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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](mailto:lloyd.etheredge@policyscience.net)

**Subject: The Secrecy and Culture of Secrecy chapter: Connecting Moynihan, Ellsberg, Richard Herrmann, Loch Johnson, and Wegner**

Dear Dr. Fischhoff and Colleagues:

Re **The Psychology and Culture of Secrecy: Behavioral Science Perspectives** chapter: There are two important areas of work in political science that should be discussed and evaluated on the basis of the wider social science/behavioral science literature:

**I. Dysfunctions of Secrecy: Analysis and Learning Rates**

Dr. (Senator) Moynihan [Secrecy: The American Experience, 1999] discusses his observations that people with access to secret information became arrogant. He believed that they become biased and inappropriately discount arguments by less privileged people.

We know that, in some circumstances, confidentiality and privacy change group and individual psychology in ways that are valuable. For example by permitting greater candor and zones of greater freedom and reduced inhibition for behavior and thought that, especially in a pluralist society, might elicit disapproval. While he is aware of these benefits, Moynihan concludes that, for US intelligence, the dysfunctions outweigh the benefits.

The Moynihan hypothesis - especially if there is credible confirming evidence in experimental and other literature - could have important implications for analysts' professional training (as well as for public policy). We do not - for example - train professional jurors and they also deliberate in secret. However, if we did train professional jurors [as we seek to develop professional analysts] we might want to develop their abilities to identify sources of their own, perhaps non-conscious, biases.

[The cognitive dysfunctions of secrecy might be enhanced if there are existing prejudices (for example, concerning Arabs). The behavior at Abu Ghraib - which I think would have been less likely against white European prisoners in Kosovo - may reflect cultural biases that can gain strength, unchallenged, in a secret world/culture. Moynihan's observations about enhanced *hubris* and arrogance may be right - as predictions - about the many tactical and strategic errors of intelligence and slower learning rates in both Iraq and Afghanistan.<1> <2>]

[Re individual level effects, you also might want to consult with Daniel Wegner at Harvard and other behavioral scientists who have done research on changes in mental processes involved in keeping secrets and the psychology of mysteries, the effects of dissociation of knowledge on cognitive processes, effects of secrets on relationships with people from whom the secrets must be kept, etc. Effects of secrecy - including effects on fantasy, self-image, the seductiveness of mystery, on emotional life - also are explored in the psychoanalytic tradition. Dr. Stanley Renshon, a political scientist and trained psychoanalyst might have further suggestions, as would one of the CIA's former psychiatrists, Dr. Post.]

## **II. Dysfunctions of Secrecy: Political Behavior and Democratic Processes**

Daniel Ellsberg, in Secrets (2003), reported observations that access to information with high security classifications induces a higher-order culture/system of contempt toward people without such access. The hypothesis is similar to Moynihan's, but Ellsberg's discussion extends more candidly to predict the political/system-level development of manipulative conspiracies within these cultures - e.g., toward Congress and the public. He cites examples from the Vietnam War and more generally. Secrecy, as a property of systems, reduces the desirable effects of accountability: In government, it also energizes primitive instincts for power, domination, manipulation, and to erode accountability further.

Re the political behavior literature: I suggest that you contact (if you have not already done so) Loch Johnson. His edited (Routledge, 2007) Handbook of Intelligence Studies has several excellent review chapters by experts about the difficulties and challenges of accountability by Congress and Parliaments. He also has written about these behavioral issues, on the basis of insider/professional experience with democratic oversight.

If the multi-method evidence suggests that Ellsberg is right, it is an impor-

tant conclusion for the National Academy of Sciences to confirm for the public in your 2010 Report.

Your scientific evaluation also could be important because such dysfunctions of secrecy and cultures of secrecy might arise in institutional units and sub-cultures within America's N = 200,000 system and limit effective oversight by people at the top of the Executive branch. [As one example, the DNI system apparently did not detect the Abu-Ghraib abuses.]

#### Another Concern: Recruitment Bias?

A higher-level question is what people are more drawn to, or selected for, secret analysis work in cultures of secrecy? Is there a predictable type of bias that could result?

Lloyd E.

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<1.> Or not. A prediction drawn from Gelb's work on Vietnam & the Pentagon Papers is that professional analysts more often get it right, and the *hubris* and arrogance and other dysfunctions are added at the political level.

<2.> Among political psychologists, you might want to talk with Richard Herrmann at the Mershon Center, who has worked on the question of biasing images {including cultural prejudices that might include Arabs.) He has used a range of methods, including experimental studies, to develop his research program. He also, as a former insider, has written about sources of intelligence errors in forecasting Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.

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