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Trump's administration poses danger to academic freedom - opinion

The Trump administration should reconsider its recent detrimental policies and reaffirm its longtime commitment to the principles of academic freedom and scientific integrity.





THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES of Health in Bethesda, Maryland.

(photo credit: GARY CAMERON/REUTERS)

By DAVID HAREL

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In laboratories and lecture halls across two countries, an alarm is sounding. Academic freedom – the bedrock of scientific progress and innovation – faces parallel assaults that threaten decades of research advancement and international collaboration.

The disturbing and hasty actions taken by President [Donald Trump's administration](#) against scientific institutions, programs, and researchers in the US are a cause for deep concern. They include drastic cuts to the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and other leading research bodies.

Beyond defunding, the administration's activity extends to imposing ideological restrictions on research priorities and appointing highly inappropriate people

to key positions.



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These changes will have far-reaching consequences for the international scientific ecosystem. They are poised to halt essential funding for breakthrough technologies and to sever collaborative networks developed over decades. They will also disrupt crucial multinational research initiatives that address global challenges, from confronting climate change and preparing for future pandemics to dealing with global cybersecurity, regulating AI, and ensuring the health and well-being of humans worldwide.

There is no need to elaborate on the enormous contribution of American science to humanity over many decades. However, the current measures threaten not only American scientists but will directly impact all scientists, Israel's included, whose work relies on collaborative partnerships and joint funding opportunities. Research and development throughout the free world is at stake, as are the academic freedom and research independence that are fundamental prerequisites to free democratic societies.



US President Donald Trump makes an announcement about an investment from Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), in the Roosevelt Room at the White House in Washington, DC, US, March 3, 2025. (credit: REUTERS/LEAH MILLIS/FILE PHOTO)

Similar, but much smaller attacks on academic institutions in Israel

Over the past two years, similar, albeit less vicious, attacks have been waged by Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#)'s government on Israeli scientific and

cultural institutions. These include crippling cuts in funding and attempts to weaken the independence of bodies such as the universities, the National Library, and the Planning and Budget Committee of the Council for Higher Education, which is responsible for the funding, curricula, and overall approval of all academic programs and degrees.

When politicians on both sides of the Atlantic attempt to subordinate academic research to shortsighted political considerations, they damage not only academic freedom but also the national and economic resilience of their countries, and, as a frightening potential consequence, of the world at large. This is not just a crisis for academia – it is a major crisis for democracy.

In light of these developments, desperate calls must go out to both governments.

Our leaders here must take urgent, proactive measures to safeguard the future of Israeli science. Efforts should focus on strengthening national funding, deepening existing collaborations, and fostering new global research partnerships and international opportunities. All of these must be done while safeguarding academic freedom and the independence of Israel's academic and cultural institutions.

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The ability of science in Israel to thrive in an increasingly unstable global landscape depends on strong, forward-thinking policies at home. As our scientists and academic institutions confront both the challenges of wartime mobilization and crippling academic boycotts from abroad, preserving academic freedom here is vital.

As for the US, the [Trump administration](#) must make a full about-turn. It should reconsider its recent detrimental policies and reaffirm its longtime commitment to the principles of academic freedom and scientific integrity, without which America cannot become great again. Far from it.

In closing, I would like to clarify that there is no contradiction between this plea to Trump and the letter my three Nobel-winning colleagues and I sent a couple of weeks ago, offering him a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize if he manages to bring about an imminent release of all Israeli hostages held by Hamas – the intention being, of course, that this be combined with an end to the war and the terrible bloodshed in Gaza.

Here, I am talking about science and the great danger Trump's administration poses to it, and there we were talking about human lives and the great danger each day brings to so many of them – the hostages, as well as the numerous

civilians and military personnel on both sides. These are two extremely grim issues, and Trump holds the key to resolving both.

The writer, a professor at the Weizmann Institute of Science, is president of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

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