

Press Release

Middle East & Central Asia Politics, Economics and Society Conference

September 7-9, 2006 Salt Lake City, Utah

Aug. 24, Salt Lake City— **The 2006 Middle East & Central Asia Politics, Economics, and Society Conference**, scheduled to take place on the campus of the University of Utah during **September 7-9th** of this year, is the fourth consecutive event of its kind. According to the Chair of the Conference organizing committee, Saban Kardas, the Conference “will convene at a critical juncture, where the Middle East and its neighbouring region of Central Asia are undergoing drastic changes.” Kardas, a political scientist from the Middle East Technical University in Ankara who is also a Teaching Assistant at the University of Utah, went on to say that “globalization, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the continued Arab-Israeli conflict, the massive rise in oil prices, the abundance of natural resources in the two regions, and the increasing democratic aspirations of the regions’ people are all factors, for better or for worse, which are making both the Middle East and Central Asia of increasing importance for the rest of the world.”

The Conference is expected to attract as many as 200 scholars, academics, representatives of public policy and civil society organizations, in addition to government officials, members of think tanks and military personnel. An estimated 125 scholarly presentations will take place in 34 topic-specific panels within a span of three days. According to Kristian Alexander, Vice Chair of the organizing committee, “the highly specialized panels are quite unique in that they deal with, among other things, academic, yet urgent issues of security, conflict resolution, and economic cooperation in the Middle East and Central Asia.” Alexander, a German national, who lived in Lebanon for 16 years, added that “as the recent deadly *mêlée* between Israel and Lebanon’s Hizballah has proved, political conflict cannot merely be solved by troops and salvos.” He went on to say that “bringing together experts who can analyze the nuances of the region and propose sound diplomatic and multi-dimensional solutions to seminal issues of war and peace is an appropriate staging ground.”

As well as the 34 panels and a concurrent Film Festival, the conference will host three distinguished plenary lectures. **Stephen Walt**, an internationally renowned professor of international affairs and American foreign policy and Dean of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard is one of the main plenary lecturers of the Conference. Walt, who regularly writes and lectures on global affairs, will speak on “**What Went Wrong with U.S. Foreign Policy? (And How to Fix It).**” Professor Walt is the author of three books including

Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005) and over fifty scholarly articles and papers including “An Unnecessary War” published just before the start of the Iraq war in *Foreign Policy* (Jan/Feb 2003) and co-authored with John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago.

“Walt’s presentation on contemporary U.S. foreign policy,” says Peter Sluglett, a professor of Middle Eastern history at the University of Utah, “will undoubtedly be extremely informative, especially to those non-specialists who rely solely on the mass media and sound bites for their understanding of the Middle East.” Sluglett has just finished a second edition of his book on Iraq under British occupation and mandate between 1914 and 1932. **Stephen Walt’s lecture will take place on Saturday, Sept. 9th at 11 am in the Saltair Room in the Union Building of the University of Utah.**

Another plenary lecture, which will serve as the Conference kick-off, will be delivered by **Mohammed Hafez**, a professor of Islam and world politics at the University of Missouri and an expert on terrorism and the Middle East. Hafez, the author of *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World* (Lynne Rienner, 2003), will deliver a talk titled: **“Iraq and the Mythology of Martyrdom.”** This will be a unique presentation using footage of the mass media tactics of the insurgence and terrorist groups fighting the U.S.-led coalition forces in Iraq. “This lecture,” says Hakan Yavuz, a professor of Islam and Comparative Politics at the University of Utah, “is a ‘must see’ for those concerned with developments in Iraq and the ongoing threat of terrorism.” **Mohammed Hafez’ presentation will take place on Thursday, Sept. 7th at 10 am in the Hinckley Caucus Room in Orson Spencer Hall.**

Dru Gladney, professor of Asian studies and anthropology at the University of Hawaii, will also deliver a plenary talk titled: **“China Faces Central Asia: A New Chapter in the Great Game?”** Gladney is the author of numerous academic articles and three books including *Dislocating China: Muslims, Minorities, and Other Subaltern Subjects* (University of Chicago Press, 2004). “There are several reasons why Gladney’s topic is extremely important,” says Yavuz. “As China’s economy is growing, so is its political ego, its military and its long-term ambitions for Asia.” Yavuz adds that “Eventually, China’s interests in Central Asia are bound to collide with those of other regional and global powers, such as Russia, India and the U.S., not to mention the intricate patchwork of ethnic and religious minorities within and outside its borders. A sound knowledge and analysis of this issue is thus critical.” **Dru Gladney’s talk will take place on Friday, Sept. 8th at 11 am in the Saltair Room in the Union Building.**

MORE INFORMATION:

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