

Panelists to Explore Afghanistan Issues at KU

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LAWRENCE -- Having trouble keeping track of all the factions and actions in Afghanistan? To help dispel some of the confusion, the University of Kansas Office of International Programs will offer a public panel, "Afghanistan 101: Political Factions, Military Operations and a Brief History of Islamic Fundamentalism," at 4 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 15, in the Kansas Union Alderson Auditorium.

Panelists include a native of Afghanistan, two KU faculty members and a Kansas City area surgeon who was a White House fellow during the first Bush administration and who worked along the Afghan border during the 1985 Soviet invasion.

Raheem Yaseer and his family escaped from communist-ruled Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1987 and ended up in the Midwest a year later. Yaseer is assistant director of the Center for Afghanistan Studies at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, which is the only such center in the United States. Yaseer will be able to explain some of al Qaeda's agenda in Afghanistan and the world and Pakistan's loyalty to the Wahhabis, a sect of Islamic fundamentalists with a strong political agenda.

Rose Greaves, KU professor emeritus of history, has studied and taught about the Middle East and Asia for 32 years, including two years at West Point Military Academy, three years at Fort Bragg, N.C., and at the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth. Greaves will outline the historical background of Islamic fundamentalism that gave rise to the Taliban and to Osama bin Laden. She was in Pakistan and Iran in 1999 to conduct research.

Jeff Colyer is an Overland Park surgeon known for his work with the International Medical Corps in Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Albania and Kenya. Colyer was a White House fellow from 1988 to 1990 and worked with the U.S. Agency for International Development. In addition, Colyer's experience as a defense analyst for the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London involved working on Afghanistan cross-border issues. Colyer spent six months in 1985 along the Afghan border during the Soviet invasion.

Capt. James Cooper, professor of naval science and commanding officer of KU's Naval ROTC program, will explain some of the U.S. and coalition military actions reported in the news. Cooper's military career includes two Pentagon assignments, one as a national security affairs action officer.

"With this panel, we hope to give people a basic historical and political background to what we are all now caught up in," said Anne Merydith-Wolf, project coordinator for International Programs.