SIGMUND FREUD AS A THEORIST OF GOVERNMENT SECRECY

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ABSTRACT

This chapter argues that the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud provide a useful methodology for the study of government secrecy. The chapter makes two specific points. First, Freud viewed the human mind as a highly complex censoring device, which systematically censors certain types of information that embarrasses the patient, while it makes available without impediment more innocuous types of information that flatter the patient's image. It is argued that governmental bureaucracies work like this too, as they systematically censor information that is embarrassing to the state and state officials, while they make available information that flatters the state. Secondly, Freud's theories provide insight into how researchers can cut through systematic censorship and gain access to hidden information. Specifically, Freud shows that patients periodically slip and release censored information to the psychoanalyst. Similarly, state officials too will slip and will accidentally release information to historical researchers who study public policies.

Keywords: censorship; government secrecy; historical censorship; self-censorship; Sigmund Freud; U.S. foreign policy.

Government Secrecy
Research in Social Problems and Public Policy, Volume 19, 5–22

ISSN: 0196-1152/doi:10.1108/S0196-1152(2011)0000019005

In spite of innovations like the Freedom of Information Act, much information on U.S. foreign policy remains hidden from public view.[1] This secrecy poses significant challenges to researchers, especially those who focus on the period after America's emergence as a superpower, post-1945. Indeed, these basic problems have increased considerably since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, which have led to heightened levels of secrecy as well as corresponding increases in state deception and propaganda.[2] The advent of the Obama administration has not so far led to any great attenuation in the problem of state secrecy.

In response to these concerns, Sigmund Freud's techniques of analyzing human psychology can be extremely useful. Freud was a master at analyzing the practice of secrecy and concealment, and his theories provide insight into these phenomena. For purposes of this chapter, I focus on Freud's *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1975), which comprises a series of lectures that Freud gave to lay audiences at the University of Vienna, during World War I, and constitutes a synopsis of psychoanalysis that is accessible but also comprehensive and sophisticated. I regularly assign this volume to my graduate and undergraduate students, for instruction in historical research methodology.

At first glance, it may seem surprising that I focus on Freud's approach, because it emphasizes secrecy in the realm of individual psychology, rather than state structures. In Freud's theories, the concealed information concerns mostly sexual matters; this is very different from the practice of secrecy in governmental agencies, which tends to conceal state violence, international aggression, illegality, and the like. However, I argue that Freud's interpretation of secrecy remains highly relevant for students of foreign policy.

For reasons of brevity, this chapter emphasizes the study of U.S. foreign policy, although the basic methodological points can be applied to the foreign policies of a broad range of states, beyond the United States.[3] Indeed, the issues of secrecy and deception have implications that extend well beyond international relations. They are also relevant to the study of internal governmental policies and to the policies of non-state actors, such as large corporations or the Catholic Church. There are several additional caveats. First, I make no effort to respond to the numerous criticisms of psychoanalysis as a theoretical perspective or as a clinical treatment of psychic disorders. My focus here is to show how Freud's methods can be adapted for historical analyses of U.S. foreign policy. Secondly, I have no interest in "psycho-history," whereby the historian seeks to psychoanalyze major figures (such as U.S. presidents) and to explain their actions by reference to childhood experiences. Such approaches are, in my view, overly

speculative.[4] Instead, I discuss more conventional methods of historical research and show how Freud's approach can enhance these methods. And thirdly, in presenting genuinely disturbing quotes from declassified U.S. government documents in the course of this chapter, I do not mean to suggest that these are typical of most declassified materials. On the contrary, I have deliberately selected some of the most interesting and disturbing materials that I have found in the course of my career to illustrate larger points.

INFORMATION CENSORSHIP

One of Freud's most important insights is his view of the human mind as a highly complex censoring mechanism, which systematically censors certain types of information, while it leaves uncensored other types of information. According to Freud, the censored information often consists of thoughts that are embarrassing to the patient, which reflect badly on the patient's character or which challenge ordinary standards of what is considered "proper." Uncensored information consists of more innocuous thoughts, which seem more consistent with societal norms of propriety. Foreign policy bureaucracies work like this too; they conceal embarrassing information, which reflects badly on the reputations of foreign policy makers, the agencies they represent, or the overarching states and social structures. In both realms – in studies of human psychology and foreign policy – a significant portion of the information remains and must remain concealed and relatively inaccessible to outside observers. And in both realms, the function of the researcher is to use whatever methods we have to gain access to this censored information. The need to gain such access is equally urgent (and equally difficult to achieve) for psychoanalysts such as Freud and for students of U.S. foreign policy.

Let us now look more carefully at the phenomenon of censorship in Freud's writings. In *A General Introduction*, Freud focuses especially on what he terms "dream censorship," whereby the patient in describing dreams will omit key pieces of information (Freud, 1975, chap. 9). As illustration of the basic point, Freud presents the case of a middle-aged Viennese woman, who underwent analysis during World War I. In her dreams, Freud's patient entered a military hospital and offered to provide what she termed "love service."

The phenomenon of information censorship is immediately apparent in this case. In the course of describing her dreams, the patient's narrative was punctuated by periodic gaps, which took the form of verbal murmurs, whereby she could not recall certain words. The patient was subconsciously

censoring her dreams, omitting crucial information, which was too embarrassing to recall. In the context of these dreams (as recounted to Freud), the patient spoke to the hospital doctor and declared, "I and countless other women and girls of Vienna are ready for the soldiers, officers, and men to ... [murmur]." The military doctor responded to the woman's offer: "Madam, supposing it really came to this, that ... [murmur]." The patient then added the following qualification: "Good heavens, I am an old woman, and perhaps it won't happen to me. And one condition must be observed: Age must be taken into account so that an old women and a young lad may not ... [murmur]" (Freud, 1975, pp. 144–145).

The meaning of these passages, Freud noted, was readily understandable in spite of the censored portions: The patient was dreaming of having sexual relations with a large number of officers and men in a military hospital. However, the patient's mind censored the most obviously sexual portions of the dreams, rendering them initially incomprehensible (to the patient, at least). The purpose of the censorship was to protect the woman from the supposedly scandalous, "dirty" content of her subconscious wish.

When viewed in retrospect, the woman's dream sequence appears as a harmless self-indulgence, not particularly shocking for contemporary readers. It is important to bear in mind that the patient was describing a sexual fantasy, not an action. However, Freud was writing almost a century ago in a different and more puritanical era. The idea that a woman would dream of promiscuous sex was considered unacceptable at that time. In any case, it is clear that the patient found the sexual content of her dreams to be shocking, and indeed, Freud found them shocking as well. Freud (1975, p. 146) closed his description of this case with the following words: "I hope you will recognize how obvious is the inference that *it is just the shocking nature of these passages which has led to their suppression*" [emphasis added].

"SHOCKING" INFORMATION IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

In the preceding case description, Freud suggests an important research rule, one that is readily transferable to the main topic of study, government secrecy: The phenomena of censorship, concealment, and secrecy are not random processes, but systematic ones. The type of information that is most readily censored is the most *shocking* material, whereby the object of our research engages in actions that flout widely accepted social norms. And such shocking information is by its nature some of the most interesting for

our analyses,[5] whether these occur in the realm of psychoanalytic psychiatry or historical research.

If we accept Freud's basic rule, the implication is that some of the most important information in our research is concealed to some degree. With regard to U.S. foreign policy, it is easy to see that "censored" materials sometimes do contain shocking information, and the censorship in these cases is clearly intended to protect the state from embarrassment (just as dream censorship protects the psychiatric patient from embarrassment).[6]

Consider the following U.S. Air Force account of operations during the Korean War:

> On 13 May 1953 twenty USAF F-84 fighter-bombers swooped down in three successive waves over Toksan irrigation dam in North Korea. From an altitude of 300 feet they skip bombed their loads of high explosives into the hard packed earthen walls of the dam. The subsequent flash flood scooped clean 27 miles of valley below ... The Toksan strike and similar attacks on the Chasan, Kuwonga, Kusonga, Toksang dams accounted for five of the more than twenty irrigation dams targeted for possible attack ... To the Communists the smashing of the dams meant primarily the destruction of their chief sustenance – rice. The Westerner can little conceive of the awesome meaning that the loss of this staple food commodity has for the Asian – starvation and slow death. "Rice famine," for centuries the chronic scourge of the Orient, is more feared than the deadliest plague. (quoted in Chomsky, 1982, pp. 112–113)

In essence, the U.S. Air Force destroyed the irrigation systems of North Korea and deliberately triggered a famine, a point that is luridly described in the Air Force's own account of the event. But the basic facts of these raids were withheld from the U.S. public – and given the details, it is easy to see why.[7]

Let us also consider a 1962 document, now declassified, transmitting a report from the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), which recommended that the United States should seek a "pretext" for an invasion of Cuba. A series of actions were suggested, which were to be initiated by U.S. forces, but would be blamed on Cuba; the overarching intent was to elicit public outrage against the communist regime and thus enable the type of offensive military action that the Joint Chiefs favored. It is important to emphasize that President Kennedy rejected the plan, and it was never implemented. However, the plan was strongly and unanimously advocated by the JCS, and it was signed by the JCS Chairman, General Lyman Lemnitzer. Here are some of the specific recommendations:

> We could blow up a U.S. ship in Guantanamo Bay and blame Cuba ... We could develop a Communist Cuban terror campaign in the Miami area, in other Florida cities, and even in Washington ... We could sink a boatload of [refugee] Cubans en route to Florida (real or simulated). We could foster attempts on the lives of Cuban refugees in

> the United States even to the extent of wounding in instances to be widely publicized. Exploding a few plastic bombs ... would be helpful.[8]

It seems clear from this document that high-level officials – in this case, America's top military officers – advocated some very shocking activities and then sought to conceal their actions to avoid embarrassment. It is unsurprising that the document describing the project was classified at an especially high level[9] and was not available to the public until its release in 2003, some four decades later. These proposed operations appear somewhat dirtier (and more shocking) than the sexual fantasies of Freud's prudish patient.

Another example of secrecy concerns the issue of official corruption, whereby public agencies are used for the enrichment of private interests, through means that are outright illegal or, in other cases, nominally legal but nevertheless improper. Such corruption is especially salient in matters of foreign policy. Surely the public would feel special discomfort if such sensitive matters as the initiation and conduct of wars or covert operations were intended to advance vested interests, rather than national security.

In the real world, of course, such corruption does occur, at least from time to time.[10] On the basis of Freud's teachings, we would expect such events to be concealed, by both the corporate executives and the governmental officials involved in such matters. Consider the following discussion of recently declassified materials pertaining to the 1961 Bay of Pigs assault, as presented by political scientist David M. Barrett:

> Days before Christmas 1960, [CIA Director] Allen Dulles held an important, and I would say scandalous, meeting in New York. In attendance [the CIA report notes] "were the Vice President for Latin America of Standard Oil of New Jersey, the Chairman of the Cuban-American Sugar Company, the President of the American Sugar Domino Refining Company, the President of the American & Foreign Power Company, the Chairman of the Freeport Sulphur Company, and representatives from Texaco, International Telephone and Telegraph, and other American companies with business interests in Cuba. The tenor of the conversation was that it was time for the U.S. to get off dead center and take some direct action against Castro." The corporate leaders had many ideas along these lines for Dulles. They included burning sugar cane fields, ruining refineries, interrupting electric power supplies, and putting an embargo on food and medicines going into Cuba ... At a minimum ... corporate interests played a 'sometimes overactive' role in support of the anti-Castro efforts.[11]

It should be noted that Allen Dulles himself had a professional background in corporate law, as a partner in the famous New York firm of Sullivan & Cromwell, which had long represented companies with interests in Cuba (see Lisagor & Lipsius, 1988, pp. 67, 214; Kwitny, 1984, pp. 162–163). At the very least, there is "the appearance of impropriety,"

with the associated possibility of scandal should the facts become public. And indeed, Barrett himself views Dulles' sharing of sensitive information with the corporate executives as "scandalous." Once again, it seems easy to understand why this information remained classified for an extended period.

No doubt government officials often rationalize the classification of controversial documents, such as the above, as being "in the national interest."[12] In other cases, however, officials frankly acknowledge their self-interested motives in concealing their actions. One such case involves a government program during the early Cold War to test the effects of radioactive isotopes on people – without their consent. Throughout the United States, unsuspecting patients at health clinics were sometimes injected with these isotopes and then were tracked over periods of time, to determine the effects of radiation exposure on their health. In several cases, pregnant women were injected, and in another case, boys at an orphanage in Massachusetts were fed irradiated breakfast cereal (*United Press International*, 1993; Hebert, 1995; Markowitz, 2000).

At least some of the officials involved in these experiments were concerned about the possibility of public exposure, and this concern is crystal clear in the documentation. A 1947 document (now declassified) directed government employees as follows: "It is desired that no document be released which refers to experiments with humans and *might have adverse effects on public opinion or result in legal suits*. Documents covering such work field should be classified 'secret.'" The document also authorized the release of any information pertaining to radiation research that could be "*beneficial* to human disorders and diseases."[13] At this point, it seems reasonable to draw the following conclusion: The practice of secrecy can be a useful tool for the upwardly mobile bureaucrat, eager to avoid public criticism.

Serious students of covert operations will recognize that such dirty activities were undertaken by several countries during the course of the Cold War. With respect to the United States, for example, it is now known that the CIA and other U.S. agencies overthrew democratically elected governments, plotted the assassination of foreign leaders, engaged in torture, and used other unsettling modes of conduct. With regard to "regular" military activities, U.S. actions during the Korean and Vietnamese wars entailed some equally dirty methods, often used on a vast scale. Within the United States itself, several government agencies performed unethical radiation experiments, as noted previously, while the CIA engaged in bizarre mind control studies on patients in psychiatric hospitals – once again, without the patients' consent – including measures such as electric shock treatment, sensory deprivation, and an ugly procedure known as "insulin coma." The

purpose of the experiment was to test new interrogation techniques and also to try and "program" people for conducting special operations (see Weinstein, 1990).

We should not be surprised by these morally troubling actions, given the generally unpleasant character of international relations throughout history. Freud himself took a very dim view of international relations, as expressed in a famous 1931 essay:

> The element of truth behind all this, which people are so ready to disavow, is that men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved and who, at the most, can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are on the contrary creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a potent share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbor is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him ... Who in the face of all his experience of life and history will have the courage to dispute this assertion? ... Anyone who calls to mind the atrocities committed during the racial migrations or the invasion of the Huns, or by the people known as Mongols under Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, or at the capture of Jerusalem by the pious Crusaders, or even indeed the horrors of the recent World War – anyone who calls these things to mind will have to bow humbly before the truth of this view. (Freud, 1961, pp. 8–59)

There is no reason to think that the United States should be exempted from Freud's observations, any more than other countries.

The basic amorality of U.S. foreign policy was to some extent a product of historical circumstance: By 1945, the United States had established itself as a global hegemon, and the perpetuation of this power position became a central tenet of official policy. Unavoidably, the quest for political and military supremacy instilled an element of ruthlessness into decision-making processes, as a matter of bureaucratic routine. Thus, an official 1954 report on covert operations to President Eisenhower (quoted in Schmitz, 2006, p. 132) made the following observations:

> There are no rules ... Hitherto acceptable norms do not apply. If the United States is to survive, longstanding American concepts of 'fair play' must be reconsidered ... [We] must learn to subvert, sabotage, and destroy our enemies.

In the view of another analyst, "The dark underside of international affairs is inherently untidy and unpleasant. It leaves little room for comfortable moral, political, or operational positions" (Charters, 1985, p. 334). Perhaps inevitably, such attitudes give rise to a large body of disturbing secrets.

THE FREUDIAN SLIP

Given the fact of official secrecy, how can we gain an accurate understanding of U.S. foreign policy? One answer is to rely on what Freud termed slips of the tongue, or in other cases, slips of the pen – whereby the person being studied will accidentally release highly significant information to the researcher. The use of this technique is basic to any serious research on U.S. policy since the beginning of the Cold War.

To illustrate his technique, Freud not only made reference to his patients, but also to slips that occurred in the popular press at the time. Some of Freud's examples are entertaining. One involved a social democratic newspaper, whose writers apparently detested Austria's royal family. In one article, the journalist meant to write of "His Highness the Crown Prince," but instead wrote, "His Highness the *Clown* Prince" – thus revealing, in Freud's view, the journalist's true feelings about the prince. The following day, the paper ran a correction, noting that they had meant to refer to "the *Crow* Prince," offering an additional slip. Another article referenced an (apparently unpopular) military commander, intending to call him the "battle scarred veteran." The writer slipped and referred to him as the "battle *scared* veteran," a rather unflattering characterization for a military figure (quotes from Freud, 1975, p. 35; emphasis added). Once again, the censorship is momentarily lifted, and the true feelings are revealed.

It is easy to see that the technique of emphasizing slips is highly relevant to studies of foreign policy. Government officials too will slip and accidentally reveal information that had not been intended. With regard to the declassification of official documents, in some cases, the document censor will accidentally allow the release of documentation that contains damaging or embarrassing information, which the censor probably intended to keep secret. In public statements and press conferences, government officials frequently slip and unintentionally reveal significant information, which is damaging to their positions or, in some cases, their reputations. This is also true of published memoirs, which often contain unintended slips of the pen.[14]

I illustrate this technique with regard to an exchange between two former CIA officers. This debate took place in Washington, D.C., in 1984, and the point of contention was a 1965 coup in Indonesia:

> [Ralph] McGehee: "the CIA prepared a study of the 1965 Indonesian operation that described what the agency did there. I happened to have been custodian of that study for a time, and I know the specific steps the agency took to create the conditions that led to the massacre of at least half a million Indonesians ..."

> Hugh Tovar: "I am rather shattered by these allegations ... I was in charge of CIA operations in Jakarta at the time, so I would have been the primary instigator of the massacres that allegedly took place. In fact the CIA served *primarily* [emphasis added throughout] as an intelligence collecting operation in Indonesia, and *did not indulge heavily in covert action* ... We certainly did not instigate the 1965 revolt. We had nothing to do with it." (verbatim transcript from Danner, 1984)

Upon first glance, it would appear that the two men offer diametrically opposing accounts of what happened in 1965, with McGehee claiming emphatically that the CIA helped organize the coup and had at least some responsibility for the resulting mass murders that followed the coup. Tovar insists equally emphatically that the CIA "had nothing to do with it" – a clear-cut denial. There seems to be a fundamental disagreement about what took place.

The reader might view this debate as a *Rashomon*-like event, whereby it is impossible to know what occurred in Indonesia. It appears that the two men were observing completely different sets of events; or alternatively, at least one of them is lying. Or perhaps, the two are debating in a postmodernist world, in which there are not only multiple interpretations but also indeed multiple truths. Under the circumstances, the reader can never know the real "truth" of the situation, with respect to the 1965 coup, or any other matter.[15]

Upon further consideration, however, the situation appears far more intelligible. With close reading, it is clear that the two men are not so far apart. It will be observed that Tovar makes several slips of the tongue and unintentionally corroborates some of McGehee's claims. Tovar does not say that the CIA *only* engaged in intelligence collection; he says the Agency engaged *primarily* in intelligence collection – which suggests that it was doing something in addition to intelligence. And Tovar does not really deny that the CIA used covert operations in Indonesia; only that it did not engage *heavily* in covert operations. It seems reasonable to conclude that the CIA was engaging in at least some degree of covert action in Indonesia.

In effect, Tovar confirms much of what McGehee alleges, even though the confirmation is unintentional, appearing as a slip of the tongue. In a full historical investigation, we would of course seek far more evidence on the Indonesia case, to supplement what we have above, before drawing firm conclusions.[16] Nevertheless, it is encouraging to realize that through a careful reading of the exchange between McGehee and Tovar – in just two paragraphs – we can already gain insight into what actually happened in 1965, even before acquiring additional evidence.

THE PROBLEM OF CONFLICTING EVIDENCE

Another difficulty facing the researcher is that of conflicting information, whereby different sources suggest different and incompatible accounts. This is a common problem for historians, whereby varied sets of memoirs, press accounts, and official documents will often present varied descriptions of the same events. The debate on Indonesia offers an illustration. Despite points of agreement, there is still significant divergence between the McGehee's and Tovar's accounts of what happened in 1965: McGehee claims that the CIA intervened extensively in Indonesia, with a major impact on the coup, whereas Tovar implies a more limited degree of CIA intervention. Determining the truth of the situation may once again seem an impossible undertaking for the historian, working decades after the events in question.

Similar problems exist in Freudian analysis, whereby patients often present inconsistent information about their impulses, and the psychoanalyst must sift through this complex raw material to proceed with the analysis. In undertaking this sifting, Freud suggested a basic technique: The information that is most embarrassing to the patient and that is most likely to conflict with the patient's self-image is the information to be believed; that which tends to flatter the patient's self-image should be more readily disbelieved. This technique, Freud noted, is derived from courts of law: "When an accused man confesses to a [criminal] deed, the judge believes him, but when he denies it the judge does not believe him. Were it otherwise, the law could not be administered, and in spite of occasional miscarriages you will admit that the system, on the whole, works well" (Freud, 1975, p. 54).

The underlying principle in law, psychoanalysis, and historical research is the same: When people make declarations that go against their interests, such declarations have a high degree of credibility.[17] From this principle, I have derived three categories of evidence:

1. The first category of evidence is *declarations against interest*, whereby historical actors admit to information that is embarrassing to them personally or damaging to their credibility. It seems unlikely that someone would make self-incriminating claims unless they are true, and, accordingly, declarations against interest would count as highly compelling evidence.[18]
2. The second category is *declarations consistent with interest*. This occurs when historical actors make statements that present themselves in a positive light. For obvious reasons, such declarations are far less credible than number 1. Of course, declarations consistent with interest may be

true, but we would usually require some independent verification before accepting them as true.

3. The third category is *neutral declarations*, which are made by someone with first-hand information, who has no obvious vested interest in the matter at hand and with no incentive to dissemble. Such admissions, being neutral, would count as credible evidence (although they are usually less credible than number 1, which is surely the best type of evidence).

These rules are useful in adjudicating the dispute between McGehee and Tovar. McGehee clearly is the more believable witness, because he was a CIA employee for an extended period, and his statements would thus fall into the category of declarations against interest. Surely, it would not be in McGehee's interest to claim that he worked for an institution that caused the deaths of half a million people. His statements seem self-incriminating to some degree and therefore more credible. Tovar's statements, on the contrary, are self-exculpating – they are "declarations consistent with interest" – and therefore less credible.

Another illustration of this basic technique concerns U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, obviously a topic on which U.S. officials had much to hide. One controversial feature of the war concerned the legitimacy (or lack of legitimacy) of the U.S.-backed regime of Ngo Dinh Diem in South Vietnam, during the period 1954–1963. With regard to this issue, the Pentagon Papers offered this assessment:

> Without U.S. support Diem almost certainly could not have consolidated his hold on the South during 1955 and 1956. Without the threat of U.S. intervention South Vietnam could not have refused to even discuss the elections called for in 1956 under the Geneva settlement without being immediately overrun by Viet Minh armies. Without U.S. aid in the years following, the Diem regime certainly and independent South Vietnam almost as certainly could not have survived. (quoted in McCoy, 1972, p. 150)

This statement may be taken as an official declaration against interest, because the Defense Department was admitting that Diem was in essence a U.S. puppet,[19] which raises doubts about his legitimacy as a nationalist leader and about the legitimacy of the U.S. intervention that supported him.

And for similar reasons, we should take very seriously the following admission from Dwight D. Eisenhower's memoirs: "I have never talked or corresponded with a person knowledgeable in Indochinese affairs who did not agree that had elections been held at the time of the fighting [in 1954], possibly 80 percent of the population would have voted for the communist Ho Chi Minh" (Eisenhower, 1963, p. 372). Once again, this statement constitutes a declaration against interest and is therefore credible as

historical evidence. And let us consider the contrary view: Why would Eisenhower say this about the communists unless it was true?

The preceding statements about the Vietnam War are considerably more believable than the frequent official claims (made during the war) that the South Vietnamese regimes backed by the United States were legitimate, whereas the communist opponents were not. The latter claims would clearly fall into the category "declarations consistent with interest" and should be considered less credible. Through this technique, it is possible to discern the truth of a situation, despite the problem of conflicting evidence.

Yet another illustration of this basic technique concerns the recent War on Terror. In September 2001, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was asked if the military might lie to the press, and Rumsfeld responded, "This conjures up Winston Churchill's famous phrase when he said ... sometimes the truth is so precious it must be accompanied by a bodyguard of lies" (quoted in Gibbs, 2002). Rumsfeld essentially stated that he would in fact lie to the press, and this claim constitutes a clear declaration against interest. Given his frank willingness to lie, Rumsfeld's later statements about the War on Terror should be viewed with suspicion. However, the claim that he *would* lie is itself perfectly credible.

These techniques of evaluating evidence can be widely applied, with regard to studies of U.S. foreign policy (and also more broadly as well). Official admissions that the United States is intervening in a conflict are more credible than the usual public denials. Admissions that government officials were advancing the interests of private corporations, for purposes of individual gain, are more credible – and should be taken more seriously – than claims that they were advancing "the national interest." Admissions that U.S. actions caused the deaths of innocent people, resulted from incompetence, involved false statements, or violated laws should, once again, be given greater weight than denials. Needless to say, we must always have compelling evidence to support our historical claims. The citation of declarations against interest constitutes some of the most compelling evidence possible.

CONCLUSION

The topic of this chapter is, on the whole depressing, in that it focuses on the practice and the study of obviously disturbing policies. Perhaps, it is appropriate that we have emphasized the theories of Sigmund Freud, who had a generally dark view of human nature. This dark view was especially evident in his writings after World War I, an event that impressed upon

Freud the human capacity for destruction and self-destruction (see, e.g., Einstein & Freud, 1934).

And yet, there also is an element of optimism in Freud's writings: Through analysis and self-examination, the patient may become aware of his or her hidden impulses and will better be able to control them. It is a basic feature of psychoanalytic theory that self-understanding is a cornerstone of mental health, and this point is readily transferable to our understanding of government secrecy. Many of the shocking policies in this chapter would have been impossible if they had been known to the public. The practice of secrecy produces pathology at the state level, just as it does at the individual level. In this respect, Freud suggests an important social function for the researcher, to uncover and expose obviously unacceptable government policies, as well as the deceptions that accompany these policies.

There is also optimism in the realization that the truth of a historical event remains discoverable, in spite of institutionalized secrecy, and Freud presents a technique for achieving this objective. With effort, we can cut through the deceptions. I will close this discussion with a quote from Robert Penn Warren's great novel *All the King's Men*, in which a character observed: "Nothing is lost, nothing is ever lost. There is always the clue, the cancelled check, the smear of lipstick, the footprint in the canna bed ... That is what all of us historical researchers believe. And we love truth" (Warren, 2001, p. 319). Freud would have understood perfectly.

NOTES

1. Regarding the issue of secrecy in general, see the excellent compilation of essays in Maret and Goldman (2009).

2. See discussion of U.S. information policy during the War on Terror in VandeHei (2005).

3. This would of course include closed societies such as the Former Soviet Union. Indeed, the method of research that I argue for in this chapter – which includes close attention to potential slips of the tongue that can accidentally reveal important details – has much in common with the method of "Kremlinology," used to study the USSR, China, and other communist states in an earlier era. Regarding the latter, see, for example, Whiting (1960). Cumings (1989) plausibly argues that the techniques of Kremlinology can be used to study the United States.

4. Another problem with psycho-history is that it tends to magnify the relevance of single individuals as casual factors, while it downplays the role of structural variables and systemic forces. Psycho-history is implicitly premised on the dubious "great man" approach. For a recent application of psycho-history written by a professional analyst, see Frank (2007).

5. Freud (1975, p. 146) makes this point with regard to press censorship, which was apparently widespread in Austria during World War I, at the time when he was lecturing: "Take up any political paper and you will find that here and there in the text something is omitted and in its place the blank white of the paper meets your eye: You know that this is the work of the press censor ... You probably think it a pity, for that must have been the most interesting part, the 'cream' of the news."

6. In making this point, I do not suggest that preventing embarrassment is the *only* cause of government secrecy, although it is probably the predominant one. Another motive would be to withhold such information as the technical specifications of new weapons systems.

7. Note that these attacks were not secret in the technical sense, in that the basic facts were publicly accessible in an open source Air Force publication. However, there was clearly an element of self-censorship on the part of the press, which did not draw much attention to these attacks. I have checked through the *New York Times* reporting during the month of May 1953 and found only passing mention of the attacks. Typically, on May 22, the *Times* mentioned that among the targets hit was "an earth filled dam north of Pyongyang," with no further details. See *New York Times* (1953). In addition to self-censorship by the press, there exists the closely related phenomenon of self-censorship by academic researchers. On this latter point, see Gibbs (2001a).

8. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (1962). For the general context regarding this JCS plan, which was termed "Operation Northwoods," see Bamford (2001, pp. 82–91).

9. The official secrecy designation for this document was "Top Secret, Special Handling, NOFORN [no foreign distribution]."

10. Regarding corporate interests, and their ability to influence foreign policy, see the following works: Kwitny (1984), Gibbs (1991), and Dube, Kaplan, and Naidu (2009).

11. From Barrett (2005). Barrett is paraphrasing and quoting from an official CIA history of the Bay of Pigs invasion. Part of the report has been declassified and is available at Barrett's website (www14.homepage.villanova.edu/david.barrett/bop.html).

12. This bias exists among many academics too. See, for example, Krasner (1978). One could argue that the realist school and its emphasis on the national interest provide a generalized justification for secrecy. Hans Morgenthau, for example, noted an inherent conflict between the "requirements of good foreign policy and the preferences of public opinion ... the government must realize that it is not the slave to public opinion; that public opinion is not a static thing to be discovered ... it is a dynamic, ever changing entity to be continuously created and recreated by informed and responsible leadership; that it is the historic mission of the government to assert that leadership." Secrecy is not directly mentioned here but it is certainly implied. See Morgenthau (1967, pp. 142–143).

13. US Atomic Energy Commission, 1947 memorandum, as quoted in Gibbs (1995, p. 217). Emphasis added.

14. A closely related issue is that of intentional "leaks" of sensitive documents to the press or online databases, such as the recent, massive leak of documents pertaining to the Afghan war to Wikileaks (for details, see Goodman, 2010).

15. I have criticized such relativist positions as theoretically untenable. See Gibbs (2001b).

16. And, in fact, recent revelations leave no doubt of U.S. involvement in the coup. See Reed (1990) and Blum (2003, chap. 31).

17. This point was readily grasped by George Orwell, who begins a classic essay: "Autobiography is only to be trusted when it reveals something disgraceful. A man who gives a good account of himself is probably lying." See Orwell (1944).

18. Of course, this is not a perfect rule. Even in law, there have been some famous cases whereby the accused confessed to crimes that, in retrospect, they clearly did not commit. But the general point – that declarations against interest constitute compelling evidence – still applies.

19. Diem did not remain a U.S. puppet, and in his last years, he began to show significant independence from U.S. policy – and this no doubt played a major role in the U.S. decision to support his overthrow, in a 1963 coup. For details, see Hersh (1998, chap. 23).

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I thank Laura Tabili and Steven Aftergood for comments.

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