

Press Release

The 2004 Middle East & Central Asia Politics, Economics, and Society Conference Transitions and Inequality in the 21st Century

Sept. 9th to 11th, 2004, Salt Lake City, Utah

Interdisciplinary analyses and problem solving in the Middle East & Central Asia. Panels: Problems of Economic & Democratic Transitions; Challenges of Post-Communism; Regional & International Affairs; Ethnic Conflict & Resolutions; Nationalism & Identity Politics; Comparative Political Economy; Palestinian-Israeli Dilemma; Poetry & Mysticism; Comparative Foreign Policies; Regional Issues of the Caucasus; Comparative Education Policies; Futures of Political Islam; Turkey's Justice & Development Party; Impacts of Globalization; Culture & Gender; Human Security, Environment & Sustainability; Media, Cinema, & Film; Human Rights; Terrorism & State Violence; Historical Studies; Law & Society; Peace Keeping Operations; Iraq and Afghanistan Nation Building Projects; Grants & Study Abroad Opportunities. Also concurrent 3-day Film Festival. Plus special plenary panel: "PERSPECTIVES ON THE POST-9-11 WORLD" featuring: Shirin Akiner, Michael Collins-Dunn, & Ambassadors to the US from Tajikistan and Syria.

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AUG. 17TH, 2004, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH — "PERSPECTIVES ON THE POST-9-11 WORLD" is the theme of the plenary panel offered by the second annual 'Middle East & Central Asia Politics, Economics, and Society Conference', to be held in Salt Lake City on the campus of the University of Utah during September 9th to 11th. The special 9-11 panel—estimated to last 90 minutes—will be held almost three years to the day of the tragedy of Sept. 11th, 2001. The panel will be composed of five prominent experts and participants: two Ambassadors to the United States from Central Asia and the Middle East, Ambassador of Tajikistan to the U.S. Khamrohon Zaripov; and Ambassador of Syria to the U.S. Imad Moustapha; and three prominent scholars on the region: Professor Shirin Akiner of the University of London, a Central Asian expert fluent in numerous Turkic and Asian languages; Dr. Michael Dunn of the Middle East Institute in Washington, who is the Editor of the well-known Middle East Journal; and Professor Stephen Zunes of the University of San Francisco, known for his critical analysis of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, including that of the Iraq war. Prof. Peter Sluglett, a History Professor at the University of Utah and a well-known expert on Iraqi history will serve as moderator to the above mentioned plenary panel on 9-11.

The conference and the special plenary panel are expected to attract up to 300 scholars, policy makers, academics and V.I.P. guests from around the world, and will cover a variety of timely themes shared in common by the broad regions of the Middle East and Central Asia. "9-11 brought forth the importance of studying the Islamic world, its intricacies and its delicate relationship with the West," said Yavuz, a professor

of Political Science and Middle East Studies at the University of Utah. Yavus, who is also coordinating a book project on the Islamic-dominated Justice and Development Party (JDP) of Turkey, said that an “increased knowledge on the part of policy makers and ordinary Americans about the regions of the Middle East and Central Asia—and vice versa—is bound to lead to a more peaceful and secure international environment”. At least five of the 31 scheduled panels are focused on the JDP, which is considered a moderate Islamic party currently ruling over Turkey. In the said JDP panels, the ramifications of rule by Islamic parties in the region will be discussed, including such themes as Turkey’s human rights policy, its foreign policy and its relation with the U.S. and its likely future membership in the European Union.

Other panels will entail topic-specific themes, ranging from feminist politics in the Middle East and Central Asia to U.S. Iraq policy and the nation building project of post-Taliban Afghanistan. The conference is considered one of the most unique of its kind, due to its thematic molding of two great, yet volatile, regions of the world—those of the Middle East and Central Asia. “It is good to hear the views of Central Asian and Middle Eastern citizens and experts firsthand,” said Kristian Alexander, Acting Chair of conference committee and Ph.D. candidate in International Relations at the University of Utah. Alexander, a German citizenship born in Lebanon who lived through the bloody civil war of that country is especially qualified to address the importance of this event. “What I saw in Lebanon during the civil war years of the 1970s and 80s proved the point for a more analytical approach to politics, conflict resolution, and mediation,” he said.

Other distinguished guests and presenters include Dr. Stephen Zunes who is the Middle East editor for Foreign Policy in Focus, a professor of politics at the University of San Francisco, and author of Tinderbox: U.S. Middle East Policy and the Roots of Terrorism (Common Courage Press, 2004). Zunes is well known for his bold opposition to the Bush administration’s unilateral policies abroad, including the increasingly divisive policy on Iraq. Though the fact that the Bush administration has attempted to forge cordial relations with moderate Muslim leaders worldwide, months before the tragedy of 9-11, Zunes had reminded readers that “... the U.S. has at times been a supporter of hard-line Islamic movements and governments. For example, Washington armed extremist Islamic groups in Afghanistan during the 1980s during the popular uprising against that country's communist regime backed by Soviet occupation forces [or that some] of the most notorious Islamic terrorists today—including many followers of Osama Bin Laden—originally received their training from the CIA during that period.” (in Foreign Policy in Focus Vol. 6, No. 24, June 2001).

Yet another distinguished scholar present at the Conference is Dr. Robert Barfield, Chair of the Dept. of Anthropology of Boston University and author of numerous scientific works on Afghanistan and Central Asia. Many experts on the region believe in the necessity of increased military and economic aid to Afghanistan, the lack of which during the decade after the end of the Cold War in essence led to the 9-11 tragedy. This conference is bound to shed light on many of the controversial and critical issues—such as human rights, terrorism, foreign policy, and coalition building—facing the U.S. and regional powers in the coming years. Local and international news and media outlets are hereby invited to participate in this event and are encouraged to contact the Conference Committee in advance.

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