychips," the definitive critique of RFID.

Since 2003, Katherine has led the fight against unethical RFID use in products and in people. She regularly testifies before lawmakers around the globe and has given over a thousand television, radio and print interviews to news outlets like CNN, NPR, Good Morning America, Business Week and the London Times, to name just a few. Executive Technology Magazine calls Katherine "perhaps the country's single most vocal privacy advocate" and Wired magazine calls her the "Erin Brockovich" of RFID."