



Congress Dials Back Research on Understanding Terrorism

Author(s): Yudhijit Bhattacharjee

Source: *Science*, New Series, Vol. 313, No. 5787 (Aug. 4, 2006), p. 610

Published by: American Association for the Advancement of Science

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3846725>

Accessed: 13-10-2017 20:14 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

American Association for the Advancement of Science is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Science*

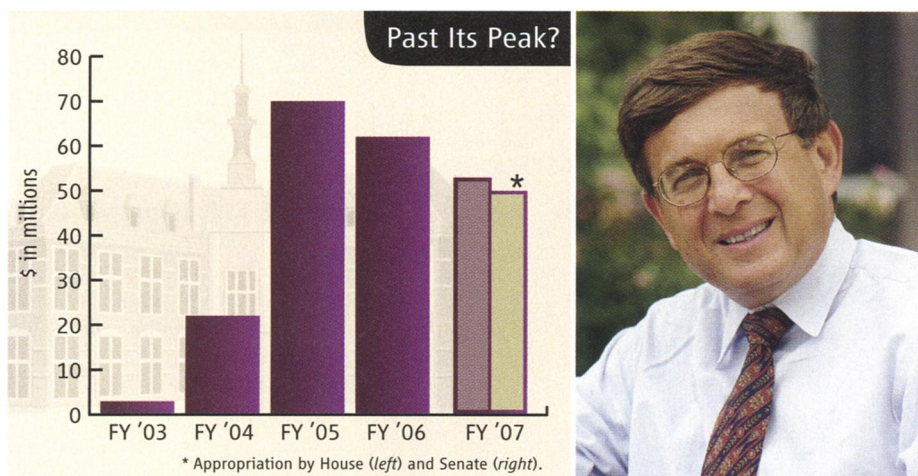
Congress Dials Back Research on Understanding Terrorism

Legislators cite shoddy management in cutting the 2007 budget for university research within the Department of Homeland Security

Arie Kruglanski spends a lot of time thinking about what drives terrorists. A social psychologist at the University of Maryland (UM), College Park, Kruglanski believes that basic research on human behavior can fill an important niche in the fight against terrorism. "The intelligence community can address the mosquito," he says, referring to the pursuit of suspected or actual terrorists. "Academic researchers can help to dry out the swamp."

Congress endorsed that argument in 2002 when it included a robust science

Funding for the university program, which peaked in 2005 at \$70 million (see graphic, below), would decline for 2007 to \$50 million in the House version and \$52 million in the Senate. (The differences will be worked out in the weeks ahead.) The two bodies have proposed even larger cuts—24% and 18%, respectively—in the agency's overall research and development budget, which emphasizes applied work for securing airports and ports and minimizing the risks of biological, chemical, and explosive attacks. The legislators cited poor financial



Downward slope. DHS's Melvin Bernstein says that the expected cuts to the university program will prevent the agency from funding any new centers.

director within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that was created after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. In short order, the directorate began funding a network of centers at universities around the country—including one that Kruglanski co-directs at UM—to generate knowledge aimed at thwarting future terrorist attacks. But only 2 years after the first center was created, Congress has become so unhappy with DHS's management of its research portfolio that it is poised to levy a double-digit funding cut next year across the department's \$1.2 billion science and technology directorate, including the centers program. A Senate panel last month labeled the directorate "a rudderless ship without a clear way to get back on course."

management, the absence of a research plan, and the lack of progress in developing technologies to protect the nation. In addition, senators would prohibit DHS from funding any center for more than 3 years. Congress expected DHS to spread the wealth, establishing a center and then letting the university find alternative sources of funding after 3 years. The Senate language does not prevent a university-based center from entering a subsequent competition, a staffer added.

The reduced funding would freeze the university program at seven centers—including one announced last week—rather than the 10 that the department had hoped to support. And agency officials say the 3-year rule will change the character of the centers, moving them away from exploring fundamental research questions toward work on

short-term problems. "We'd have to choose narrower topics instead of open-ended problems that reach into more fundamental aspects of homeland security," says program director Melvin Bernstein. The shorter timeline would also tilt training toward master's degree students rather than Ph.D.s.

Legislative aides say that members felt they had no choice but to crack down on DHS's research activities after finding what the House appropriations committee calls "financial reporting deficiencies, including serious difficulties maintaining accurate financial records related to obligations and disbursements." In short, says one congressional staffer, "the directorate [has failed] to answer how it is executing its programs and what it has done with its money."

One example is some \$67 million within the university program, which includes fellowships and other initiatives, that Congress awarded over the past 4 years but DHS had not obligated. Bernstein said last week that the money has "now been fully accounted for," although he declined to provide a breakdown of how or when it will be spent. "When we started, it took us anywhere from 6 to 8 months to start a center, so the money came in a lot faster than we were able to spend it," he says. "Now we have a steady state." However, Bernstein says these newly committed funds won't allow DHS to add to its stable of centers or to award new fellowships next year.

Shaun Kennedy, deputy director of the DHS-funded National Center for Food Protection and Defense (NCFPD) at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, says it's hard for his and other centers to find other federal backers because their work is so multidisciplinary. NCFPD's goal of reducing the potential for contamination in the nation's food supply and minimizing the effects of an attack on it, he notes, requires cross-fertilization across disciplines as diverse as epidemiology, food microbiology, economics, and risk communication. "DHS is the only agency whose mission justifies funding this type of work," he says.

UM's Kruglanski and other center directors are hoping that legislators eventually drop the 3-year funding limit when they reconcile the two spending bills, even if they don't restore funding to the program. "Our center is investigating the causes, motivations, and recruitment mechanisms that drive terrorism," he says. "We need to integrate all the knowledge on terrorism from the past 30 years and carry out a broad set of studies. It doesn't make sense for us to think short-term."

—YUDHIJIT BHATTACHARJEE