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Social Science Research and International Relations

The repercussions of Project Camelot, a Department of Defense study of social conditions and movements in some other countries (*Science*, 10 Sept. 1965), led the President to ask the Secretary of State to establish procedures to prevent government sponsorship of foreign-area research that would adversely affect United States foreign relations. When the nationals of one country study sensitive or delicate issues in another country, problems are very likely to arise, and to have a special acuteness if the study is sponsored by government. American scholars studying social, economic, and political changes in other countries can be an embarrassment to their own country and a nuisance to their hosts; their work can arouse suspicions; and it may be difficult for nationals of the host country to distinguish private from public auspices. The President and the Department of State were, therefore, concerned with a real problem.

To meet that problem, the State Department has established an internal Foreign Affairs Research Council that will review and, if it approves, give clearance to foreign-area research proposals planned by other government agencies (*Science*, 19 Dec. 1965). This solution raises difficulties of its own. As a general principle, when parallel agencies of government have overlapping and perhaps conflicting interests, one of the interested parties is not the proper agency to settle disputes. The State Department, which now has the deciding voice, is properly concerned to avoid any political risk or embarrassment to the United States. The more zealously risk is avoided, the more likely it is that proposals that others consider valuable will be banned. If interagency disagreements do arise, it seems obvious that the risk or other disadvantages should be assessed in terms of the nature, methods, and personnel of the proposed study and should be weighed against the potential gains. Yet the State Department, which does not claim to be strong scientifically, has announced that it will not consider scientific or other aspects of a proposal, only its probable impact on foreign relations. Moreover, clearance requirements could be extended to other types of research conducted outside the United States. Clearance procedures are now restricted to social and behavioral studies intended to support the missions of operating government agencies, but the President's request could be interpreted or broadened to include oceanography, meteorology, and other fields.

The more restricted the exercise of the new authority is, the less reason there is to fear difficulties, and, of course, the less meaningful the new arrangements are. On the other hand, if the State Department uses its new responsibility vigorously, the system seems well designed to antagonize other government agencies, to alienate social scientists, and to deprive the nation of useful information that could be obtained if some of the banned studies had been permitted.

The whole situation—which the State Department has promised to review in a few months—is an indication that the ways in which studies in the social and behavioral sciences can be of use to the government are not so well understood as are the ways in which physical and biological studies can be useful. Donald Hornig recognized this difference in a recent address in which he admonished psychologists to study the problem of how their field could best aid government planning, work, and policy making. The National Academy of Sciences has also recognized the problem in establishing an Advisory Committee on Government Programs in the Behavioral Sciences. The Camelot affair and the dubious procedures adopted to prevent similar difficulties in the future indicate that there is indeed need for social scientists and government agencies to study their interrelationships and reciprocal responsibilities.—DAEL WOLFLE