MIT and IDA: a new relationship

By Reid Abee

The controversial Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA), which has been called an instrument of unscrupulous complicity with the military, has always been handled "at arms length" by its members-institution, said Dr. J.P. Ruina, a former President, Dr. Ruina, now MIT Vice-President for Special Laboratories, explained that the ten universities which sponsor IDA have always had a free regard to the appropriateness of classified research on campus, and that they do not take an active part in IDA operations.

Structural change

IDA, Ruina said, has a board of trustees, in which twelve members directly represent the sponsoring institutions, but in which there are a number of members-at-large. It is in the function of the Board of Trustees to choose the management and determine to some extent the institutional policies.

A new proposal drafted by IDA's member trustees in March would alter the corporate structure to make IDA even more remote from the member institutions, under the new system it would be free agents who are merely nominated by the universities.

The drafting of the resolution followed soon after two of the member institutions, Princeton University of Chicago, voted in faculty meetings to change their relationship with IDA. The Princeton faculty voted overwhelmingly in approval of a plan to "change the structure of IDA to one in which universities are not responsible for its management and activities." It is believed that campuses protest against IDA had a part in motivating the proposed change.

The heart of IDA is in Alexandria, Va., as are most of its operations. IDA's only outlying facility is the Communications Research Division located in Weizmann Hall at Princeton University, which conducts theoretical research in communications and crypsanalysis. The presence of that facility caused so much friction with the students at Princeton that the University confidentially put to CRD outside.

IDA was founded about twelve years ago, when the Defense Department recognized the need for sophisticated defense analyses which could not be made within the traditional military structures. The first attempts at those analyses were made within the civil service; when that failed, the Defense Department approached MIT. MIT recognized at that time that it would be inappropriate to conduct the Defense Department's classified work on campus; so rather than take the job itself, MIT agreed to take the lead in forming a "consortium of universities" to handle aspects of the SST by IDA's Economic and Political Studies Division.

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