



**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc.

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December 01-04, 2011
WASHINGTON DC

July 5, 2011

Richard C. Levin
President, Yale University

Peter Salovey
Provost, Yale University

Dear President Levin and Provost Salovey,

I write to you on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our concern that influence or pressure from, or prejudicial information supplied by, the Bush administration may have played a role in Yale University's decision in 2006 to reject the appointment of Professor Juan Cole to the Yale faculty, and to ask that you initiate appropriate measures to fully investigate that possibility.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 3000 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

As you may recall, Professor Cole's candidacy for a position at Yale attracted considerable hostile attention in some conservative media outlets as a result of Professor Cole's outspoken criticisms of policies of the governments of the United States and Israel. In a letter dated June 20, 2006, and addressed to Andrew Hamilton, then provost of Yale, we expressed our concern that "politically-motivated pressures outside and inside the university rather than professional norms may have influenced the Senior Appointments Committee's decision to overrule the recommendation of the two departments" (History and Sociology) that had recommended that Professor Cole be appointed. Provost Hamilton's response, dated June 30, 2006, stated that "[o]ur criteria for appointment are based solely on an individual's scholarship, teaching, and service, and an individual's political views are never taken into account in making appointment decisions."

We feel compelled to revisit this matter now because on June 15, 2011, *The New York Times* published an article by James Risen indicating that around the time that Yale was considering Professor Cole for appointment to its faculty – and while those critical of Professor Cole's views were mobilizing to oppose his appointment – the Bush administration was apparently seeking, in probable violation of the law, to have the CIA collect and provide information that might be used to discredit him. This report raises the possibility that officials of the Bush administration or an intelligence agency, or someone working at their behest, may have communicated with or circulated information to Yale officials and/or faculty members, directly or indirectly, with the aim of affecting the outcome of the university's deliberations concerning Professor Cole's appointment.

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We are confident that you would agree that any such contact, communication or influence would constitute highly improper interference with the integrity of Yale's hiring process, an assault on Yale's autonomy as an institution of higher education, and a flagrant violation of the principles of academic freedom. Given this, we feel it essential that Yale reveal any and all communications between government officials and Yale faculty or staff concerning Professor Cole, and take prompt and transparent action that would enable it to rule out the possibility that it was subjected to any improper government influence in this case.

We therefore request that an independent committee consisting of members of the Yale faculty as well as faculty drawn from other universities be appointed to conduct a thorough investigation of this matter, with unrestricted access to all relevant records, in order to ascertain whether any attempt was made by any government official or agency, or anyone working on their behalf, to influence Yale's decision-making with regard to Professor Cole's appointment. In light of what we have learned in recent years about efforts by the Bush administration and its allies to silence or besmirch critics of its policies, it seems only reasonable to ensure that there was no impropriety in this case.

We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Suad Joseph".

Suad Joseph
MESA President
Professor of Anthropology and Women's Studies
University of California Davis

cc: Juan Cole
Chronicle of Higher Education
Inside Higher Ed