feedback

SDI compromising

To the Editor:

We have recently learned of a disturbing development in the research funding practices of the US Department of Defense (DoD). DoD intends to use the prestige and standing of MIT and other research universities — and their demonstrated wealth, prestige and status — to pursue an effort to influence and legitimize the politically controversial Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), commonly known as "Star Wars." These efforts are being coordinated by the MIT Office of the Provost and the MIT Academic Senate. What has MIT's response been to this dilemma, and why has MIT failed to address the issue?

In recent years, DoD has been providing increasing amounts of basic research funding to MIT. However, MIT researchers might inadvertently be providing DoD with control over the selection of candidates for SDI funding, thereby influencing DoD's selection of SDI projects. When researchers are in such a situation, there is a serious risk of undue influence on their work.

We believe that MIT should reverse itself and encourage open discussion of SDI funding issues. MIT should take the lead in initiating discussions with other research universities and federal agencies to ensure that research funding is not used to influence the selection of SDI projects. In addition, MIT should request that this statement be published in the first issues of its journals and other publications. MIT has no plans to take a stand on this issue and has, in fact, tried to prevent faculty from publicly voicing objections to the program if they mention its existence. MIT should consider reversing its policy of trying to censor itself, thereby ensuring that the academic community can express its views on this issue.

In conclusion, we believe that MIT should do the following:

- MIT should immediately issue a statement articulating its current policies in regard to the impacts of SDI funding on university life.
- MIT should outline the steps it intends to take to ensure that its researchers and students are able to participate in SDI initiatives in a manner consistent with its academic values.
- MIT should make clear that it will not tolerate attempts by DoD to influence the selection of SDI projects, and that it will take appropriate measures to ensure that such attempts do not occur.
- MIT should initiate discussions with other research universities and federal agencies to ensure that research funding is not used to influence the selection of SDI projects.
- MIT should request that this statement be published in the first issues of its journals and other publications.

We hope that MIT will take this opportunity to revisit its policies on SDI funding and to ensure that its researchers and students are able to participate in SDI initiatives in a manner consistent with its academic values.

Sincerely,

[Signatures]

[Names and Affiliations]

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