

## REVIEW

**Academics in Service of the American Empire:  
*The Minerva Research Initiative***

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**ABSTRACT:** Since 2008, the U.S. military has relied on an ambitious research program called *The Minerva Research Initiative* established by then-Defense Secretary Robert Gates with the primary goal of achieving “a deeper understanding of the social, cultural and political dynamics that shape regions of strategic interest (to the U.S. government) around the world.” Initial funding for this program was fifty million dollars, an amount that has been increasing over the years. The primary purpose has been to finance the work of academics at American universities and experts in other research centers as analysts on issues that may have an impact on the national security policies of the imperialist State.

**Keywords:** The Minerva Research Initiative; Regions of strategic interest; Research and strategic interest.



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Through the Minerva Initiative, the Department of Defense aims to support and focus resources on the “best universities in the country”; to define and develop fundamental knowledge about sources of present and future conflicts with a focus on understanding the political trajectories of key regions in the world; and to improve the ability of the Department of Defense to develop a body of “cutting edge social science” and interdisciplinary studies conducted by *top researchers in these fields*. In short, it seeks to recruit the cream of their intellectual elite for the endurance and glory of Manifest Destiny.

The Minerva Initiative recently announced on its website (<http://minerva.dtic.mil>), the list of 14 winners chosen from over 300 candidates who competed for funding for the research period from 2013 to 2016. Research topics include “The Strength of Social Norms Across Cultures: Implications for Conflict and Intercultural Cooperation” proposed by Michele Gelfand, Department of Psychology at the University of Maryland; and “The Human Geography of Resilience and Change: Land Rights and Political Stability in Indigenous Societies of Central America,” which will be carried out by Jerome Dobson, professor at the University of Kansas and President of the American Geographical Society. Dr. Dobson seeks to clarify the impact of these factors “on the capabilities of the Department of Defense and their general implications for the national defense of the United States,” and he laid down in detail the funding required for a proposed five-year period: \$3,001.985. Curiously, the abstract identifies neither the countries of “Central America” to be studied nor the indigenous peoples who will be the “objects of study.”

The illustrious geographer seeks to define, digitally map and assess land use schemes in indigenous municipalities of “Central America.” Moreover, Dr. Dobson boasts that with the data and results of this project his country’s military will obtain “new capabilities for carrying out human geography research, comparable to (but more advanced) than that used extensively during World Wars I and II.” The question remains whether Dr. Dobson will appear on this occasion before his academic peers in those countries and before the indigenous communities “studied” as a researcher paid by the U.S.

Department of Defense, or—as he did in the case of the Mexico *Indígena* project in Oaxaca, which was denounced by organizations of indigenous peoples—he will deny the military use of his results.

The Minerva Initiative also organizes annual two-day conferences with panels of academics, officials from the Department of Defense responsible for developing strategies and policies, and personnel in charge of military operations whose purpose is to report on research projects underway and reflect on the impact of Minerva on the social sciences. Last year the meeting, which took place on the symbolic dates of September 11-12, was held on the campus of the University of California and was attended by the Minerva Steering Committee, which included Daniel Chu, Under-Secretary for the Department of Defense Strategy, and Christopher Kojm, Coordinator of the National Intelligence Council, who was one of the keynote speakers. The audience for such a distinguished gathering was about 150 guests selected from among scholars and experts in priority areas of the program. Sessions dealt with: 1) Structural Dynamics in Violent Organizations; 2) Leadership and Succession in Autocratic Regimes; 3) Insurgencies and Ungovernable Spaces in West Africa; 4) Technology, Power and Security in China; 5) Mobilizing for Change: Who Becomes a Terrorist?; 6) Energy and Stability; 7) Climate Change, Resource Access and Security; and 8) Projecting Power in a Globalized World.

On the list of Minerva's key current projects is that of anthropologist Montgomery McFate, initiator of the (Human Terrain System) program of social scientists embedded in combat brigades of the neocolonial wars in

Iraq and Afghanistan and head of the “Cultural Knowledge and National Security” Project. McFate is currently writing a book with the suggestive title *Military Anthropology*, which responds to a basic question of her research: What can we learn from the life experience and intellectual legacy of a number of social scientists who are contributing directly to military operations? This diligent anthropologist reports that she has completed five chapters, each of which is about a particular concept, such as: military leadership, information operations, strategic objectives, irregular warfare, insurgency, counterinsurgency and intelligence, etc. Without a doubt, this work is a future *Best Seller* that will be recommended as a textbook for all departments and faculties of military anthropology.

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