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Security, Lying, and the Strategic-Moral Calculus

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Abstract. This article elaborates on truth and falsehood as both developmental psychological and political phenomena.

Although many children from many different ethnic backgrounds are told not to lie by those who raise them, children lie anyway and have much experience with it by the time they become adults. Without analyzing putative causality through components of some genetic-environmental interaction, evolutionary theory, or conditioning sequence, one might merely ponder the value of adult lying for specific political security problems.

For example, Bosnian Serb leaders have officially appealed for calm since British troops fatally shot a former local police chief and arrested a hospital director on July 10 during an operation to arrest alleged war criminals who were secretly indicted by a United Nation-sponsored tribunal. Also, significant data suggest these same leaders have and are coordinating a campaign of harassment and intimidation of foreigners in response to the operations. Here the public lie may render counters to the campaign more difficult. Leaders may claim that harassment and intimidation incidents are being carried out by renegade Serbs, even that the incidents are really carried out by Croats, Muslims, NATO forces or some "third force" as active propaganda against the Bosnian Serbs. Given the seeming Bosnian Serbian goal of maintaining homogeneous territory in violation of the Dayton Accords, the lie seems strategically appropriate.

As another example, significant data suggest that Elmer Pratt, a former Black Panther, was convicted of murder through purposeful deception on the part of elements of the United States criminal justice and larger political systems. Specifically, neither the defense nor the jury knew at the time of the trial that (1) a prosecution "star witness" was an informer for the authorities and that (2) an eye witness who identified Pratt as the murderer had earlier identified someone else. As cited in a New York Times article, a retired Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agent has given sworn statements that Pratt was "framed." The deceptive behavior of some personnel within the criminal justice and larger political systems may have well seemed strategically appropriate in serving the FBI's Cointelpro campaign that included some illegal behaviors to--among other things--neutralize effective assets of the Black Panther Party.

As still another example, the lies of omission of a US Air Force general and commission of a US Air Force lieutenant have directly led to the choice of a nominee for the position of Chairman, Joint Chief of Staffs who has exemplary "integrity", i.e., does not engage in similar sexual behavior. The delayed admission of the general's lie has prevented a promotion but maintained his current position. That of the lieutenant has led to loss of current position and a bad conduct discharge. The strategic consequences here are mixed.

The moral consequences of all three examples? To Serbian Bosnian leaders, the secular and sacred goals of a Serbian entity are themselves highly moral. The means of lying are warranted against insidious, implacable foes who allegedly will do anything to prevent the goals from being achieved. (And, of

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course, adherence to the Dayton Accords would endanger lucrative and illegal enterprises--lies and moral issues of a different sort.) To the FBI, the goal of protecting the land of the free, the home of the brave, and the rule of law is at least partially subverted through illegal behavior. Both sides--actually the many sides of racial and political conflict in the 1960s and early 1970s--become and have become morally corrupted. To the US Air Force (USAF), the abstract equating of all types of lying mixed with the concrete partiality of adjudicating specific instances corrupts morals, good order, and discipline more than the real and putative sexual offenses. The public USAF stance of lying not adultery being the real issue--or of adultery having no military significance unless it is prejudicial to good order and discipline--further corrupts the very idea of a highly valued morality, integrity, and espousal of higher principles in all situations whether one is being monitored or not. This is because military adulterers are already in trouble with authorities who have equated adultery as negatively correlated with military integrity, character, and "the right stuff".

Why is lying so officially and totally proscribed by security organizations--i.e., we don't lie and don't tolerate those who do? After all, psychological research can strongly support the following propositions: (1) lying and telling the truth are so intertwined that omnipresent phenomena like jokes are unconscious attempts at simultaneously engaging in both (cf. Freud, 1905); (2) various sorts of lies are "surprisingly high" among religious and secular high school students (cf. Bruggeman & Hart, 1996); (3) attempts to prevent or curtail lying may actually inculcate more effective and less detectable lying (Lowenstein, 1994); (4) the developmental psychology of lying is everyday becoming better documented not as a pathology or moral failing but as a social skill (cf. Peterson, 1995); (5) to the question who lies comes the answer--everyone--but there are individual differences about what kind, how often, to whom, and about what (Kashy & DePaulo, 1996); (6) and finally lying may be termed standard operating procedure and thus not even grounds to apply sanctions against other security-related organizations (cf. Kaun, 1994.) To this may be added significant research concerning unconscious defense mechanisms besides sublimation and varieties of non-defense related dissociation. Perhaps the proscriptions against lying form the ultimate reaction formation, a psychodynamic cover for obtaining the satisfaction of lying in a distorted, converse fashion.

Back to the children. To most children of all ages, lying for collective or individual security purposes ineluctably becomes strategically valued and ambivalently morally valued. The individual of any age who insists on telling the truth regardless of the consequences figuratively or literally suffers the fate of Cassandra. And, perhaps, rightly so. For the lie about lying is that the truth will set you free. (See Bruggeman, E.L., & Hart, K.J. (1996.) Cheating, lying, and moral reasoning by religious and secular high school students. *Journal of Education Research*, 89, 340-344; Freud, S. (1962.) Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious. In J. Strachey, (Ed.), *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Author: Richard W. Bloom, Volume 8). London: Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1905); Kashy, D.A., & DePaulo, B.M. (1996.) Who lies? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70, 1037-1051; Kaun, D.E. (1994.) Lying as standard operating procedure: Deception in the weapons testing process. *Journal of Socio-Economics*, 23, 229-254; Lowenstein, L.F. (1994.) Why children lie: How to prevent and to curtail it. *Criminologist*, 18, 11-22; Peterson, C.C. (1995.) The role of perceived intention to deceive in children's and adults' concepts of lying. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 13, 237-260; Terry, D. (July 20, 1997.) Los Angeles confronts bitter racial legacy. *The New York Times*, pp. 1; 10; U.S. soldier slightly hurt in Bosnian blast attack. *The New York Times*, p. 8.) (Keywords: Deception, Lying, Truth.)