



RESEARCH NOTE

April 2020

Defense Personnel and Security Research Center (PERSEREC)

Dr. Eric L. Lang (Director), Ms. Callie J. Chandler (Deputy Director), Dr. Rene M. Dickerhoof, Ms. Stephanie L. Jaros, Dr. Leissa C. Nelson, Dr. David A. Richmond, Ms. Andree E. Rose, and Dr. Olga G. Shechter

Defense Personnel and Security Research Center (PERSEREC)
Office of People Analytics (OPA)

CONTENTS

Welcome to PERSEREC	2
Contacting PERSEREC and Accessing Selected Reports	2
Our Vision	2
Initiatives	3
Social Media and Public Information Vetting	4
Insider Threat Management	4
Vetting for Special Populations	5
Continuous Vetting (CV)	5
Espionage and Resource Exfiltration	5
Suicide Studies	5
Reporting Behaviors of Concern	6
eAdjudication	6
Workplace and School Violence	7
Investigation & Adjudication Quality	7
Mental Health Vetting	7
Adjudicative Desk Reference	8
Consolidation of DoD Central Adjudication Facilities (CAFs)	8
History	8
Achievements	10
Frequently Asked Questions	11

WELCOME TO PERSEREC

The Defense Personnel and Security Research Center (PERSEREC) is a Department of Defense entity dedicated to improving the effectiveness, efficiency, and fairness of DoD personnel suitability, security, and reliability systems. PERSEREC is part of the Office of People Analytics (OPA, see OPA.mil), which is a component of the Defense Human Resources Activity (DHRA) under the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness).

To achieve its mission, researchers at PERSEREC:

- Conduct applied research and development to improve personnel suitability, security, and reliability policy and practice.
- Disseminate action-oriented research information to policymakers and practitioners.
- Conduct long-term programmatic research and development for the human resource management, security, and intelligence communities.
- Provide quick-response studies and analyses in support of policy formation and systems improvement.
- Develop innovative systems, tools, and job aids for policymakers, managers, and practitioners concerned with personnel suitability, readiness, security, reliability, and insider threat.

Contacting PERSEREC and Accessing Selected Reports

For more information about our products, tools, and reports, or to provide feedback on this website please email us at: perserec@mail.mil

Selected open-source PERSEREC reports and products are available by entering “PERSEREC” or a specific term (such as “insider threat”) in the search utility at OPA.mil. Many PERSEREC reports are also available from the Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC)(<https://discover.dtic.mil/>).

OUR VISION

PERSEREC’s applied research and development activities are directed to achieving the following goals for DoD and, for many initiatives, the entire Federal community:

- Efficient and cost-effective automated programs that deliver fair, equitable, and timely decisions regarding suitability for employment and the granting of clearances for access to classified information and other national security assets.
- Personnel suitability, security, and reliability programs that incorporate risk-management principles and maximize the use of information technology and databases to expedite investigative and adjudicative processes.



- Administrative processes that minimize labor-intensive tasks, reduce burdens on both applicants, and government personnel as well as promote greater levels of reciprocity across Federal agencies.
- A trusted population of military, civilian, and industrial employees who are motivated and fully aware of their security responsibilities and of foreign intelligence threats that could impact their lives, work, or combat mission.
- A resilient and ready military, civilian, and industrial workforce.

INITIATIVES

PERSEREC focuses its efforts on solving some of the most difficult challenges facing DoD and other federal agencies such as modernizing the personnel vetting process, mitigating insider threats, and eliminating barriers to care. Below we describe each of PERSEREC's major initiatives from across our diverse portfolio including:

- Social Media and Public Information Vetting
- Insider Threat Management
- Vetting for Special Populations
- Continuous Vetting (CV)
- Espionage and Resource Exfiltration
- Suicide Studies
- Reporting Behaviors of Concern
- eAdjudication
- Workplace and School Violence
- Investigation and Adjudication Quality
- Mental Health Vetting
- Adjudicative Desk Reference
- Consolidation of DoD Central Adjudication Facilities

In addition, PERSEREC provides direct support and assistance to personnel, security, and suitability policymakers and operations managers in many DoD and other Federal agencies including the:

- Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and its components, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security, the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency, Washington Headquarters Service, the Defense Office of Hearings and Appeals, Office of Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (OUSD(Policy)),

- branches of the United States Armed Forces,
- Security, Suitability and Credentialing Performance Accountability Council (PAC) and its federal agency members, the National Insider Threat Task Force (NITTF), and the Intelligence Community.

Finally, to strengthen U.S. National Security and the security of our trusted partners, PERSEREC routinely shares and learns from our closest allies, especially the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Social Media and Public Information Vetting

PERSEREC research shows that publicly available electronic information (PAEI) provides relevant and timely data on security clearance applicants and holders, as well as other government personnel in sensitive positions. PAEI is defined as content that is accessible to the public via the Internet. PAEI may include social networking posts, and open source material such as news articles, court records, and comments on websites. In some cases, PAEI is the unique source of security relevant information (i.e., the information of concern was not found in other databases or investigative sources). The type of data located on these sites may include images, text, video, location, and other metadata. PERSEREC partnered with the International Association of Chiefs of Police to develop the first ever PAEI vetting guidelines, and then partnered with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Army G2, Military Personnel Policy, and OUSD(I) to conduct a series of pilot studies to assess the unique insight PAEI provides on DOD's military applicants, and military and civilian clearance holders. Automating the collection of relevant PAEI is the most significant impediment to full-scale implementation within DoD's personnel security program. Automation depends largely on natural language processing (NLP) capabilities, but NLP is not mature enough to address rhetorical devices such as hyperbole, idioms, and sarcasm. Therefore, a human analyst is required to review the content which drives up cost.

Additionally, PERSEREC has been tracking trends in social media and the effects on Operations Security since 2013.

Insider Threat Management

Reviews of serious incidents, such as the Washington Navy Yard tragedy as well as the WikiLeaks data case found failures to capitalize on available information in detecting and mitigating potential insider threats. PERSEREC conducts research in order to improve the identification and management of DoD personnel who pose a safety or security threat. One aspect of this initiative focuses on improving the monitoring of personnel with security clearances through use of additional data sources and technologies. We are determining the utility of these information sources and the conditions where their use is both legal and consistent with individual privacy protections. A second aspect of this initiative focuses on improving the identification, communication, and assessment of relevant information to prevent or mitigate the threat.

PERSEREC founded The Threat Lab in 2018 to realize the Department of Defense (DoD) Counter-Insider Threat Program Director's vision to incorporate the social and behavioral sciences into the mission space. PERSEREC's Threat Lab works with stakeholders to transform operational challenges into actionable research which is then executed. The Threat Lab then designs and executes research projects that result in accessible, concise findings, and recommendations for training and awareness materials that organizations can use as-is or customize for their own purposes.

Vetting for Special Populations

Since 2012, PERSEREC has supported the Offices of the Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence, Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness, and Undersecretary of Defense for Policy with research on background vetting of DoD military accessions, current Service members, and civilians with foreign nexus risk characteristics, and international military students who come to the United States for education and training in connection with foreign weapon sales. PERSEREC's research on these topics has focused on identifying gaps in current vetting procedures through policy and program reviews, data analytics, and subject matter expert interviews. Each study has resulted in a set of actionable recommendations for how to mitigate the identified security vulnerabilities, many of which have been implemented by policy stakeholders.

Continuous Vetting (CV)

CV transforms federal personnel vetting processes by identifying potential threats earlier and enabling investigations to be conducted faster and more efficiently. PERSEREC has conducted numerous studies which have helped to shape continuous vetting programs. PERSEREC conducted evaluations of numerous electronic data sources to assess the efficacy of their use in continuous vetting. These studies also resulted in the development and refinement of algorithms for improving identity resolution and issue identification from these records. PERSEREC conducted comparative analyses of alternative continuous vetting use cases that demonstrated the potential benefits of a CV approach relative to traditional reinvestigations. Recent studies by PERSEREC have focused on optimizing the frequency of continuous vetting, evaluating the reliability of data used by CV systems, and assessing the value of alternative data sources, especially in areas where coverage by existing data sources is incomplete. Self-reported information remains a key component of the vetting process and PERSEREC has conducted a study to identify which questions and instructions on the personnel security questionnaire should be modified and how additional automation could be used to improve the accuracy and completeness of filer responses.

Espionage and Resource Exfiltration

Since its founding, PERSEREC has been committed to helping DoD stakeholders better detect, prevent, and mitigate malicious insider threats, to include espionage and unauthorized exfiltration of DoD resources. Over the years, PERSEREC has produced several reports that take an historical approach to reviewing espionage cases. These reports have described trends in espionage by Americans, comparing more recent cases (i.e., cases since 1990), to cases from earlier periods. More recent PERSEREC work on this topic focuses on a broader definition of the threat to include all cases of exfiltration of classified DoD resources, regardless of a specific conviction of espionage (e.g., hoarding, leaking). This new work is designed to provide DoD stakeholders with empirically based, operationally relevant behavioral indicators that signal potential future threats and opportunities for intervention. The first study taking this new approach found that the majority of perpetrators exhibited pre-arrest behavioral indicators, and that a behavioral threat assessment framework yields actionable information that could be used to intervene in cases of potential resource exfiltration. Additional work is underway to add new and non-DoD cases to the body of exfiltration cases under examination.

Suicide Studies

In 2013, the Defense Suicide Prevention Office was designated as the DoD policy office for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention. Since 2015, PERSEREC has supported DSPO and the military service branches by conducting basic research on topics such as indicators of suicide found on social media, suicide-related incident reporting in the DoD Personnel Security Program, barriers to care, and mental health help-seeking behavior among Service members, gaps in provision of bereavement support to Service members, and next of kin after a suicide loss, military officer mental health help-seeking, and lethal means safety. PERSEREC has also developed tools and interventions for military personnel focused on lowering suicide risk and increasing protective factors. These products include a video that educates Service members about how to respond to indicators of suicide posted on social media, a military suicide postvention toolkit that equips DoD personnel with best practices on how to promote healing in unit members and next of kin after a suicide loss, a lethal means safety video and slogan, and an upstream suicide intervention that encourages Service members to reach out for help early, addresses common barriers to care, and promotes a connection to DoD-wide and local resources. PERSEREC's research aligns with the public health approach to suicide prevention by treating suicide as a public health problem and focusing on reducing suicide risk and increasing resilience in the universal population of Service members.

Reporting Behaviors of Concern

DoD personnel who pose a threat or experience personal problems may show early warning signs, but supervisors and others do not always recognize indicators or report their concerns through proper channels. To address this challenge, PERSEREC has conducted extensive work to understand barriers to reporting and to examine and develop tools for increasing supervisor reporting of personnel issues, security concerns, and insider threats. This research identified important factors that contribute to increased reporting to include increasing (a) awareness and understanding of concerning behaviors, (b) felt responsibility, and (c) sense of accountability. PERSEREC developed a simple reporting tool based on these factors and conducted subsequent research to build an online application aimed at supervisors to provide in-depth information about concerning behaviors, strategies and resources available to supervisors for responding to concerns, and resources available to help employees in need.

eAdjudication

The process of adjudicating background investigations for suitability, security, and credentialing determinations requires substantial time, labor, and training. As a strategy to reduce the resource demands of adjudication, DoD implemented automated clean case screening, a practice referred to as electronic adjudication (eAdjudication). eAdjudication applies a set of business rules to the results of Tier 1 and Tier 3 initial investigations and Tier 3 reinvestigations to ensure that they are clean (i.e., include no information requiring human review), allowing a substantial number of cases to automatically receive favorable determinations. Implementation of eAdjudication has substantially reduced the resources required to adjudicate investigations (Youpa, Baweja, Vargheese, Nelson, & Reed, 2018).

As originally implemented, the eAdjudication business rules were quite conservative and resulted in a substantial number of cases that failed eAdjudication but later receive favorable determinations from a human adjudicator. PERSEREC continues work to improve the business rules to increase the percentage of cases that pass eAdjudication without creating risk to national security.

Workplace and School Violence

Despite many policy and procedural changes to address workplace violence, DoD continues to experience incidents of workplace violence committed by individuals who were authorized access to DoD facilities. When workplace violence occurs within the DoD, resources are diverted from the larger mission, making it a threat to national security.

PERSEREC has conducted case studies of workplace violence within the DoD to identify common foreground factors that preceded the incidents. A threat assessment approach was used to identify foreground factors of lethal workplace violence committed by DoD insiders. PERSEREC studies showed that cases of lethal workplace violence were influenced by the interaction of discernable personal, interpersonal, and organizational factors. Our studies also included analysis of DoD insider threat policies with regard to the identification, communication, and mitigation of kinetic insider threats. Our studies highlight opportunities for workplace violence prevention by addressing organizational vulnerabilities that enable the escalation of workplace violence. PERSEREC is currently engaged in a review of public school best practices for school security and a comparison with relevant Department of Defense Education Activity policies and procedures to improve the mitigation and prevention of school violence.

Investigation & Adjudication Quality

Quality review helps promote standardization and reciprocity of national security, suitability and fitness determinations. To support these goals, PERSEREC developed tools implemented by DoD to assess the quality of personnel security investigations (PSIs) as well as the documentation accuracy of adjudication decisions. The success of PERSEREC's quality review program was instrumental in the 2011 decision by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to remove DoD's personnel security clearance program from GAO's list of "High Risk" program areas. PERSEREC quality initiatives implemented by DoD included the online "Rapid Assessment of Incomplete Security Evaluations" (RAISE) for monitoring investigation quality, and the "Review of Adjudication Documentation Accuracy and Rationales" (RADAR) for monitoring adjudication documentation quality.

Mental Health Vetting

PERSEREC conducts research to improve the identification of personality disorders and other mental health conditions that may pose a suitability or security risk and to minimize stigma and inefficiencies associated with the investigation and adjudication of mental health conditions. One aspect of this initiative has focused on identifying the behavioral characteristics of individuals that are considered security risks based on personnel security clinician expert ratings. Results were used to develop item weights for the Dispositional Indicators of Risk Exposure (DIRE) scale, which has been successfully used to evaluate the security and mental health fitness of individuals employed in a sensitive nuclear program. A second aspect of this initiative is to minimize the collection of unnecessary information about mental health conditions for initial or continued eligibility for access to classified information. As a result, overly broad mental health questions in Section 21 on the Questionnaire for National Security Positions (SF-86) have been modified to focus on a limited set of standardized clinical conditions that could pose a security risk in an effort to reduce stigma, wasted investigative time and resources. The third aspect of this initiative seeks to improve the timeliness of personnel security investigations and adjudications related to mental health through the development of a trained cadre of clinicians. PERSEREC produced a needs assessment, job analysis, and program of instruction (i.e. curriculum) for psychologists and psychiatrists who provide consulting services to DoD's Personnel Security Program (PSP). A clinician training course is being

developed to include course structure and content. The training course is intended to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and fairness of mental health data collection and interpretation within DoD's PSP.

Adjudicative Desk Reference

The Adjudicative Desk Reference (/Portals/52/Documents/perserec/ADR_Version_4.pdf) (ADR) is a comprehensive, softcopy-based reference work for personnel security adjudicators investigators, and managers. It is a comprehensive collection (500+ pages) of background information about the issues covered by the 13 adjudicative guidelines. For each guideline, such as Alcohol Consumption, it provides information that an adjudicator or manager might want to know about that behavior (i.e., alcohol abuse or dependence) before making a decision, or that an investigator should know in order to formulate the right questions. This background information about adjudicative issue areas is not U.S. Government policy, so it may not be cited as an authority for denial or suspension of access. It is a job aid to assist personnel security adjudicators, investigators, and managers in implementing the U.S. Government personnel security program. The ADR has also been useful to appeals panels and lawyers dealing with security clearance decisions, personnel officers making suitability and trustworthiness decisions, and Employee Assistance Program counselors. The ADR was updated in 2014 to reflect changes in the adjudicative guidelines and new academic research on the topics covered by these guidelines. Although the ADR has been recommended by the Security Executive Agent Advisory Committee (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, ODNI) and has a wealth of useful information that continues to be accessed by security professionals around the world, users should be aware that it does not reflect policy changes since 2014.

Consolidation of DoD Central Adjudication Facilities (CAFs)

In 1990, PERSEREC assisted DoD with efforts to consolidate DoD adjudication facilities from 18 to eight. In 2010, in concert with Base Closure and Realignment (BRAC)-mandated Central Adjudication Facility (CAF) collocation to Ft. Meade, Maryland, PERSEREC assisted with efforts to further consolidate DoD adjudication. Over the course of these efforts PERSEREC provided key support to the working group tasked with working out a consolidation strategy by compiling and integrating evaluations of potential consolidation approaches and plans. PERSEREC also led the workload analysis, with input from the component CAFs and other stakeholders, to identify operational responsibilities of the new DoD Consolidated Adjudications Facility (DoD CAF) and the resources required to meet those responsibilities. Consolidation helped improve the efficiency and standardization of collateral security and suitability determinations, (e.g., through implementation of automated electronic adjudication “eAdjudication” tools designed by PERSEREC) including new vetting requirements of Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12 (HSPD-12). PERSEREC continues to support discussions on consolidation related topics, including recent analyses requested by the Government Accountability Office, DoD Office of General Counsel (DoD-OGC), and OUSDI regarding potential efficiencies and consistent use of best practices across DoD's Personnel Security Appeals Boards (PSABs).

HISTORY

PERSEREC was established in response to a recommendation by the Department of Defense (DoD) Security Review Commission (known as the Stilwell Commission), set up in the wake of several espionage events including the very damaging Walker spy case, to improve the department's personnel security system. In its 1985 report, the commission called for a personnel security

research center to provide policymakers with an objective basis for policies and processes related to the security clearance system. Established in 1986, PERSEREC was located in Monterey, CA, because of its proximity to the west coast office of the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) and the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), where there was already a nucleus of personnel security data managers and researchers.

Our original directive included a "sunset clause" requiring that the organization cease to exist in 1990 unless DoD directed its continued existence. Based on a favorable review by DoD components of PERSEREC's performance, this clause was eliminated in 1992 and we became a permanent element within the DoD. The beneficial effect of the sunset clause was to force us to focus on creating practical benefits for the personnel security system. (See the section on Past Achievements for some of these benefits.)

Since 1986, PERSEREC's mission has evolved in response to changing needs and opportunities. Several years after the end of the Cold War, we were tasked to evaluate security awareness briefings throughout the intelligence community to ensure that the briefings had been modified to take the changed security environment into account. When the increasing need for reciprocity of clearances led to greater standardization of procedures, PERSEREC drafted the first Federal community-wide version of the Adjudicative Guidelines, approved by the President in 1997. We also drafted the updated version approved by the President in 2006. Over the years we expanded our focus to address additional emerging risks and opportunities under the broader umbrella category of "Insider Threat" to become one of the leading national and international sources for applied government research and science-based recommendations and tools.

For example, because of our focus on personnel security and the clearance program, we systematically analyzed and tracked patterns of malicious insider behavior by Americans who have been arrested for espionage, exfiltration, and other insider crimes against the United States since 1947, and have been a principal provider of unclassified information on espionage and exfiltration to the security community.

Changing technology has had a major impact on our work. As soon as the Internet became available, we began developing web-based products for the dissemination of relevant reference and training materials to the personnel security and counterintelligence communities. We were one of the earliest pioneers of social media and automated database vetting, with a primary focus on the automation of the investigative process. PERSEREC conducted a number of foundational studies demonstrating the feasibility, potential costs, benefits, risks, and outcomes associated with adopting a risk-based approach to continuous personnel vetting with greater reliance on the use of electronic data sources and automated processes. These innovations, developed with input from privacy and civil liberties offices to ensure investigative fairness, are projected to save the government tens of millions of dollars, while improving the timeliness, frequency and thoroughness of investigative checks.

We developed and refined technologies to improve decision-making and diagnostic processes for security and human reliability programs. For example, in coordination with the Joint Suitability and Security Reform effort, and more recently the Government-wide Security, Suitability and Credentialed reform effort, our "eAdjudication" (automated clean-case adjudication) system was implemented across a number of agencies, shortening the case processing times, reducing costs, and improving the consistency of security clearance decisions. This technology is now being adapted to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the process for making employment suitability decisions. In mitigating security, safety, and reliability risks associated with personality disorders, we have developed and validated an assessment instrument that efficiently assesses dysfunctional aspects of personality that are neither accessible via self-report nor readily observable by others, and improved the Mental Health questions on the SF86 Questionnaire for National Security Positions.

Since 2011, we also expanded our applied research to other personnel risk areas, such as how best to encourage help seeking and prevent violence. For example, our efforts are being used to better understand and mitigate suicide, especially for military service personnel. Among the many contributions in this area, progress is being made developing and implementing REACH (“Resources Exist, Asking Can Help”), which is an upstream suicide intervention. Additional efforts have included developing a Military Suicide Postvention Toolkit that assists the Services with promoting healing among survivors of a suicide loss, and the video "Simple Things Save Lives," which was developed to disrupt the bystander effect by encouraging social media users to connect with other users who post content suggesting they are experiencing stress and/or conflict.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Developed a DoD-wide help-seeking training for Services members, Resources Exist, Asking Can Help (REACH), which encourages military personnel to reach out for help despite perceived barriers to care (2020)
- Published Trends of open source information about resource exfiltration cases including espionage (2019)
- Developed a DoD-wide Postvention Toolkit which outlines best practices for responding to a suicide loss in the unit and preventing subsequent suicides. Identified self and supervisory incident reporting rates to quantify the extent of underreporting among the cleared population (2019)
- Established The Threat Lab to realize the DoD Counter-Insider Threat Program Director's vision to incorporate the social and behavioral sciences into the mission space (2018).
- Successfully tested the use of publicly available electronic information in the military accessions and personnel security vetting programs (2014, 2017, 2018).
- Supported SAPRO and Accession Policy efforts to implement assignment eligibility screening for Sexual Assault Responses Coordinators, Victim Advocates, military trainers, instructors, and recruiters (2014-2017).
- Improved Mental Health items (Section 21) on the "Questionnaire for National Security Positions" (SF-86) used for vetting all security clearance applicants and ongoing access eligibility (2014-2016).
- Produced a Guide to support civilian employment suitability and fitness determinations at DoD (2016).
- Produced an Adjudicative Desk Reference (2014, 2007, 1999)
- Successful Completion of Automated Continuous Evaluation System (ACES) Pilot Test Series (2014)
- Supported consolidation of DoD adjudication facilities (1992, 2010-2013).
- Produced an Online Guide to Security Responsibilities (2012, 2006, 2001)

- Developed Adjudicator Certification Program (2010)
- Automated Clean-Case Electronic Adjudication "eAdjudication" for SECRET-Level Cases (2009)
- Rapid Assessment of Incomplete Security Evaluations (RAISE) System for Monitoring Investigation Quality (2009)
- Review of Adjudication Documentation Accuracy and Rationales (RADAR) Method for Monitoring Adjudication Documentation Quality (2009)
- Improved the Predictive Accuracy of Industry Personnel Security Investigation Requirements (2007)
- Developed a System for Automated Continuous Evaluation (ACES)(2005)
- Drafted Adjudicative Guidelines (1994) and Updates Leading to Changes in the National Standard (2005)
- Phased SSBI-PR Implementation that yielded cost-avoidances for DoD of over \$250M (2005)
- Identified Reportable Counterintelligence and Security Indicators (2005)
- Provided Guidance for Supervisor and Coworker Reporting of Information of Security Concern (2003)
- Published a Guide for Preventing and Responding to School Violence (1999) Provided Guidelines for Combating Workplace Violence (1996)
- Enhanced the Productivity and Scope of Background Investigations (1996, 1991)
- Developed an Automated Credit Report System (1994)
- Improved Due Process for Adverse Personnel Determinations in DoD (1995) Developed Military Applicant Security Screening (MASS) (1994)
- Developed a Screening System for Marine Security Guards (1989)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Does PERSEREC conduct background investigations on the general public?

No. Most personnel security investigations for the Department of Defense (DoD) are conducted by DoD's Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA) and its contractors. Our job is to do applied research to support improvements and innovations in personnel security policies and automated systems. Much of our work focuses on policy recommendations, prototype tools, and processes to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and fairness of personnel security systems.

2. Is PERSEREC a defense contractor or a government agency?

PERSEREC is a government entity—a Division of the Office of People Analytics (OPA), which is a component of the Defense Human Resources Activity (DHRA). However, the PERSEREC government team works closely with a contingent of contractor employees collocated at our California research facility.

3. What does personnel security in the Department of Defense mean?

Personnel security is a program for ensuring, to as great an extent as reasonable, that civilian employees, military service members, and defense contractor employees have been properly assessed for trustworthiness and reliability to be in a position of trust that, for many individuals, includes eligibility to access classified information. The DoD must make a determination that cleared employees are loyal to the United States, free of conditions that might impair their judgment, and not vulnerable to personal compromise as a result of concerning foreign affiliations, serious ongoing financial mismanagement, or other past and current behaviors of concern. The Department must also ensure that trusted personnel are aware of their security responsibilities for the protection of classified and sensitive information and are alert to the risks of espionage, terrorist activities, and other security risks.

4. Why have many of the most damaging spies held a high-level security clearance?

While there may have been no justification for denying a clearance to these individuals at the time of their initial selection for a position of trust, people change over time. Issues develop, sometimes years later, that render a person vulnerable to compromise or impel that person to engage in illegal behavior. A major challenge for personnel security programs is to identify and address potential issues and vulnerabilities of members of the current workforce before they develop into espionage and other Insider Threat-related activities. Current Security and Suitability reform efforts, such as implementations of Continuous Evaluation (CE) and Continuous Vetting (CV) should help to address that challenge.

5. Who actually makes decisions about DoD security clearances?

These decisions (or eligibility determinations) are made by personnel security adjudicators who are located at the DoD Consolidated Adjudications Facility (CAF), which is part of the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA). An adjudicator is a government official who makes a decision about eligibility for access to classified information based on all available investigative information, i.e., a "whole person" approach. Adjudicators can also revoke an existing clearance if sufficient information comes to light demonstrating that continued eligibility would present an unacceptable risk to national security.

6. On what grounds could the government deny me a security clearance or remove it after it has been granted?

The criteria for obtaining and keeping a security clearance are outlined as 13 Adjudicative Guidelines (from the 2017 National Security Adjudicative Guidelines, see <https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/Regulations/SEAD-4-Adjudicative-Guidelines-U.pdf>). Each Guideline includes reasons to disqualify an applicant's eligibility for access to classified information, as well as mitigating factors that might justify the granting or retention of a clearance despite the existence of a disqualifying factor.

7. What can I do to keep my security clearance after it has been granted?

The best general advice is to use good judgement; e.g., obey the law, don't take chances such as drinking and driving, and if you develop a financial, drinking, or emotional problem, seek counseling or treatment. Report (to your local Security Officer) suspicious solicitations from unknown persons. Remember that you have been entrusted with national security information and, because of this, you bear a special responsibility not carried by most other citizens.

8. Because many government and contractor jobs require a security clearance, how can I apply for a clearance?

Individuals cannot obtain a security clearance on their own. First, you need to be selected or hired for a position that requires a clearance, and only then can an employer or sponsor submit your application for a security clearance of the appropriate level (e.g., Confidential, Secret, or Top Secret) depending on the requirements of the job. At that time you must fill out a personnel security questionnaire to start the investigation.

9. How likely is it for a security clearance application to be denied, or a current clearance revoked, because an individual has a mental health condition or is seeking Mental Health treatment?

Although individuals are understandably concerned about this, the likelihood of denial or revocation is very small. Based on 14 years of data (FY2006-19), for individuals who reported a mental health condition or treatment, less than 1% had their security clearances denied or revoked due solely to the mental health issue.

More information, advice and answers about DoD's personnel security program are available at the DCSA website: <https://www.dcsa.mil/mc/pv/>