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Strategic Implications of 12 Unasked Questions in Response to Disaster

Items for consideration

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Checklist of questions

Implications of Afghanistan

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References

Produced on the occasion of publication of an analysis of *What Went Wrong in Afghanistan* (*Foreign Policy*, March/April 2013) and of investigation of the *Boston Marathon bombings* (April 2013)

Checklist of questions

1. What questions have not been asked?
 2. Is any checklist of questions, asked and unasked, maintained as a source of collective learning?
 3. Who ensured that the unasked questions were designed off the table?
 4. What agenda is served by not asking particular questions?
 5. What pressures are applied to those endeavouring to ask those questions, and what penalties result from asking them?
 6. What is not addressed through the framing provided by the questions which are asked?
 7. Will providing a satisfactory answer to the questions asked resolve the issue -- or will the issue re-emerge, perhaps reinforced, in a new form on a subsequent occasion?
 8. Does allocation of resources to the question asked ensure that no resources are allocated to those that are not?
 9. Do previous strategic challenges offer examples of ignoring uncomfortable questions -- and failing to learn from them?
 10. Does the strategic focus on isolating (and eliminating) a primary cause serve primarily to assuage public opinion by enabling "[Mission Accomplished](#)" to be declared?
 11. By addressing symptoms, does the quest for symbols of rapid closure through conventional strategies serve to avoid any need for rethinking on how to address more deep-seated systemic ills?
 12. How vulnerable is a society rendered, whether through failure to ask such questions or through the lack of higher orders of thinking it indicates as being necessary?
- A "13th question", might well be: **what are the questions to which no one in authority wants an answer?**

The most serious mistakes are not being made as a result of wrong answers.
The true dangerous thing is asking the wrong question.
[Peter F. Drucker](#)

Implications of Afghanistan

The editorial of the issue on *What Went Wrong in Afghanistan* (*Foreign Policy*, March/April 2013) -- a special report on "12 years of getting it wrong" -- is remarkably clear on the manner in which strategic issues were not discussed at the highest levels with regard to Afghanistan. The issue features a "gloves off" article by insider [Vali Nasr](#) (*How Obama Let Diplomacy Fail in Afghanistan*) summarizing arguments elaborated in a book (*Dispensable Nation: American Foreign Policy in Retreat*, 2013). His argument could be reviewed in terms of a set of unasked questions. For example, Nasr makes the point that with respect to the US administration's handling of Afghanistan:

... my time in the Obama administration turned out to be a deeply disillusioning experience. The truth is that his administration made it extremely difficult for its own foreign policy experts to be heard... On the campaign trail, Obama repeatedly stressed that he wanted to get things right in the broader Middle East, reversing the damage that had resulted from the previous administration's reliance on faulty intelligence and its willingness to apply military solutions to problems it barely understood.

Not only did that not happen, but the president had the disturbing habit of funneling major foreign-policy decisions through a small cabal of relatively inexperienced White House advisors whose turf was strictly politics. Their primary concern was how any action in Afghanistan or the Middle East would play on the nightly news, or which talking point it would give to the Republicans. The Obama administration's reputation for competence on foreign policy has less to do with its accomplishments in Afghanistan or the Middle East than how the U.S. actions in that region have been reshaped to accommodate partisan political concerns.

Implication of Boston Marathon bombings

In the case of the Boston Marathon bombings, as announced by FBI Special Agent in Charge, Richard DesLauriers ([Remarks of at Press Conference on Bombing Investigation](#), 18 April 2013):

The FBI Boston's Joint Terrorism Task Force, composed of more than 30 federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, including Boston Police, Massachusetts State Police, and ATF, HSI, United States Secret Service, and others responded to the scene. Many of them were already there as part of the general security for the marathon already in place.

The entire focus of the investigation, and the resources deployed, was on identifying the perpetrators. This recalls the framing of the military intervention in Afghanistan and the focus on the elimination of Osama bin Laden. The emphasis in both cases is on bringing an individual "to justice" -- to make the individual "pay" -- and on the prevention of future perpetration of such incidents. No reference is made as to the causes engendering such incidents, except that by implication they are clearly the work of deranged, even evil, minds -- disruptive of a satisfactory status quo.

Questions might be usefully raised regarding the justification for the numbers deployed in the Boston area. CNN indicated that more than 9,000 law enforcement officers, many armed with shotguns and automatic rifles, were sent to the suburb of Boston in the quest for a single individual. By comparison, Britain, the second largest contributor to NATO's Afghanistan operation, currently has about 9,000 troops in that arena. At what point might the response in Boston be challenged as "overreaction" or "overkill" -- especially if the latter proves literally to be the case? (Steven Rosenfeld, [How Absurd: 8 crazy reactions, ridiculous conclusions, and dumb media behavior coming out of the Boston bombings](#), *AlterNet*, 19 April 2013; Paul Campos, [The Boston Bomber Brothers Got the Attention They Wanted](#), *AlterNet*, 20 April 2013).

If the city is in "lock down" in response to the threat from a single individual, what does this imply for a situation in which the number of suspects constituted a group of 10 or 100?

Common pattern of strategic responses?

The pattern of response is reminiscent of a lynch mob mentality, now exacerbated by a modern media frenzy -- as indicated by the extent of coverage of the Boston marathon bombings. This of course contrasts remarkably with the minimalistic coverage of the many "incidents" involving far greater number of deaths in Syria, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan -- in which families are notably disrupted by the death of innocent children and bystanders.

Following the controversies over "enhanced interrogation" (aka *torture*), *extraordinary rendition*, and *imprisonment without trial* for extended periods, the interaction between the erosion of collective morality and the erosion of legality is increasingly evident, as highlighted with respect to increasing use of drones by [Maureen Dowd](#) ([The C.I.A.'s Angry Birds](#), *The New York Times*, 16 April 2013).

It would seem that the assertive declaration (now frequently made by authorities in response to disaster) that **"all the options are on the table" somehow only includes those that reflect the pattern of questions asked, excluding those neglected by failure to ask more radically appropriate questions** (*Framing the Global Future by Ignoring Alternatives: unfreezing categories as a vital necessity*, 2009; *Considering All the Strategic Options -- whilst ignoring alternatives and disclaiming cognitive protectionism*, 2009). **How to prove that no options have been ignored when some argue specifically, citing opportunities ignored, that this is clearly not the case?** How are "non-negotiable" options to be reconciled with such a declaration?

The rationalization of "printing money", under the euphemism of *quantitative easing* (to avert financial bankruptcy), can increasingly be seen as extended to a form of "qualitative easing" with respect to morality (*From Quantitative Easing (QE) to Moral Easing (ME): a stimulus package to avert moral bankruptcy?* 2010). Whether or not *moral equivalence* is claimed or denied (cf. [Jeane Kirkpatrick](#), *The Myth of Moral Equivalence*, *Imprimis*, January 1986), the approach evokes the possibility of an unquestionable pattern of "be done by as

you did" -- which lends itself to speculative reflection (*Writing Guidelines for Future Occupation of Earth by Extraterrestrials: be done by as you did?* 2010). Offering a degree of reality to that speculation is the announcement, at the time of writing, that [NASA has discovered the most Earth-like planets yet](#) -- orbiting distant stars.

Curiously the process of eliciting and pandering to a lynch mob mentality may be seen as consistent -- but perversely, to the longer-term disadvantage of society -- with that associated problematically with engendering popular consent ([Edward Bernays](#), *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, 2011, *Propaganda*, 1928; [Noam Chomsky](#) and [Edward S. Herman](#), *Manufacturing Consent: the political economy of the mass media*, 1988). How then to recognize the possibility of [groupthink](#) and its consequences for "intelligence failure" -- and to enable corrective measures? How then to address the systemic challenge of question avoidance (*Question Avoidance, Evasion, Aversion and Phobia: why we are unable to escape from traps*, 2006)?

More problematic is the degree to which it can be suspected that information released to the public during the course of any disaster is designed to ramp up knee-jerk responses and the justification for them. The pattern is in process of being documented in relation to the Boston Marathon bombings ([Julie Lévesque](#), *The Boston Bombing Web of Lies*, *Global Research*, 26 April 2013; [Alex Seitz-Wald](#), *The "Facts" Keep Changing About the Boston Bombings -- and it's fueling a conspiracy theory industry*, *AlterNet*, April 2013).

The difficulty is that a related pattern is evident in relation to increasing concerns regarding the continuing conflict in Syria and the possible use of "chemical weapons" ([Stephen Lendman](#), *Fabricated Intelligence and the WMD Pretext: Obama heads closer to war on Syria*, *Global Research*, 25 April 2013; [David Edwards](#), *Won't Get Fooled Again? Hyping Syria's WMD 'Threat'*, *Media Lens*, 13 December 2012). The existence of such "evidence" has now been confirmed by [David Cameron](#) ([Alan Cowell](#) and [Hwaida Saad](#), *British Leader Says Evidence of Chemical Warfare in Syria Is Limited but Growing*, *The New York Times*, 26 April 2013).

There is no capacity to question the credibility of such statements in the light of the widely noted falsity of the earlier declaration formally made by [Colin Powell](#) to the United Nations Security Council on [5 February 2003](#) in order to enable intervention in Iraq -- and the associated misrepresentation of "evidence" by the British Prime Minister at that time. There is no question of asking what might be the source of the chemical weapons or their precursors -- just as questions are avoided regarding the source of the arms used in Syria or in other arenas of bloody conflict. The logic recalls the primary argument presented in response to gun control campaigners by the US National Rifle Association: *Guns don't kill people, people do*. It is not clear why this argument does not also apply to "chemical weapons" or to the considerable concern with regard to acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran. There is accumulating evidence that [white phosphorus](#) has been variously employed [over the past decade](#), notably by those concerned about its claimed use in Syria.

Why are authoritative statements about the accumulation of "evidence" now to be taken seriously in the light of the past pattern of misrepresentation? **How is any authority with the power to misrepresent the facts now able to prove that the evidence is not tainted in some way and has not been subject to various forms of tampering?** As with the request made of Iran, what form should "concrete proof" now take with respect to other matters of concern, as separately discussed (*10 Demands for Concrete Proof by We the Peoples of the World*, 2012). Is the visual evidence of the use of bombs to be taken as valid evidence -- given that "false flag" operations may well be justified to decision makers by reasons of "national security", as has happened in the past? **The question now is not what is to be construed as "evidence", but rather how much would it cost to fake that "evidence" credibly, and to whom is the price worth paying?** (*Politicization of Evidence in the Plastic Turkey Era al-Qaida, Saddam, Assassination and the Hijab*, 2003).

Modern advertising campaigns of any kind, especially with respect to competing products, increasingly make the issue comprehensible to many. The use of superlatives by each, to claim originality and superiority, can only imply that one or both are lying -- with little possibility of being credibly challenged.

As suggested by [Vali Nasr](#) with respect to Afghanistan, there is a case for exploring the matter otherwise -- as is most notably evident in the work of [Josh Kerbel](#) for the US intelligence community as a consequence of 9/11. Nasr cites [Richard Holbrooke](#) with respect to strategic formulation by the latter's team on Afghanistan:

I want you to learn nothing from government...This place is dead intellectually. It does not produce any ideas; it is all about turf battles and checking the box. Your job is to break through all this.

As implied by Nasr, the past decade in the Afghanistan arena would seem to have demonstrated that strategy is elaborated and implemented by "know-it-alls" -- lacking any ability to question the basis for their own confidence (*Transforming the Unsustainable Cost of General Education: strategic insights from Afghanistan*, 2009). This despite the widely remarked admission regarding the existence of [unknown unknowns](#) by the former Secretary of Defense, [Donald Rumsfeld](#), as discussed separately (*Unknown Undoing: challenge of incomprehensibility of systemic neglect*, 2008).

As demonstrated in that arena, claiming to have all the answers precludes the possibility of asking new questions to enable learning. Politicians and economists exhibit the same tendency with regard to the current economic crisis -- despite the historically unprecedented escalation in the numbers of unemployed as a consequence of their policies (*12 Mindsets Ensuring Disappearance of Employment Opportunities*, 2012). Why waste time -- exhibiting doubt and uncertainty to those who expect the provision of answers to be a primary characteristic of leadership (*The Future of Leadership: reframing the unknown*, 1994). To what extent does strategic leadership require the capacity to ask new questions, to encourage such questions to be asked, and to embody the [negative capability](#) extolled by the poet John Keats?

Is it possible to identify the new questions of value through which current leadership has reframed the challenges of the times? Is a leader to be remembered by the questions asked? Alternatively, is the historical legacy of a leader who failed to respond creatively to such challenges to be best recognized through a particular question that was not asked?

What questions can the present ask that makes a mockery of the past and frames it as quaint -- perhaps worthy of the ridicule in which it

is currently held? What questions may the future then ask that will frame the present as quaint -- perhaps worthy of ridicule in its turn?

Why is it that a commercial group, [Dassault Systems](#) -- part of the [Dassault Group](#), renowned for its manufacture of military equipment -- should have launched a worldwide media campaign under the slogan *If we ask the right questions, we can change the world*? Can one imagine this being done by any part of the United Nations system, the European Commission, or any government?

Asking appropriate strategic questions

One possibility is by "question substitution", as argued by [Daniel Kahneman](#) (*Answering An Easier Question*, In: *Thinking Fast and Slow*, 2011). In response to a complex "hard" question regarding difficult problems, this involves finding a related question which it is easier to solve. He describes the substitute as a "heuristic question". He addresses to some degree whether this substituted question offers useful insights into the difficult question. A concern is obviously whether the substitution obscures the original question, which then remains "unasked", whilst giving some measure of satisfaction through addressing the easier one

The art of interrogation -- notably as applied to any terrorist suspect -- then elicits a semblance of orderly "explanation" to the satisfaction of the interrogators, who may well feel no need to question their own methodology and the framing of reality it ensures. As with science more generally, however, its methods are vulnerable to arguments such as the following articulated by [Norman Campbell](#):

... we accomplish the apparently miraculous feat of reducing a chaotic world to order because we carefully confine our attention and our efforts only to those portions which we find can be ordered (*The Foundations of Science*, 1920)

For Elaine Scarr (*Thinking in an Emergency*, 2011):

The seduction against thinking in an emergency comes... from two sources: first, from a false opposition between thinking and acting; second, from a plausible (but in the end, false) opposition between thinking and *rapid* action. Now a third, equally potent, form of seduction becomes visible: the acts of thinking that go on in emergencies are not recognized by us as acts of thinking. We misrecognize them. More precisely, we correctly recognize the presence of habits in these mental acts but incorrectly conclude that habit is incompatible with, or empty of, thought. We are therefore willing to set these mental acts aside. Our derisive attitude toward habit prevents us from seeing the form of thinking embedded in these cognitive acts and hence makes us willing to give up, or set aside, the most powerful mental tools that stand ready to assist us. (pp. 14-15)

It could be argued that a disaster is effectively a natural memorial to an asked question. This condition of systemic neglect is likely to be compounded by the process famously identified by [George Santayana](#): *Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it*.

Better questions: Curiously Scarr, in her focus on habit, fails to discuss the role of questioning, and **asking the right question**. This is a theme increasingly evoked as a means of eliciting a fruitful mode of action (Stephen Wunker, *Asking the Right Question*, *Forbes*, 15 December 2012; Michael Hyatt, *The Power of Asking the Right Question*, 18 January 2012; Hal Gregersen, *How to Ask the Right Question*, 3 April 2013; Irene Leonard, *The Art of Effective Questioning: asking the right question for the desired result*; Chris Legard, *Asking the Right Question*, *BBC Word of Mouth*, 17 July 2012; M. Neil Browne and Stuart M. Keeley, *Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking*, 2011).

What then are "**better questions**", as variously asked (Norah Morgan and Juliana Saxton, *Asking Better Questions*, 2006; William F. McComas and Linda Abraham, *Asking More Effective Questions*, CET; Jeremy Statton, *How to Ask Better Questions*; Steven Heller, *The Quest to Ask Better Questions*, *The Atlantic*, 3 May 2012; Warren Berger, *A More Beautiful Question*; Mary Thomas Farrar, *Asking Better Questions*, *The Reading Teacher*, 1984). How does this process recognize any "unasked question"?

It could then be asked how such insights could have been better applied with respect to the strategy of intervention in Afghanistan. A perceptive question was asked in that connection by [Ziauddin Sardar](#) and [Merryl Wyn Davies](#) (*Why Do People Hate America?* 2002) -- an approach explored by others (Donald Cuccioletta, *Why do they hate US? Unilateralism and the rise of anti-Americanism*, *Inroads: A Journal of Opinion*, 1 January 2004). The challenge for the individual or group concerned, in asking such perceptive questions, can be usefully compared to the challenge of body odour. Put bluntly: **One "stinks" more than one thinks**. This can even be clearly observed in the relationships between leaders of the most progressive movements, as separately discussed (*Epistemological Challenge of Cognitive Body Odour: exploring the underside of dialogue*, 2006).

Public relations consultants have long responded to recognition that any "body corporate" may well suffer from an odour problem -- however the distinction is to be made metaphorically between "body odour", "halitosis", and "flatulence" (*Obama's Economic Spin: a new pony or manure stink?* *Conservative Read*, 2012; *The stench of tobacco industry dirty linen*, *Tobacco Control*, 2000; *Greed, spin and bonuses: why our banks stink*, *The Times*, 14 March 2013; *By Any Other Name, Goldman's Spin of the Revolving Door Would Still Stink*, *CBS News*, 19 August 2011). The metaphor may be fruitfully associated with current issues (*Sins of Hot Air Emission, Omission, Commission and Promise: the political challenge of responding to global crises*, 2009).

A contrasting challenge to perceptiveness is that associated with happiness -- the much-cited preoccupation with "*Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness*" in the *United States Declaration of Independence*, and that of Bhutan with respect to **gross national happiness**. There is increasing concern that the quality of happiness experienced is not what might be hoped. Much effort is put into public relations and "spin" to disguise both how one's initiatives "stink" to others and to disguise the unease with regard to the sense of happiness. The associated dilemma is well explored with respect to the USA in a book variously titled by [Barbara Ehrenreich](#) (*Bright-sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America*, 2009; *Smile Or Die: How Positive Thinking Fooled America and the World*, 2010).

The array of so-called "WH-questions" might then be applied to both cases as follows:

Contrasting "stinkiness" with "happiness"	
"Stinkiness" (think: Guantanamo Bay, targetted assassination, and innocent civilians killed by drone strikes)	"Happiness" (think: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To whom does one stink? • When does one stink? • Where does one stink? • What is it that stinks? • Which stink bothers others most? • Why does one stink -- and does it matter? • How to discover the nature of the stink with which one is associated in the eyes of so many? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With whom is one happy? • When is one happy? • Where is one happy? • What is it that makes one happy? • Which form of happiness is most attractive? • Why does achieving happiness matter? • How to discover the nature of the happiness to which so many aspire?
<p>Does the Statue of Liberty have a body odour problem? Or, as with garlic eating cultures, is it just a question of getting used to it, growing to like it, and ignoring the effect on others?</p>	

Why do web facilities and encyclopedias focus on providing answers -- precluding recognition of questions? Why is there no open source equivalent to *Wikipedia* -- for questions held to be as yet unanswered? The [World Question Center](#) of the [Edge Foundation](#) offers one approach -- through questioning its members. Another has been the generation of questions implicit in the focus of international constituencies (*Generating a Million Questions from UIA Databases: Problems, Strategies, Values*, 2006).

Further possible strategic implications

Other possibilities for consideration can be variously argued:

- *Gruesome but Necessary: Global Governance in the 21st Century? Extreme normality as indicator of systemic negligence*, 2011
- *Lipoproblems: Developing a Strategy Omitting a Key Problem -- the systemic challenge of climate change and resource issues*, 2009
- *10 Unanswered Questions on Iran and Israel*, 2012
- *Global Strategic Implications of the "Unsaid"*, 2003
- *Map of Systemic Interdependencies None Dares Name: 12-fold challenge of global life and death*, 2011
- *Enabling Collective Intelligence in Response to Emergencies*, 2010
- *Disastrous Floods as Indicators of Systemic Risk Neglect: implications for authoritative response to future surprises*, 2009
- *Anticipating Future Strategic Triple Whammies -- in the light of earthquake-tsunami-nuclear misconceptions*, 2011
- *Cui Bono: Groupthink vs Thinking the Unthinkable? Reframing the suffocating consensus in response to 7/7*, 2005
- *Superquestions for Supercomputers: avoiding terra flops from misguided dependence on teraflops?* 2010
- *Groupthink: the Search for Archaeoraptor as a Metaphoric Tale -- missing the link between "freedom fighters" and "terrorists"*, 2002
- *Critical thinking vs. Specious arguments: web resources*, 2001
- *Engaging with Questions of Higher Order: cognitive vigilance required for higher degrees of twistedness*, 2004
- *The Future of Leadership: reframing the unknown*, 1994
- *Checklist of Nasty Methodological Questions -- regarding development analyses and initiatives*, 1981
- *Remedial Capacity Indicators versus Performance Indicators*, 1981

Strategic frame setting through a pattern of questions

The matter and the response can be reframed by analogy in terms of the medical response to a health issue, following the approach of [Donald Schon](#), with respect to [generative metaphor and frame setting](#). Massive urgent use of first aid resources may indeed be justified in response to the symptoms. However, if the crisis arises from a pattern of questionable behaviour -- drugs, alcohol, lifestyle -- with a tendency to engender the medical issue in the future (as with the [metastasis of cancer](#)), then questions can be usefully asked, such as:

- what induces the behaviour in the individual?
- why do such incidents encourage copycat behaviour (as with school shootings)?
- how does society induce lifestyle diseases?
- why is society unable to address issues inducing such behaviour -- whether endangering the individual or society?
- why is the focus on preventive measures, however drastic, but not on curing characteristics of society engendering such behaviour?
- why is the public response so out of proportion in comparison with "incidents" in other countries which tax payer funds help to engender/
- who fails to ask such questions -- and why -- and what is the reaction to those who do?

Given the questions raised by Nasr regarding "negotiation with the enemy" (a challenge currently evident in the case of the Taliban or Iran), also of interest is to ask how the engagement between "others" could be radically reframed to mutual advantage -- and why such exploration is avoided. Especially problematic are cases of the affirmation of the "other" as being evil, most notably by Barack Obama on the occasion of his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize and by the current US Secretary of State in relation to the Boston Marathon bombings (*Remarks by the President at the Acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize*, 10 December 2009; *John Kerry: We've been*

in direct confrontation with evil, *BBC News*, 19 April 2013). The difficulty is that Obama is himself framed as "evil" by many of his fellow citizens, just as the Christian-inspired US is framed as "satanic" by many of Islamic inspiration -- and the favour is returned. Some would argue that opposing political parties in a democracy tend to see each other as fundamentally misguided, if not essentially evil in their inspiration. These incommensurable framings suggest the need for allocation of significant resources to transcending their limitations. As argued by [Sam Keen](#) (*Radical Questions for Critical Times*):

Your question is the quest you're on. No questions -- no journey. Timid questions -- timid trips. Radical questions -- an expedition to the root of your being.

At the time of writing, various parties are envisaging a new approach to the challenges of terrorism in the USA, as indicated by Amy Zalman (*Post-Boston: Keep Calm and Think Clearly (Part I)*, *The Globalist*, 23 April 2013). Less clear is whether the quality of questions is itself being addressed or whether the emphasis is on "more of the same", because it is familiar and can be framed as "effective". The lesson of Afghanistan is that this knee-jerk strategic reflex is not as adequate as is so readily portrayed.

How is the quality of more appropriate questions to be distinguished from that characteristic of the political, military and intelligence failures of the past? Is asking potentially more fruitful questions, or creating a context in which they may be evoked, itself dangerous for those involved, as explored with respect to overpopulation (*Overpopulation Debate as a Psychosocial Hazard: development of safety guidelines from handling other hazardous materials*, 2009).

Contrasting possibilities for reframing such negotiation, as previously argued, include:

- *Middle East Peace Potential through Dynamics in Spherical Geometry: engendering connectivity from incommensurable 5-fold and 6-fold conceptual frameworks*, 2012
- *Poetic Engagement with Afghanistan, Caucasus and Iran: an unexplored strategic opportunity?* 2009
- *And When the Bombing Stops? Territorial conflict as a challenge to mathematicians*, 2000

Strategic questioning

A remarkably succinct account of the issues implied by the above is provided by the social activist and human rights campaigner Fran Peavey (*Strategic Questioning: an approach to creating personal and social change*). This concludes with the following summary:

- Questioning is a basic tool for rebellion. It breaks open the stagnant hardened shells of the present, and opens up the options that might be explored.
- Questioning reveals the profound uncertainty that is imbedded deep in all reality beyond the facades of confidence and sureness. It takes this uncertainty towards growth and new possibilities.
Questioning can change your entire life. It can uncover hidden powers and stifled dreams inside of you ... things you may have denied for many years.
- Questioning can change institutions and entire cultures. It can empower people to create strategies for change.
- Asking a Question that leads to a strategy for action is a powerful contribution to resolving any problem.
- Asking Questions that open up more options can lead to many unexpected solutions.
- Asking Questions that help adversaries shift from their stuck positions on an issue can lead to acts of healing and reconciliation.
- Asking Questions that are unaskable in our culture at the moment can lead to the transformation of our culture and its institutions.
- Asking Questions and listening for the strategies and ideas embedded in people's own answers can be the greatest service a social change worker can give to a particular issue.

Is there evidence of such questioning in relation to either the Afghanistan arena or the Boston Marathon bombings? Where is such evidence? How credible is it?

Curiously participation in the Boston Marathon, as for participation in military activity in Afghanistan, is fundamentally a matter of [honour](#). Moral equivalence aside, this is equally true for "competitors" and "combatants" of whatever colour, justifying for themselves the extremes to which they are prepared to go. As a fundamental value, appropriate strategic questioning is therefore intimately entangled with honour, as can be more generally argued (*Honour Essential to Psycho-social Integrity*, 2005).

Immediately following the Boston Marathon bombings, killing 3 and injuring 264, the world was witness to the [collapse of a sweatshop factory in Bangladesh](#) -- with the death of some 400 and over 1,000 injured. Given the intense current effort to trace connectivity, and frame explanations with regard to the bombings, why is it irrelevant to ask how many of those involved in any way with the Boston Marathon wore garments sourced at low cost from that factory (Richard M. Locke, *Can Global Brands Create Just Supply Chains?* *Boston Review*, May/June 2013; [Henry Farrell](#), *The Bangladesh Catastrophe and International Supply Chains*, *Crooked Timber*, 29 April 2013). Why is it equally irrelevant to ask how many associated with the Marathon have been in some way associated with the military intervention in Afghanistan and its far greater fatalities for both [coalition forces](#) and [Afghan civilians](#)? (*Identification of Bullets: human right and human responsibility?* 2009).

As a matter of personal strategy, how might a comparison be made between the honourable self-questioning associated with [jihadi suicide missions](#) in Afghanistan and that of veterans suiciding as a consequence of endeavouring to combat it? (*Suicide Rate Among Vets and Active Duty Military Jumps: Now 22 a Day*, *Forbes*, 5 February 2013).

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