



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

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4 September 2007

Marshall M. Bouton, President
The Chicago Council on Global Affairs
332 S. Michigan Avenue, Suite 1100
Chicago, Illinois 60604-4416

Fax: (312) 821-7555

Dear Mr. Bouton:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA). We wish to convey to you our distress regarding your decision to cancel a forum, scheduled for September 27, 2007, in which two of this country's most distinguished professors of Political Science, John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, were to speak about their new book, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*. This action on your part constitutes a serious violation of the principles of free expression and the free exchange of ideas. We urge you to invite professors Walt and Mearsheimer to speak at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs at a mutually convenient time in the near future. It is important to rectify the effect that your cancellation on July 24 has had in reinforcing an intellectual environment that seeks to restrict informed and critical discussion of issues that are vital to this country's future.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (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 more than 2700 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.

According to numerous press reports, pressure from supporters of Israel who are critical of Walt and Mearsheimer led you to take the highly unusual step of canceling the previously scheduled event. In these reports, you are cited as saying that the speakers are controversial and that you preferred that they appear in "an appropriate forum" balanced by an opposing viewpoint. Yet, John J. Mearsheimer, R. Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, and Stephen M. Walt, Robert and Renee Belfer Professor of International Affairs, John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, have spoken before the Council on numerous occasions in the past without being forced to share the podium with those who oppose their points of view. It is only in this case, that of a presentation critical of Israeli policy and its supporters, that they have been subjected to the litmus test of "balance." We regret that you chose to succumb to pressure exerted on the Council and are dismayed that in justifying your actions you have adopted the argument that controversial ideas should not be aired unless they are immediately and at the same event "balanced" by opposing views.

As the Association of American University Professors, the American Civil Liberties Union, and many other organizations have persuasively argued in official statements, the argument of “balance,” selectively invoked, has been repeatedly used to stifle the free exchange of ideas, especially when it comes to discussions about Israel and U.S. foreign policy. We are concerned that your decision --reminiscent of that taken by the Council-General of the Polish Consulate in New York to cancel a talk on Israel and U.S. foreign policy on October 3, 2006 by the renowned historian New York University Professor Tony Judt-- contributes to raising the wall of censorship. Indeed, three other organizations in Chicago as well the Center for the Humanities at the Graduate Center at the City University of New York, among others, have since either cancelled or turned down appearances by the authors.

We strongly urge you to reconsider your decision of July 24, and in the process affirm your support for free expression and the free exchange of ideas, by inviting Professors Walt and Mearsheimer to give a talk at the Council without requiring that they share the podium and without restrictions on the content of their presentation.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Zachary Lockman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Zachary Lockman
MESA President