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# An Intractable Problem with the Security Classification of Information

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**Abstract.** This article identifies an infrequently discussed but highly significant problem with the protection of information for security purposes.

The omnipresence of the need to protect information for security purposes is underlined by the import of such protection for all social entities—from the governments of nation-states, through commercial organizations, to formally unaffiliated individuals. The frequently discussed Issues related to this type of information protection include the amount, type(s), and content(s) of information to be protected; who has and doesn't have a need to know this information; how acceptable degrees of trust can be identified for individuals who may have a need to know in the present and/or future; infrastructural support and a risk analysis of this support for an information protection policy that would embrace the technologies of communications, operations, and physical security; and the compatibility of information protection policy with the essence of the social entity that allegedly will benefit—and the interactive effects between policy and essence. An infrequently discussed Issue pertaining to content(s) of information to be protected is continuous dynamic of flux in any entity's security situation.

As to this flux, there may well be specific pieces of information that almost always are of high security value—e.g., a nuclear weapons development process or the identity of an intelligence agent or case officer. However, most specific piece of information may be of unusual security value at one point, of none at another, of some intermediary value at still another. And through time, these values may ebb and flow and leave and return much as a Nietzschean eternal recurrence.

One source of this continuous dynamic of flux is that the security value of a specific piece of information very often depends on its semantic relationships with other information. Another source is the continuous hermeneutic applications of one's allies, neutrals, and adversaries—and even those who are wittingly uninvolved with one's pursuits. These applications can lead to information being perceived as of high security value one moment and of low or intermediary value the next.

When confronted with the continuous dynamic of flux, protectors of information have only three choices and related combinations. All information can be protected. None can. Or one can play the flux much as one can play the horses—except that there is much more information than horses. This problematic confrontation is intractable. It would seem to suggest that vastly more information is protected than needs to be. It would seem to suggest that information protection may too easily turn into the protection of the bureaucracy and jobs and budgets of those entrusted to protect information as opposed to the security of the entity needing protection. It would suggest that even bringing up such observations could be deemed as working against information and security protection—with noxious consequences for the observer. Lastly, it would suggest that the usual status of intelligence and security academics as unworthy of serious attention unless they advocate what intelligence and security authorities already have faith in or intuition for has the redeeming value of a protection to state what seems to be the truth under the shield of benign neglect. (See Author. Administrative data for security classification guides. <http://www.navysecurity.navy.mil/opnavins.htm>; Executive Order 13292. (March 28, 2003). Further amendment to Executive Order 12958, as amended, classified national security

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Volume 1. Introduction, history and adverse impacts. Oak Ridge National Laboratory. K/CG-1077/V1.)