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Trends. Fetishism, Secrecy, and Security

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Abstract: This article discusses the Federation of American Scientists' Secrecy News and how it characterized the Bush Administration's stance towards the President's Daily Brief as "fetishism."

The Federation of American Scientists' Secrecy News has characterized the Bush Administration's stance towards the President's Daily Brief (PDB) as "fetishism." Specifically, the News has stated that "the Administration believes that the confidentiality of the President's daily intelligence briefing...(PDB)...is so important that its continued secrecy must take precedence over any investigation into the failure to prevent the terrorist attacks of September 11." Moreover, this News statement has been made in the context of (1) the Administration refusing to share an August 6, 2001 PDB with Congressional investigators--a PDB that contained some information about the potential for aviation terrorism--and (2) the White House press secretary asserting that the principle of confidentiality rather than the sensitivity of the PDB justified withholding the PDB from the investigators.

To the News, placing the instrumentality of secrecy above the larger security interests of the nation (United States) is fetishism. Yet, the Fourth Edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association describes fetishism as denoting "recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or (sexual) behaviors involving the use of nonliving objects" (p. 526). Is there such data supporting the hypothesis of such phenomena linking the Bush Administration and the PDB or the restriction of the PDB to others?

Fetishism also has denotations suggesting (when applied to the PDB Issue) that the PDB and/or restricting the PDB might be viewed (1) with awe as if having magic properties or spirit or (2) as eliciting unquestioning reverence, respect, or devotion. Is there data supporting the former? As to the latter, are there data supporting "reverence" and "devotion"? As to "unquestioning respect," is there not at least some periodic questioning--as mild or meager as it might be--or no questioning but also no respect, because the position on the PDB and confidentiality is based on some cold political calculation that may be subject to change as soon as the politics change?

In conclusion, it might be more appropriate for the News to make the case that the Bush position may be misguided or just plain wrong based on various ethical, moral, social, cultural, or political criteria. In a world wherein language often reflects thought and shapes public discourse and helps construct further thought, a close reading based on word selection--viz., fetishism--may be not a frivolous exercise but instead one in shared responsibility for the common good. (See Blackell, M. (2001). Democracy and ambivalence: Totem and Taboo revisited. *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture & Society*, 6, 46-57; (Author. (1994). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*. (4th Ed.). American Psychiatric Association: Washington, D.C.; Munroe, R. L., & Gauvain, M. (2001). Why the paraphilias? Domesticating strange sex. *Cross-Cultural Research: The Journal of Comparative Social Science*, 35, 44-64; Fetishism and the President's Daily Brief. (May 22, 2002). *Secrecy News*, 2002, 45; Tetlock, P. E., Kristel, O. V., Elson, S. B., Green, M. C., & Lerner, J. S. (2000). The psychology of the unthinkable: Taboo trade-offs, forbidden base rates, and heretical counterfactuals. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 78, 853-870.) (Keywords: Federation of American Scientists, Fetishism, Presidents Daily Brief, Secrecy News, Security.)