

**DEAKIN CONFERENCE 2026
MIDDLE EAST STUDIES FORUM**

THE MIDDLE EAST IN TRANSITION

4-5 November 2026 | 9.00 am-5.00 pm



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The Middle East in Transition

Burwood Corporate Centre (BCC)
Level 2, 221 Burwood Highway
Burwood 3125 VIC

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STUDIES FORUM**

Welcome

The last two years have witnessed a profound shift in the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, yet these transformations are inseparable from the region's longer historical trajectories. In Gaza, today's severe humanitarian crisis unfolds within a decades-long history of occupation, conflict, and contested narratives of homeland and displacement. In Syria, the post-Assad transition remains complex, shaped by the legacies of authoritarian rule, colonial-era borders, and the historical negotiation of minority rights and communal identities. In the wake of the United States' and Israel's attacks on Iran, Washington's policies are entangled with a long history of external intervention, Cold War legacies, and competing moral narratives about global order and responsibility.

These regional developments have impacted Australia. Rising intolerance, Islamophobia, and antisemitism have exposed vulnerabilities in the nation's social cohesion. Communities grapple with questions of identity, representation, and the ethics of coexistence. These challenges underscore the need for critical reflection on the stories societies tell about each other, the policies that structure belonging, and the practices that cultivate - or erode - social trust. The yearning for justice, recognition, and human security is both contemporary and deeply historical. It is voiced through political claim-making but also through literature, oral histories, visual culture, and everyday acts of resilience that carry memories across generations.

MESF is proud to once again host this biennial conference, bringing scholars together to exchange ideas and explore how past and present intersect in shaping conflict, identity, resilience, and hope in the Middle East. We look forward to an engaging and illuminating experience.

Conference Committee

Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh, Chairperson

Dr Virginie Rey

Dr Zouhir Gabsi

Renee Davidson

PROGRAMME

Day One
4 November 2026



9.15-10.30 am

Commencement Speech & Keynote Address

Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh, Chair

Opening Remarks

Professor Michelle Burgis-Kasthala, La Trobe University

A new (dis)order? State de-formation and genocide in Gaza

10.30-11.00 am

Morning Tea

11.00 am-12.30 pm

Plenary: Conflict and Mediation

Chair: **Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh**

Professor Ibrahim Fraihat, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies

Omani and Pakistani mediation in the Third Gulf War

Assistant Professor Mohsen Solhdoost, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

When ceasefires fracture: Iran, maritime access, and the coercive relocation of war

12.30-1.30 pm

Lunch

1.30-3.00 pm

Parallel Sessions

Panel A: U.S. and Iran

Chair: **Mr Amin Naeni, Deakin University**

Mr Firas Naji, Independent Researcher

The war of economic corridors is reshaping the Middle East

Dr Shaiwal Satyarthi, The University of Delhi and Assistant Professor Pawan Kumar, Amity University

USA-Israel attack on Iran and questions of aggression in international law

Dr Julia Rohnifard, Taylor's University TBC

"Operation Epic Fury" and the erosion of the prohibition on force: Breach of international law at the 2026 U.S.-Israeli war on Iran

Assistant Professor Ali Bakir, Qatar University TBC

The revisionist hegemon: Implications of U.S. foreign policy for the Middle East

Panel B: Regional Security and Deterrence

Chair: **Prof. Ishan Yilmaz, Deakin University**

Mr Suhaib Shaukat, The University of Exeter

The limitations of an outsourced security framework in the Gulf

Dr Mohammad Seyam, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies

Non-state armed actors and the limits of conventional military power: A strategic assessment of the Izz al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades' performance in 2023-25 Gaza War

Dr Andrew Thomas, Deakin University

Doubling down: The successes and failures of Iran's forward defence doctrine in 2026

Panel C: Colonial Legacies and State Transformation

Chair: **Dr Dara Conduit, The University of Melbourne**

Dr Hadeel Abdelhameed, LMU's Käte Hamburger Research Centre global dis:connect

Gulf cultural governance: The making of the post-oil citizen

Dr Fiona Hill, Independent Researcher

Saudi Arabia's heritage sunrise

Ms Zoe Davies, The Australian National University

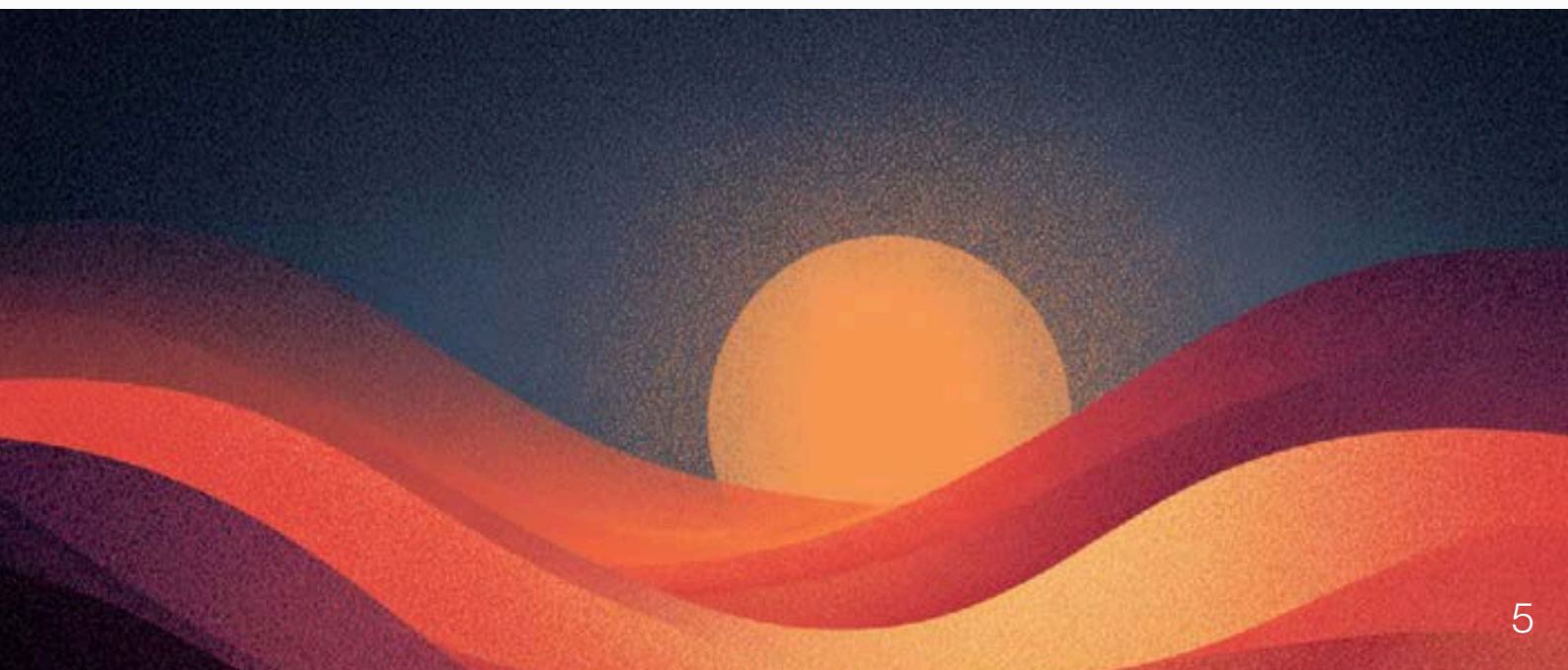
Colonial continuities in Gulf labour dynamics

Ms Alia Ardon, The University of Sydney

Ecological circumnavigations of archival silences: The twentieth-century colonial industrialisation of eucalyptus in Morocco

3.00-3.30 pm

Afternoon Tea



3.30-5.00 pm
Parallel Sessions

Panel A: Post-Assad Syria: Historiographies and Transitional Justice

Chair: **Mr James Godfrey, The University of Canberra**

Dr Nour A. Munawar, The University of Amsterdam

Heritage after Assad: A decolonial framework for post-conflict Syria

Dr Stephen Pascoe, UNSW Sydney

Oral history, transitional justice and the archiving of Syrian suffering

Dr Ruth Wells, UNSW Sydney

Memories of Syria's prisons: How torture, detention and disappearance can shape narration

Panel B: Taliban Governance: Extraction and Gender Apartheid

Chair: **Dr Niamatullah Ibrahimi, The University of Melbourne**

Dr Farkhondeh Akbari, Monash University

Diplomacy under gender apartheid: Analysing international responses to Taliban rule

Dr Abbas Farasoo, La Trobe University

Ethnic domination and resource control in Afghanistan: From codified law to the land cadastre

Dr Niamatullah Ibrahimi, The University of Melbourne

Taliban extractive economy and everyday peace: Mining and contentious politics in Afghanistan

Dr Arif Saba, Deakin University

Rethinking norm robustness: Selective norm robustness, alliance shielding, and the prohibition on the use of force

Panel C: Media Narratives and Digital Authoritarianism

Chair: **Mr Benedict Moleta, The Australian National University**

Dr Dara Conduit, The University of Melbourne

The political economy of digital authoritarianism: Evidence from the Iranian regime's implementation of technology

Dr Ali Mamouri, Deakin University

Manufacturing war: How narratives justified the attack on Iran

Mr Amin Naeni, Deakin University

Chinese technology transfers and the expansion of Iran's digital control architecture

Professor Abeer Al-Najjar, The American University of Sharjah

Governing the Narrative: Control, Alignment, and the Politics of Arab Media



PROGRAMME

Day Two
5 November 2026



9.30-10.30 am

Keynote Address

Chair: **Dr Zouhir Gabsi, Deakin University**

Associate Professor Lucia Sorbera, The University of Sydney

No to war: Towards humanistic practice in Middle East Studies

10.30-11.00 am

Morning Tea

11.00 am - 12.30 pm

Plenary: Antisemitism and Islamophobia

Chair: **Professor Ihsan Yilmaz, Deakin University**

Dr Zouhir Gabsi, Deakin University

Selective solidarity: The politics of language in addressing antisemitism and Islamophobia in Australia

**Dr Sara Cheikh Husain, Deakin University and
Mr James Godfrey, The University of Canberra**

New antisemitism is Islamophobia's new apparatus:
An IHRA infused Australian multicultural governance
and its impact on Australian Muslims

12.30-1.30 pm

Lunch

1.30-3.00 pm

Parallel Sessions

Panel A: Politics of Identity and Dissent

Chair: **Dr Ali Mamouri, Deakin University**

Ms Ziba Akbari, Deakin University

Kurdish political agency in Iran under conditions of closure (1979 to present)

Dr Miniature Malekpour, The University of Sydney

From Green to Women, Life, Freedom: Digital resistance and the jurisdictional creep of the UN Cybercrime Convention

Dr Afsaneh Seifinaji, The University of Melbourne

Normalising dissent in Iran: Women and incremental change

Panel B: Transnational Identity and Belonging

Chair: **Dr Andrew Thomas, Deakin University**

Dr Seema Khan, Deakin University

The Middle East's geopolitical conflicts and the reconfiguration of transnational Muslim identity: Evidence from Pakistan

Dr Hussein Tahiri, Victoria University

Beyond Sykes-Picot: Self-determination, postcolonial order, and the case for a United Kurdish State

Dr David Tittensor, The University of Melbourne

Foreign interference and transnational repression: A Turkish case study



Panel C: Legacies of Revolution

Chair: **Dr Mariam Farida, Macquarie University**

Ms Mahtab Hassanzadeh, Macquarie University

From deep state to Islamic State: Reading the Iranian revolution through Foucault's 'Iran Writings'

Mr Omar Mohamed, Charles Sturt University

From Tahrir Square to Exile: Revolutionary learning after Egypt's January Revolution

Dr Marika Sosnowski, The University of Melbourne

The law after revolution: Allocation of rights

3.00-3.30 pm

Afternoon Tea



3.30-5.00 pm

Plenary: Iran, Lebanon, Syria: International conflict, domestic legitimacy and regional change

Chair: **Mr Benedict Moleta, The Australian National University**

Dr Niloufar Baghernia, The Australian National University

Iran after the war: Pressure, adaptation, and constraint

Dr Mariam Farida, Macquarie University

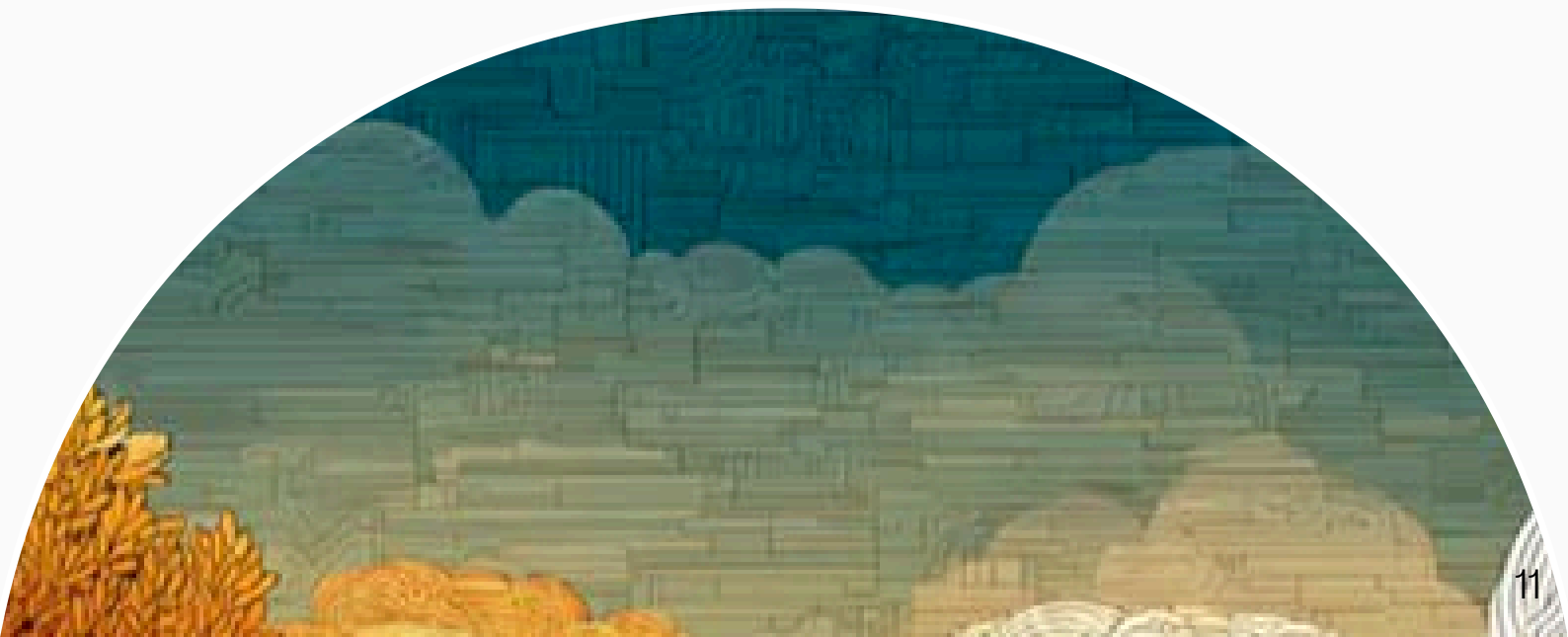
The myth of autonomy? Hezbollah's Realpolitik in an era of regional escalation

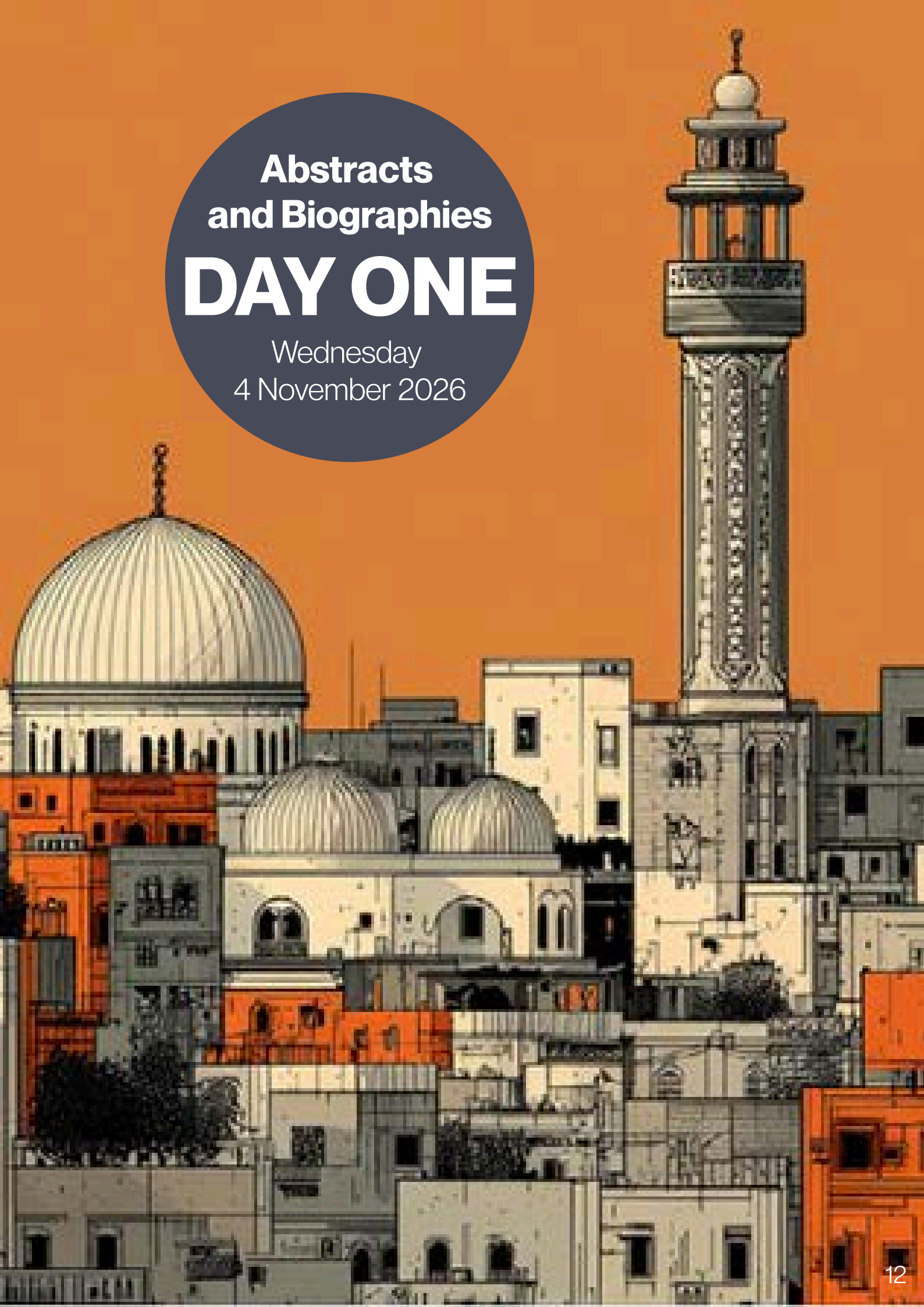
Mr Benedict Moleta, The Australian National University

The struggle for Syria in regional perspective: From Patrick Seale to Ahmed al-Sharaa

Dr Mireille Rebeiz, The University of Otago

The legal classification of Hezbollah and Lebanon's international obligations in time of war





**Abstracts
and Biographies**

DAY ONE

Wednesday
4 November 2026

Keynote Address

DAY ONE

9.30-10.30 am

A new (dis)order? State de-formation and genocide in Gaza

States are often formed in the throes of violent upheavals or the structural imposition of colonial domination. This is the case across the Middle East and North Africa which continues to experience profound regional realignment, state breakdown, conflict and impunity. Lying at the geographical heart of the region is Gaza whose population overwhelmingly hails from lands they were displaced from during the 1948 Nakba. While the territory and its people have confronted many challenges since then, it has been events since late 2023 that speak to an acceleration of earlier trends seeking radically to reset Gaza's future. Here, in this talk, Professor Burgis-Kasthala will first consider how international legal regimes relating to self-defence, international humanitarian law and the prohibition against genocide provide some useful tools to appreciate Gaza vis-à-vis its regional role. Second, the talk will evaluate what forms of state formation are possible or precluded by international law, especially in light of recent UN Security Council initiatives. The talk will conclude with a reflection on the role that self-determination can play during and after Gaza's genocide.

Professor Michelle Burgis-Kasthala
La Trobe University

Michelle Burgis-Kasthala was appointed as Professor of International Law at La Trobe University in 2025. Previously, she has worked at the University of Edinburgh, the University of St Andrews and the Australian National University. Her work broadly considers matters of accountability, adjudication and territorial disputes across the Arab world.





DAY ONE - Plenary Panel

11.00 am-12.30 pm

Omani and Pakistani mediation in the Third Gulf War

This paper examines the supply and demand of mediation in the changing dynamics of the Middle East. We argue that mediation becomes feasible when the strategic, political, and relational interests of mediators and conflict parties align. Using a comparative analysis of Omani and Pakistani mediation efforts before, during, and after the Third Gulf War (beginning 28 February 2026), we explore how such alignment shapes mediation outcomes. The study traces the causal pathways of both mediation attempts to explain why Oman and Pakistan emerged as mediators, and why Pakistan-but not Oman-facilitated the first ceasefire of the war. By examining the peacemaking roles of Pakistan and Oman, the paper contributes to debates on the regionalisation of mediation and the evolving architecture of conflict management in the Middle East.

Professor Ibrahim Fraihat

Doha Institute for Graduate Studies

Ibrahim Fraihat is a Professor of International Conflict Resolution at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, and the founding president of the Arab Society for Conflict Studies. He previously served as a Senior Foreign Policy Fellow at the Brookings Institution and taught conflict resolution at Georgetown University. His books include *Conflict Mediation in the Arab World* (2023), and *Iran and Saudi Arabia: Taming a Chaotic Conflict* (2020)

When ceasefires fracture: Iran, maritime access, and the coercive relocation of war

Ceasefires are often treated as steps from war toward peace. This paper argues that they can also transform war by relocating coercion into less visible domains. Drawing on a multi-round, evidence-adjudicated simulation of the Israel–Iran–US theater, it develops the concept of coercive relocation: the movement of strategic pressure from direct exchange into proxy leakage, contested maritime access, commercial exposure, and bargaining under ambiguity. The case shows how a pause can remain formally meaningful while strategic danger shifts into Lebanon, Hormuz, Bab al-Mandeb, mediator credibility, shipping and insurance stress, and competing claims over what the ceasefire governs. Methodologically, the paper combines OSINT-first evidence adjudication, structured expert judgment, probabilistic updating, escalation-ladder filtering, scenario simulation, and policy-regret logic.

Assistant Professor Mohsen Solhdoost
Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

Mohsen Solhdoost is an Assistant Professor of International Relations at Xi'an Jiaotong–Liverpool University. His research focuses on crisis escalation, proxy warfare, and AI-enabled methods for early warning and strategic foresight, with regional expertise in the Middle East.





DAY ONE - Panel A

1.30-3.00 pm

The war of economic corridors is reshaping the Middle East

This paper examines the profound shift in the global order with the U.S. transitioning towards a 19th century assertive doctrine of raw power, resource extraction, and weaponised interdependence. From this perspective, economic corridors are weaponised to serve U.S. interest and to contain the greater Eurasian project. Alternatively, they are utilised as a network for continental integration and to establish a new regional order. Examining Iraq's "Development Road" within this context, the study concludes that economic corridors in the Middle East have transcended their commercial utility to become primary geopolitical battlelines. Ultimately, the survival and stability of the region depend on establishing functional integration based on shared energy, interconnected supply chains, and joint manufacturing rather than exclusive resource extraction, and exclusionary security alliances.

Mr Firas Naji

Independent Researcher

Firas Naji is a researcher with Master of Art (Research) degree from the University of Sydney. His thesis entitled Partners in the Homeland – Communal diversity, cultural hegemony and national identity in Iraq 1958-1963. He presented several papers to conferences in Australia and Iraq including at past MESF conferences in 2016 and 2018. Firas regularly writes opinion article at al-Mada newspaper, Baghdad, Iraq.

USA-Israel attack on Iran and questions of aggression in international law

The regulation of the resort to force as a matter of individual criminal liability dates back to the founding of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg in 1945. The problem of the crime of aggression within contemporary international law relates to the distinction between normative recognition and institutional implementation. At the normative level, aggression has been defined with considerable clarity and incorporated as one of the core crimes in international law. The present paper examines the age-old concept of aggression, mapping its relevance in the USA-Israel attack on Iran starting February 2026. It finally concludes stating that even though retrospective effect is not present even the emblematic acts of recognition and charge can reignite the public,Äôs dwindling faith in transnational law, but still lasting credibility requires meaningful reform of global governance.

Dr Shaiwal Satyarthi

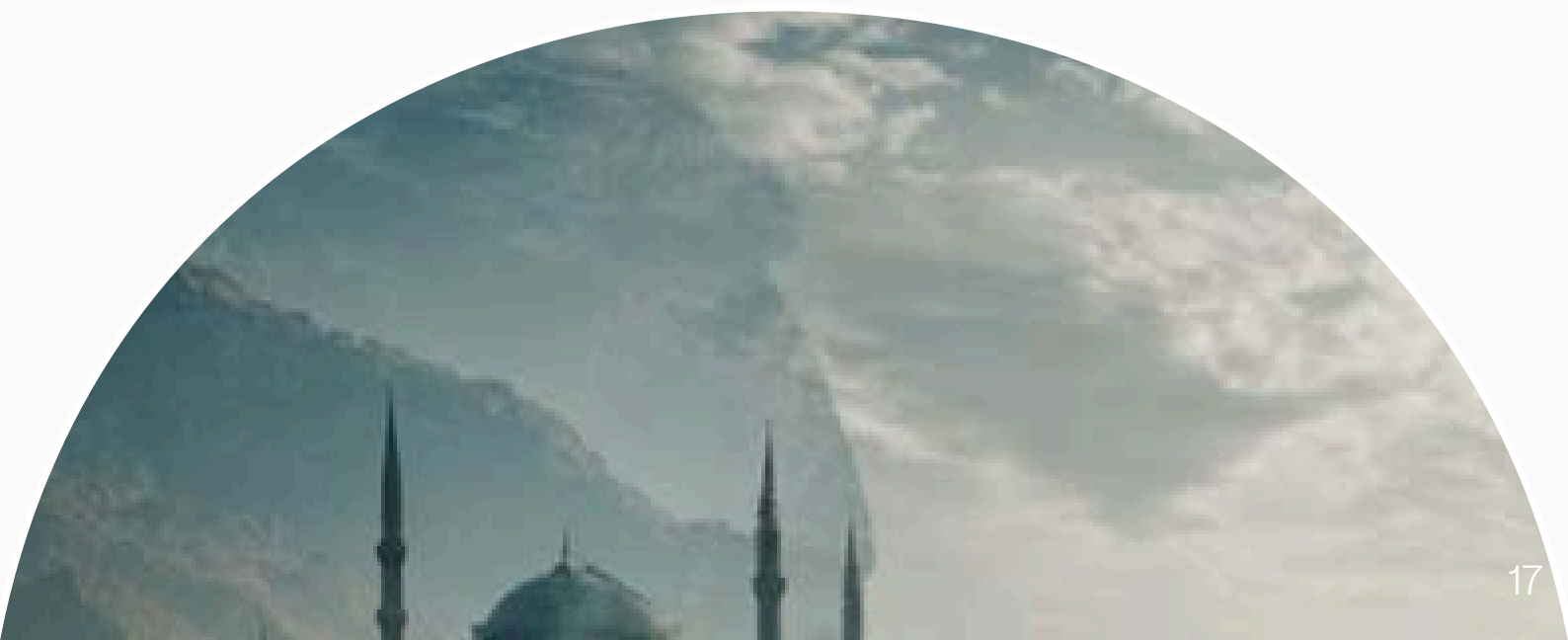
The University of Delhi

Dr Shaiwal Satyarthi is a Full-Time Professor of Law at the Faculty of Law, University of Delhi. A seasoned academician having experience of more than 2 decades of experience, he has previously taught at Chanakya National Law University and has been invited to deliver lectures all over India. He is the author of two volumes book on intellectual property rights and is currently working on a monograph, 'the Future of International Law'.

Assistant Professor Pawan Kumar

Amity University

Pawan Kumar teaches at Amity Law School, Amity University, Noida, India. He is an honorary assistant professor at the International Institute of Justice and Police Sciences, Bengaluru and has close to 7 years of full-time teaching experience. He has attended the Indian Law Institute, South Asian University and Chanakya National Law University for his doctorate, master's, and bachelor's education. His area of expertise is international legal studies.



"Operation Epic Fury" and the erosion of the prohibition on force: Breach of international law at the 2026 U.S.-Israeli war on Iran

The paper examines the 2026 U.S.-Israeli war on Iran through the lens of international law, assessing its legality under *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. The war constitutes an assault on the UN Charter, risking impunity for IHL violations. The *jus ad bellum* analysis shows the operation fails to meet self-defense thresholds: the reference to Article 51 is not a credible justification, the "imminent threat" claim is untenable. The *jus in bello* analysis reveals war crimes, including the direct strike on Minab primary school killing 168, threats against civilian infrastructure, and over 1,400 civilian deaths. The UNSC's one-sided Resolution 2817, condemning Iran's retaliation, created "council-endorsed impunity" for the actions of the US and Israel. These blatant violations of international law are yet another contribution to normalization of a new moral low in international politics.

Dr Julia Roknifard,
Taylor's University TBC

Dr Julia Roknifard is Senior Lecturer at the School of Law and Governance, Taylor's University (Malaysia), where she teaches subjects on political science and international relations at the Bachelor's program on Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE). She is specialised on the matters of international security and Middle East politics, with a particular focus on Iran.

The revisionist hegemon: Implications of U.S. foreign policy for the Middle East

International Relations scholarship has long equated revisionism with rising, dissatisfied powers seeking to overturn an established order, while casting the hegemon as an inherently status quo actor. This article challenges that assumption by arguing that the United States, "the principal architect of the post-1945 international order," has itself become a primary revisionist force. Drawing on a re-conceptualisation of revisionism as a behavioural rather than positional concept, the article argues that American revisionism is not an episodic aberration tied to a single administration, but a structural trend driven by relative decline, domestic political transformation, and intensifying great power competition.

Assistant Professor Ali Bakir
Qatar University TBC

Ali Bakir is an Assistant Professor of International Affairs, Security, & Defense at Qatar University. He is also a Non-resident Senior Fellow at the Middle East Council on Global Affairs. He was, until recently, a Non-resident Senior Fellow with the Scowcroft Middle East Security Initiative and the Middle East programs at the "Atlantic Council", and a Task Force member at the "Center for Strategic and International Studies" (CSIS) in Washington, DC.



DAY ONE - Panel B

1.30-3.00 pm

The limitations of an outsourced security framework in the Gulf

On February 28th, in response to the US strike, Iran immediately retaliated with attacks on several Gulf Arab countries, bursting a well-crafted image of stability that has attracted millions of investments and people, with thousands of missiles and drones in the sky. Iran's continuous attacks on the Gulf capitals have questioned the reliability of the US military bases, which were supposed to act as a deterrent, but they attracted a barrage of missiles, thus questioning a security architecture that has outsourced their security to Washington. The research will analyse the limitations of an externally supported security architecture to develop a more regionally focused security framework, specifically exploring strategies through which Gulf Arab countries can establish a sustainable security architecture that maintains effective deterrence in future conflicts.

Mr Suhaib Shaukat

The University of Exeter

Suhaib Shaukat is a student at the University of Exeter, where he is currently pursuing Middle East Studies. His academic interests focus on the politics and international relations of the Middle East, with particular attention to regional diplomacy, security dynamics, and political developments in the Arab Gulf region.

Non-state armed actors and the limits of conventional military power: A strategic assessment of the Izz al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades' performance in 2023-25 Gaza War

The October 7th, 2023, offensive by the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades represents one of the most strategically consequential operations by a non-state armed actor in recent Middle Eastern history. This paper provides a systematic strategic assessment of the Brigades' military performance throughout the 2023 - 2025 Gaza war, examining how a sub-state organisation with asymmetric capabilities sustained prolonged resistance against one of the world's most advanced military forces. Drawing on O'Neill's insurgency typology, Arreguin-Toft's asymmetric conflict theory, and Boot's analysis of non-state actors, the paper examines four operational dimensions: tactical adaptability, tunnelling infrastructure, counter-surveillance capacity, and legitimacy management amid civilian suffering. The paper argues that the Gaza war illustrates the structural limits of conventional military superiority.

Dr Mohammad Seyam

Doha Institute for Graduate Studies

A Palestinian researcher specializing in conflict resolution and security studies. Holds a Ph.D. in political science from Beirut Arab University in 2024, focusing research on the intricate dynamics of the Israeli occupation and its impact on Palestinian life. My research primarily centers on the Palestinian case, exploring the multifaceted effects of the Israeli occupation.

Doubling down: The successes and failures of Iran's forward defence doctrine in 2026

The 2026 invasion of Iran proved that if the Islamic Republic's existence is threatened, it is prepared to impose consequences on the world in the name of future deterrence. Though it has been weakened, the continuation of Iran's forward defence strategy still presents significant challenges to its neighbours in the region and its adversaries around the world. It is likely to double down on the strategy that kept the regime in power: proxies, conventional weapons, global clandestine activity and control of the Strait of Hormuz. It is likely these pillars – and not nuclear weapons – that the regime will invest in as security imperatives, as they create strategic depth.

Dr Andrew Thomas

Deakin University

Dr Thomas is a Lecturer in International Relations Middle East Politics at Deakin. His research focuses on Iranian foreign policy, international relations theory and the world order. His 2024 book "Iran and the West" explores Iran's relationship with Western Powers through non-Western approaches to international relations.



DAY ONE - Panel C

1.30-3.00 pm

Gulf cultural governance: The making of the post-oil citizen

The Arab Gulf petrostates are transitioning to a post-oil era by heading towards a sustainable future that seeks revenues from non-oil sectors including entertainment and tourism. According to the global narrative of neoliberalism, this means shifting to a creative-based economy that prioritises the value of creative industries over manufacturing and information and communication technologies. The UN Trade and Development identifies this economy as 'the cycles of creation, production and distribution of goods and services that use creativity and intellectual capital as primary inputs' (UNCTAD 2024) which requires a new form not only of governance, but also of citizenry. The new mode of governance implies that the growth regimes should start investing in the intellectual capital of the population as the 'natural' and reproductive lucrative resource instead of black gold. To facilitate this transformation, current Economic Visions of the Gulf states indirectly propose an amendment of their social contracts through converting the population from rentier citizens to local work forces that are equipped with quasi-liberal dispositions ready for the global job market. This optimised version of the post-oil citizen might be an entrepreneurial, self-reliant subject who enjoys critical and creative identity (Jones 2017).

Dr Hadeel Abdelhameed

LMU's Käte Hamburger Research Centre global dis:connect

Hadeel Abdelhameed is a research fellow at the LMU's the Käte Hamburger Research Centre global dis:connect (2025-2026). Abdelhameed's intellectual interests are about the theatre development history and, cultural governance, public policy and creative -based economy in the Arabic petrostates with more focus on Iraq and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. She is Currently, she is working on her first monograph 'Developing Theatre in Iraq: oil, modernity and Subjectivity'. She is the founder of the Iraqi Women Academics Network, and The Society of Iraqi Theatre Studies.

Saudi Arabia's heritage sunrise

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's dramatic economic and labour law transitions over the past 20 years, and the real effects Saudi Vision 2030 objectives are currently having on citizens' lives, compels comment on the power of promoting local heritage, in all its forms, as a driver of profound demographic transformation. This paper surveys the country's trajectory from pre-2001 and reviews daily life post-MBS, where the focus is on the arts and cultural heritage, tilting foreign relations in new, more equitable directions, and creating opportunity for confident, sophisticated encounters with the non-Arab, non-Muslim world.

Dr Fiona Hill

Independent Researcher

Dr Fiona Hill is an independent scholar, cultural mediator, and trade consultant invited to work on a broad range of projects across the Arabian Peninsula, the Gulf Arab countries, the 'Levant', North Africa, Iran, and Central Asia over the past three decades. She is a regular visitor to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia since 1997.

Colonial continuities in Gulf labour dynamics

This paper challenges notions of Gulf regional exceptionalism by exploring how the legacy of early British influence over the region's labour dynamics has been obscured in our understanding of the region's history. It considers how a tendency to divide the Gulf's history into a pre-oil pearling era and a modern hydrocarbon age, has the effect of presenting human movement in the region as a contemporary hydrocarbon-driven phenomenon unanchored from earlier histories and divorced from British influence. Consequently, the historical imprint of British influence in continuing to shape modern migratory dynamics is occluded and systems of governance managing labour mobility, such as kafala, are rendered as uniquely Gulf customs that are somehow exceptional from the worldwide migrant labour systems that our globe and economies depend upon.

Ms Zoe Davies

The Australian National University

Zoe Davies is a PhD student with ANU. She is one of two annual recipients of the ANU RASS Discretionary Director's Award. She received a Chancellor's Letter of Commendation after graduating with her Masters (Advanced) in Middle Eastern and Central Asian Studies from ANU. Her research focuses on coloniality and labour mobilities in the Middle East. She has previously worked for the Australian Government as an advisor and as a Lecturer at ANU.

Ecological circumnavigations of archival silences: The twentieth-century colonial industrialisation of eucalyptus in Morocco

Amazigh historian Brahim El Guabli argues that hegemonic and institutional Moroccan archives today, after the colonial era (1912-1956) and the repressive authoritarian Years of Lead (1960-1999), are sites of loss rather than sites of memory. In response to this scholarship, I theorise that the soil, in which colonially planted eucalyptus remains, is a site of other-archives from which the missing perspectives of the twentieth-century colonial and sovereign exploitation of the nation, in the interest of capitalism, become uncoverable. Keywords: ecological imperialism, eucalyptus industrialisation, private and public industries, Mvçamora Forest, Sidi Yahya El Gharb, other-archives, authoritarianism, coloniality of power, Morocco, Indigenous epistemologies.

Ms Alia Ardon

The University of Sydney

Alia Ardon is an emerging filmmaker and researcher, interested in the plurality of historical narratives and ecological imperialism. Her film in development, 'Kalitus', which investigates the journey of eucalyptus from so-called Australia to Morocco, and its colonial industrialisation, was awarded first prize at the USU Creative Awards 2024, and her Honours thesis on the topic was awarded the University Medal at the University of Sydney in 2026.





DAY ONE - Panel A

3.30-5.00 pm

Heritage after Assad: A decolonial framework for post-conflict Syria

In conflict and post-conflict settings, cultural heritage and memory are often mobilised to legitimise power and contest belonging. This paper examines that dynamic in Syria, where the uprising and war of 2011–2024 and the fall of the Ba'athist regime have opened an opportunity to redefine the nation's cultural and political landscape. Grounded in ethnographic fieldwork with displaced Syrians, including those from ethnic and religious minorities, the study develops a theoretical framework for decolonising heritage in the post-Assad era. It argues that conventional preservation and reconstruction paradigms must give way to participatory, people-centered approaches. Such a decolonial turn transforms heritage from an instrument of conflict into a foundation for equity, social cohesion, and sustainable recovery.

Dr Nour A. Munawar

The University of Amsterdam

Munawar is an archaeologist and UNESCO heritage expert, currently working as a research fellow at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. His research focuses on the politics of the past, the uses and abuses of heritage and cultural memory, archaeology of the contemporary past, and the decolonization of heritage in the Arab region and the Global South. His work bridges academia and practice.

Oral history, transitional justice and the archiving of Syrian suffering

A defining image of the fall of the Assad Regime in December 2024 was of detainees being released from notorious jails like Saidnaya. However, thousands of Syrian families are still waiting to learn the fate of their loved ones. This paper reports on the project Documenting Detention: Stories of Prison Detainees in Australia. This project is being undertaken by a team of researchers at UNSW in partnership with the Syrian Australian Network of Detainees and Survivors (SANADS), to collect testimonies from Syrians who survived detention or from the relatives of detainees and forcibly disappeared individuals in Syrian prisons who currently reside in Australia. This paper reflects on the uses and ethics of oral history in documenting and archiving collecting suffering.

Dr Stephen Pascoe
UNSW Sydney

Stephen Pascoe is a historian of cities, infrastructure, population and imperialism who works primarily on the modern Middle East and the global French Empire. His forthcoming monograph *Contested Concessions: The Struggle for Infrastructural Sovereignty in Syria*, examines the paths by which foreign-capitalized infrastructure companies in French Mandate Syria became the targets of popular discontent, critique and boycott.

Memories of Syria's prisons: How torture, detention and disappearance can shape narration

Prison systems in Syria were designed as architectures of silence, to produce fear and undermine social connections. Survivors of detention, torture and disappearance may carry psychological injuries that affect their ability to narrate their experiences, seek recognition, and participate in transitional justice. I discuss how trauma, shame, moral injury, and bereavement shape survivors' experiences of and engagement with truth-telling. Drawing on global mental health research, participatory work with Syrian psychologists, and the neuroscience of trauma, this presentation examines how detention disrupts memory, embodiment, and narrative agency. It asks what forms of support are needed for survivors to tell their stories safely and meaningfully, and how life narratives might contribute to informal transitional justice, collective memory, and peacebuilding in Syria.

Dr Ruth Wells
UNSW Sydney

Ruth Wells is a Senior Research Fellow in Psychiatry and Mental Health at the UNSW. Their research focuses on improving mental health services in humanitarian settings globally and bringing to light how conflict and social exclusion can impact on the well-being of displaced communities. They bring a feminist and decolonizing lens to critically evaluate mental health services towards being more person centred, equitable and culturally-responsive.



DAY ONE - Panel B

3.30-5.00 pm

Diplomacy under gender apartheid: Analysing international responses to Taliban rule

States have adopted varied diplomatic responses to the Taliban's systematic repression of women and girls in Afghanistan since 2021. We ask whether these practices reinforce or challenge conditions of gender apartheid, drawing on the 1973 Apartheid Convention's principle that all actors bear responsibility for enabling apartheid. We introduce the Gender Apartheid Diplomacy framework to assess how engagement with the Taliban (bilateral, multilateral or minimal) aligns with support for Afghan women and girls (meaningful, symbolic or none). Applying the framework to NATO and allied states involved in Afghanistan and all states with Women, Peace and Security (WPS) national action plans, we analyse 122 countries. The findings reveal a persistent gap between diplomatic engagement and substantive support for women and girls, raising important questions of state and international accountability.

Dr Farkhondeh Akbari

Monash University

Dr Farkhondeh Akbari is a Research Fellow at the Centre of Excellence for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (CEVAW) at Monash University. Her research focuses on the diplomacy of non-state armed actors, peacemaking, feminist foreign policy, and the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

Ethnic domination and resource control in Afghanistan: From codified law to the land cadastre

In Afghanistan, land has long served less as a national resource than as an instrument of ethnic domination, redistributed by successive regimes to consolidate power and reward loyal constituencies. This paper examines how the Taliban, since August 2021, has transformed that legacy into a bureaucratic system of dispossession. It argues that the regime dismantled the codified land tenure system, replacing it with decree-based institutions centred on a Land-Usurpation Commission, special land courts, and a new criminal code. Technical survey teams have registered millions of jeribs of pasture and farmland as "Emirate property" within a state "Land Bank," voiding existing claims. In Hazara regions, land is reassigned to Pashtun nomads and settlers while simultaneously opened to resource extraction, revealing a technocratic system of ethnic domination rather than national resource governance

Dr Abbas Farasoo
La Trobe University

Dr Abbas Farasoo is a researcher at La Trobe University and formerly a Lecturer in Political Science at the University of Melbourne. He holds a PhD from Deakin University and an MA from the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. His research focuses on proxy wars, state formation, ethnic conflict, and international security, particularly in Afghanistan and South Asia.

Taliban extractive economy and everyday peace: Mining and contentious politics in Afghanistan

Insurgencies thrive on shadow, illicit, and extractive economies. Yet far less is known about how these wartime political-economic practices shape their governing practices. This paper examines these dynamics by investigating the Taliban's focus on mining in Afghanistan and community resistance against such practices. Drawing on a contentious politics framework, it conceptualises mining sites as critical meso-level arenas where the extractive political economies of ruling and insurgent actors intersect with community-level practices of peacemaking and social and economic reproduction. By integrating insights from everyday peacebuilding with structural political economy, the paper argues that the Taliban's extractive economy systematically erodes everyday peace and undermines the social and economic foundations essential to local community survival.

Dr Niamatullah Ibrahim
The University of Melbourne

Dr Niamatullah Ibrahim is a Senior Research Fellow at the Initiative for Peacebuilding, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Melbourne. His research focuses on social movements, political violence, local peacebuilding, and post-conflict governance and security dynamics.

Rethinking norm robustness: Selective norm robustness, alliance shielding, and the prohibition on the use of force

Existing theories of norm robustness struggle to explain why settled international norms can command widespread discursive acceptance while generating highly uneven implementation. This article argues that, for settled norms embedded in veto-structured institutions, discursive validity and practical enforcement are structurally decoupled rather than mutually reinforcing. Building on Deitelhoff and Zimmermann's distinction between validity and facticity, and drawing on Frost's concept of settled norms, the article develops the concept of selective norm robustness and identifies alliance shielding as the mechanism that explains variation in practice-level implementation. The argument is examined through a structured comparison of four recent cases of interstate applicatory contestation of Article 2(4) of the UN Charter.

Dr Arif Saba

Deakin University

Dr Arif Saba is a Visiting Scholar at Deakin University, where he also completed a PhD in International Relations. His research interests, more broadly, include rising powers, international order, international norms, and norm contestation. His research has been published in *International Peacekeeping*, *Global Studies Quarterly*, *International Politics*, and *Journal of Contemporary China*. He is also co-editor of *Mapping Futures for Afghanistan*.



DAY ONE - Panel C

3.30-5.00 pm

**The political economy of digital authoritarianism:
Evidence from the Iranian regime's implementation of technology**

A strong but complex interplay is emerging between the politico-economic and digital aspects of authoritarianism, raising questions as to how this relates to the existing political economy of authoritarianism that has been observed over the course of many decades. This paper asks: Are the politico-economic dynamics that have long shaped authoritarianism also relevant to understanding digital authoritarianism? To answer the question, this article identifies three mechanisms through which the longstanding politico-economic dynamics of authoritarianism also shape the implementation of digital authoritarianism. It argues digital authoritarianism is subject to the same politico-economic constraints that shaped the pre-digital operating environment the authoritarian state.

Dr Dara Conduit

The University of Melbourne

Dr Conduit is an Australian Research Council DECRA Fellow and Senior Lecturer in Political Science in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne. My research sits at the intersection of authoritarian politics and cyber technology, and I am pursuing a research agenda to further the understanding of the contentious politics between actors in authoritarian regimes, particularly in relation to digital authoritarianism.

Manufacturing war: How narratives justified the attack on Iran

Modern wars are fought not only on battlefields but in the information space. The war on Iran illustrates how narratives are constructed and adapted to justify military action. This paper examines three mechanisms: the fabrication of facts, the manipulation of war aims, and the inversion of victim and aggressor. Claims about threats and capabilities were amplified without firm evidence, while strategic goals shifted over time but were presented as consistent. At the same time, narratives framed the war as defensive, recasting the initiator as the victim. These processes shaped public perception and reduced scrutiny. Drawing parallels with past cases such as Iraq, the paper argues that narratives are not reflections of war but instruments of power, used to legitimise violence, mobilise support, and redefine objectives.

Dr Ali Mamouri

Deakin University

Dr Ali Mamouri is a Research Fellow at Deakin University and former Lecturer at the University of Sydney, as well as universities in Iran and Iraq. He has taught in Qom and Najaf seminaries and published widely in English, Arabic, and Persian across academic and media platforms. He previously served as Strategic Communications Advisor to the Iraqi Prime Minister.

Chinese technology transfers and the expansion of Iran's digital control architecture

This paper examines how cooperation between China and Iran has contributed to the expansion of Iran's digital control architecture and strengthened the regime's capacity to manage dissent across the cycle of nationwide protests. Drawing on evidence from technology transfers, policy documents, official statements, and the evolution of Iran's digital governance infrastructure, the paper traces how Chinese technologies and expertise have been incorporated into Iran's internet governance and surveillance ecosystem. The findings demonstrate that Sino-Iranian cooperation extends beyond the provision of technological tools. Chinese companies, digital governance models, and technical expertise have contributed to the development of Iran's censorship infrastructure, internet shutdown capabilities, platform regulation mechanisms, and emerging AI-enabled surveillance systems.

Mr Amin Naeni

Deakin University

Amin Naeni is a PhD Candidate and Teaching Fellow at Deakin University in Australia and a Visiting Fellow at Dublin City University in Ireland.

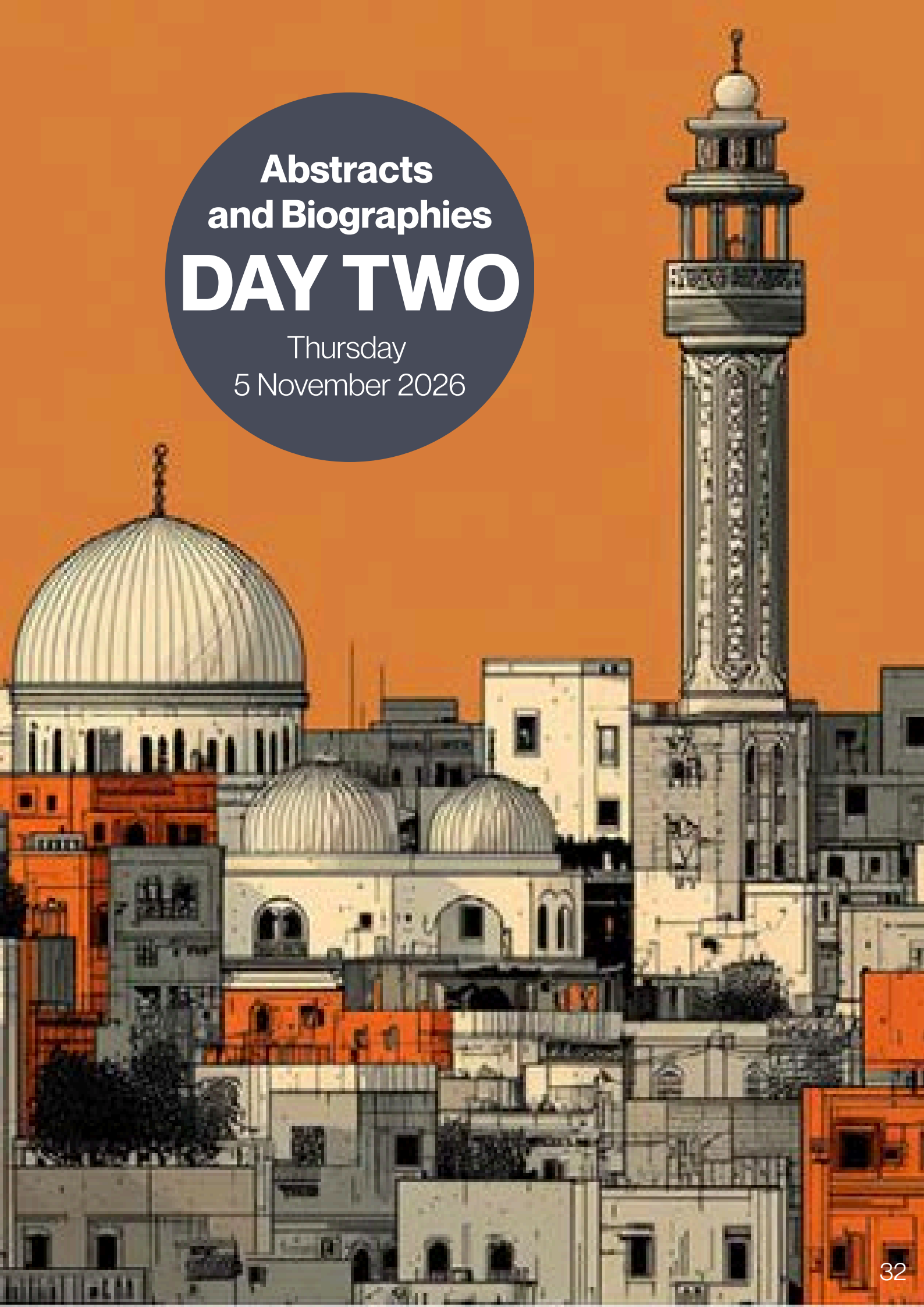
Governing the Narrative: Control, Alignment, and the Politics of Arab Media

This paper reframes Arab media as a system of narrative governance rather than a binary of freedom and censorship. It argues that control operates through alignment, embedded in ownership, editorial hierarchies, and shifting red lines, where self-regulation becomes normalized as professional judgment. Tracing transformations from satellite television to digital and AI-driven media, the paper shows how technological change has been absorbed into adaptive strategies of power. What appears as plurality often reflects managed pluralism, where visibility and dissent are carefully calibrated. Gulf-centered transnational media play a central role in structuring this order. Yet, Arab journalists and publics continue to negotiate constrained spaces of critique, revealing the tensions and possibilities within a hybrid authoritarian media system.

Professor Abeer Al-Najjar

The American University of Sharjah

Abeer Al-Najjar is a Professor of Media and Journalism Studies. She writes as a media scholar grounded in the region's lived realities, examining how power, conflict, and memory shape narratives across the Middle East. Professor Al-Najjar's work interrogates media ethics, AI, and representation, with a focus on Gaza and Syria, situating current crises within longer histories of colonialism, displacement, and contested knowledge.



**Abstracts
and Biographies**

DAY TWO

Thursday
5 November 2026

Keynote Address

DAY TWO

9.30-10.30 am

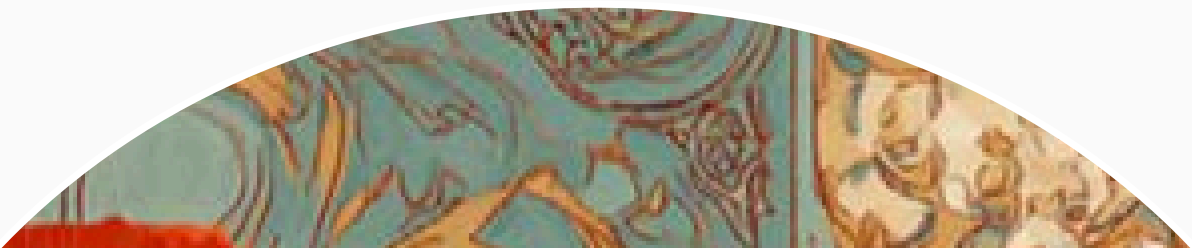
No to War: Towards Humanistic Practice in Middle East Studies

A work of feminist visual art inspires this keynote's title: No to War, created by Huda Lutfi in 2003, during global antiwar mobilisations against the US invasion of Iraq. Two decades later, as genocidal wars destabilise the Middle East and undermine international law, Middle East scholars face a fundamental question: no to war, but towards what end? This keynote addresses that question - methodological as much as political - in three movements. Colonisation and misrepresentation of the Middle East and North Africa are not new. Said (1978) demonstrated that Orientalism was not merely political and economic but epistemic; Lockman (2004) showed that Middle East Studies has been shaped by competing political interests and ideological pressures as much as intellectual traditions. In a moment of escalating colonial violence, the field's institutional and epistemological foundations demand critical scrutiny. Drawing on feminist, decolonial, and Indigenous scholarship, I propose a humanistic and feminist genealogical framework, tracing connections between today's crises in Gaza, Syria, Lebanon, and Iran and the colonial cartographies that produced them — foregrounding unauthorised archives: artistic, embodied, and communal. I turn finally to Australia to ask what a situated Middle East Studies might look like from this vantage point, proposing feminist genealogy, transnational history, and intellectual biography as resources through which the field can rewrite dominant narratives of conflict and justice. No to war — but towards new practices of knowledge, solidarity, and engagement.

Associate Professor Lucia Sorbera

The University of Sydney

Dr Lucia Sorbera is Associate Professor in Arab, Islamic and Middle East Studies at the University of Sydney, where she serves as Chair of the Discipline of Arabic Language and Cultures. She is co-leader of the Research Cluster on Cooperation and Conflict at the Vere Gordon Childe Centre, and a core member of the Powerful Stories Network.





DAY TWO - Plenary Panel

11.00 am-12.30 pm

Selective solidarity: The politics of language in addressing antisemitism and Islamophobia in Australia

This article explores how antisemitism and Islamophobia are constructed within Australian political and media discourses, examining the role of language - including collocation, contextualization, and recontextualization - in shaping public attitudes. Drawing on discourse analytical approaches, the study analyses twenty-four political speeches and media texts from the past five years, asking how political and media actors frame each form of prejudice, what similarities and differences emerge between them, and what linguistic strategies shape public perception. The findings show that Australian public discourse frames antisemitism as an urgent threat demanding swift action, while Islamophobia is addressed through comparatively less immediate and distinct frameworks.

Dr Zouhir Gabsi
Deakin University

Zouhir Gabsi is a senior Lecturer in Arabic and Islamic studies at Deakin University, Melbourne. Named Australia's lead researcher in Middle Eastern and Islamic studies by The Australian Research Magazine for both 2024 and 2025, his work spans Islamophobia, the Arab Spring, and religious and political discourse - most recently in his 2024 book *Muslim Perspectives on Islamophobia: From Misconceptions to Reason*.

New antisemitism is Islamophobia's new apparatus: An IHRA infused Australian multicultural governance and its impact on Australian Muslims

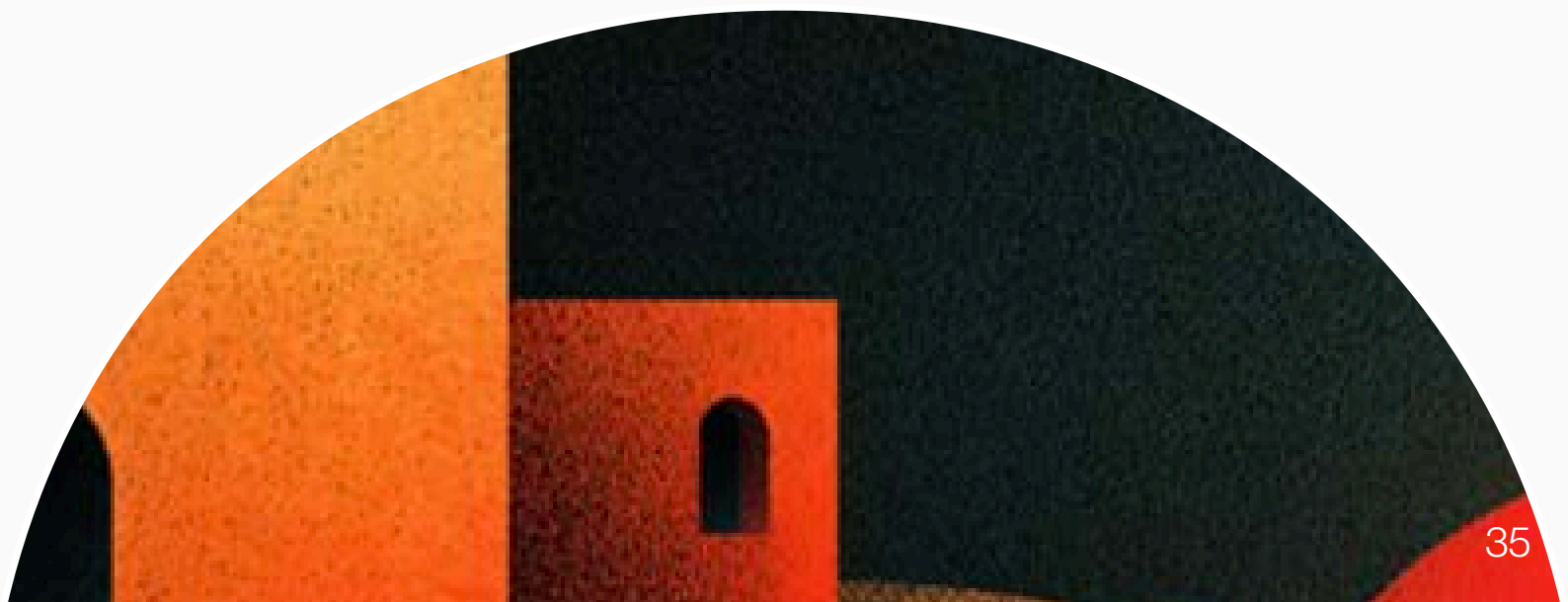
Australia's multicultural framework has long governed Muslim communities through counter-terrorism governance disguised as social cohesion, conditioning civic participation on political moderation. This paper argues that following October 7, 2023, the same apparatus continues through a new instrument: new antisemitism, which conflates anti-Zionism with antisemitism. Through critical policy analysis of Australian government and community documents, it demonstrates that the two narratives structuring the War on Terror apparatus, the suspect community and the good/bad Muslim, now function through antisemitism: Muslims are constructed as presumptively antisemitic, & silence on Palestine replaces moderation as the marker of 'good Muslim.' The paper contributes to critical multicultural governance studies through a focus on how it disciplines Muslim political identity in the post-Gaza context.

Dr Sara Cheikh Husain
Deakin University

Sara Cheikh Husain is a sociologist researching Islamophobia and social justice, with a focus on Palestinians and Muslim communities in the West. Her book, *The Politics of Anti-Islamophobia in Australia: The Case of Muslim Community Organisations* (2025), examines Muslim advocacy and state governance. She presented at the international *Embracing Diversity: Tackling Islamophobia* conference in Baku in 2024, has contributed to UN human rights advocacy, and serves on the executive board of the Australian Association of Islamic and Muslim Studies (AAIMS).

Mr James Godfrey
The University of Canberra

James Godfrey will submit his PhD thesis shortly through the University of Canberra. His employment has included being a university tutor/researcher and a trade union organiser. For 40 years he has campaigned for social justice, locally and internationally. Recently, as a spokesperson for Freedom Flotilla Coalition, he has supported the physical challenge to Israel's illegal siege of Gaza, Palestine. He has volunteered on BRISMES' Committee for Academic Freedom and as a food cooperative director.





DAY TWO - Panel A

1.30-3.00 pm

Kurdish political agency in Iran under conditions of closure (1979 to present)

This paper examines Kurdish political agency in Iran from 1979 to the present, focusing on how repression and the denial of Kurdish identity have reshaped political action. Rather than emphasizing overt confrontation, it argues that agency has been reconfigured through less visible forms. It asks how Kurdish actors respond when institutional participation is restricted. Drawing on an ongoing qualitative study using interviews, social media data, and historical analysis, it traces a shift from organized resistance to dispersed and indirect practices. It shows that political agency emerges not only through confrontation but also through distancing, relocation, and the creation of alternative spaces where identity and dissent are renegotiated.

Ms Ziba Akbari

Deakin University

Ziba Akbari is a PhD candidate in Political Science at Deakin University, whose work focuses on Kurdish politics in Iran, minority rights, and state–society relations in the Middle East. Her research examines political agency under conditions of repression, with particular attention to informal practices, identity, and resistance.

Normalising dissent in Iran: Women and incremental change

Women activists in Iran operate under dense legal, religious and securitised constraints that make formal advocacy extremely dangerous. Yet dissent persists and expands through everyday discursive practices. Drawing on narrative interviews with women activists inside Iran (2024–25), this study conceptualises discursive spaces of discontent as informal arenas where gendered harm is discussed and reframed as a form of injustice. This study traces four interlocking practices reported across interviews: reframing “violence” beyond episodic physical abuse to encompass structural, cultural and legal harms; building storytelling infrastructures that use anonymity, safe circles and narrative rituals to enable disclosure and pedagogical dialogue; achieving cumulative “small wins” through low-threshold digital acts that keep feminist language ambiently present; and enacting everyday contestation.

Dr Afsaneh Seifinaji

The University of Melbourne

Afsaneh Seifinaji holds a PhD in Politics and International Relations from the University of Melbourne. She is a knowledge exchange and participation advisor at ANZSOG and teaches in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne. Her research focuses on political violence, gender, conflict, and radicalisation in the Middle East.

From Green to Women, Life, Freedom: Digital resistance and the jurisdictional creep of the UN Cybercrime Convention

Imagine Berlin, 2027. An Iranian women's rights activist, granted asylum years earlier, receives a knock on her door. Not from Iranian intelligence, but from German police, acting on a formal data request filed by Tehran under the new UN Cybercrime Convention. The request doesn't mention activism. It cites a domestic Iranian statute criminalising “unauthorised encrypted communication,” and asks Germany, as a signatory, to hand over message records as a matter of routine legal cooperation. This paper argues that the UN Convention against Cybercrime, adopted by the General Assembly in 2024, creates precisely this kind of pathway, and in doing so quietly expands authoritarian reach over diaspora and exile communities. Using Iran's feminist digital movements, from 2009's Green Movement to Women, Life, Freedom, what happens when that resistance infrastructure becomes a legal target?

Dr Miniature Malekpour

The University of Sydney

Dr Miniature Malekpour is a scholar, filmmaker, artist, and writer, whose work spans cinema studies, feminist theory, carceral justice, and human rights. As Lived Experience Lead at About Time, she mentors formerly incarcerated writers across Australia, and serves as a Research Assistant at Justice Collaboration (USYD). Her writing also appears in *Honi Soit*, *Diabolique Magazine*, and *The Conversation* (AUS/NZ).



DAY TWO - Panel B

1.30-3.00 pm

The Middle East's geopolitical conflicts and the reconfiguration of transnational Muslim identity: Evidence from Pakistan

The escalating conflict involving Israel, Iran, and the United States has reshaped the political and ideological landscape of the Middle East, with consequences extending across the wider Muslim world. This paper examines how the Iran-US-Israel confrontation have transformed transnational Muslim identity by narrowing long-standing Sunni-Shia divisions. Using Pakistan as a case study, it explores how regional developments in the Middle East have influenced domestic religious and political dynamics, generating unprecedented cross-sectarian solidarity in response to US-Israel aggression. Drawing on qualitative analysis of political discourse, joint sectarian declarations, and public protests, the paper argues that Middle East conflicts are reshaping Muslim political identities far beyond the region with important implications for regional geopolitics and the evolving security architecture of the Middle East.

Dr Seema Khan

Deakin University

Dr Seema Khan is a Lecturer and Research Fellow in International Relations at Deakin University. Her research focuses on Security Studies, political violence, human rights, and geopolitical competition across South Asia, the Indo-Pacific, and the Middle East. She is the author of *Balochistan and the Mélange of Violence* (Routledge, 2024). She held research fellowships at the London School of Economics and Henry L. Stimson Center, Washington, DC.

Beyond Sykes-Picot: Self-determination, postcolonial order, and the case for a United Kurdish State

This paper revisits the Kurdish question within Middle East historiography as a post-Ottoman and postcolonial crisis of political order rather than a minority issue internal to four states. Tracing the legacies of Sykes-Picot, coercive state formation, denied identity, stratified citizenship, and recurrent displacement across Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, it develops the scholarly and normative case for an independent, united Kurdish state. Kurdish unification is examined as a self-determination project tied to justice, stability, democratic representation, cultural survival, accountable governance, and regional restructuring. The paper also addresses objections rooted in territorial integrity, instability, and geopolitical resistance, offering a reasoned response to the failures of existing state frameworks.

Dr Hussein Tahiri
Victoria University

Dr Hussein Tahiri is Adjunct Associate Professor at Victoria University and holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Melbourne. He writes on Kurdish society, nationalism, and Middle Eastern politics. He is the author of *The Structure of Kurdish Society and the Struggle for a Kurdish State*.

Foreign interference and transnational repression: A Turkish case study

Turkey is consistently ranked as one of the top five worst offenders in relation to transnational repression and foreign interference. This involves attempts to silence activism in their diaspora through punishment, deterrence and/or co-optation. Driving this practice is an ongoing war between the Turkish government and the transnational Gülen Movement (GM). The GM was previously an ally of President Erdoğan's Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, AKP) but was accused of plotting the 2016 coup attempt. Since then, the AKP has vowed to remove them root and stem around the world; the GM at its peak had operations in no less than 160 countries. This paper will examine the repressive strategies employed by the Turkish government against the GM with a particular focus on Australia and the potential impacts it is having on the diaspora.

Dr David Tittensor
The University of Melbourne

David Tittensor is a Senior Lecturer in Islamic Studies and Graduate Research Director in the Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. His research interests are religion and society, Muslim movements, religion and development, Turkish politics and society, and the wider Middle East. He is co-editor of *'Muslims in Contemporary Australia'* (Brill, 2025).



DAY TWO - Panel C

1.30-3.00 pm

From deep state to Islamic State: Reading the Iranian revolution through Foucault's 'Iran Writings'

The past two decades have witnessed numerous US invasions of 'Middle Eastern' states, which many historians consider to be the beginning of the cracks to the American deep state. The following paper utilises a historiographical approach to explore a small corpus of work produced by Michel Foucault, namely, his Iran writings. The aim of this paper is to examine Foucault's understudied perspective on the events of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and his concept of political spirituality. Foucault's work reveals an underlying anxiety within Western intelligentsia, characterised by secularism, universal humanism, and neoliberal positivism. In the face of growing repression, the trend of diasporic nostalgia calls for a much deeper understanding of historical identity(ies), and the global structures that have a stake in this temporality.

Ms Mahtab Hassanzadeh

Macquarie University

Mahtab Hassanzadeh is a recent graduate from Macquarie University in Sydney, where she completed a Master of Research in History. Mahtab's thesis explored the nexus between nationalism, and the role of archaeology as an ideological apparatus of the state. Her most recent publication is a research paper which analyses Michel Foucault's concept of political spirituality with regard to a body of work he produced, namely, his 'Iran Writings'.

From Tahrir Square to Exile: Revolutionary learning after Egypt's January Revolution

This paper examines how exile transforms the political ideas, strategies, and democratic visions of actors who participated in Egypt's January 2011 Revolution. While extensive scholarship has explored the revolution's causes and outcomes, little attention has been given to how its participants have reassessed their experiences after more than a decade in exile. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 15 influential revolutionaries - including Islamists, liberals, civil activists, and academics - living in Europe and North America, the study explores the lessons they have learned, the mistakes they would avoid, and their visions for Egypt's political future. The paper contributes to debates on political exile, revolutionary learning, and democratic transitions in the Middle East.

Mr Omar Mohamed

Charles Sturt University

Omar Mohamed is a PhD candidate at Charles Sturt University, Australia. His research focuses on political Islam, democratisation, terrorism, political exile, social movements, and Middle East politics. He has published peer-reviewed journal articles and presented his research at academic conferences. His doctoral research examines the evolution of political Islam through the case of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.

The law after revolution: Allocation of rights

Revolution entails a paradox - there is simultaneously a fundamental rupture of governmental control with relative continuity of law, bureaucratic systems and everyday routines. This paper shifts the focus away from top-down, national level analyses and the overwhelmingly male and violent events of revolution to instead focus on the forms redress and retribution takes through the allocation of legal rights by Syria's new government in the aftermath of revolution.

Dr Marika Sosnowski

The University of Melbourne

Marika Sosnowski is a legal anthropologist with primary research interests in the fields of critical security studies (mainly ceasefires), local/rebel governance and legal systems (particularly issues around citizenship and belonging) with a geographical focus on Syria.



DAY TWO - Plenary Panel

3.30-5.00 pm

Iran after the war: Pressure, adaptation, and constraint

The recent Iran-Israel-US war has produced different readings of its impact on the Islamic Republic. The prominent view argues that the war remade Iran: a new generation of leaders, a guerrilla-style military, leverage over the Strait of Hormuz, and a nationalism that pulled society behind the state, amounting to a new balance of power. This paper accepts that these changes are real. However, drawing on Iran's damaged economy and contested legitimacy at home, it shows that this new balance of power may in fact be a fragile and temporary situation. Its durability depends more on Iran's ability to manage internal dissatisfaction than on its ability to deal with the US. This paper treats Iran as an example of how weaker states respond to overwhelming pressure.

Dr Niloufar Baghernia,
The Australian National University

Niloufar Baghernia holds a PhD in International Relations from the Australian National University (ANU). Her research focuses on international relations, Iranian foreign policy, Iran-China relations, and Middle East politics. Her work has appeared in peer-reviewed journals, and she has also taught at ANU as a sessional Lecturer and course convenor.

Hezbollah's Realpolitik in an era of regional escalation

For more than three decades, Hezbollah has sought to balance its dual identity as both a Lebanese political movement and the cornerstone of Iran's regional "Axis of Resistance." Through participation in electoral politics, state institutions, and social welfare provision, the organisation has cultivated an image of strategic autonomy rooted in Lebanese nationalism. This presentation argues, however, that Hezbollah's pursuit of domestic legitimacy has never displaced the structural realities of its relationship with Iran. Rather, periods of regional crisis consistently expose the limits of Hezbollah's autonomy and reaffirm its function within Iran's broader deterrence architecture. What I would like to show is the changing (or lack thereof) landscape around Hezbollah and what it means to its realpolitik. Even though Hezbollah has put considerable efforts on branding itself as a national organisation, semi-autonomous from Iran, only to ultimately face situations where it falls to regional rivalries and its proxy characterisation. So, why is Hezbollah unable to be an autonomous Lebanese party and its existence is very much linked to its fit-for-purpose role as an Iranian agent. In other words, the (not so) changing face of Hezbollah's realpolitik dictated by regional conflicts.

Dr Mariam Farida

Macquarie University

Dr Farida is a Lecturer in Terrorism Studies, Middle East and Global politics in the School of International Studies at Macquarie university. She has also served as a consultant for Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) programs in CSNSW. Her research interest includes Middle East politics and non-state groups. She is the author of the book Religion and Hezbollah: Political Ideology and Legitimacy (Routledge 2020).

The struggle for Syria in regional perspective: From Patrick Seale to Ahmed al-Sharaa

The purpose of this talk is twofold. Firstly, it considers continuity and change in Syria, from the time of Patrick Seale, 1965, 'The Struggle for Syria' to the present, when President al-Sharaa aims to reset the country, place in international affairs, while struggling to manage old sectarian problems and new geostrategic strife, in a post-Assad country damaged by long civil war. For Seale, control of Syria was key to the region, making the 'two-way traffic' of internal instability and international intrusion the object of his study (of the period 1945 to 1958). I suggest that, today, Seale's ideas may be most useful at regional scale, where 'two-way traffic' in and out of the Middle East remains key to international politics, as becomes clear when the traffic is blocked. Secondly, this regionalisation of Seale's ideas is used to bring themes of the 3 papers together for discussion.

Mr Benedict Moleta

The Australian National University

Benedict is a PhD student in International Relations at the Australian National University, writing on the work and intellectual legacy of Coral Bell. Parallel interests include the history of the Arab and Islamic world (Islamist movements in particular), thought and action in the public sphere from Lessing via Lenin to Adorno and later, language learning and singing.

The legal classification of Hezbollah and Lebanon's international obligations in time of war

Drawing on theories of statehood, this presentation examines the legal status of Hezbollah – an Iranian funded Shia Islamist party and armed organization operating from Lebanon - as State or non-State actor and Lebanon's responsibilities toward the international community. It focuses on the Oct. 7 attacks and Hezbollah's on-going war with Israel. Simply asserting that Hezbollah is a terrorist organization does not explain the extent of its relationship with the Lebanese State, nor the legal consequences of this relationship. This presentation seeks to answer the following questions: what is the legal classification of Hezbollah? What are Lebanon's international obligations? What State is accountable for Hezbollah's actions in the Middle East?

Dr Mireille Rebeiz

The University of Otago

Mireille Rebeiz is a Professor of Francophone & Middle East studies, Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies at Dickinson College (USA). I received my first Doctorate (PhD) in Francophone Studies from Florida State University and my second doctorate (SJD) in International Law from Penn State Dickinson Law. Today, I serve as Director of the Dickinson New Zealand Program at the University of Otago.

