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Foreign Research Necessary

The House and the Senate are scouting a new and sensitive front of the cold war: government-sponsored research in foreign countries.

These studies by social scientists provide information useful in defining and carrying out U.S. policies abroad. Research might identify the causes of unrest in time to avert a crisis or examine the role of a particular institution in a country.

This is not spy-work but a scientific inquiry into what makes foreign societies tick and how they might react. It involves sociology, psychology, political science and other academic disciplines.

The U.S. has learned that such information is valuable but also that well-intentioned projects may further muddy the foreign policy waters. Sen. Fred R. Harris plans to open hearings on the delicate relationship of government and science and the complicating nuances of foreign relations. One question he will examine is whether all government-backed social research abroad should be approved and controlled by the civilian State Department.

One project of the Defense Department last year was misconstrued as "meddling internally". Operation Camelot was to examine the causes of revolution in underdeveloped countries, beginning with Chile. But neither the host government, the U.S. State Department nor the U.S. ambassador in Chile was fully informed of the scope and purpose of the research. With U.S. intervention in Santo Domingo only

weeks old, Chilean leftists reacted angrily and rekindled Latin fears and tempers.

The furor cancelled the project, and the President ordered that the State Department review all future research backed by the CIA, USIA, Defense Department and other non-scientific agencies. The federal agencies are not particularly happy with the arrangement, and the social scientists have cried "censorship."

Rep. Dante Fascell will introduce bills to soothe the strained relations between the academic freedom, political interference, methods and goals of government-commissioned research.

Fascell would establish a White House Conference on the behavioral sciences, create an office of social and behavioral sciences in the executive branch and establish a National Foundation on Social Science to coordinate existing research. This would put the social sciences on more equal footing with the physical sciences.

The government needs to know a great deal more not only about what forces are changing the world, but how people over the world are reacting to and coping with the changes in their lives. The behavioral sciences can be an effective tool in obtaining information needed to formulate effective and realistic policies abroad.

While the efforts of Sen. Harris and Rep. Fascell will not provide all the answers, they will at least start us on a national assessment of how best to use this new tool.

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