

Some Nuclear Secrets Need to Be Shared

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Some U.S. nuclear secrets would be more valuable if they were shared among law-enforcement officials, allies and even some enemies, says [Michael Levi](#) in [science magazine](#) **Seed**. Blanket security was a sensible approach when no one knew the basic principles that could be used to build a nuclear bomb. But today, scientists overestimate how much revealing secrets could help terrorists, says Mr. Levi, an energy-security specialist and fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.



The most important confidential information these days no longer involves theoretical questions such as the most effective shape of uranium in a bomb — most scientists in the field can figure that out. The really valuable secret is how to process the uranium into the required shape. “While some theoretical ideas can make the dirty work easier,” says Mr. Levi, “many would not contribute materially to anyone’s efforts to build a bomb.”

The U.S. would be better off with a more subtle policy that balances the risk of information disclosure with the potential benefits for U.S. security, says Mr. Levi, who has written extensively about nuclear terrorism. For example, the current policy prevents police officers and customs officials from obtaining information that might help them detect a nuclear weapon as it was being smuggled into the U.S. Similarly, the majority of inspectors for the International Atomic Energy Agency have never seen the inside of a nuclear bomb. The U.S. could allow them to do so without giving away crucial secrets, a step that would greatly help the IAEA determine whether a country is making nuclear weapons.

Some nuclear secrets could even be effectively shared with enemies, says Mr. Levi. If the U.S. released certain technical details of its radiation detection equipment, for instance, it might convince terrorists that preparations for an attack on the U.S. could be spotted. In each case, a delicate balance needs to be struck, says Mr. Levi. But making the effort to use openness strategically would make the U.S. safer than continuing to rely on obsessive secrecy. —
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