The Lambert Report

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An authoritative account of the state of foreign area studies in the United States was prepared recently by Richard D. Lambert and collaborators and published in April 1984 under the title *Beyond Growth: The Next Stage in Language and Area Studies.* The report was directed by a broadly representative Steering Committee, financed by a contract with the Department of Defense and a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and publicized under the auspices of the Association of American Universities.

The report provides an assessment of competency and instruction in foreign languages; of expertise, research and training in area studies; and of the availability of library and information resources. Universities, the military and some private organizations are covered. The report estimates the national needs and reviews patterns of funding, public and private, in the light of the gap between available resources and these needs. The result is a number of recommendations which, if implemented, would drastically alter graduate teaching and research in comparative politics. The principal recommendations are to trim the number of students and at the same time to extend their area training, to encourage large-scale, long-term research projects and to continue federal government support for foreign area centers. Most importantly, the report repeatedly calls for centralized planning, funding, and monitoring of area training and research, with the aim of directing funds wherever required by "the national interest." Government funding for this planned development of area studies should be provided directly by the Department of Defense wherever possible, with regard to the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and East Asia, and by other government agencies and private foundations for other regions (pp. 186 and 278). The report proposes the creation of a "central funding and administering body for language and area studies" (p. 279), patterned after the NSF and the NEH, to be located within the Smithsonian Institution.

The report offers a wealth of data and a number of detailed diagnoses. Not all of these are uncontroversial: as one would expect, in private conversations area specialists tend to find the general assessment excessively sanguine. But what I find objectionable in the entire thrust of the report are not the findings but the very assumptions that organize the analysis and motivate the recommendations, specifically, the notion that knowledge about foreign areas is produced exclusively by U.S. scholars conducting research at the sites and the ingenuous use of the concept of "national interest." I think this model of the production of knowledge is inaccurate and that the concept of "national interest" is untenable as a criterion of the development of science, any science.

How Is Knowledge About Foreign Areas Generated?

The report is based on a mistaken conception of the way knowledge about foreign areas is produced and its recommendations reflect this misconception. In Lambert's view, U.S. scholars acquire knowledge of foreign areas by conducting research at the site. The report calls for large research projects, emanating from large university centers, and conducted over long periods by American scholars throughout the world.

This model appears like nostalgia for the projects that scholars from the United States carried out some 20 years ago, often with the support of AID and other government agencies: large studies such as Almond's and Verba's *The Civic Culture,* the International Studies of Values in Politics (ISViP), Inkeles's and Smith's surveys of modernity, and a handful of others. All of these were conceived in the United States, addressed to scholarly or ideological pre-occupations in the United States, employing methods which were viewed as legitimate (and thus for which one could get funding) in the United States, and executed at the site. Some of these projects, particularly the ISViP, involved a considerable amount of local collaboration. But their common feature was that original data were generated all over the world directly by or at the instigation of scholars from the United States.

To Lambert's regret, such large undertakings have become almost extinct. The reason is not only that asserted by the report, the lack of funding, or the political lessons of the Vietnam War, a topic about which the report is silent. The main reason, in my view, is the development of social science in other countries. What the report fails to notice is that most of the knowledge we in the United States have today about foreign areas originates from research activities initiated and conducted by scholars from these areas, working for local institutions and responding to ideological concerns and practical needs in their own countries as well as to general theoretical preoccupations. Moreover, foreign scholars produce not only data. The very understanding of the world by American scholars has been fundamentally shaped by ideas originating from abroad.

Let me just cite some examples, by area. It was Rokkan who taught American scholars to see European politics in historical terms; Dahrendorf who identified the structure of conflict in post-war Europe; Crozier who, together with Hoffman, corrected the American misconception about the "instability" of French politics; Pizzorno who provided the key to the radicalization of Western European workers after 1968. Allardt, Birnbaum, Boudon, Giddens, Habermas, Korpi, Miliband, Offe, Poulantzas, Sartori are just a few among those who contributed something distinct to our understanding of Western European politics. And to take just one empirical topic, most of what we know about voting patterns in Western Europe is the product of work of Allardt, Bdrre, Dogan, Galli, Jaffre, Lancelot, Klingeman, von Pappi, Pesonen, Rabier, Sarlvik, Valen, and others.

One might be tempted to conclude that Western Europe is exceptional, because of its economic wealth and intellectual traditions, but such a conclusion would be incorrect. For the past 15 years, our understanding of Latin America and eventually much of our view of the Third World in general has been dominated by a work co-authored by a Brazilian and a Chilean, Cardoso's and Faletto's (1969) *Dependency and Development in Latin America,* and another book by an Argentine, O'Donnell's (1973) *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism: Studies in South-American Politics.* We have been coping with perspectives offered by Dos Santos, Frank, Furtado, Germani, Jaguaribe, Prebisch, Ribeiro, Quijano, Stavenhagen. And to consider again just one empirical topic, much of what we know today about the crucial area of informal urban economy in Latin America is the product of work of Latin American research institutions, such as CEBRAP in Sao Paulo, CEDES in Buenos Aires, El Colegio de Mexico, CELADE and FLACSO in Santiago, IEP in Lima, and others.

Even our understanding of Eastern Europe has been influenced by local scholarship. At least Polish social scientists have had an impact on our theoretical conceptions and produced important data. Ossowski's book on social structure became a classic; Nowak's surveys of values are a rich source of data and of methodological innovation; Wesolowski's studies of stratification altered the terms of analysis of social conflicts in socialist countries and provided a unique data base; Wiatr's writings led to the revision and a refinement of the concept of "one party systems"; finally, Staniszkis' analysis of the relation between economic and political cycles organized much of our thinking about the most recent period.

Certainly none of the above is intended to denigrate the contributions, and in many cases the leading role, of scholars based in the United States. I do not mention specific illustrations only because of space, and they would take space. But I believe that the examples above are sufficient to conclude that any report about our knowledge of foreign areas which ignores the health of social science training and research in these countries is fundamentally misdirected.

In brief, the Lambert Report is based on an erroneous model of the production of knowledge. As the result, the data provided are at best incomplete and at worst misleading: incomplete to the extent that neither foreign educational nor research institutions are covered and misleading in reducing questions of international collaboration to issues of access of American scholars to foreign research sites. Moreover, some recommendations of the report are simply counterproductive.

Support for Foreign Institutions

Anyone concerned about the advancement in the United States of knowledge about foreign areas would be interested to encourage, promote and, to the extent possible, sponsor social science training and research in those areas. If we conceive of an extreme alternative, a Senegalese scholar writing in English about her country is a more effec-

tive producer of knowledge than a U.S. academic who has mastered French and the local languages and earned his stripes (three years of residence and at least two visits during the past five years according to the report) in Senegal. Scholars in the United States have good reasons to be concerned about the situation of graduate training and thus prospects for research in, say, today's Argentina, where the military dictatorship succeeded in creating a generation that has no knowledge of native social science traditions and whose contact with foreign thought in university political science courses ended with Machiavelli.

The silence of the report about aid to foreign institutions, scholarships for foreign students in the United States, and support for locally initiated research projects is particularly noteworthy given that American foundations, Ford in particular, have over the years played an important role in these activities, a role that has been reduced recently. Advancement of foreign area research in the United States requires (1) aid to research institutions in foreign countries,

(2) direct support for research projects initiated in foreign countries, (3) training of foreign students, in their native institutions and at U.S. universities, (4) extensive, free flowing collaboration among scholars, and (5) continuing monitoring of research and training needs of foreign countries. Parachuting did not work in the past and will not in the future.

The Issue of Access

The appeal to "national interest" of the United States to justify social science activities conducted by American scholars abroad cannot help but provoke pernicious consequences for the advancement of area studies. The Lambert Report does not define "national interest," limiting itself to examples that range from military to political to private business applications of social science. The report is careful to emphasize the need for independence and for open circulation of ideas but the entire argument is couched in terms of the utility of social science training and research for this nebulous "interest."

The report does observe the importance of international scholarly collaboration and bemoans growing difficulties in the access of scholars from the United States to foreign sites. The authors slide, however, with disarming naivete over the central question the report evokes, namely, why should foreign governments open access and foreign scholars offer collaboration to activities which are guided by, and financed because of, the national interest of the United States? Indeed, is it not reasonable to expect that if and when social science becomes an instrument of "national interests" then barriers of access will become truly prohibitive? If American scholars want to study an Indian language in Mexico in the U.S. national interest, there is no reason that the Mexican government should not tax this activity or the Mexican scholars should not demand a share of the knowledge.

The report recognizes that difficulties of access may result from direct funding of research by the Department of Defense and recommends that such funding "should be confined to such countries and situations where scholarly access to research sites will not as a consequence be threatened" (p. 186). I am particularly concerned about the effects of this formulation upon the autonomy of social science in some Eastern European countries, such as Poland. Over the years, Polish scholars have fought with some success against attempts from the secret police and sectors within the Party to isolate them from the West by the argument that all American scholars are in one form or another agents of the United States government. By relegating research in the Soviet area to the Department of Defense the report seems to be willing to concede the point, thus creating a threat to the hard won and always tenuous autonomy of social science in Poland, Hungary, and perhaps other countries.

Those who seek to manage American social science face a trade-off between justifications in terms of national interest and access. True, there will always be institutions and individual scholars, in the United States and abroad, who will be willing to conduct research oriented toward any aims. But the experience of years of "counter-insurgency" studies shows how poor such research tends to be and how costly it can be for the country to base its policies on these findings. Instead of seeking to coordinate and even merge social science activities conducted by universities with military and other contract research, they should be kept cleanly and clearly apart. I am not questioning the right and the need of the Department of Defense, other federal agencies, and private corporations to utilize any of the freely circulating ideas, research findings, and data sources, nor their capacity to conduct and contract research. But I am persuaded that access and collaboration are much more important to the development of our knowledge of foreign areas than any immediate needs of government or business institutions and that anything that limits access and collaboration is counter-productive.

"The National Interest" and Social Science

The Lambert Report is an attempt to instrumentalize language and area studies in the United States on behalf of national interest. The report, its authors state boldly, adds up to "an integrated, internally consistent strategy for the next stage of language and area studies." They call for "collective planning, intelligent allocation of resources, and effective monitoring of the progress of the field." And all of this is to fully serve "the national interest" (p. 279). Indeed, what is wrong with foreign area research now is a "skewed profile of research output that only partly serves the national interest" (p. 145).

I find the entire project quite chilling. The technocratic impulse of the report is evident in its combination of the language of "the" national interest with the call to centralize and bureaucratize control over all social science activities, public and private. The vision offered by the report is of one Central Agency, the custodian of the national

interest, which will plan, distribute funds, and monitor everyone. The technocratic bias is so pronounced that even the customary phrases about increasing citizen competence to evaluate government policies find no place in the references to national interest.

I am not quite certain how to think about the fact that the authors—who are after all social scientists themselves—are completely unabashed in their belief that there exists something in singular that can be legitimately called "the national interest." The report does not even bother to define this interest. From the examples in the text (particularly pages 163 and following) it would seem that everything that government agencies may need for the purposes of foreign, military and other, policies is in the national interest. In addition, the national interest includes promoting American businesses abroad. In fact, one specific recommendation is that "Part B of Title VI should be extended to include basic research relevant to the general policy interests of American business abroad" (p. 173).

It is not apparent to me that there exists something that could be identified as "the general policy interests" of American business abroad: presumably American businesses compete with each other, at home and abroad. And if such a single collective interest does exist, is it the same as the general policy interests of American workers, farmers and consumers? The entire thrust of modern political theory is to question the notion that there exists a unique "national interest" and that, even if one such interest could be somehow identified, voters would exhibit an intransitive collective preference for it in elections. We have come to understand democracy as a process which involves continual competition, and we have learned that the results of the democratic process are not unique and that they are inherently unstable. Clearly, governments are elected and they have legitimate authority to pursue policies, but it strikes me as a profound lack of understanding of the democratic system to confuse government policies, not to speak of policies of business, with national interest.

The authors claim at one moment that "Too much freedom for researchers leaves larger national interests unprotected..." (p. 150[1]). This is pure nonsense: terms are undefined and there is not a shred of evidence. If foreign areas studies indeed need more planning, funding, and monitoring, both the justification for the centralized policy and its eventual implementation must be based on principles that can pass intellectual scrutiny and can evoke a fair degree of consensus. The Lambert Report fails to provide them: "national interest" will not do.

The alternative to centralized policy is usually justified in terms such as commitment to truth, quality of ideas, pursuit of excellence and so forth. This language is absent from the report, and one is led to assume that the reason is that neither the federal government, the foundations, nor private corporations would be willing to support activities justified in such terms. Thus, ultimately, the Lambert Report may be seen by many as a reasonable compromise between pure science and the repeated

[1] The sentence continues: "while too much constraint undermines the quality of the research and may stifle it altogether."

attempts to militarize foreign area research. Yet I am persuaded that several specific recommendations would be counter-productive to the very goals set by the authors and the sponsors of the report. Moreover, I believe that the terms of discourse imposed by the report constitute a threat to the continuing advancement of social sciences in the United States and to the international flow of ideas and data.

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