

**DEAKIN CONFERENCE 2026
MIDDLE EAST STUDIES FORUM**

THE MIDDLE EAST IN TRANSITION

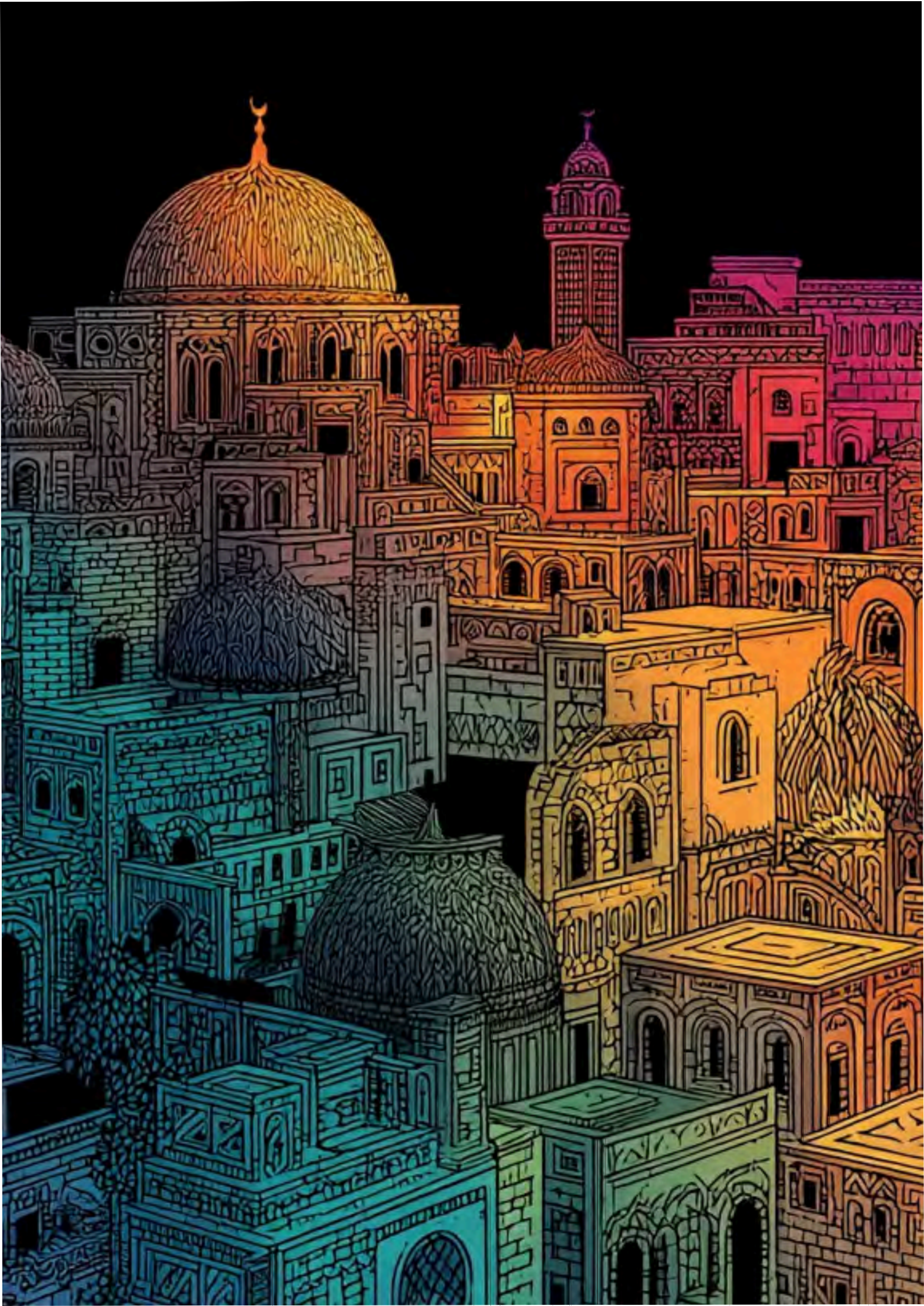
November 4 - 5, 2026 | 9am - 5pm

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**DEAKIN
MIDDLE EAST
STUDIES FORUM**

**20
26**





The Middle East in Transition

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

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DEAKIN
**MIDDLE EAST
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 echoed across Australia, where their social and cultural afterlives are increasingly visible. 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 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

Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh, Chairperson

Dr Virginie Rey

Dr Zouhir Gabsi

Renee Davidson

PROGRAMME

Day One
November 4, 2026



9.15 - 10.30

Commencement Speech & Keynote Address

Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh, Chair

Opening Remarks

Prof. Michelle Burgis-Kasthala, La Trobe University

A New (Dis)order? State De-formation and Genocide in Gaza

10.30 - 11.00

Morning Tea

11.00 - 12.30

Panel: Conflict and Mediation

Chair: **Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh**

Prof. Ibrahim Fraihat, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies

Omani and Pakistani mediation in the Third Gulf War

A/Prof. Mohsen Solhdoost, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

When Ceasefires Fracture: Iran, Maritime Access, and the Coercive Relocation of War

12.30 - 1.30

Lunch

1.30 - 3.00

Parallel Sessions

Panel A: U.S. & Iran

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

Mr Firas Naji, Independent Researcher

The War of Economic Corridors is Reshaping the Middle East

Dr Shaiwal Satyarthi, University of Delhi & Mr Pawan Kumar. Asst. Professor, Amity University

USA- Israel attack on Iran and questions of Aggression in International Law

Dr Julia Rognifard, 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

A/Prof. Ali Bakir, Qatar University, TBC

The Revisionist Hegemon: Implications of U.S. Foreign Policy for the Middle East

Panel B: Regional Security & Deterrence

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

Mr Suhaib Shaukat, 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 & State Transformation

Chair: **TBC**

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, Australian National University

Colonial Continuities in Gulf Labour Dynamics

Ms Alia Ardon, University of Sydney

Ecological Circumnavigations of Archival Silences: The Twentieth-Century Colonial Industrialisation of Eucalyptus in Morocco

3.00 - 3.30

Afternoon Tea

3.30 - 5.00
Parallel Sessions

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

Chair: **TBC**

Dr Nour A. Munawar, 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 & 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, Latrobe 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 & Digital Authoritarianism

Chair: **Mr Benedict Moleta, Australia National University**

Dr Miniature Malekpour, University of Sydney

From Green to Women, Life, Freedom: Digital Resistance and the Jurisdictional Creep of the UN Cybercrime Convention

Mr Amin Naeni, Deakin University

Chinese Technology Transfers and the Expansion of Iran's Digital Control Architecture

Dr Dara Conduit, 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



PROGRAMME

Day Two
November 5, 2026



9.30 - 10.30

Keynote Address

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

A/Prof. Lucia Sorbera, University of Sydney

No to War: Towards Humanistic Practice in Middle East Studies

10.30 - 11.00

Morning Tea

11.00 - 12.30

Panel: 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 &
James Godfry, 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

Lunch

1.30 - 3.00

Parallel Sessions

Panel A: Politics of Identity & Dissent

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

Dr Afsaneh Seifinaji, University of Melbourne

Normalising Dissent in Iran: Women and Incremental Change

Ziba Akbari, Deakin University

Kurdish Political Agency in Iran under Conditions of Closure
(1979 to Present)

Dr Mehdi Berriah, French Institute of the Near East

Jihad between Normativity and Crisis: Medieval Frameworks
and Contemporary Reappropriations

Panel B: Transnational Identity & 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, University of Melbourne

Foreign Interference and Transnational Repression: A Turkish
Case Study



Panel C: Legacies of Revolution

Chair: **TBC**

Ms Mahtab Hassanzadeh, Macquarie University

From Deep State to Islamic State: Reading the Iranian Revolution through Foucault's 'Iran Writings'

Mr Omar Mohamed, Charles Stuart University

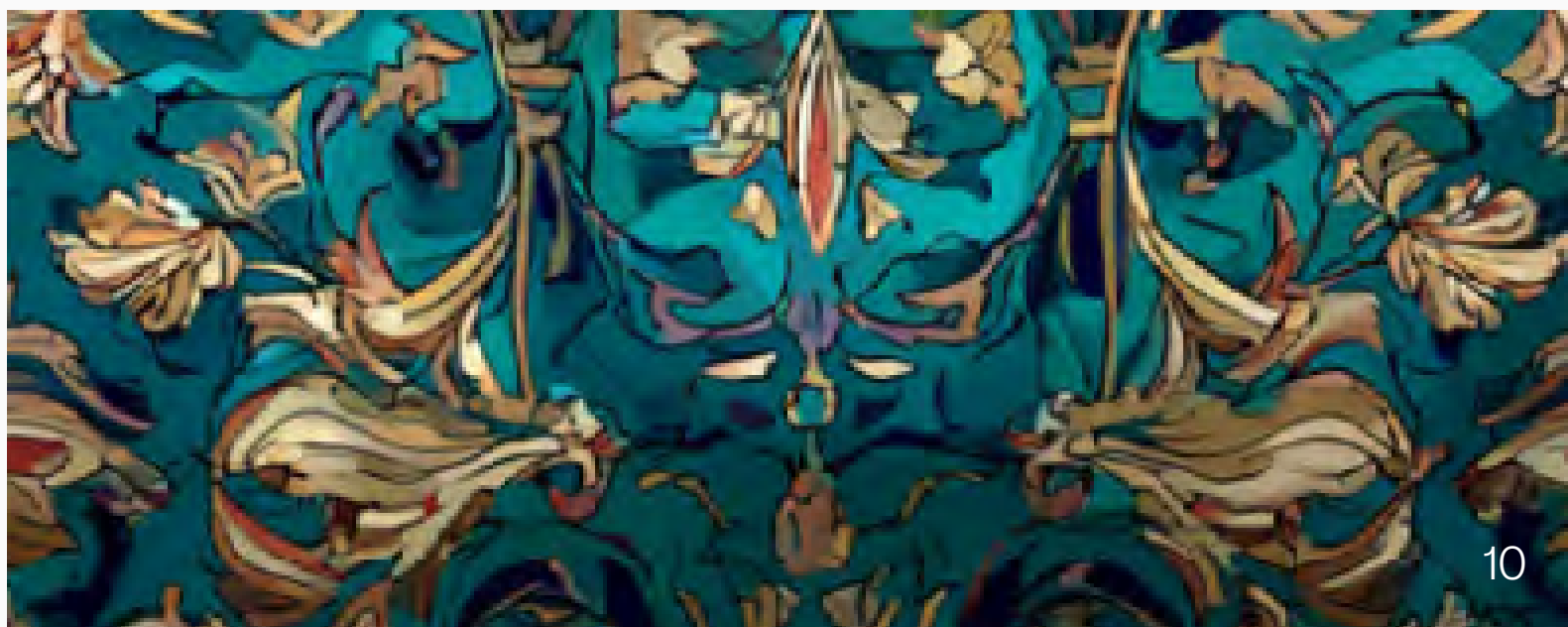
From Tahrir Square to Exile: Revolutionary Learning after Egypt's January Revolution

Dr Marika Sosnowski, University of Melbourne

The Law after Revolution: Allocation of Rights

3.00 - 3.30

Afternoon Tea



3.30 - 5.00

Panel: Iran, Lebanon, Syria: international conflict, domestic legitimacy, regional change

Chair: **Mr Benedict Moleta, Australia National University**

Dr Niloufar Baghernia, Australia National University

Iran After the War: Pressure, Adaptation, and Constraint

Dr Mariam Farida, Macquarie University

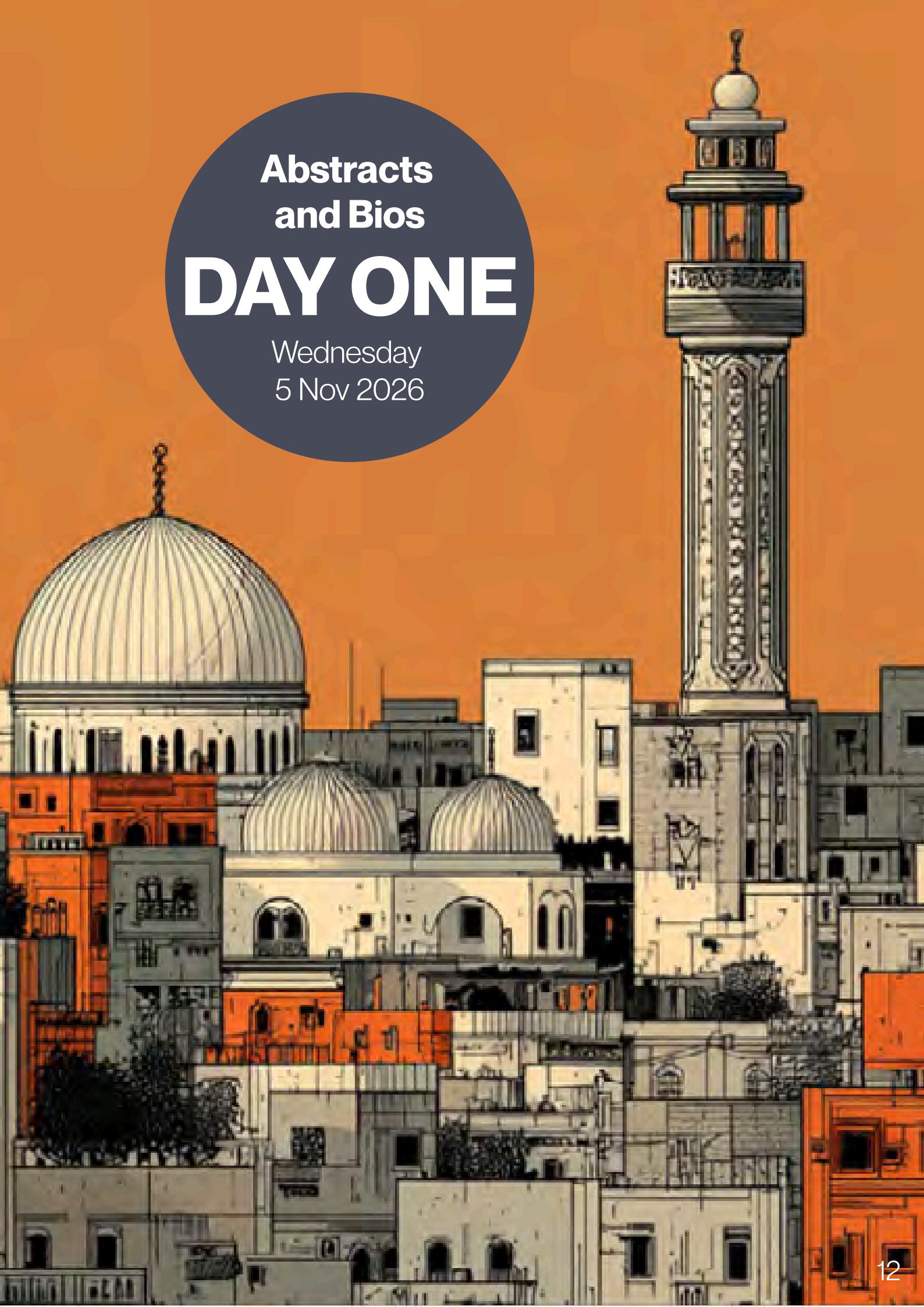
The Myth of Autonomy? Hezbollah's Realpolitik in an Era of Regional Escalation

Mr Benedict Moleta, Australia National University

The Struggle for Syria in Regional Perspective: From Patrick Seale to Ahmed al-Sharaa

Dr Mireille Rebeiz, University of Otago

The Legal Classification of Hezbollah & Lebanon's International Obligations in Time of War



**Abstracts
and Bios**

DAY ONE

Wednesday
5 Nov 2026

To be updated

A stylized illustration of a city skyline, likely Jerusalem, featuring a large dome on the left and a tall minaret on the right. The buildings are rendered in a graphic, almost comic-book style with bold outlines and a color palette of orange, grey, and white. The background is a solid orange color.

**Abstracts
and Bios**
DAY TWO

THURSDAY
6 Nov 2026

To be updated