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Trends. An Open Mind on Openness: Personnel Security and Counterintelligence at Los Alamos

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Over the past few months there's been much ado over alleged espionage and security violations within at least one United States (US) national laboratory--that at Los Alamos in New Mexico. Some analysts, government officials, and legislators within and outside the US have declared these allegations--if proven--to be one of the direst intelligence shortfalls ever to have been experienced by the US. In actuality, the allegations--if proven--suggest two significant fallacies about personnel security and counterintelligence programs as we enter the 21st century.

First, the programs are based on the premise that they can identify traitors and traitors-to-be at a better-than-chance level. It is also assumed that this level is higher than what would be the case if there were no such programs and identification occurred serendipitously. (A more conservative assumption might be that even a chance or below-chance level afforded by the programs would be valuable if without such programs the resulting level would be even further below chance.) Yet empirical data bearing on these assumptions--at least in the unclassified world--are lacking. Even classified data--if they exist--supporting these assumptions might be suspect, given the view of many scientists that so-called "open research" amenable to peer review of the most diverse nature often results in superior quality to "closed research." Given that the resources for personnel security and counterintelligence programs could be better employed elsewhere--if such programs turn out to be ineffective--the hue and cry about better and tighter security at Los Alamos might be specious at the least.

Second, what information truly needs to be guarded? Although many intelligence experts--usually for nonattribution--discount the threat of losing mountains of classified political, social, and economic analyses, many cite the loss of classified nuclear weapons design and specifications data as the worst of all tragedies. Well, the worst of all tragedies may have happened and what are the tragic consequences? Perhaps they are unknowable. And if consequences are unknowable, why are programs being directed to stop the unknowable from occurring? If consequences are knowable and tragic, where and what are they? Perhaps "open skies" policies promulgated by some officials of the first Eisenhower administration--concerning nuclear weapons and, by extension, other sensitive matters--bear another look in the present context. These policies suggest that security can be enhanced if knowledge is available and shared among allies, neutrals, and adversaries.

In conclusion, the allegations about espionage and security violations at Los Alamos may be noteworthy not for uncovering Keystone Cop intelligence and legal procedures but the conceptual fallacies on which these procedures are based. (See Heric, M., Lucas, C., & Devine, C. (1996). *The Open Skies Treaty: Qualitative utility evaluations of aircraft reconnaissance and commercial satellite imagery*. (1996). *Photogrammetric Engineering and Remote Sensing*, 62(3); *Open skies impasse shifts alliance plans-Attributed to political realities, softening of traffic growth forecasts*. (1998). *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, 149(19); Rostow, W. W. (1982). *Open skies : Eisenhower's proposal of July 21, 1955*. University of Texas Press; *The new American*. (April 12, 1999). *The Nation*, 15; U.S., South Korea sign open skies accord-Also agree to press for resumption of talks aimed at easing security tensions with North Korea. (1998). *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, 148(24).) (Keywords: Counterintelligence, Espionage, Personnel Security.)