

Letters editor, *Science*

In the letter below, we wish to bring to the attention of the science community a major challenge by a US Government agency to the role of universities in maintaining the integrity of science in the laboratories that they manage. We have squeezed our description of the situation into a 300-word letter but would welcome an invitation to expand this letter into a guest editorial. We also would welcome the attention of *Science's* "News and Comment" section to this issue.

Sincerely yours,

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**"Missile defense agency blocks fraud investigation at MIT's Lincoln Laboratory"**

We wish to bring to the attention of your readers an incident that challenges the independence and integrity that university oversight is supposed to provide for federally funded research laboratories.

Late last year, the Pentagon's Missile Defense Agency (MDA) blocked MIT from investigating an allegation of fraud in a 1998 study by the "Phase One Engineering Team" (POET) of which MIT Lincoln Laboratory staff constituted 2 of the 5 members.

The study, "Independent Review of TRW Discrimination Techniques" reviewed and evaluated techniques developed by a missile-defense contractor to allow the missile interceptors currently being deployed by the US to discriminate between warheads and simple decoys. The allegation is that POET covered up the inadequacies of these discrimination techniques revealed in a flight test.

The current situation and the background issues are described respectively in the press<sup>1</sup> and in two Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports.<sup>2</sup> In brief, MIT's administration, after years of delay, concluded that the concerns of one of its faculty members, Professor Theodore Postol, had enough merit to require an investigation.

MDA then classified the report of MIT's preliminary investigation and declared that, even if MIT assembled a review panel with the requisite clearances, the panel would not be given access to any of the classified documents because MDA deemed that a fraud investigation by MIT was unnecessary and that the panel therefore would have no "need to know."

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<sup>1</sup> "MIT forced to halt probe of alleged fraud at Lincoln Lab," *Boston Globe*, Dec. 3, 2004, B3, <http://www.boston.com/tools/archives>; and "DOD bars inquiry on fraud at Lincoln Lab, *The Tech*, Dec. 3, 2004, p. 1, <http://www-tech.mit.edu/V124/N58/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Review of results and limitations of an early national missile defense flight test*, GAO-02-124, 2002; and *Review of allegations about an early national missile defense flight test*, GAO-02-125, 2002, <http://www.gao.gov/docsearch/repandtest.html>.

A great deal of relevant information remains in the public domain. In addition to the two GAO reports, this information includes a declassified near-final draft of the POET study and Postol's detailed critique of that draft.<sup>3</sup> MIT is not willing, however, to pursue an investigation on the basis of this public information.

Professor Postol has brought his concerns to the attention of his MIT faculty colleagues but there has thus far been no effective response.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Letter from Professor Theodore Postol to John Podesta, White House Chief of Staff, and attachments, May 11, 2000, [http://www.fas.org/spp/starwars/program/news00/postol\\_051100.html](http://www.fas.org/spp/starwars/program/news00/postol_051100.html)

<sup>4</sup> Theodore Postol, "Maintaining integrity at MIT," *MIT Faculty Newsletter*, January-February, p. 6 and "When everything is secret, there is no truth," *ibid.* March-April 2005, p. 9, contact [postol@mit.edu](mailto:postol@mit.edu).