Secrecy and Physicists: Intersections of Science and National Security
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Physicists have been proponents as well as critics of government secrecy affecting their work. Enrico Fermi once wrote (in Physics Today) that “Contrary to perhaps what is the most common belief about secrecy, secrecy was not started by generals, was not started by security officers, but was started by physicists.” Yet Edward Teller, Frederick Seitz and others argued that secrecy in science and technology could profitably be reduced by 90% or more. Secrecy in physics is of course most pronounced in research related to nuclear weapons development. Though this is a longstanding concern it is still not a settled one. Disputes over nuclear weapons-related secrecy continue to resonate today as researchers and authors challenge the boundaries of official disclosure regarding the nuclear weapons enterprise. This paper will survey the current landscape of secrecy in science, and will discuss recent controversies involving publication of nuclear weapons physics, the infrastructure of nuclear research, and the prospects for secrecy reform.