

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-4605**

Dear Secretary DeVos,

I write to you concerning Federal funds administered under Title VI of the Higher Education Act at Georgetown University. I have recently become aware of is systemic support for biased, anti-American, pro-BDS individuals and scholarship at Georgetown University's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (CCAS) that are not in accordance with the mission of Title VI funds and contrary to America's national security interests. While any university is free under the First Amendment to pursue any academic course it deems worthwhile, no matter how unwise, it does not authorize the university to spend federal grant money for programs not in accordance with the intent of the grant program and counter to America's interests.

A recent Middle East Forum report<sup>1</sup> concluded that the whole of Georgetown's Middle East studies programs applies to each part, including CCAS: "Georgetown University's various Middle East studies (MES) faculty have a reputation as the most intolerant, ideological, anti-Israel, and pro-Islamist in the United States." Federal funds, earmarked for a specific purpose, should not be used to support such ideologically driven programs.

The so-called Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement is a dagger aimed at the heart of one of America's closest allies, Israel. Moreover, Title VI funds are specifically designated in part to "promote access to research and training overseas, including through linkages to overseas institutions." An academic boycott of any country, including Israel, violates this provision of the law.

CCAS's NRC and FLAS funding for FY 2018, estimated to continue annually in FY 2019-21, totals \$484,558. Yet the Center is run by openly pro-BDS faculty.

CCAS's director, Osama Abi-Mershed, is signatory of a letter pledging<sup>2</sup> "not to collaborate on projects and events involving Israeli academic institutions" in spite of "assurances" he, as the director of a Title VI-funded center, was legally required to give<sup>3</sup> to "maintain linkages with

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<sup>1</sup> "Islamists, Apologists, and Fellow Travelers: Middle East Studies Faculty at Georgetown University," December 4, 2017, Campus Watch. Available at: <https://www.meforum.org/7071/middle-east-studies-faculty-at-georgetown>

<sup>2</sup> "Middle East Scholars and Librarians Call for the Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions," Available at: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSea61ZOHpNJOrUni8W8P0K73Q2g3Sxf8U4IRggb-pwm2Yz2-g/viewform>

<sup>3</sup> See: Higher Education Opportunity Act, Public Law 110-315 Available at: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-110publ315/html/PLAW-110publ315.htm>

overseas institutions of higher education.”<sup>4</sup> Certainly, advocating the boycott of any nation is not within the mission of Title VI’s mission, nor the interests of the United States.

The petition in question is unequivocal in its pro-BDS position, stating “we call on our colleagues in Middle East Studies to boycott Israeli academic institutions, and we pledge not to collaborate on projects and events involving Israeli academic institutions, not to teach at or to attend conferences and other events at such institutions, and not to publish in academic journals based in Israel.”

When confronted with this violation, Abi-Mershed simply denied any Title VI support. In response to a scholar’s inquiry in 2014<sup>5</sup> about Abi-Mershed’s signing he replied “we are not tax-supported.”

A journalist asked the then-acting dean of the Walsh School of Foreign Service, James Reardon-Anderson, about this matter, and he replied “we are very proud that the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies has been, and we hope will remain, a recipient of Title VI designation and support.”

To date, there has been little to no oversight on why taxpayers should support a federally-funded center when its director seemingly violates federal policies and, when caught, lies about CCAS’s status as a Title VI-supported entity.

There is every reason to think this problem is pervasive. Even if Abi-Mershed’s leadership alone does not indicate a serious issue with BDS, CCAS is also home to Judith Tucker, among the most virulently anti-Israel, pro-BDS professors in America. As president of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), the umbrella group for scholars in the field, she wields significant influence over official stances toward myriad issues. MESA has over the past several decades adopted a consistently anti-American, anti-Western, and anti-Israel perspective on scholarship and political issues; under Tucker these trends have accelerated.

Tucker is a signatory<sup>6</sup> of a petition calling for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions. MESA under her presidency was vocal in its opposition to the Anti-Semitism Awareness Act, as expressed in a letter to members of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary and the House Judiciary Committee.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See: “PART 656—NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTERS PROGRAM FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND AREA STUDIES OR FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES,” Available at:

<https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?c=ecfr&sid=f676f369ef344334d95b8d70f7abb575&rgn=div5&view=text&node=34:3.1.3.1.26&idno=34#34:3.1.3.1.26.3.39.2>

<sup>5</sup> “Contrary to Georgetown Prof’s Claims, Dean Says Center Receives Taxpayer Support,” Winfield Meyers, September 22, 2014 Campus Watch, Available at: <https://www.meforum.org/campus-watch/21736/contrary-to-georgetown-prof-claims-dean-says>

<sup>6</sup> “Over 400 Middle East scholars and librarians call for the boycott of Israeli academic institutions (Updated),” August 6, 2014. Mondoweiss. Available at: <https://mondoweiss.net/2014/08/scholars-librarians-institutions/>

<sup>7</sup> “Concerns regarding the “Anti-Semitism Awareness Act of 2018”,” Middle East Studies Association, Committee on Academic Freedom, June 4, 2018. Available at: <https://mesana.org/advocacy/committee-on-academic-freedom/2018/06/04/concerns-regarding-the-anti-semitism-awareness-act-of-2018>



Among the Act's examples of anti-Semitism to which MESA under Tucker's leadership objected:

- "Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews."
- "Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of the Jews as a collective."
- "Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust."

In April, Tucker wrote a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo objecting to State's refusal of entry to BDS founder Omar Barghouti that lauded him precisely because of his BDS work:<sup>8</sup>

Mr. Barghouti is a prominent Palestinian activist and co-founder of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement . . . Barring Mr. Barghouti from entering the United States deprives university students and faculty, as well as members of the general public, of an opportunity to directly engage with a well-qualified speaker on an issue of major public interest.

In May, Tucker wrote another letter to Sec. Pompeo objecting to State's denial of visa to PLO executive committee member Hanan Ashrawi. MESA whitewashed Ashrawi's record by claiming she "has had a long and distinguished career as a political leader, a scholar and an advocate for peace."<sup>9</sup> Yet as the Middle East Forum reported at the time

She is, however, an advocate for killing Israeli civilians. In 2000, she told the AP that "the army of occupation and the settlers have become legitimate and select targets of Palestinian resistance." On the PA's *Voice of Palestine* in 2001, Ashrawi explained that "the only language Sharon understands is the language of violence." In 2004, when a PBS interviewer asked Ashrawi if she would condemn all Palestinian violence, she responded that "you cannot tell the Palestinians, you mustn't resort to any kind of violence, whatever, including self-defense." Her 2015 condemnation of Israel's "invasion of the Al-Aqsa mosque" makes her an advocate for fomenting violence.<sup>10</sup>

Ashrawi is also an advocate for terrorists. A *Jerusalem Post* headline covering her 2007 speech at Emory University said it all: "Ashrawi Defends Hizbullah and Hamas."<sup>11</sup> Defending Hamas is

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<sup>8</sup> "US denial of entry to Omar Barghouti," April 17, 2019 Middle East Studies Association, Committee on Academic Freedom, Available at: <https://mesana.org/advocacy/committee-on-academic-freedom/2019/04/17/us-denial-of-entry-to-omar-barghouti>

<sup>9</sup> "Denial of a US Visa to Hanan Ashrawi," Middle East Studies Association, Committee on Academic Freedom, Available at: <https://mesana.org/advocacy/committee-on-academic-freedom/2019/05/22/denial-of-a-us-visa-to-hanan-ashrawi>

<sup>10</sup> "MESA Demands US Welcome Palestinian Terror Apologist Hanan Ashrawi," A.J. Caschetta, The Algemeiner, June 16, 2019. Available at: <https://www.meforum.org/58793/mesa-demands-us-welcome-palestinian-terror-apologist>

<sup>11</sup> "Ashrawi defends Hizbullah and Hamas," Gil Stern Stern Hoffman, October 30, 2007, The Jerusalem Post. Available at: <https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Ashrawi-defends-Hizbullah-and-Hamas>

nothing new for her, as she told the UPI on April 30, 1993, that she didn't "think of Hamas as a terrorist group. We coordinate politically ... the people we know and talk to are not terrorists."<sup>12</sup>

And:

Ashrawi has consistently denied any historical connection between the ancient Hebrews and Jerusalem, or between Judaism and the land first called "Palestine" by the Romans. She has also denied that Jews were ever expelled from Arab countries after Israel declared independence in 1948.

Yet for Tucker – the most prominent member of CCAS's faculty – Ashrawi and Barghouti deserve to be lauded as peace-loving citizens of the world, while Israel should be subjected to the bigoted policies promoted by the worldwide BDS movement.

Other professors whose flagrant pro-BDS bias in a Title VI-supported institution that are of concern include, but are not limited to:

Yvonne Haddad, a long-serving apologist for Islamism and a strong advocate for BDS. She supported MESA's removal of "non-political" from its by-laws in an attempt to smooth the way for its adoption of BDS as official policy. She is a signatory to the 2014 call for an academic boycott of Israel.

Rochelle Davis, a signatory to the 2014 call for an academic boycott of Israel and proponent of the "right of return" for all Palestinian "refugees," an act that would end Israel as a Jewish state.

While all of these individuals are entitled to their views, and Georgetown's CCAS is entitled to spend private and other funds on whatever they like, they should not be allowed to spend taxpayer funds, directed by law, in ways not in accordance with statutory mandates. Currently, there is a lack of transparency as to how Title VI funds are being spent at CCAS and whether or not they are in accordance with statutory mandates.

I am also deeply disturbed by the presence on CCAS's Board of Advisors of several Gulf luminaries whose interests in American academe surely stem from their desire to influence it. Given Title VI's intentions of producing policy experts whose advice can be relied on to strengthen American national security, these advisors, representing as they do countries whose interests do not always coincide with America's, are problematic. They include:

- Abdulrahman bin Saud Al-Thani, Qatar's Minister of State. Qatari influence over American higher education has grown substantially over the past decade, even as its nefarious activities in support of terrorism and the spread of Salafist ideology has continued unabated.
- Turki Al-Faisal Al-Saud, Chairman, King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, Saudi Arabia. Georgetown has a long history of courting Saudi money. Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal donated \$20 million in 2005 to endow the Alwaleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, which has long been a seat of Wahhabi propaganda in the heart of Washington.

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<sup>12</sup> "Hanan Ashrawi: Kill Israeli Soldiers and Settlers," November 18, 2000. Available at: <https://www.camera.org/article/hanan-ashrawi-kill-israeli-soldiers-and-settlers/>



- Hunaina Al-Mughairy, Ambassador Sultanate of Oman to the United States.

Given that Title VI funds are intended to train students in America's national security interests, having senior officials from authoritarian regimes that may not have the same interests at heart as the U.S. seems counter to the program's purpose and raises serious concerns about conflicts of interests.

To remedy this unacceptable situation, I urge the Department of Education to undertake a thorough review of CCAS's activities to determine how Title VI funds are spent on such undertakings, and whether or not they are in accordance with statutory mandates. Support for academic boycotts of American allies, and foreign-sovereigns on advisory boards, may be acceptable with other funds, but not with taxpayer-directed dollars designated for American national security training.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "D. Shur", written in a cursive style.