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National Security and Multiple Selves

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Abstract. This article describes the positive and negative consequences for national security of the ontology and phenomenology of multiple selves.

The academic and applied disciplines of political psychology are predicated on the hypothesis that human psychology has consequences for political behavior. This hypothesis is variously termed obvious through the equating of psychology and behavior; nonsensical through the reifying of a material, objective world over a mental, subjective world; or simplistic in the context of reciprocal synergy between and among that which is psychological and that which is political. But the hypothesis remains.

One basic variant of the hypothesis focuses on the impact of self-psychology on the security aspects of politics. Theoretical and empirical data related to this impact suggest no simple conclusion. For example, Sherman and Cohen (2002) studied the role of the self on the phenomenon of resisting evidence that challenges the validity of long-held belief. This phenomenon can be exemplified by political policymakers who refuse to change tack in the face of disconfirming—even seemingly overwhelming—intelligence. And this refusal to change can cover not only opinions, attitudes, and beliefs, but also behaviors stemming from them and further reinforcing them.

Sherman and Cohen (2002) argue that resistance to disconfirming evidence can be a defensive tendency to protect the perceived worth and integrity of the self. In other words, a concatenation of opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are integral enough to the self so that jettisoning that concatenation risks jettisoning the self. While the degree to which this defensive maneuver may be based on aspects of consciousness and unconsciousness is debatable, a resistant individual might well be excused for at least incipient ambivalence towards destroying the self in the service of one's country—especially in a security context that can contain elements of corruption, hidden agendas, self-serving tactics and strategies, and irrationality among security practitioners.

But there can be a way out. Sherman and Cohen (2002) posit that individuals can “respond to information in a less defensive and more open-minded manner when their self-worth is buttressed by an affirmation of an alternative source of identity.” These researchers go on to write “self-affirmed individuals are more likely to accept information that they would otherwise view as threatening, and subsequently to change their beliefs and even their behavior in a desirable fashion.” A conclusion with security import would then be that alternative sources of identity—a version of which would be multiples identities or selves—have a positive impact on best utilizing accurate intelligence for security decision making.

However, that alternative sources of identity may have positive security impact is contraindicated by a common response set manifested by personnel security authorities. For example, the Director of Central Intelligence Directive (DCID) 6/9 may be viewed as a collection of guidelines for collecting information in the service of constructing an hypothesized self of an individual being considered for the awarding or maintaining of a high-level security clearance, special access to information, or a sensitive position. The personnel security adjudicator is tasked with integrating the information collected by

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investigators and from databases in the construction of an hypothesized self—except in cases wherein the identification of proscribed behavior automatically elicits closure of adjudication and a denial of clearance, access, or position. The notion that the individual to be adjudicated may have alternative sources of identity or multiple selves—some of which may be based on the same information collected by investigators and from databases—can be a threatening one to the adjudicator. Besides the identification of multiple selves, the consideration of which are prepotent and when can be so difficult that it might contribute to the very rejection of a commensurate theory of human personality to the detriment of a personnel security program.

Multiple selves may have security implications in yet other ways. Suh (2002) has posited that the consistency among multiple selves is positively correlated with psychological well-being that is presumably positively correlated with satisfactory security functioning. Suh's contention is supported in a discussion differentiating dissociative from associative personality disorders by Oppenheimer (2002) who notes that "cognitive complexity of the neurological system may be an endogenous factor affecting the occurrence of associative disorders and...failing association." In other words, association, if not actual consistency, may be crucial to multiple selves avoiding the shoals of psychopathology. Finally, multiple selves as semi-fictional narratives (Brown, 2001), socially conditioned subjugating discourses (Wood & Roche, 2001), and as virtual selves (cf. Kunkle, 2002) merit systematic exploration for security impact.

Multiple selves very profitably serves as a vehicle for remaining humble about the person as persons in political psychology. (See Brown, M.T. (2001). Multiple personality and personal identity. *Philosophical Psychology*, 14 435-447; Director of Central Intelligence Directive (DCID) 6/9. (November 18, 2002). Physical Security Standards for Sensitive Compartmented Information Facilities. <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/dcid6-9.htm>; Kunkle, S. (2000). Hollow subjects in a headless world. *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture & Society*, , 301-311; Sherman, D. K.; & Cohen, G. L. (2002). Accepting threatening information: Self-affirmation and the reduction of defensive biases. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 11, 119-123; Suh, E.M. (2002). Culture, identity consistency, and subjective well-being. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 83, 1378-1391; Wood, G. G., & Roche, S. E. (2001). Situations and representations: Feminist practice with survivors of male violence. *Families in Society*, 82, 583-590.) (Keywords: Multiple Selves, Security)