MIT's foreign policy: careful consideration

By Michael McNamara

The recent international negotiations between MIT and Saudi Arabia, which broke down apparently over the issue of Saudi Arabian funds for nuclear research at MIT, illustrate that the Iranian nuclear engineering program which caused so much concern on the campus this semester isn't going to be an isolated case of "foreign policy" for MIT.

The proposed Saudi program would have contacted MIT to a straightforward piece of technical cooperation - the development of Arubian needs for water and electrical power, and environmental plans to meet those needs. It involved nothing exploitive - just a technical solution to an immediate problem, "buying" of an academic department at MIT expense, or the politics of the containment government.

But even such standard research, when translated into the context of dealing with a foreign government, raises political and moral issues which are far more complex. The same problem is addressed more seriously when it can be seen that policies and procedures outlined in MIT's past studies of foreign financial commitments - the committee when it completes its work.

Similarly, a report on the Iran contracts, past foreign contacts and offers, and the history of MIT's international commitments should be prepared and released. There is almost no information available on this topic anywhere. While, presumably, the committee on international commitments will be informed of these things, the whole committee's decrees have to be told, both to participate in the discussion and to be able to respond to the recommendations of the committee when it completes its work.

Finally, there should be a moratorium, or stop foreign contracting until the committee reports a contract acceptable to the faculty and establishes mechanisms for dealing with such programs. The administration says it has been justified past offers from abroad on the same grounds as any domestic or foreign programs which, in two restated cases, have proven inadequate. Holding all ongoing negotiations until MIT has clarified and stated its policies on foreign contracts, and that MIT must not just prevent such misgivements mistakes as the Iranian program, which appears to be alternative administration closing contracts alternatives to the MIT and MIT should be making unalterable precedent. In addition, if MIT's foreign dealings are as extensive as they seem to be, such a moratorium will need a much closer look at the policy review - a highly process to date which might well start some unnecessary encouragement.

There is no doubt that MIT will need some sort of foreign policy to deal with new needs, and the long-term implications of the recent contract. MIT has yet to get an adequate framework for setting unalterable precedent. In addition, if MIT's foreign dealings are as extensive as they seem to be, such a moratorium will need a much closer look. The policy review - a highly process to date which might well start some unnecessary encouragement.

The first is that the administration should heed the spirit of the IRG report, by having a foreign policy which is based on the broadest possible participation in the policy-making process. It should not be a decision made by one or two people in the administration without the faculty. The committee when it completes its work.

The second is that the administration should not be held as a final case of "foreign policy" for MIT. The negotiations with Saudi Arabia may be an isolated one, but the pressure for such contracts will continue. The administration should heed the spirit of the IRG report, by having a foreign policy which is based on the broadest possible participation in the policy-making process. It should not be a decision made by one or two people in the administration without the faculty. The committee when it completes its work.

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