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Trends. Pinning the Tail on the Donkey: A Legacy of the Legacy Codes

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The ongoing saga of alleged spy Wan Ho Lee continues to illustrate how United States (US) domestic politics can harm national security. Allegations of misappropriating information about a miniaturized nuclear warhead, neutron weapons, and now the "legacy codes"--computer codes approximating how virtually the entire U.S. nuclear weapons arsenal--seem to be effected more in the context of domestic partisan warfare than in confronting foreign threats.

Since the story broke that a Taiwanese-born U.S. citizen was alleged to have spied against the US and for the People's Republic of China, representatives of both major U.S. political parties have largely engaged in the quest for partisan blame. Democrats have been repeating that the spying was initiated during a Republican administration, Republicans that the Democrats "blew" the investigation. Now Republicans have triumphantly claimed additional espionage on the Democrat's watch.

The party in power--the President and team--seems to be on the short end of the stick in such matters. If it very effectively and promptly uncovers espionage, it is damned because the espionage occurred at all. If it misses treasonous activity, the party can only be safe if the activity is never uncovered, not uncovered for many years, turned around on the opposition party, or somehow attributed to some other entity in a manner that fosters a bilateral front and homogeneous response. If it publicly divulges salient matters of an espionage activity, it risks divulging sensitive methods and sources. Also, letting the adversary know that it knows what the adversary knows and has done constrains action and gives an advantage to that adversary. Moreover, attempting to publicly nonrespond or to engage in some sort of strategic deception against the adversary about the espionage and its consequences can too easily be exploited by domestic political adversaries as withholding information from U.S. citizens--even lying to them. All of the above concerns can be exploited by political renegades within each party as well.

As recent votes in the U.S. House of Representatives on military operations in Yugoslavia point out, the U.S. President is not the only political official who may conflate security and political concerns or cynically or without conflict manipulate the former for the latter. The US capability for a bipartisan security debate and position seems nonexistent. Enemy images have colored the debate among domestic political opponents as much as among domestic and foreign adversaries. While worrying about espionage and threats from "the other," the US may have lost a crucial family jewel--not the "legacy codes" and other information about nuclear weapons, but the legacy, even the myth, of a cohesive self and the nuclear family. (See Herr, C.F., & Lapidus, L.B. (1998). Nuclear weapons attitudes in relation to dogmatism, mental representation of parents, and image of a foreign enemy. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 4, 59-68; Knapp, B.L. (1997). Beckett's That Time: exile and "that double-headed monster...time." *Journal of Melanie Klein and Object Relations*, 15, 493-511; Rice, W.R., & Holland, B. (1997). The enemies within: Intergenomic conflict, interlocus contest evolution (ICE), and the intraspecific Red Queen. *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology*, 41, 1-10; Risen, J., & Gerth, J. (April 28, 1999). U.S. says suspect put data on bombs in unsecure files. *The New York Times*, p. A8; Schmitt, E. (April 29, 1999). Lawmakers outraged by failure to monitor suspected atomic spy at lab. *The New York Times*, p. A8; Spector, B.I. (1998). Deciding to negotiate with villains. *Negotiation Journal*, 14, 43-59.) (Keywords: China, National Security, Political Psychology, Spying.)