

Introductory Remarks
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A Talk by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt
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I have spent a lot of time thinking about how to introduce our speakers. What I am *not* going to do is tell you about their resumes. Let me just say that these are two of America's most distinguished political scientists, especially in the area of security studies. In a recent survey by the respected journal *Foreign Policy*, listing the most influential academics in this area, both of our guests made the list. They are associated with the "realist school" of analysis, which typically involves a positive engagement with American power. You can make your own assessment of them in a few minutes. I want to take my short time here to address some bigger issues. One of those issues is Barack Obama. Another is Martin Luther. These may not seem relevant at first glance, but perhaps they will seem more relevant upon second glance.

Regarding Barack Obama, we are now watching what may be a new form of politics in this country. Joe Trippi, the creative political campaign manager who organized Howard Dean's abortive 2004 presidential bid, recently said that Hillary Clinton has run the most effective *top-down* presidential campaign in history. He said she is struggling against Barack Obama because he is running the most effective *bottom-up* campaign in history and she has not figured out how to counter his strengths. Two weeks ago Obama became the first presidential candidate ever to have a million donors contribute to his campaign. A million donors. Almost all of these are through the internet. In February alone, he added 385,000 people to his donor list and raised \$56 million. \$45 million of that was on the internet and 90% came in donations of less than a hundred dollars. *That* is bottom-up politics.

Regarding Luther, historians say that Luther became "Martin Luther, World Famous Reformer" rather than dying in obscurity as "Martin Luther, Seminary Priest" because he came along just as the printing press was invented. Tacking debating points on a church door is provocative, but having an essay read by tens of thousands is a fundamentally different matter. Luther was the first widely-read, best-selling author in history. The bishops lost control of the information network, and his challenge to church

authority went beyond the halls of the university, where he taught, into the public realm. This simple fact changed history.

In a similar way, Professors Mearsheimer and Walt emerged, Luther-like, in the internet age. Had their initial 2006 article on “The Israel Lobby” been published a decade earlier it might have died an obscure death, especially since it was published in Britain, not the normal place one goes to reach the American public with discussions of American politics.

But in this new age of the internet, the fact that an article is published overseas does not drop it into a black hole. That article was as close as your computer. You did not even have to subscribe to the journal to read it or to download it. That original article was published in a 24-page version in the *London Review of Books*. If even ten people in this room read that journal on a regular basis, I would be surprised. That article was downloaded thousands of times and zipped around the world from listserv to listserv like Superman in flight. Then it was put on Professor Walt’s website at Harvard’s Kennedy School in a longer, 81-page, single-spaced version complete with 227 footnotes. Within four months, that longer version was downloaded over 275,000 times. Let me repeat that: over 275,000 times. An 81-page, single-spaced academic article with 227 footnotes was downloaded over 275,000 times. Then it was reprinted in slightly revised form in *Middle East Policy*, a respected journal, and was downloaded thousands of times more. Then last year it was turned into a 484-page book, written in small print, and became a *New York Times* and university bookstore best seller. I do not have enough words to tell you how astonishing this is. Such a phenomenon is exactly that, a phenomenon. It does an end run around the conventional centers of power. It mobilizes elements of the public who are not otherwise empowered.

I am not about to suggest that our speakers tonight are going to create a new Reformation. They are far too tied into the American power structure to fall into that category. Both have very conventional academic careers. Professor Mearsheimer is a graduate of West Point and served as a career military officer for a time before ending up at the University of Chicago. Professor Walt is past Dean of the Kennedy School at Harvard. What is amazing about the controversy over their writings is that they are not coming out of the hard right or the hard left, which you might think from all the bruhaha,

but out of the center. They are *not* revolutionaries. They are *not* radicals. In a sense, they are classic conservatives who want to preserve American influence in the world and believe that current policies are weakening it. In a very profound sense, they *are* the establishment.

Under different circumstances, the names Mearsheimer and Walt would not be known outside of academic circles, and their articles would be read by hundreds, not hundreds of thousands. Only a handful of you would have heard of them, almost all through a political science class in foreign policy. Few of you would have turned out to hear them speak. But these are not ordinary times and the controversy over their writings must be seen in historic context.

All of you in this room sense that there are major shifts occurring in world politics. I can guarantee with near certainty that in ten years you will not recognize the Middle East. Something will happen that is so unanticipated and so unprecedented that we will be astounded. We may also be left in despair. You also sense that there is something wrong with our domestic political system. How do these decisions get made that create chaos on the other side of the world? Why is it that five media conglomerates control our information system? Why is it that we have a hundred television channels but consider a political centrist like Alan Combs to be representative of the left? Why is there an effort to create an “index” of books you should not read and thoughts you should not consider? Why is it that the proud University of Michigan Press suspended its distribution contract with a British publisher because some of their books contain radical ideas that students in London, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, Jerusalem, Ankara, and Delhi encounter on a routine basis, but you should not?

There are no simple answers to these questions, and there is no single factor that explains what is going wrong. But something is going wrong. Our speakers tonight have a thesis that they want to present. It is not a simple thesis. It is not a conspiracy theory. It does not pretend to explain everything. Some of you will agree with it, and others will disagree. But I think I can say that all of you will leave this auditorium intellectually challenged and perhaps even provoked.

I have said what I have to say. You are anxious to hear our speakers, and so am I. I present to you Professors John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt.