

by Omer Aziz

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Ex-government officials have always occupied a particular sweet spot for members the Ivy League. Regardless of what one did while in power, regardless of how disreputable or immoral or even criminal one's actions, the elite academy has been all too willing to embrace even the most dubious of former officials.

So it was that last Friday night, Henry Kissinger spoke at Yale — to which he has donated an [archive of personal documents](#)

, where he occasionally participates in a course with Cold War historian

[John Lewis Gaddis](#)

, and where he give an

[invite-only talk just a year ago](#)

. Last week's "conversation" was moderated by Harvard Professor Niall Ferguson, who is also Henry Kissinger's official biographer. As if to underscore the incestuous insider game on display, sitting in the third row was Paul Bremer, the "Administrator" of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, the man who de-Baathified the country, threw millions of people out of work, and helped destroy the Iraqi state, which spurred the insurgency, the Sunni-Shia civil war, and later the transmogrification of al Qaeda in Mesopotamia into the Islamic State. A record to proudly burnish in and around Yale University.

At least members of the Yale community would be allowed to ask questions of Mr. Kissinger, challenge him on his public record, and dispute the wrongheaded assessment of the US-Iran nuclear deal he penned in the [The Wall Street Journal](#) just days prior, right? Wrong. Ferguson was to screen all questions ahead of time, and the questions Mr. Kissinger received were the intellectual equivalent of underhand softballs. There was a discussion of "World Order," Kissinger's latest book, questions about Iran and the Middle East, ruminations on China. Every question Ferguson asked could have been competently answered by an undergraduate.

The Yale community was not however informed—just as the WSJ, Washington Post, and New York Times do not inform their readers—that Kissinger is Chairman of Kissinger Associates, a global consulting firm that has clients in the Gulf region of the Middle East and other regions

Kissinger opines on. This is a classic conflict of interest. Astute readers will recall that Kissinger [resigned the chairmanship](#) of the 9/11 Commission when the Senate Ethics Committee, along with prominent voices in the media, demanded Kissinger disclose his client list.

It is disturbing to observe famous ex-government officials paid one complement after another, given the floor in the auditorium of an elite university, and then protected from actual, difficult questions the public may have. Why is it that “intellectuals” like Mr. Kissinger are so afraid of being confronted, through argument and evidence, over their records? My own question, on Kissinger’s complicity in the [1971 genocide in Bangladesh](#) that left up to three million people dead, was conveniently ignored by Ferguson. The moderator is supposed to ensure a real conversation takes place. Ferguson did the opposite: He guarded his subject and censored tough questions.

While critics often argue that free speech on university campuses is threatened by an overly-PC, overly-sensitive culture, the contest over ideas is actually threatened far more by powerful men like Kissinger (and Ferguson), who would rather commend each other for their great work than have a real debate over war crimes and human rights abuses. When you’re an insider, you’re an insider for life—and that means you get away with anything, decades after you left office.