

Unhappy Times in Cambridge

A Mideast scholar loses a directorship over CIA funding

Ezra Bowen

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After wrestling through the fall with some nasty allegations about the integrity of one of its scholars, Harvard announced a resolution last week that satisfied no one. In a carefully worded statement, Dean A. Michael Spence disclosed that Professor Nadav Safran would resign this summer as director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, after a ten-week investigation into his acceptance of CIA money to support both a scholarly conference and his book.

Against university rules, said Spence, Safran had invited Middle East scholars from the U.S. and abroad to a symposium on Islamic fundamentalism, to be held at the center on Oct. 15–16, without first telling either Harvard or the guests that the CIA had contributed \$45,700 toward the conference. Moreover, Safran's recently published book, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, had been underwritten in part by a CIA grant of \$107,430, conveyed under a contract granting the agency review and censorship of the manuscript. When, a week before the conference, word leaked out about the CIA backing, Safran notified the guests. A number of them canceled plans to attend. Three of the center's six-man executive committee demanded Safran's resignation. The campus erupted in an angry colloquy about Government control of research, and Harvard turned crimson in embarrassment.

Though the university has no general covenant against CIA funding, its canons do require disclosure of any such grants and forbid outside contracts restricting free dissemination of faculty research. Therefore, Spence announced, after much soul searching, Harvard has accepted Safran's "preference for stepping down as director" after two years of "scholarly leadership." The dean announced he was disbanding the center's executive committee and added that Safran, who has been a professor of government at Harvard for 27 years, will retain tenure.

Spence's gingerly treatment of the case did not sit well with some of his academic colleagues. They point out that over the past two decades Harvard, Berkeley and a host of other schools, wary of Government influence but still eager for federal research grants, have set up policies to ensure that no research is secret or subject to prior review. Now the Safran incident has resurrected the thorny question of whose research money is clean and whose is not. One of the Harvard center's defrocked committeemen, Richard N. Frye, denounced the Spence report as a "whitewash" that ignored the broad effect on scholarly integrity. An academic who bowed out of the conference claimed, "People in the Middle East to whom we must have access would never trust us again."

Spence allowed that "the university owes an apology to scholars in the field" but conceded that not all of the blame should be heaped on Safran. It seems that when Safran signed the CIA contract for his book nearly four years ago, he told then Dean Henry Rosovsky about it. Somehow, Rosovsky's office never got around to responding. Last week Safran, angry at the prolonged controversy and the pressure to resign, stoutly defended his integrity and scholarship: "I have received requests for my book ... from the Saudi embassy in Washington."

Safran acknowledged his "mistake" in not announcing agency funding of the conference at the outset. However, he insisted, the money came with no strings attached. He

therefore considered it “analogous to the contributions made to the center by private corporations and individuals.”

At week’s end Harvard clearly hoped the furor would subside. But the noise level of the debate suggested it would take some time for the wounds to heal. Said the unrelenting Frye: “This is a crisis. I don’t know if the Middle East center will ever recover from this.” —*By Ezra Bowen. Reported by Timothy Loughran/Boston*

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