



Rules of Engagement

How Government Can Leverage Academe

Martin Kramer

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About the Author

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—Martin Kramer
June 2011

“Science has no fatherland, but the scientist must have one.”

—Louis Pasteur

Introduction: Opening Academe

NO ONE WHO watches Washington closely can fail to note the enhanced role of academics in foreign policy and punditry since the election of President Barack Obama. Not only have some leading academics been recruited to serve in policy positions, many more have huddled with top officials behind closed doors. Gossip blogs name the professors who have been summoned to the White House or State Department to share their views on U.S. policy toward Iran's ambitions or Egypt's revolution. International relations and area specialists drop hints of their discreet influence over the exercise of American "smart power." They clearly are not ashamed to be perceived by their peers and the public as foreign policy insiders.

It is a remarkable shift. For almost two generations, major parts of academe have been alienated from America's exercise of power. The deeper origins of this attitude lie in the turbulent 1960s, a period of distrust during which the universities became cauldrons of opposition to U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. The student protesters of that era became professors, and today they populate the top rungs of academe. Many never abandoned their antipathy toward the institutions that define and defend U.S. interests, especially intelligence agencies and the military. The most enduring evidence for the persistence of this attitude has been the unwillingness of faculty at many leading universities to allow the reinstatement of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), the military training program that was banned from campuses during the Vietnam War.

The September 11 attacks did prompt some academics to rethink their prior assumptions. Al-Qaeda represented a manifest evil, so that helping the United States to combat it seemed like a moral obligation. As one leading liberal academic put it, "I would have been willing to go fight and die myself to protect my country from another such attack."¹

But dissent over the Iraq war dissipated the spirit of shared purpose. By 2006, the partisan gap between Democrats and Republicans on the Iraq war exceeded even that of the Vietnam war.² Academe, one of the

most solidly Democratic redoubts in America, opposed the Bush administration's extension of the "war on terror" to Iraq with a singleness of opinion verging on unanimity. For many academics, Iraq was evidence that American power was still being systematically abused or misused by its stewards. The same academic who had been prepared to die to prevent a recurrence of 9/11 emerged as one of the Iraq war's most vigorous critics.

But time heals. The 1960s generation is headed toward retirement, and its grip on the institutions of academe is weakening. (The *New York Times* ran a piece in 2008 under the headline "The '60s Begin to Fade as Liberal Professors Retire.")³ The most practical and symbolic aspect of academic alienation, the campus ban on ROTC, is eroding fast across America's elite campuses, from Stanford to Harvard. ("Once a campus outcast, ROTC is booming at universities," announced a 2011 *Los Angeles Times* headline.)⁴ And academics who study foreign lands are prepared to engage government more openly and more intensively than at any time since the presidency of John F. Kennedy.

How government might facilitate this other engagement is the topic of this paper. I took a first cut at it under very different circumstances, in the middle of the Bush years, at a moment of maximum need—and maximum alienation. The September 11 attacks and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan drove government agencies and the U.S. military to scour for experts, analysts, translators: anyone with applicable knowledge about the theaters of the war on terror. They went to the think tanks, the consulting firms, the "heritage communities"—America's own citizens and residents from the battlefield countries—in an effort to find the ideas and people needed to support America's wars.

But above all, the agencies looked toward the universities. Government rightly identifies academe as a vast "open source," a tremendous domestic store of knowledge about the wider world, probably the largest outside government itself. Academe is home to people who know foreign histories, languages, traditions, and politics—knowledge often resulting from years of research

and training in foreign places. It is also chock-full of well-educated people who come precisely from those foreign places that so preoccupy policymakers. And although, as academics, they process and package knowledge in ways that may seem arcane to outsiders, Washington could mine and refine that knowledge directly, obviating the need to collect it far away and perhaps honing its analysis in the process.

Government is also aware that academe is home, for four years or more, to many of America's most promising young people. There they are schooled, tested, and sorted. Although government recruits students on its own, partly through a wide range of scholarship programs with service requirements, the persuasive force of a faculty mentor is powerful reinforcement. If relationships could be established with the professorial mentors of outstanding students, such a process could facilitate their recruitment. Connections with faculty also could save many costly misses when sorting out other potential recruits.

The Bush administration did launch a number of initiatives to recruit from academe, carefully constructed to circumvent the familiar sources of opposition. Agencies of government and the military gingerly probed for opportunities, and they found a few. ("A Pentagon Olive Branch to Academe"—so ran the headline on one story about an April 2008 speech by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates to the Association of American Universities in Washington.)⁵ But even these modest initiatives sometimes encountered resistance, especially when they approached the humanities and social sciences.

This study only became relevant again with Obama's election. Presidential power is now in the hands of one of "their own"—a graduate of Columbia and Harvard, and a former faculty member at the University of Chicago. A commander in chief formed by Morning-side Heights, Cambridge, and Hyde Park is perfectly positioned to summon the legions of academics who campaigned and voted for him. Believers in "soft" or "smart" power, they are keen to prove its applicability in the real world. The romance of the "best and the brightest" is enjoying a minor revival.

No one knows how long the present moment of grace will last, but this once-in-a-generation opening

should be used to create structured and effective partnerships among the many clusters of American knowledge about the world. And since the flow between government and academe is the most obstructed, this is where the most work needs to be done. In this lies the potential for transformation.

To do this work, there must be an in-depth understanding in government of what drives and motivates academics. This paper is intended as a kind of short field manual for government's engagement with academics. The American research university is a different setting from a government agency or a Washington think tank. The hierarchy of incentives and rewards is easy to misconstrue by anyone who has not spent considerable time on a campus since school days. Some of this story has been parodied in campus novels, precisely because the university seems like a foreign land to those who reside outside it. But while the codes of academic life may sometimes seem as impenetrable as Afghan tribal rivalries, they have their own internal logic, and decoding them might similarly turn adversaries into allies.

This paper is arranged around what I regard as the three keys to understanding the inner workings of academe. The first is peer review: the crucial need of academics to have their work validated by their peers—and no one else. How can government, which has no peer standing, build peerlike clout? The second (which may seem to contradict the first) is independence: the certain belief of academics that they are the freest and most truthful of all people and that their independence is best preserved by endowments. How can government, which makes no endowments, gain the leverage held by those who do make them? The third is access: the preoccupation of academics with securing and maintaining their unimpeded access to sources, data, and foreign places. How can government, which classifies information, share enough of it to compete?

Even a glance at these drivers of academic behavior reveals their contradictions. For example, how much truth really gets spoken when it contradicts peer consensus or might lead a foreign government to withhold a research permit? Academe constantly wrestles with the dilemmas posed by its own values, and consensus is elusive. Powerful forces within academe seek

to regulate it, precisely to assure that outsiders do not. But these abounding contradictions themselves open room to maneuver for outsiders: corporations, donors, foreign governments—and, not least, the U.S. government.

I was approached to write this study because I wrote an earlier critique of Middle East studies in America. I have been asked in the course of this project whether the American interest would be better served by the isolation of academe. If, as I showed in my book, the denizens of Middle East studies departments and centers have been so biased and error-prone, what is the point of encouraging government's engagement with them?

Middle East studies may be a particularly egregious case of alienation and failure, but even in my book I stressed their potential as an asset: "The field is still home to many talented, experienced, and knowledgeable people, who could contribute much more than they do, were they not burdened by dogma or pressured to conform. The field is ripe for change." I also predicted their renewal and reinvigoration by a new generation, more open to competing ideas and more respectful of intellectual differences than were their 1960s-scarred predecessors.⁶ Having made that prediction in 2001, I have seen it come partly to pass. I am often asked if I am optimistic or pessimistic about the future of my own field; I answer that I wrote an optimistic book and have every reason to believe my optimism has been justified by subsequent events.

Americans—even those who openly disdain the prejudices and foibles of the nation's tenured faculty—continue to draw deeply on their personal fortunes to assure their children the credentials only universities can confer. If they believe that their own eighteen-year-olds are capable of sorting useful knowledge from the bias of ideological faculty, there is no reason to think the U.S. government incapable of doing the same.

Because I am a Middle East expert, because I have written this paper for a think tank specializing in the Middle East, and because the Middle East takes up so much of America's foreign policy bandwidth, I will be drawing my examples from the study and analysis of the Middle East. No doubt a similar study could

be compiled with a focus on East Asia or Africa or another world region. I have reason to believe that patterns of interaction with government are shared across the humanities and social sciences. But I feel constrained to write about what I know. Hopefully, my analysis and recommendations will be more broadly applicable, even if the examples are specific.

This paper, published as it is by a Washington think tank as a "Policy Focus," is directed toward policymakers in government, and not to academics. I presuppose something less than an in-depth familiarity with the culture and workings of academe. Academics know the issues, know what they do, and may even know why they do it. My purpose is to provide policymakers with some useful pointers as they consider how to get professors, deans, and university presidents to work with them.

Finally, I make no effort to assess the many fellowship programs that have as their objective the recruitment of students to government service. The general trend in such programs is away from no-obligation fellowships (such as the Foreign Language and Area Studies fellowships administered by Title VI area studies centers) and toward fellowships encumbered with service requirements (such as the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program). My assumption is that however these fellowship programs are structured, they are all bound to be more effective if university faculty—the mentors of these very same students—are themselves engaged with government at some level.

The Smith Richardson Foundation supported this study, and Nadia Schadlow, senior program officer, showed great forbearance and patience during its gestation. I also took inspiration from her own paper, *The Struggle against Radical Islam: A Donor's Guide*, in which she posed this question: "With the billions put into the global war on terror (now often referred to as the Long War) by the U.S. government, many funders may very well ask: What is left to do?"⁷ The Smith Richardson Foundation and The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, both privately funded entities, found something left to do: suggest how to invest some of those resources more productively. This is a modest contribution to that end.

1 | Apply Peer Pressure

IMAGINE THAT OPENING a business or introducing a new product line required the approval of all of one's leading competitors. This scenario comes close to conveying the essence of academe's primary means of self-regulation: peer review. It also constitutes the major obstacle to enhanced cooperation between government and academe.

Peer review is at the very core of academic life. Throughout his or her career, the academic is subject to periodic, secret review by peers. Some peers will be colleagues who work in the same institution, but the true universe of one's peers is disciplinary—fellow academics who, wherever they are on the face of the globe, belong to the same discipline. And it is called a “discipline” for a reason. Academic disciplines are intensely self-regulating, and academics know that their appointments and promotions, and the publishing on which both depend, will all be decided secretly by peers around the world, whom they may or may not know.

For example, to earn a promotion, and especially to receive tenure, an academic must receive favorable recommendations from perhaps a dozen or more peers who are secretly solicited to write their impressions of the candidate's publications and scholarly demeanor. Likewise, university presses, which constitute the gold standard of publishing for purposes of promotion and tenure, also solicit reports by anonymous readers before accepting a manuscript for publication. Of course, it is important to be valued in one's own institution, and by one's own colleagues. But while this may be necessary, the scope of peer review assures that it is not sufficient.

This review process introduces uncertainty and unpredictability in the career trajectory of every academic. The result is that academics are extremely sensitive to the zeitgeist in their disciplines. This sensitivity is especially acute in the humanities and social sciences, which tend to be driven by politics, fad, and fashion to a far greater extent than other disciplines. A major disciplinary role is played by professional associations— for example, the Middle East Studies Association and

the American Anthropological Association—which purport to maintain discipline-wide standards through their power to confer honors. Inevitably, these associations have committees that seek to establish and uphold ethical standards of conduct and protect “academic freedom.” Few academics can afford to defy the consensus of such bodies or remain indifferent to their formal sanctions.

In such associations, the most radical activists tend to gain ascendancy, at least in committees. Indeed, these activists often view professional associations as a prime arena for political mobilization. Eschewing mainstream politics, they seek compensation in the hallways and back rooms at annual conferences in Boston or San Francisco. Though not necessarily the most distinguished scholars in their fields, they tend to be the most vociferous and purport to manifest the living conscience of their peers—who, they are wont to complain, are always ready to sell out a timeless principle in exchange for a transient gain.

Such peer communities make up perhaps the most entrenched obstacle to government's engagement with academe, seeking to prove their virtue (or at least their relevance) through their vigilance in upholding the purity of their fields. To their minds, too close and intimate a collaboration with government is a form of defilement, which it is their duty to resist. At the very least, these communities insist on their prerogative to scrutinize every program, relationship, and connection—institutional or private—to determine whether it conceals some element that would endanger “academic freedom.” Given the conclusion drawn decades ago that the principal threat to such freedom emanates from Washington, it is not surprising that the records of academic professional associations are full of resolutions warning members against the temptations dangled before them by the state.

So how does government evade or erode such opposition? One route has been to answer secrecy with secrecy—that is, to establish relations with individual scholars away from the campus, on a strictly

confidential basis. There are grounds to believe that the number of scholars who have participated in projects sponsored by the intelligence and defense communities in fields such as Middle Eastern studies is much larger than anyone in those fields is prepared to admit. Emile Nakhleh, a CIA analyst who was responsible for political Islam in the agency, has described his efforts in these words:

In order to benefit from the wealth of knowledge that exists in academia on Islamic activism and on Muslim societies in general, the CIA encouraged me to put in place a comprehensive academic outreach program and urged its analysts to stay current on the open-source literature and academic research and publications. Although the CIA academic outreach had a rocky start in the early 1990s—academics were rather skittish in dealing with the world of intelligence—in the following decade and a half the program became robust and acquired credibility in the world of academe. I systematically reached out to academics and other private-sector experts on the subject and began to invite them to annual conferences and monthly symposia series...Over the years, hundreds of U.S. academics with expertise in the Middle East, Muslim countries, and Islamic activism worldwide have participated in these events.⁸

It is telling that Nakhleh mentions not a single name of any of the “hundreds” of participants in these symposia. Although these events would have been entirely unclassified, and the academics involved would have offered precisely the same analyses as in their published writings, the mere fact of the encounter would be regarded by other academics as scandalous.

If peer review operates in utmost secrecy, why should this alternative peer community not conduct itself secretly as well? As Nakhleh attested:

Senior academics who participated in the first two conferences began to strongly encourage other, and perhaps more skeptical, professors to participate in the CIA-sponsored outreach program because of its quality. One senior professor told a colleague of his, “Don’t worry about participating in the program; I know the organizer and the quality of the program.”⁹

This is one strategy for overcoming the constraints imposed by academic peer communities: operate in secrecy and build up an alternative peer community

that offers younger participants encouragement and validation by a few senior scholars. If this could be achieved by the CIA (the most suspect agency of government) and in Middle East studies (the most suspicious corner of academe), it could presumably be done by any branch of government, with anyone.

But the participation of an academic in a one-day symposium in a nondescript building somewhere in Northern Virginia is a very low-intensity form of engagement. Government has always sought to achieve another, wider objective: to influence the research agendas of academics and pull them in directions relevant to national security needs.

Such projects are regarded by some academics as far more intrusive, apt to subvert a process of prioritization that should be governed entirely by academic peers. Academic research is produced, first and foremost, in pursuit of appointments and advancement within university hierarchies. Because career progress depends so closely on the opinions of one’s peers, collective conventional wisdom determines what is worthy of study and what is not.

These priorities may be dramatically different from those of government. Indeed, academics take pride in producing work for one another according to rules internal to their field, and according to priorities no one else shares. As a result, much research clusters around a few privileged subjects deemed especially important, when in fact the researcher’s audience is composed almost entirely of academics, whose criteria for determining which subjects are worthy of study often include their irrelevance to the mundane interests of the United States.

A prime example of scholarly inclinations was the 1990s neglect of the study of Iraq. The United States had waged a major war against Iraq in 1991, with half a million U.S. troops dispatched to Kuwait to expel Saddam Hussein’s forces from that country. This should have provided ample incentive for American scholars to invest their efforts in further study of Iraq. After all, it did not take a great deal of imagination to see that the United States was likely to clash with Saddam Hussein again. New research opportunities also arose from the transfer to the United States of eighteen metric tons

of Iraqi official documents—four million documents in all—that became available to American researchers through a project at Harvard. Furthermore, Congress authorized a new program to promote research on the Middle East, which gave dozens of overseas research grants to American academics in the early 1990s. Its chief program officer said it would not have come into existence “were it not for Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent war.”¹⁰

Yet this combination of incentives did nothing to fill the empty shelf of Iraq studies in American academe. Some of America’s leading academics admitted as much in 2003, when the United States launched yet another war against Iraq. Augustus Richard Norton of Boston University put it this way: “We don’t have a single academic expert in America who understands how Iraqi politics work in 2003, not a clue.” Judith Yaphe of the National Defense University echoed the lament: “There’s nobody in this country who really knows the internal dynamics, the fabric of how Iraq works.”¹¹ Later the myth would develop that if only Washington had listened to its academic Iraq “experts,” the Iraq war might have turned out differently. “I have many friends who are Iraq experts,” claimed Rashid Khalidi, a professor of history at Columbia, who went on to insist that all these friends warned against war.¹² In fact, the United States had hardly any academic Iraq experts, as evidenced by the absence of a single American-authored in-depth study or up-to-date primer on the country.

University of Michigan historian Juan Cole gave this explanation for the yawning Iraq gap in academic research:

No American historian has essayed a major work on Baathist Iraq, for which the sources would have to be propaganda-ridden Iraqi newspapers, expatriate memoirs with an axe to grind, Western news wire reports, and what documents the U.S. government has been willing to declassify. Given the limitations of these sources, it is no wonder that most scholars have devoted their energies to the Ottoman and British periods, for which more documentation exists, the biases of which are more easily dealt with because passions have cooled with the passage of centuries.¹³

This explanation offers a window into the mindset that had effectively suppressed the study of contemporary Iraq in the American academy. A young researcher approaching Cole or one of his colleagues with a proposal to work on Baathist Iraq would have been told not to waste his or her time. Outside the United States, scholars did invaluable work on this very subject, making excellent use of (among other sources) those “propaganda-ridden Iraqi newspapers.” But in America, the academic leadership of Middle East studies actively discouraged comparable research on Iraq.

And what sort of research did the leaders of Middle East studies deem worthwhile? The shortest path to positions, influence, and power in Middle East studies ran through the study of the Palestinians. Analysis of the papers presented at the annual Middle East Studies Association conferences showed that studies of the Palestinians consistently outnumbered research papers on Iraq, both before and after the Iraq war. (In fact, in most years, the Palestinians were the most studied of all Arab peoples. Only papers on Egypt occasionally surpassed those on the Palestinians in quantity.) And in the study of the Palestinians, to judge from the research topics, any period and any subject were just fine. Newspapers, memoirs, and oral testimonies—the very same sources dismissed by Cole as ruling out academic study of Iraq—were accepted as evidence in the study of the Palestinians.¹⁴

In 2004, Cole announced proudly that “a significant part of the U.S. government is now busily reading the books and articles about the Middle East produced by Middle East academics at U.S. universities. Without that corpus of literature, these brave and dedicated men and women would be flying blind.”¹⁵ In fact, they were flying blind even with this “corpus” of literature, because so much of it was so far removed from the main concern in 2004, Iraq. Noah Feldman, a law professor sent to Iraq in May 2003 to serve as a constitutional advisor, witnessed the following scene on the military transport he took to Baghdad:

Pausing to take in the moment, I glanced around at my new colleagues. Those who were awake were reading intently. When I saw what they were reading,

though, a chill crept over me, too. Not one seemed to need a refresher on Iraq or the Gulf region. Without exception, they were reading new books on the American occupation and reconstruction of Germany and Japan.¹⁶

But what else *was* there to read? In the absence of analysis, these Americans had fallen back on its weak cousin, analogy.

It is possible for government to circumvent obstacles and influence research priorities, by directly or indirectly commissioning research projects by academics. But such initiatives have always required a particularly deft hand and sensitivity to the peculiar circumstances created by peer monitoring. For this reason, many in government have viewed the effort as more trouble than it is worth.

Commissioning research is more trouble because a vast difference exists, in the academic view, between private consulting—that one-day visit to Washington, or a ten-page background paper—and prolonged research leading to substantial publications. Consulting is basically a private matter, permitted by universities to their faculty as a matter of course, within specified time limits. In contrast, publication-generating research can be subject to university regulations (especially if it uses university facilities or involves human subjects), its funding may have to be funneled through a university's sponsored research office, and it ultimately involves a decision by a publisher.

Any stage in this process can trigger close scrutiny by peers, who will pay particular attention to two requirements in the regulations of most universities and the resolutions of most professional associations: a publication cannot be subject to prepublication review by its sponsor, and it must carry a full disclosure of all funding sources. At every stage, sponsorship by a government or national security agency is a potential red flag—and a possible deterrent, especially for younger faculty.

So how does a deft hand in government stimulate substantial publications within academe? One approach is to identify a mediating institution that enjoys academic respectability yet falls outside the formal purview of academe, and to channel the initiative

through it. This approach, pioneered decades ago by the U.S. Air Force in its relationship with the RAND Corporation, has created space for academics to conduct research defined by military and intelligence priorities. The intermediate institutions effectively turn the link between government and the academics into a business transaction through a third party, in which the two principal parties interact indirectly.

Few American experts on any aspect of the contemporary Middle East have never been approached by a consulting firm or think tank to prepare a study ultimately funded by a military or intelligence agency. More experts have accepted such offers than are prepared to admit it. But in absolute numbers, they represent a very small percentage of the much larger pool of knowledge still effectively locked up in the closed discourse of academe.

Another model, again relying on intermediate parties, rests on stimulating policy-relevant research within the space provided by such quasi-governmental institutions as the U.S. Institute of Peace and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. These institutions have been immensely successful in building reputations as semischolarly venues, in which academics rub shoulders with officials. The U.S. Institute of Peace, in particular, has proven to be an extremely effective conduit for academic input into policy debates on Iraq and Afghanistan. Its historic connection to the State Department has done much to associate its approach in the minds of academics with “soft power” and so endear it to the liberal center within academe. The Woodrow Wilson Center, in its Middle East Program, has placed primary emphasis on Iran and has been favored by the Obama administration as a contact point with academe. Because these institutions depend in whole or in part on the federal government for their funding, they are careful to tune their research agendas to current policy needs. But because of their independence from any single government agency, they are difficult to pigeonhole.

Indeed, it might be taken as a compliment that the government of Iran targeted the Middle East Program of the Wilson Center. Its Iranian-American director was detained in Iran on suspicion of fomenting a

“velvet revolution” at the behest of the Bush administration. Her interrogation and imprisonment by Iranian authorities revolved entirely around the research agenda of the Wilson Center, whose leadership felt compelled to announce that the center had no role in servicing the administration’s Iran policy.¹⁷ Still, for all these professions of independence, the Wilson Center is unquestionably a place nurtured and fostered by the U.S. government in order to harvest ideas, especially from academe, that might inform policy debates.

The Wilson Center model is particularly tilted toward research that favors engagement over confrontation, and diplomacy over “kinetic” action. The same holds true at the U.S. Institute of Peace. This leaves out the Defense Department, which has been most directly responsible for getting things right on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan. As the military is itself an instrument of American “hard power,” it is regarded by many critics of U.S. policy as somehow uniquely culpable for the inevitable errors that attend to the use of such power. The Pentagon thus has a harder row to hoe in tapping the intellectual capital of academe. It has done so in part through the traditional machinery of contractual relations with mediating third parties, especially think tanks that have long histories of conducting Pentagon-sponsored research. To a limited extent, the military can use its own academic institutions as links to wider academe. The National Defense University, the war colleges, and the military academies all interact with the margins of civilian academe.

But there is ample evidence that the Pentagon desires more: an intimate relationship with academics that would give it direct access to academe and would, in turn, stimulate interaction between defense and academic research. This results in part from the realization, in both Iraq and Afghanistan, that the success of counterinsurgency depends on a multidimensional understanding of foreign social structures, cultures, and narratives—and that this cannot be acquired on the fly, but does exist in corners of academe, where scholars may devote a lifetime to studying subject matter that once seemed arcane but has now become topical, such as the structure of the Shiite religious

hierarchy in Iraq or the interactions of Afghan tribes and ethnic groups.

The latest Pentagon initiative to stimulate university-based research is the Minerva Initiative, which was announced by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in 2008. The Minerva Initiative consists of research grants in areas marked priorities by the Department of Defense. The administrators of Minerva, acutely aware of the history of academic resistance to “penetration” of the academy by military and intelligence agencies, have sought to give academic researchers a sense of autonomy comparable to what they enjoy in other research. The resulting work will be unclassified and subjected to minimal procedures of vetting.

But the Defense Department has not hidden itself behind the usual multiple layers of separation. In Minerva, a deliberate effort is being made to legitimize open interaction between the Defense Department and the social sciences. One of the initiative’s implicit purposes is to transform the climate of relations between academe and the military. Minerva has been criticized, in some quarters, as a renewed effort by the Pentagon to “infiltrate” academe and distort its research agendas in such a way as to preclude disinterested scholarship.¹⁸ This claim misses the point. If the Defense Department merely wished to shift the research agenda of academics, it could have done so discreetly through mediating third parties. Minerva is more ambitious.

Ultimately, while each agency of government has its own preferred technique for engaging academe, the shared objective should be the same: the creation of a large peer community within universities that is responsive to engagement with government and prepared to defend it against its critics, both on campus and in professional associations. Peer validation is crucial to securing academic status for research that, while solicited and supported by government, nevertheless aspires to the standards of academic scholarship. The aim must be to transform the perception of government sponsorship from something unusual and slightly suspect to something commonplace and mundane—in other words, comparable to the research grant programs of the major foundations.

And the government would do well to take a page from the foundations, the most successful of which have adapted their grants programs to the academic environment. They have effectively built their own peer communities of academics who, in the past, have also been recipients of research grants and who help to identify promising younger scholars whose research agendas they seek to influence. While these foundations have program officers, they are careful to institute academic-style peer review, which enhances the prestige of their grants and the willingness of promotion and tenure committees and university presses to treat the resulting products without prejudice.

Just as important, these foundations favor giving large numbers of smaller grants, which are crucial to the work of scholars in the early stages of their careers. A small research travel grant, money to hire a research assistant, a semester off to complete a major project—these are all relatively modest needs, but for the younger scholar, having them met can make all the difference between a finished product and a stalled project. And since the objective is creating a peer community, the larger the community is, the better—as in those “hundreds” of participants in CIA symposia. Individualistic as academics pretend to be, when it

comes to dealing with government, there is more comfort in the herd—and the larger the herd, the more comfortable the individual.

Unlike foundations, government is often ill-equipped to deal with a multitude of small grants. In its first grant cycle, Minerva made a handful of individual grants in the millions of dollars—a traditional preference of the Defense Department, which is accustomed to administering “big science” research projects. But it is important, when departments like Defense seek to engage academe, to remember that the way to build the widest possible peer community is to “spread the wealth.”

Adapting in this way can be a bureaucratic headache, and government usually prefers to work with a few well-established grantees. When grants are small by definition (such as student scholarships), their administration is often outsourced. But if government agencies are to enjoy something of the same relationship to academe as the major foundations in the social sciences and humanities, it must emulate them. That means making available small grants and closely monitoring their progress through program officers who double as network builders—in this case, between their agency and academe, and among their agency’s academic grantees.

2 | Seed, Not Feed

A CORE CONVICTION of academe is that it exists as a separate estate, independent of the state, the church, corporations, the media—that, indeed, it constitutes an oasis of critical thought about the failings of every other estate. Part of the myth of academe is that it alone is truly capable of self-regulation, because it alone benefits from practices that guarantee its denizens will always speak truth.

The most important of these guarantees is the endowment. Universities and colleges are funded from many sources, but the most prestigious of the sources—those used to finance research chairs and centers—are generally received as endowments in perpetuity. A benefactor bestows upon the institution a gift, which becomes the sole property of the institution and the proceeds of which are disbursed to the faculty for use as they see fit. While the benefactor broadly defines the purposes of the gift, it is the faculty who chooses which of their number will benefit from it. This beneficiary, who owes no obligation to the benefactor, is free to pursue his or her research in whichever direction it may lead.

Because endowments are so prized, and because of their close association with the ideal of academic independence, those in a position to attract them, and to make them, have a tremendous influence within academe. Endowments are generally described as “hard money,” as opposed to research grants, which are placed under the rubric of “soft money.” Academics may be believers in “soft power,” but they have a strong preference for hard money. Those in the university whose livelihoods depend on soft money find themselves in an endless cycle of grant submissions and reviews, whereas those who benefit from endowments have the leisure to pursue their inquiries wherever they lead.

Endowments are also connected to tenure—that is, the practice of universities to guarantee appointments in perpetuity to their best faculty. These commitments may or may not be backed by an actual endowment, but they are commitments that trump all others. Nothing is more sacrosanct in the university than a tenured

position, and no tenured position is more sacrosanct than one backed up by a specific endowment.

Taken together, endowments and tenure are regarded as the material and institutional foundations of academic freedom, by which academe seeks to distinguish itself from other forms of human endeavor, most of which are governed by continuous accountability. An academic, once tenured and endowed, has more protections than does any person in America—more than chief executive officers, army generals, journalists, congressmen, and even the president of the United States, all of whom may be dismissed or impeached or voted out of office for some perceived failure. And within the university, there is a clear division between the endowed and the tenured on the one hand, and the soft-moneyed and untenured on the other. No one who would engage academe can afford to ignore these basic structural attributes.

The U.S. government operates in this environment at a distinct disadvantage. It cannot endow programs and chairs. The resources it provides are invariably soft. Numerous other players on the academic scene have much more leeway to endow. This obviously includes individuals and corporations, but the greatest problem is posed by foreign individuals and governments, which over the years have sought to influence the academic research agenda to include or exclude topics.

The ideological resistance to engagement with government is diminishing within academe, but the resources emanating from abroad constitute stiff competition with those offered by the U.S. government—a competition fueled by the assumption of many foreigners that American academics make great lobbyists. A prime example of how this has affected the research agenda in Middle East studies is the case of Saudi funding for academic programs in American Middle East centers.

Over the years, Saudi donors have marked these centers for their own brand of engagement. Until recently, the largest such endowment was the Sultan Endowment for Arab Studies, established at the University of

California at Berkeley in 1998 with a \$5 million gift from the Prince Sultan Charity Foundation. Prince Sultan, now the Saudi crown prince, is the father of Prince Bandar, who was then Saudi ambassador to Washington. A newspaper described the transformation at Berkeley's center wrought by this endowment:

In Stephens Hall at UC Berkeley, the Center for African Studies occupies a two-room office marked by cracked walls and scuffed linoleum floors.

Down the hall, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies operates out of a sumptuously appointed suite of offices with stained glass, gleaming copper paneling and a trickling fountain.

A few years ago, these centers were virtually the same. Both made do with modest budgets and tiny offices. They shared a copier.

Then Nezar AlSayyad, chairman of Middle Eastern Studies, took two trips to Saudi Arabia with UC Berkeley chancellors.¹⁹

Prince Bandar arrived in person at Berkeley to deliver the check. Not only did the Saudi royal family establish an Arab studies program on prime academic real estate. A million dollars of the Sultan Endowment at Berkeley was earmarked for "outreach," that is, activities beyond the campus.

The Berkeley gift would be dwarfed seven years later when Saudi investor Prince Alwaleed bin Talal gave \$20 million each to Harvard and Georgetown Universities. The prince, in advance of making his gifts, made it known that he was looking for suitable academic partners for his largesse, and several universities made submissions in the hope of being tapped. The endowments put Alwaleed's name on an Islamic studies program at Harvard and on a center for Muslim-Christian relations at Georgetown. The donor's interest ran well beyond conventional academic study. The director of the Georgetown center announced that "a significant part of the money will be used to beef up the think tank part of what the center does."²⁰

The intended effect of these endowments has been less to stimulate the study of Saudi Arabia than to deter it. For example, in 2003, only two years after the 9/11 attacks, the Middle East Studies Association annual conference featured more than three hundred

presentations, yet not one dealt with Saudi Arabia.²¹ It was well understood by center directors, department chairs, deans, and provosts that 9/11 had put Saudi Arabia on a public relations spending spree in America, which consisted of encouraging academics to change the subject—away from terrorism and the problems of Saudi Arabia, and toward the supposed flaws in U.S. foreign policy (above all, U.S. support for Israel). The ever-present awareness in academe that Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states are shopping, and willing to endow programs, not only drives scholarship away, but also empowers precisely those academics who have the easiest rapport with this class of donors.

How is it that such benefactions are not deemed to contradict the principles of academic freedom and independence? They come in the form of endowments in perpetuity. They are irrevocable asset transfers, which theoretically leave universities free to do with the money as they see fit. Once the transfer is complete, it is extremely difficult if not impossible for the donor to claw it back. But not all donors' intents are equal. The degree to which the university strictly respects the intent of the donor depends upon many factors, but a primary consideration is the effect upon possible future gifts. And since it is widely believed, for example, that Saudis who have given once may give again, beneficiary institutions tend to respect their wishes.

While the U.S. government makes no endowments, some of its programs of support for academe have existed for so long that they constitute virtual endowments—or, to be more precise, semi-entitlements. This was the case with the venerable Title VI program, which subsidizes university-based area studies centers through the U.S. Department of Education. The program received its first appropriation in the late 1950s, during the Cold War, and initially was rationalized as a contribution to "national defense." Title VI subsequently evolved into the mainstay of area studies in the United States. While the centers must apply for funding in regular cycles (at present, every three years), a stable cluster of centers at leading private and public universities receive Title VI grants with predictable regularity.

What makes the acceptance of Title VI funds palatable, even for the most radical academics, is the location of the program in the Department of Education, its entrusting of the selection process for centers almost entirely to the academic community, and the absence of any clear criteria for the program's contribution to national security. In fact, Title VI is an almost entirely unencumbered semi-entitlement, based on what might best be described as a "trickle-down" concept of knowledge. It subsidizes academics to do largely what they wish to do in any case, on the assumption that some of what they produce—conferences, books, graduates—will diffuse broadly into society and government, and enhance America's understanding of the world in ways that cannot be measured.

Title VI became a source of contention over the years, precisely because there are no metrics to measure its success in fulfilling the intent of government. Indeed, this intent has become so obscured over time that consensus no longer exists about what it once was or what it should be.²² The program, which was costing in excess of \$100 million a year, was reviewed time and again, most recently by the National Academies. Each time it eluded meaningful reform. In early 2011, Congress cut the budget of Title VI by 40 percent, a clear sign of disaffection with the loose rationale for the program. Title VI is a prime example of how such programs can be captured by those who regularly benefit from them and ardently defended by the bureaucracies that administer them.

In a future of contracting federal budgets, no agency will be able to "feed" university programs for decades as Title VI did. The era of the virtual endowment is ending. But while government cannot feed programs, it can do much to seed new ones and bring them to the point when they might become self-sufficient. The Centers of Excellence sponsored by the Department of Homeland Security constitute one possible model. Homeland security involves a wide range of technology-driven activities, and the department moved quickly after its creation to engage scientific partners in academe. The department launched a competition for multiyear, multimillion-dollar project grants, large enough to permit formation of full-fledged centers.²³

Homeland security is less shrouded in controversy than overseas wars, and the Centers of Excellence concentrate on areas much closer to the hard sciences, where the rules of engagement with government are better established and not nearly as contentious as in the humanities and social sciences. But the program highlights the one advantage government has over every other player in academe. Individual donors and foreign governments are parting with endowments for perpetuity, and so they tend to favor well-established beneficiaries with long track records at brand-name institutions. The U.S. government can afford to ignore academe's own pecking order, identify hungry start-ups that need seed money, and kick-start them long before they might qualify for actual endowments. In other words, government can act as a kind of venture capitalist in search of academic entrepreneurs, as opposed to its risk-averse competitors who seek only steady returns.

Each government agency knows its own needs best, but one could imagine a wider consortium of departments with national security responsibilities—a very broad category—focused on institutions that, since 9/11, have invested their own resources in areas like Middle East studies but that are too new to the game to be competitive according to the academic criteria exemplified by the Title VI program. It is possible to envision a different kind of Middle East or East Asia or Africa studies center, combining area studies, strategic studies, international relations and foreign policy studies, geography and environmental studies—multidisciplinary centers of theory and practice, of the sort supported on a smaller scale by the Olin Foundation in its heyday.

Existing programs such as Title VI are relics of a different era, when universities could dictate terms of engagement in such a way as to preclude meaningful partnership with government. But large endowments from various corners of Arabia may also be in decline, as governments in oil-producing states retrench, and Arab revolutions make it more difficult for American universities to accept such donations without arousing progressive protest. For a comparatively modest investment, it may be possible for government to create a new template to complement, if not supersede, the traditional area studies center.

3 | Invite Them Over

WHAT DOES GOVERNMENT have that academe does not? A flood of information, many cuts above what one finds in the library or on the internet, and a range of overseas outposts that facilitate all sorts of interesting interactions beyond the usual reach of academics. This is access.

It would be a wild exaggeration to say that academics do not have access. Academics travel all the time, to conduct research and pick up the latest news from trouble spots. Sometimes they even do it on the taxpayers' tab, through such venerable programs as Fulbright-Hays. In 2003, one social scientist of the Middle East listed on her curriculum vitae that she had received *four* Fulbright fellowships, for research in Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, and Tunisia, and at least three major U.S. government regrants, mostly for work in Jordan. She had also been on U.S.-government-funded lecture tours to Kuwait, Jordan, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Oman. (Interestingly, there would seem to be no contradiction between lecturing abroad for the U.S. government and demonstrating abroad against it. This same academic took to the streets of Beirut that spring to demonstrate against the Iraq war, after attempting to deliver a letter to the U.S. ambassador denouncing "aggressive and racist [U.S.] policies toward the people around us.")²⁴

An academic may also conduct research at any one of a number of American research centers abroad. Many of these award research grants, and provide assistance to scholars in obtaining precious research permits, to do everything from archaeological digs to archival research to anthropological studies. These opportunities also are underwritten by the American taxpayer through a program specific to overseas research centers, and these centers regularly call upon U.S. diplomats to smooth their access with local authorities.

In addition, academics, certainly in the major research universities, enjoy access to massive library collections that include thousands of difficult-to-acquire books in languages such as Arabic, Persian, and Urdu. Anyone entitled to admission to libraries at

Harvard and Princeton, Michigan and Berkeley, stands in an Aladdin's cave of treasure. Hardly anywhere in the Middle East, for example, is it possible to range over so many uncensored shelves. Only the older American academics, and veteran librarians, will remember the instrumental role the U.S. government played in building up these collections, in some cases from scratch. The United States accepted payment in local currency in return for shipments of wheat from foreign governments that had no hard currency. It then bought locally published books with the soft currency and provided them gratis to American university libraries.

So the privileged access academics do enjoy is largely thanks to the power and wealth of the United States, as projected by various branches of its government acting in the national interest. Over the years, many of these massive subsidies have been turned into entitlements, surrendered almost entirely to academics to disburse as they see fit. So concealed is the government's machinery for assuring Americans their access to people, places, and sources that many academics have no idea of the original intent behind the programs. But buried beneath the layers stands one bedrock rationale: the United States should ensure that its academics travel more, see more, and read more than anyone else, because things learned through all this privileged access might somehow prove useful.

This rationale is assumed as a matter of course by officials from Cairo to Beijing, who know that information gathered for one purpose may well serve another. The willingness of foreign governments to accommodate American academics thus largely reflects the state of their own relations with the United States. Where those relations are cordial, access is readily granted. Where relations are tense, American academics feel the chill. In places where relations are poor or nonexistent, an American academic may be denied entry, intimidated, or even detained. While friendly governments, such as those in the Gulf states, seek to influence American academics through their largesse, hostile governments seek to achieve similar results by carefully calibrating access.

Academics pursue several strategies to assure unimpeded access even to places where suspicions of Americans run high, such as Palestinian refugee camps or the Islamic Republic of Iran and other less-than-friendly countries. One such strategy involves becoming an amplifier of grievances against the United States. In late 2008, for example, the director of Eurasian programs at the U.S. National Academies, accompanying a medical delegation on a visit to Iran, was detained twice for nine hours of questioning in his hotel room. A former associate director of a Middle East center, also a frequent visitor to Iran, made this comment on the episode: “It’s particularly frustrating when very well-intentioned people who are completely apolitical are going to Iran with very good intentions, but the fact of the matter remains that there was a policy in the Cold War era that led to the United States undertaking a covert operation aimed at regime change in Iran.”²⁵ This is the instinctual response of a part of academe: lay ultimate responsibility for denial of access to American academics at the feet of the U.S. government—in this case, for a covert operation conducted fifty-five years earlier. (Of course, when these same academics are granted access thanks to the U.S. government—for example, in Egypt, which has a privileged relationship with the United States—they flatter themselves into believing that it is entirely out of respect for their scholarship.)

This strategy of self-interested ingratiation is fairly benign. But another strategy is more sinister, and crosses the line into a kind of intellectual McCarthyism. This is the claim, sometimes aggressively made in professional associations, that those academics who do engage the U.S. government, for whatever reason, endanger their colleagues and so should be isolated or censured. The present controversy surrounding the Human Terrain Teams—anthropologists (and other social scientists) embedded with U.S. military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan—is a case in point. The presence of anthropologists is designed to enhance sensitivity of U.S. forces to cultural contexts, and to allow these forces to better distinguish between friend and foe, a crucial element in successful counterinsurgency—and a moral imperative, since it saves

innocent lives. But their service, it is claimed by academic critics, fosters the impression among local populations that any anthropologist might be a soldier or spy. Many in the anthropological guild have condemned both the program and its participants, because the embedding of anthropologists allegedly compromises the field access of all anthropologists by rendering all anthropologists suspect.

Of course, this opposition to embedding of academics does not in any way diminish the academic insistence that the military think academically. One of the major complaints about the Iraq war in the academic community involved the U.S. military’s failure to protect the Iraq Museum from looters. Prior to the war, American archaeologists had met with military officials, to present them with a bewildering list of five thousand “no-strike” sites—one for every year since the first known cuneiform tablet was created. There was a follow-up meeting at the State Department. A memo went out giving high priority to protecting the Iraq Museum. But U.S. commanders in Baghdad never read it. The U.S. military will never get these things entirely right, especially in the heat of battle—a powerful rationale for embedding academics. Yet it is precisely the academics who oppose embedding, arguing that it would make them complicit in the waging of war and compromise their access.

When Minerva solicited applications for research grants, one of the topic areas was intended to entice academics by offering them access to a vast quantity of documents generated by the regime of Saddam Hussein that had fallen into U.S. hands during the war. Minerva invited proposals from academics to make use of this archive—a unique collection, given the almost total inaccessibility of Arab state archives anywhere. But academic critics and Iraqi archivists were quick to denounce the plan, on the grounds that the U.S. government had no right to control access to the archive, and that it should be restored to Iraq. “Providing access to sanctioned U.S. universities, U.S. research centers and U.S. scholars is gross discrimination against the undeniable owners of the seized records, the Iraqi people,” wrote the director of the Iraqi National Library and Archives.²⁶

The inclusion of the Iraqi documents idea in the grant solicitation was an effort to show how engagement with the Defense Department could provide academics with access to sources otherwise beyond their reach. But the choice of a foreign archive captured in a controversial war provided a ready opening for opponents of Minerva, who claimed that removing such documents from Iraq was no different from looting archaeological artifacts. When the first Minerva grants were announced, the grant for research on captured Iraqi documents went to a nuclear physicist, not an Iraq specialist.

So just what sort of access can the U.S. government provide that does not involve such controversial methods as embedding or sharing war spoils? One possible answer is suggested by an initiative of the Kennedy administration, as related by the late J. C. Hurewitz, a political scientist of the Middle East. Hurewitz, who had spent the Second World War in the Office of Strategic Services and then settled into academic life at Columbia University, received a call from Washington in 1963, inviting him to conduct a research project on the role of the military in Middle East politics. (This came at a time when the region was being swept by military coups.) This is how Hurewitz later told the story:

President Kennedy had issued an executive order whose thrust was essentially this: the U.S. is flooded daily with unclassified reports on the armed forces and associated politics from all sovereign states across the globe. Most of the material, while germane, was never put to analytical use. It was simply filed, cluttering the storage facilities. The executive order proposed that a dozen scholars or so, covering different regions of the world, be assigned to evaluate the information for its immediate and longer value. So far, only a half-dozen of the intended assignments had been made, but the one on the Middle East was still open. Would I be interested in a Defense contract carrying a generous honorarium (including expenses) running into six digits? I promptly turned it down, on the ground that I had a prior commitment to the Council on Foreign Relations. He then trimmed the offer to fit my needs.²⁷

In those days, before the internet, it was very difficult for academics to gain access to unclassified

foreign sources on their own. Newspapers, journals, and other real-time materials took months to arrive in university libraries. In later years, the government initiated wider distribution of open source materials, which became crucial to academic research. Right through the Cold War, the government-sponsored Foreign Broadcast Information Service published an unclassified (if pricey) daily report of foreign media in translation, and any serious scholar of the Middle East made sure to have access to it.

Today, of course, academics have direct access to a far wider range of sources, thanks to the internet and Google. Many of the unclassified government databases, such as World News Connection (the successor of the Foreign Broadcast Information Service), are readily available to anyone at a subscribing library. Not only is the vernacular press of the Middle East readily accessible online, so too are the websites of dissidents, opposition groups, and jihadists of all kinds. One might conclude, given this abundance of material, that academics need no helping hand from government to locate research sources. And for many research projects, an internet connection and access to a major university library are all that is required.

But there is still a vast quantity of “open source” materials collected by government and never distributed to the public. Various branches of the government also use advanced tools to mine tremendous quantities of data from open sources—tools without which it is difficult to sift through mountains of material. Then, too, there are the government’s own reports distilling the open sources—thousands upon thousands of papers that may as well be unclassified, resting as they do upon unclassified sources. And as a consequence of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, thousands of people in government have rich first-hand experience on the ground, and they themselves constitute a potential resource for academics. (Indeed, many of these American soldiers, diplomats, and intelligence analysts have shared their experience in books and articles, which have been published by academic presses and journals.)

The challenge of government is to fashion initiatives that provide academic partners with first access to these databases and resources. This does not require

declassification of secret sources, or security clearances for academic scholars—measures that might compromise either the government or academe or both. The aim would be to expand the preexisting tradition of government sharing of its open sources, to enrich scholarship in mutually beneficial ways.

Academe is averse to research that makes use of classified sources, not simply out of hostility toward government (although this may be the motive of hardcore opponents of all cooperation). If the source is classified, it cannot be verified or validated by another researcher, which places the resulting work outside the parameters of peer criticism or peer acceptance. So any government initiative must encourage research that need not be vetted by an agency before publication, and that can gain acceptance as legitimate academic research. Of course, some in academe may be eager to plumb the depths of secret sources on a personal and part-time basis. There is no reason not to engage such academics as consultants. But the public programs—the grant competitions, above all—need to rest on first access to open sources, leading to conventional scholarly publication.

At the same time, government-sponsored interaction with academics that is not of an academic nature—for example, invitations to speaking tours abroad, which are prime opportunities for academics to collect information—should benefit those academics who are already engaged with government and who are prepared to defend and promote such engagement on campus. There is a notion within the public diplomacy bureaucracy that the most suitable spokespersons for America abroad are precisely those academics who are (mildly) critical of U.S. policies. This is supposed to

establish the credibility and disinterestedness of such programs. It would be neither feasible nor desirable to insist that academic beneficiaries of such programs support this or that U.S. policy. But it would be perfectly legitimate for these programs to privilege academics who, in their research activities, participate in a mutual exchange with government. Not only would their travels indirectly benefit the agencies with which they cooperate, but these speakers might more accurately convey to their audiences some sense of how U.S. policy is made and what sorts of inputs go into its making.

Simultaneously, it is crucially important to spur a discussion within academe about ways in which control of access by foreign governments distorts research agendas and research findings. For years, academic radicals have kept the spotlight on the ways cooperation with the U.S. government allegedly corrupts academe. But a strong case can be made that securing access from authoritarian governments and police states has much greater potential to corrupt. Despite the Arab Spring, the Middle East is largely unfree, by the criteria of Freedom House and every other objective measure. The notion that foreign academics never make compromises to secure access in most Middle Eastern countries is naive. Just as foreign money needs to be exposed, so too do the explicit and implicit conditions imposed by foreign governments on American academics. All access comes at a cost. That exacted by the U.S. government is so low as to be negligible, a basic fact that needs to be propagated throughout academe. The more this truth is acknowledged, the more readily academics will engage government openly, and without apology.

4 | Conclusion: National Need

IT IS IMPORTANT to recognize that even if all the barriers between government and academe could be dismantled through magic intercession, the years during which academe retreated into itself changed its culture. Academe became inwardly oriented, introspective, and highly specialized. Academics became accustomed to writing for one another, shunning a wider audience. They also invested heavily in theoretical and quantitative models, which were meant to give their endeavor the aura of science. One political scientist called these academic preferences “the cult of irrelevance,” and its dominance has left even the academics skeptical about whether they can make a contribution.

These doubts, once confined to campus, were put on display for Washington when Harvard political scientist Joseph Nye penned an op-ed titled “Scholars on the Sidelines” for the *Washington Post*. “Scholars are paying less attention to questions about how their work relates to the policy world,” wrote Nye, “and in many departments a focus on policy can hurt one’s career.” He expressed regret over the self-imposed “withdrawal” of America’s academic international relations scholars, and proposed a few measures that might encourage deeper interaction between academics and policymakers. But he ended on a pessimistic note: “If anything, the trends in academic life seem to be headed in the opposite direction.”²⁸ Nye’s piece gave rise to extensive commentary in the blogosphere, indicating that he had touched a raw nerve.

Government has always found something off-putting in the academic style. In earlier decades, the objection was to the tendency of academics to hold on to cherished ideas past their expiration date and to stand aloof from teamwork. In 1947, Harvard diplomatic historian (and intelligence advisor to the State Department) William Langer told CIA officer Kermit Roosevelt, Jr., that “the academic is all too apt to lack elasticity. He is generally an individualist, and when he thinks he is right he is all too prone to be impatient with the difficulties.”²⁹ But at least the academics in those days were intelligible. Now even that has been

lost, so that many academics who are eager to put their services at the disposal of the present administration are unable to depart, even temporarily, from the jargon of their academic disciplines.

Government has also been spoiled by the think tanks, which have specialized in processing ideas—some of them derived from academe—into digestible nuggets upon which the bureaucracy feeds. The think tanks arose, in part, precisely because academe withdrew from the policy field. So-called think tankers became “the best and the brightest,” moving in and out of government and producing the books and papers that piled up on the desks and nightstands of America’s leaders. In academe, it became common to associate think tanks with the political right. But think tanks have flourished on the other end of the spectrum too. It can be very difficult, from a campus outside the Beltway, to compete with think tanks that have the single-minded, full-time mission of influencing policy.

The evolution of engagement between government and academia will require a reopening of the academic mind. No one expects academe to abandon its own highly specialized language and rituals, which create a distinct sense of community (or, as critics might put it, tribal belonging). But if there is to be engagement, and if the drift described by Nye is to be arrested, more scholars in academe must emulate Nye and speak out on behalf of a kind of intellectual bilingualism. The question is whether government can stimulate or encourage this process.

No one knows the answer for certain, but an encouraging parallel exists. It is striking how many academics since 9/11 have managed to gain footholds in the mainstream media and the blogosphere. In response to heightened media interest, the savviest academics have learned to supply the goods as the media like them. Academics who publish op-eds or contribute to weblogs are no longer regarded by most of their colleagues with pure disdain. The academic engagement with the media enjoys the active encouragement of university public relations offices and deans, eager to

demonstrate the relevance of their faculty's work. In an age of the corporate university, where every piston of the institutional engine must fire reliably, a premium is placed on media-friendly scholars who confidently offer quick assessments as each wave of crisis breaks across the media landscape. Those who are most adept at this tend to be younger scholars, many of them first drawn to these studies because of 9/11, who assume that addressing the public is just part of the job.

There is reason to believe that a comparable cadre of young faculty could learn the language of government. In this internet age, these scholars too have access to the voluminous unclassified reports emanating from government agencies and to the products of the think tanks. It is probably true, as Nye asserts, that the disciplines push young scholars in other directions. But these are not normal times. Resources are scarce, and administrators in higher education are aggressively touting every grant solicitation to their faculty. The younger and hungrier scholars are, the more likely they are to take a chance—if the potential rewards outweigh the risks. Add the “Obama effect” in academe, and the opportunities for all forms of engagement, outreach, and outsourcing seem more promising than they have in a very long time.

But to get there, government must do what the media have done: aggressively seek out the best up-and-coming academic talent. It must package its initiatives in ways that are attractive, or least acceptable, to the academic consensus on professionalism and ethics. It must spread grants widely, in an effort to create large peer communities supportive of engagement with government. Simultaneously, it must focus on a few carefully identified “centers of excellence” and provide them with initial resources to launch them to self-sufficiency. And it must find creative ways to give academics access to the wealth of information that is the byproduct of the expanded role of the United States in the world, and particularly in the crucial theaters of the Middle East.

This engagement cannot be the work of one agency or department. Naturally, each part of the bureaucracy is intent upon meeting its own needs. Hence the plethora of programs, initiatives, and grant programs, all of them crafted to meet the specific needs

of their administering agency, and few of them alert to the multiple factors that affect their reception in academe. At some level, as close to the top as possible, it is crucial to formulate a vision of national need. This is done to some extent in relation to government's need for foreign-language speakers. An interagency board seeks to define areas of deficit and then balance the competing needs of the different parts of government. Something similar might be contemplated in regard to government's broader engagement with academe, especially in the area of research. At the very least, such an interagency board would be useful for exchanging “best practices” and preventing needless duplication of efforts. Were it to include leading academics, it could serve the more ambitious aim of identifying areas of mutually shared research interest.

If there is a need for a figure to lead that effort, it might well be Robert Gates, the soon-to-be-former secretary of defense, who has had a long personal history of his own engagement with academe. It was Gates who, in 1986, as the CIA's deputy director of intelligence, came to Harvard to make a speech to the faculty defending cooperation between intelligence agencies and academe. “Working with your government to bring about a better foreign policy is not shameful; it is consistent with a scholar's highest duty,” he said.³⁰ More than twenty years later, this time as head of the defense establishment, he made a similar appeal before an audience of university presidents. “It is an unfortunate reality,” he said,

that many people believe there is this sharp divide between academia and the military—that each continues to look on the other with a jaundiced eye. These feelings are rooted in history—academics who felt used and disenchanting after Vietnam, and troops who felt abandoned and unfairly criticized by academia during the same time. And who often feel that academia today does not support them or their efforts.

These feelings—regardless of whether they are based in reality—are not good for our men and women in uniform, for our universities, or for our country.³¹

Between those two speeches, Gates served as president of a university (Texas A&M), mastering at first hand the complexities of administering a community

of scholars. This mix of experiences, which has made Gates fluent in both languages, is a rare thing, and the opportunity it presents should not be lost.

This paper opened with an epigraph by Louis Pasteur: “Science has no fatherland, but the scientist must have one.” In this age of globalization, internationalization, and the internet, the assertion may seem

anachronistic—and nowhere more so than in academe. But the power and prestige of the American academy owe no less to the power and prestige of the United States than to academe’s own openness to the world—and probably more. This is the basis of a shared interest. Intelligent management by government can transform it into a joint project, for the mutual benefit of all.

Notes

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