

Anthropologists Express Concern Over Government Plan to Support Military-Related Research in Universities

Jean E. Jackson

LAST SUMMER, FORMER MIT professor Hugh Gusterson, nine other anthropologists, and I co-founded the Network of Concerned Anthropologists (NCA), with the goal of examining the Pentagon's new policy of hiring social scientists for newly expanded types of military work – which goes far beyond conventional classroom teaching and the like. The Pentagon is aggressively recruiting social scientists for programs like the Human Terrain Systems, which embeds social scientists in combat teams in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. NCA asked anthropologists to sign a pledge not to do covert work or work in occupied territories: concerned.anthropologists.googlepages.com/home.

These new policies have attracted the attention of anthropology professional associations and others in related disciplines. In the summer of 2006, the American Anthropological Association established an Ad Hoc Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology in U.S. Security and Intelligence Communities. The Commission's charge was to develop modes of dialogue with security, intelligence, and military agencies, in order to communicate the AAA's perspectives on ethics and in order to better understand those agencies' interest in anthropology. The Commission produced a preliminary report in November 2007 (available at www.aaanet.org). Last November the executive board of the AAA formally discouraged its members from participating in HTS. (Contact me for sources on HTS.)

NCA is continuing to monitor activities related to the role of anthropologists and the military. The Minerva Consortia Project, as recently outlined by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, would fund university consortia to do military-related research in a significantly expanded fashion, sponsoring research in the social sciences and humanities. Gates' speech was given to presidents of leading research universities in a closed meeting. Space limitations prevent a comprehensive discussion of the initiative; a Chronicle of Higher Education article on the meeting can be found at: chronicle.com/news/article/4316/us-defense-secretary-asks-universities-for-new-cooperation.

Upon hearing about the Pentagon's plans to fund university consortia, the NCA prepared the statement below. We feel that the Minerva initiative should not only concern social science scholars and professionals, both within and outside academia, but should be discussed by all faculty members in large research universities.

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Some Concerns About the Minerva Consortia Project

IN A SPEECH ON April 14, 2008 (www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1228) Secretary of Defense Robert Gates unveiled Pentagon plans to fund university consortia to do 4 kinds of work:

- 1) Create an archive of open-source documents in "Chinese military and technology studies."
- 2) Exploit documents captured in Iraq for "The Iraqi and Terrorist Perspectives Projects."
- 3) Research the relationship between terrorism and religion, especially Islam.
- 4) Engage disciplines such as history, anthropology, sociology and evolutionary psychology to produce new fields that might be as important as game theory and Kremlinology were in the cold war.

Gates promised that the new consortia would work in accord with academic freedom and would be open to "diverse points of view."

While these plans are at an early stage and will doubtless continue to evolve in ways we cannot predict, based on Secretary Gates' speech the Network of Concerned Anthropologists has these initial questions and concerns:

- 1) The U.S. university system is already highly militarized, that is, many universities take in a large proportion of their research funding from military sources. This is problematic for four reasons:
 - a. The fields so supported are distorted by focus on issues of utility to war making. Whole fields of study hypertrophy and others shrink or

are never developed as researchers are drawn from one field into the other, Pentagon-desired ones. Nuclear and other weapons research related areas grow, at the expense of environmental research, for example. Moreover, theory, methodology, and research goals in such fields as physics, computer science, and engineering after decades of military funding now operate on assumptions that knowledge about force is paramount.

- b. These research foci begin to structure what gets taught to students and what research projects students themselves see as the best options for their own work. A brain drain from other research directions occurs.
 - c. The dependence on single sources of funding with their own agenda tends to reduce intellectual autonomy in ways that go beyond the selection of subject matter for research.
 - d. The University becomes an instrument rather than a critic of war-making, and spaces for critical discussion of militarism within the university shrink.
- 2) While Secretary Gates indicated in his speech that research conducted through these consortia would not be classified, we wonder if it will be open to all faculty and students regardless of nationality. Will Chinese and Syrian graduate students, for example, be welcome to conduct research through these consortia? Will researchers with critical research on their CVs or histories of unacceptable political activity be discriminated against in the funding process?
 - 3) Important questions arise as to what level of research is being commissioned. In the case of the Chinese and Iraqi archives in particular, is the plan to fund high order research questions or to outsource to low-wage under-graduate or graduate students or other academics mundane tasks of data collection, sorting and analysis – in other words, low-level intelligence work – in a similar process to the outsourcing of other military work to private contractors? Is the reason this work is not to be outsourced to private contractors either or both that those contractors charge more than the universities will and that the university gives legitimacy and credibility to the results in a way that contractors do not?
 - 4) Who will make funding decisions and on the basis of what criteria? When private foundations or government agencies (such as the National Science Foundation) fund academic research, they rely heavily on a network of academic peer reviewers and on panels of academic experts to adjudicate proposals according to strictly academic criteria. How does the Pentagon plan to evaluate applications for funding? What will be the role of military officers and/or Pentagon civilian officials in the evaluation of applications? How will the program's openness to "diverse points of view" be assured?
 - 5) Why are these research needs being identified by the Pentagon as the most important ones? The research questions themselves contribute to creating more national and human insecurity by trafficking in the construction of a Chinese enemy image and of a connection between Islam and violence. In addition, we ask why evolutionary psychology, a field seen by many academics as disreputable pseudoscience, is being singled out for support.
 - 6) A funding source introduces subtle but powerful biases into research: we now know that academic research funded by the pharmaceutical industry is more likely to find drugs safe and reliable than research funded through NIH, and research funded by the chemical industry is more likely to find new compounds safe than independent research. Research funded by the Pentagon rather than through the National Science Foundation or the National Endowment of the Humanities is likely to show similar or more extreme differences. The Pentagon is an agency that lacks the historical commitment to more open debate and the freer pursuit of knowledge associated with, for example, NSF and NIH and many foundations, and university funds themselves.
 - 7) In his speech, Secretary Gates appeals to universities to relax admissions criteria for military veterans, to allow ROTC to violate campus non-discrimination codes (barring discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation), to offer online instruction to military personnel not on campus, and to fast-track military students for graduation by giving them academic credit for military experiences. This amounts to remaking the university around the needs of the military and giving military students special status within the university. It also asks the university to subsidize and legitimate the military education needs of the Pentagon. Studies of a parallel process in U.S. high schools, the JROTC program, show that training high school students to prepare them for enlistment is advertised as a contribution to both national security and to the schools' budgets, when in fact it uses local school district resources, sometimes in amounts that exceed a half million dollars. If one adds to the Pentagon's formal budget the appropriations for the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the cost of nuclear weapons, and other military costs budgeted through other agencies, the U.S. military budget is over \$800 billion. Surely the Pentagon does not need educational institutions to provide further subsidies.

Also see: www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/04/16/minerva. ■

Jean E. Jackson is a Professor of Anthropology (jjackson@mit.edu).