Military research influences the MIT education

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Ph.D. salaries are inflated by strong military demand. MIT competes for labor by raising faculty salaries, and pays for it by raising tuition.

Military funding not only affects the size of academic departments, but also the biases research areas explored. DOD influence in computer science probably contributes to Project Athena's networking excellence and lack of interacting software expertise.

Outside funding also affects MIT policy. MIT prides itself on a policy of nondiscrimination against gays and lesbians. Except when the military is doing the discrimination, as in ROTC.

And consider the effect on society as a whole. The sustained military research budget in times of peace reflects and contributes to the dominance of military concerns within all technological enterprises. With SDI, military pervasiveness will only increase.

Congressmen say that the Strategic Defense Initiative is harmless because it's only research. But $20 billion of research in five years is four times the annual military research budget of all universities in the nation today.

But won't SDI drain engineers from the non-military high-technology industries that are vital to our economy? What additional cost in high technology trade will we bear?

And what will happen to MIT and our society if the revolutionizing influence of technology becomes increasingly military-driven?

So much in the world is interconnected, beyond math, physics, and electrical engineering. I learned almost nothing about the forces which shape society from my undergraduate MIT curriculum.

But awareness of dangerous technological influence is inextricably linked with our survival on this planet. I hope MIT will promote such awareness through educational reform, and be willing to take controversial actions. But when universities line up like lemmings in the queue for Star Wars research, I wonder if it's already too late.

(Editor's note: Cowan is a graduate student in computer science and a member of MIT Student Pugwash.)

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