



THE MIDDLE EAST IN TRANSITION

DEAKIN
UNIVERSITY
BURWOOD
5 December 2022

MIDDLE EAST
STUDIES FORUM



ADI
ALFRED DEAKIN INSTITUTE FOR
CITIZENSHIP AND GLOBALISATION

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HOUSEKEEPING

The conference will be held on Level Two of Building BC at Deakin University's Burwood campus. The building is at the Burwood Highway end of the campus, near tram stop 63 and Campus Entrance 2. See page 23 for a campus map.

WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR

The Middle East had entered a new era of uncertainty. Russia and China, in their own fashion, seek an end to US hegemony. The transition to a new order therefore offers both danger and opportunity.

While a number of Middle East states seem more lukewarm on their US alliance in recent years, others have seen the opportunity to break free from restraints created by US hegemony. This is true both of adversaries such as Iran as much as it is for supposed US-allies like Turkey. The United States faces a future in the Middle East where it is unable to deter its rivals or even enforce its policy preferences on allies.

Economic crises, exacerbated by the COVID pandemic and the Ukraine invasion, continue to make life miserable for many in the Middle East. Social unrest has translated to political action in numerous places, especially Iraq, Lebanon, Iran, Sudan and Palestine over the past year. Several countries remain in a perpetual state of conflict, with wars continuing in Syria, Yemen and Libya with no hope for resolution in sight. And while terrorism does not attract the headlines that it once did, the continuing presence of ISIS and new emerging extremism in the Middle East means that it won't stay out of view for long.

In the past few years, we have witnessed new methods of automated warfare at the periphery of the Middle East, most notably in the use of suicide drones in the Armenia-Azerbaijan and Russia-Ukraine wars. Cyber warfare and the cutting of energy supplies through artificial intelligence, not to mention attacks of both military and civilian targets, are likely to figure more prominently in regional wars and domestic crack downs in the Middle East.

The US, for its part, has sought to reassert control through new alliances. The Abraham Accords have brought recognition of Israel from several Arab states, with the prospect of this expanding all the way to Saudi Arabia, something once unthinkable. The US has worked to further realign the region to its interests economically and politically through the I2U2 agreement. However, this has not hindered China's quiet diplomacy and Russia's more aggressive engagement with the region.

MESF is honoured to host this conference to bring forth new thinking and research on changes in the Middle East in this period of transition, uncertainty and opportunity. Most of all, we are proud to once again being able to bring scholars together for face-to-face exchanges of ideas for the first time since the COVID pandemic began in 2020.



James Barry, PhD

Conference Convenor, Organising Committee

SCHEDULE

8:30 REGISTRATION AND COFFEE

9:00 OPENING REMARKS

Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh, Convenor, Middle East Studies Forum, Alfred Deakin Institute

Dr James Barry, Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University

9:15 **Keynote Address: After al-Qa'ida, after ISIS? Violence in the Middle East**

Chair: Prof Benjamin Isakhan

Prof Sarah Philips, Professor of Global Conflict and Development, University of Sydney

10:15 MORNING TEA

10:45 PARALLEL SESSIONS 1 & 2

Panel 1: Cultural Developments in the Middle East

Chair: Dr William Gourlay

Dr Virginie Rey, Deakin University

Muslim Museums: Curating Islam in Multicultural Societies

Dr Ayca Arkilic, Victoria University of Wellington

How and Why Do States Engage Their Diaspora Youth?: Lessons from the Middle East and North Africa

Mr Rachmiel Travitz, Deakin University

The Self-Identification of Middle Eastern and North African Jews: Language, Labels, Peoplehood and Poetry

Panel 2: Economic Crisis and Political Sovereignty

Chair: Dr Andrew Thomas

Dr Anas Iqtait, Australian National University

Economic Outlook in Non-Oil Exporting Arab Countries

Dr Mariam Farida, Macquarie University

"People, Army, Resistance": The End of Hizbullah's Legacy

Dr Tristan Dunning, American University of Afghanistan

Problems with Proscription: Armed Non-State Actors & Governance in the Middle East

12:00 LUNCH

1:00

PARALLEL SESSIONS 3 & 4

Panel 3: Reconstruction After Conflict

Chair: Dr Ali Mozaffari

Ms Eleanor Childs, Deakin University

The Intersection of Gender and the Destruction of Cultural Heritage

Dr Daniel Tower, University of Sydney

The Survival of Assyrians and the Continuance of Conflict in post-ISIS Iraq

Prof Benjamin Isakhan, Deakin University

Rebuilding Mosul: Public Opinion on Foreign-Led Heritage Reconstruction

Panel 4: Persistence of State Violence, Resilience of Civil Society

Chair: Dr Virginie Rey

Dr Marika Sosnowski, GIGA Hamburg

Fear and Violence, Loyalty and Treason: Settlement of Status in Syria

Dr Naser Ghobadzadeh, Australian Catholic University

Societal Paradigm Shift in Iran

Dr Nelia Hyndman-Rizk, UNSW Canberra

Lebanese Women at the Crossroads: Caught between Sect and Nation

2:15

AFTERNOON TEA

2:30

PARALLEL SESSIONS 5 & 6

Panel 5: Changing Geopolitical Landscapes in the Middle East

Chair: Dr Galib Bashirov

Dr Andrew Thomas, Deakin University

The Need for Non-Western IR in Understanding a Changing Iran

Dr Niamatullah Ibrahimi & Dr Abbas Farasoo, La Trobe University & Deakin University

Understanding Shifts in U.S. Policies Towards the Taliban: A Critical Analysis

Mr Amin Naeni, Deakin University

Domestic Incentives for the Pivot to the East Among Middle Eastern Powers: The Case of Iran's Ambitious Digital Authoritarianism

Panel 6: Regional Actors and Strategy

Chair: Dr Dara Conduit

Dr William Gourlay, Monash University

Building Bridges and Other Pursuits: Turkey's foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East

Ms Neda Zeyghami, Deakin University

Continuity And Change in Iranian Foreign Policy

Mr Arash Ghassemi, Deakin University

Iran's Emerging Long-Arm Strategy for Power Projection in the Indian Ocean

3:45

Panel 7: The Future of the Middle East

Chair: Dr James Barry

Dr Farkhondeh Akbari, Monash University

Diplomacy with the Taliban: The Challenges Peace Settlements in Afghanistan

Prof Lukas Kieser, University of Newcastle & University of Zurich

The Future of the Lausanne Treaty

Prof Bob Bowker, Australian National University

Tomorrow there will be Apricots: An Australian Diplomat in the Arab World

5:00

Prof Akbarzadeh, Vote of Thanks

5:15

Conference Close

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Professor Sarah Phillips

After al-Qa'ida, after ISIS? Violence in the Middle East

This talk will explore the implications of an overlooked fact about violent extremist groups in the Middle East: they are widely seen as relatively mundane offshoots of state power by people who live in the areas most affected by them. Using insights from cultural anthropology, and the sociology of knowledge, I will ask why this fact is so often overlooked and what it means for understanding the contours of violence in the region, particularly now that groups like al-Qa'ida and ISIS appear to have passed their highwater marks. I argue that focusing on things left unsaid can open new ways of thinking about old questions.

Biography

Sarah G. Phillips is a Professor of Global Conflict and Development, and an Australian Research Council Future Fellow at the University of Sydney. Her research draws from years of in-depth fieldwork, and focuses on international intervention in the global south, knowledge production about conflict-affected states, and non-state governance, with a geographic focus on the Middle East and Africa. Sarah believes that studying places that are typically marginalised within International Relations is the best way to understand how the world works

ABSTRACTS AND BIOS

Dr Farkhondeh Akbari

Diplomacy with the Taliban: The Challenges Peace Settlements in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is back in Taliban hands by virtue of military conquest rather than a negotiated peace settlement. All attempts at diplomatic engagement for a peace settlement had failed. The idea of diplomatic engagement with the Taliban emerged as an option when the war persisted and violence intensified in Afghanistan. The argument was that a political solution had to be sought to resolve the conflict and end the US and coalition forces' longest war that began as a response to the tragic 9/11 events in the United States. Diplomatic engagement with the Taliban has enhanced their return to power by using diplomacy as a tactic to achieve their goals and objectives; however, peace settlement diplomacy requires a commitment to peace and the capability to compromise, an organisational characteristic that the Taliban lacked. This paper reflects on some of the challenges of diplomatic engagement with the Taliban for the purpose of peace settlement.

Biography

Dr Farkhondeh Akbari is a postdoctoral research fellow at Gender, Peace, and Security Centre, at Monash University. She focuses on diplomatic negotiations with extreme non-state armed actors, peace processes and women, peace, and security agenda. She obtained her PhD in diplomatic studies from the Australian National University. Her thesis examined the required characteristics for non-state armed actors to engage meaningfully in diplomacy for the purpose of peace settlements, and looked at the cases of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Farkhondeh has work experience at the Department of Political Affairs at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and Afghanistan's Independent Directorate of Local Governance in Kabul. Farkhondeh is also an activist, using her research to advocate for human rights – especially the rights of women and girls and the plight of the Hazara people in Afghanistan. She tweets @FarkhondaAkbar.

Dr Ayca Arkilic

How and Why Do States Engage Their Diaspora Youth? Lessons from the Middle East and North Africa

Various MENA states, including Turkey, have developed diaspora engagement programs specifically targeting diaspora youth. For Ankara, such programs include scholarship and leadership programs as well as heritage camps and tours. Turkey's diaspora engagement intensified during the pandemic. Other countries in the MENA, such as Morocco, Israel and Egypt have developed similar policies to reach out to their young overseas populations. Through a case study of Turkey, this paper's main objective is to explain why states invest in youth engagement. Drawing on diaspora diplomacy and soft power scholarship, and contextualizing Turkey's youth engagement efforts within the broader MENA region, the paper argues that MENA states' approach to youth-oriented engagement shares common themes, such as the cultivation of national identity, the promotion language and culture, and investment in leadership and empowerment. This agenda seeks to reinforce foreign policy interests abroad and forge loyalty to the homeland. Yet, as countries with authoritarian tendencies, most MENA states use strong-handed tactics to police dissent through strategies of transnational repression, legitimization, and co-optation, which yields mixed responses from the diaspora. The paper also has implications for authoritarianism, long-distance nationalism and comparative politics, as it is one of the few cross-national studies investigating diaspora youth policies, which remains in itself an understudied field. In doing so, it speaks to some of the main questions of the conference concerning sovereignty and the future of the region for minorities and marginalized groups.

Biography

Ayca Arkilic is a lecturer in Comparative Politics at Victoria University of Wellington. I completed my PhD at the University of Texas at Austin. I have been teaching and conducting research on Middle Eastern politics, Islam, and state-diaspora relations. My most recent publication is *Diaspora Diplomacy* (Manchester University Press, 2022). I am the recipient of the Victoria University Early Career Teaching and Research Excellence Awards and one of the founding members of the Middle East and Islamic Studies Aotearoa (MEISA) network in Aotearoa New Zealand. I serve as an Associate Editor of the leading diaspora journal, *Diaspora Studies*.

Prof Bob Bowker

Tomorrow there will be Apricots: An Australian Diplomat in the Arab World

Looking back at the lessons of 50 years of engagement with the Arab world as an Australian ambassador, UN official, academic and company director, I present some reflections on the region and its prospects; and an overview, from the perspective of a policy practitioner, of the trends and issues that will be addressed by other speakers. I then offer three conclusions that those considering a career connected directly or otherwise to the Middle East may wish to reflect upon. The paper anticipates there will continue to be a surfeit of adversity across the Middle East, including ongoing population displacements, and economic malaise. The Arab world will emerge from the nightmares of the past decade into a world which is both different and, in some respects, unchanging. It argues that governments in the region will struggle to find a sustainable balance between satisfying the expectations and sometimes contradictory demands of their political audiences and meeting the imperatives of national survival in a globalised security environment. Against that background, I argue that we should both speak, and act, according to our values because we want those values to be respected. It is in our interests for the international system to be strengthened by observation of those values. But our primary responsibility should be to listen, and to respond, where we can, to those who carry the burdens and opportunities of a changing Middle East. It is Arabs, and Iranians, who must reboot their institutions according to their own sense of what it means to be Arab, or Iranian, in this century.

Biography

Bob Bowker retired from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in 2008 after a 37-year career working mostly on the Middle East. He was posted to Saudi Arabia from 1974 to 2006, and Syria from 1979 to 1981. He was Australian ambassador to Jordan (1989-1992). He was Director of External Relations and Public Information, and later Senior Adviser, Policy Research of UNRWA in 1997-1998, based in Gaza and Jerusalem. He was the Australian ambassador to Egypt (2005-2008) and non-resident Australian ambassador to Syria, Libya, Tunisia and Sudan. Following his retirement from DFAT he returned to the ANU Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies where he was Adjunct Professor from 2008 to 2016, and an Honorary Visiting Fellow from 2017 to 2019.

Ms Eleanor Childs

The Intersection of Gender and the Destruction of Cultural Heritage

The sense of international urgency created by the unparalleled use of intentional heritage destruction (IHD) tactics by the Islamic State (IS) in its pursuit of territorial control and ideological supremacy in Syria and Iraq ushered in multiple developments to international law, policy, and normative frameworks. Primarily, these developments have strengthened the links between the destruction of cultural heritage, international security, and human rights (namely cultural rights). What has remained almost entirely absent from this discourse is the possibility for IHD in armed conflict to be driven by gender-based persecution or to have gendered consequences, particularly for women. This research intends to examine IHD from a feminist perspective in order to examine how gender may inform or underline women's experiences and understandings of heritage destruction. This will be achieved firstly by conducting fieldwork to document the narratives of Syrian and Iraqi women who experienced the loss of their cultural heritage at the hands of the IS, and secondly by employing a feminist-informed data analysis, centred on uncovering how intersecting power dynamics, including gender, may have altered the impacts of IHD on ethno-religiously diverse women from Syria and Iraq. By examining the extent to which IHD had a gendered impact on women's security and women's cultural rights, this research is intended to interrogate the validity of the exclusion of gender within international security and human rights-based responses to IHD.

Biography

Eleanor Childs is a first year PhD Candidate with a background in International Relations and a focus on the Middle East, specifically the Levant (Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and Jordan). She has worked as a Research Assistant at the National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies and the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation on projects related to violent extremist organisations. She also has experience living and working in the region, designing multi-million-dollar projects related to post-conflict stability.

Her areas of interest include nationalism, refugee politics, human security, social movements, and gender.

Dr Tristan Dunning

The Problems with Proscription: Armed Non-State Actors and Governance in the Middle East.

Many states in the Middle East lack key aspects of definitional sovereignty, such as a monopoly of the use of coercive force within their internationally recognised territory. In fact, several regions are governed in a de facto sense by armed non-state and/or hybrid actors. These areas are often subject to humanitarian crises. The default position of the developed world vis-à-vis such actors is often proscription and the marginalisation of these actors as 'terrorist' organisations. Such designations, however, elide the complexity of government-society relations and the saliency of the de facto authorities in the lives of their erstwhile constituencies. Blanket designations of these organisations, moreover, have the potential to criminalise the people living under their control and compound underlying humanitarian and political crises. To this end, the paper investigates the governance roles of armed non-state and hybrid actors within the region, predominantly by reference to the Hamas movement in the Gaza Strip, among others, and the potential problems with legally proscribing such organisations. It asks how the international community might constructively engage with armed non-state and hybrid actors in terms of governance, especially when the movement is entrenched and enjoys a substantial level of ongoing popular support.

Biography

Dr Tristan Dunning is an Associate Professor of Political Science and Public Administration at the American University of Afghanistan, in exile. He is the author of *Hamas, Jihad and Popular Legitimacy: Reinterpreting Resistance in Palestine* and the editor of *Palestine: Past and Present*. His research interests include the governance roles of non-state armed organisations and hybrid actors in the Middle East region.

Dr Abbas Farasoo

Understanding Shifts in U.S. Policies Towards the Taliban: A Critical Analysis

The 'war on terror' produced discourses, which elevated terrorism as a primary threat to international peace and security and justified the overthrow of regimes that were suspected of supporting terrorism. After two decades, the United States seeks to wind down the war, including through negotiations with groups that it once regarded as terrorist or complicit in terrorism. This paper takes a critical approach to examine these shifts in U.S. policy in relation to the Taliban in Afghanistan. It conceives the Taliban as a networked movement that consisted of local roots, transnational jihadist ties and connections to Pakistan's proxy war in Afghanistan. The paper then identifies and problematises key assumptions of American discourses by assessing them against local patterns of terrorism and (in)security and the Taliban's violent tactics. Drawing on U.S. sources, it finds that the U.S. discourses shifted over time between various aspects of the Taliban movement as signifiers of its identity to justify shifting Washington's priorities in Afghanistan. These discursive shifts, which reflected U.S. policy priorities, introduced uncertainties and contradictions that contributed to the failure of the war efforts in Afghanistan.

Biography

Dr. Abbas Farasoo is currently the Subject Coordinator and Lecturer in Political Science at the University of Melbourne in Australia. Dr. Farasoo completed his PhD at Deakin University in 2022 and his research focuses on proxy wars in Afghanistan, South Asia, and the Middle East. He also worked as one of the investigators on the Carnegie Corporation of New York-funded project "Assessing the Impact of External Actors in Syria and Afghan Proxy Wars" (Grant number: G-18-55949) at Deakin University, Australia. Additionally, he worked as Chargé d'Affaires and Deputy Ambassador of Afghanistan to Australia (2014-2017). Before that, he worked as the Deputy Director-General for Regional Cooperation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan (2013-2014).

Dr Mariam Farida

"People, Army, Resistance": The End of Hizbullah's Legacy

The escalating situation in Lebanon since the start of several demonstrations in 2015, to rid the country of the deeply sectarian political elites, has brought the question of Hizbullah's rise and decline. The country's deep economic and financial crisis has been categorically described as the worst economic crisis in 150 years. Hizbullah, a group that has earned its domestic legitimacy from support networks, is now put to the test as several incidents are starting to resemble a gradual loss of its constituent support. This comes after a series of events that took place in October 2019 revolution, followed by the explosion of Beirut Port in August 2020. Hizbullah has then been labelled as an endorser of the political regime that has led the country to its biggest financial crisis. The paper aims at identifying how the ongoing developments in Lebanon (and the lack of national plan to save the economy) is changing the Party's legitimate support from within. This loss of internal legitimisation is paralleled with international pressure in the form of economic sanctions, which paralysed the country even further, the regional changes surrounding Lebanon and Hizbullah; namely, the Israel-Gulf states peace talks, the continuous economic sanctions on Iran and its implications, and COVID-19 economic burdens that have presented itself as an urgent priority and a game changer. The paper's interest, then, is in underlying how Hizbullah's slogan "People, Army, Resistance" which has legitimised its resistance operations both in Lebanon and in regional conflicts, is no longer viable, and could lead to the end of Hizbullah's legacy.

Biography

Dr Farida is a Lecturer in Terrorism Studies in the Department of Security Studies and Criminology at Macquarie university. She also serves as a consultant for Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) programs in CSNSW. Her research publications include Middle East politics, non-state groups, terrorism, and political violence. Dr Farida's research has been published in journals such as *International Review for Social Research* and *Journal for Policing, Intelligence, and Counter Terrorism*. Dr Farida is a member of AVERT Research Network and Counter Extremism Hub. She is the author the book *Religion and Hezbollah: Political Ideology and Legitimacy* (Routledge 2020).

Mr. Arash Ghassemi

Iran's Emerging Long-Arm Strategy for Power Projection in the Indian Ocean

Since the occupation of Ormuz Island by the Portuguese in 1515, the historical reality that was forced upon Iran by threats, bayonets, occupations, secessions, and concessions have been two pivotal forces that have gradually shaped Iranian strategy in the northern part of the Indian Ocean: there is a potential threat from the sea, and yet, there is an opportunity to respond strongly to a threat in the sea. These two realities are the essence of Iran's emerging "Long-Arm Strategy" for power projection in the northern part of the Indian Ocean. Preparing for the next war in order to prevent it from happening – a three-pillar operational strategy has been shaped: Control of the Strait of Hormuz and its strategic islands; Strong presence with sea-denial capabilities in the Bab El-Mandeb Strait (i.e., Yemen); Connecting these two strategic chokepoints through the sea, from the Mokrani Sea to the 10th parallel north. Because, with over a quarter of the world's total oil and more than a third of the world's natural gas passing through these chokepoints' shipping lanes, these geographic features act as force multipliers for the projection of Iranian regional and even global power. This study will explore Iran's Long Arm Strategy in the northern part of the Indian Ocean through a hybrid adaptation of conceptual defensive and offensive realism in search for a better understanding of Iran's ambitions and concerns at the sea and the changing nature of the sea power in the battlefields of the future.

Biography

Arash Ghassemi is a PhD Candidate at Deakin University. He holds a BA in Political Science from Florida Atlantic University and an ALM in International Relations from Harvard University. Ghassemi's research focuses on decision-making, Iran, oil, and the Strait of Hormuz. He is utilizing an adaptation of Allison's bureaucratic politics model to analyse and examine the extent, role, significance, strength, and limitations of individual, organizations, and political expediency of the system that affect decision-making in Iran regarding construction of the Gohar-Jask oil pipeline. His research interests, more broadly, include strategic studies, decision-making, governance, Muslim communities, international security, war and peacebuilding.

Dr Naser Ghobadzadeh

Societal Paradigm Shift in Iran

Iran's politics are becoming more and more marked by political unrests. Demonstrations start because of economic, political, or social grievances, but the protesters' demands quickly grow to include fundamental changes, and in most cases, the overthrow of the Islamic Republic. Suggesting that there is a ubiquity of grievances, this presentation argues that these grievances are symptoms of a societal paradigm shift in Iran, which has ushered in "disequilibrium in a social system", to borrow a phrase from Chalmers Johnson. Shifting away from traditional and religious values and norms, many Iranians have embraced new values and norms that are diametrically opposed to those of the ruling clergy. In order to curb political instabilities, Iran's ruling clergy ought to overcome or at the very least alleviate systematic disequilibrium. This is feasible if the governing clerics are prepared to compromise, which would require a change in the character of the Islamic Republic. Iran's governing clerics may be laying the groundwork for a new revolution if they rely entirely on repressive measures to address political unrests.

Biography

Naser Ghobadzadeh is a senior lecturer at the National School of Arts, Australian Catholic University. Naser's interests lie in the study of Islamic political theology, secularism, and Middle East politics. Ghobadzadeh holds a Ph.D. (University of Sydney, 2012) and an M.A. in Political Science (Shahid Beheshti University, Iran 2001). Ghobadzadeh has written three books including *Religious Secularity: a theological challenge to the Islamic state* (2015), *Caspian Sea: legal regime, neighbouring countries and US policies* (2005 - in Farsi) and *A study of people's divergence from ruling system* (2002-in Farsi). He is also co-editor of *The Politics of Islamism: Diverging Visions and Trajectories* (2018).

Dr William Gourlay

Building Bridges and Other Pursuits: Turkey's Foreign Policy in the Eastern

Mediterranean and Middle East

Cliché posits Turkey as the bridge between east and west, but from the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, its primary diplomatic focus was on integration into the "West." This changed from the 2010s, when Turkey broadened its foreign policy outlook and began to pay more attention to and engage more closely in the Middle East, just as the socio-political upheavals of the Arab Spring created a more difficult terrain in which to operate. This paper will examine the ways in which domestic and international factors shape Turkey's foreign policy postures and initiatives in its immediate neighbourhood. The paper argues that Turkey's foreign policy continues to be defined by three long-standing concerns that lie at the heart of its self-image: its relationship with the West; its anxieties over national cohesion and territorial integrity; and its aspirations for leadership in the Muslim world. Using these three prisms, it will examine Turkey's recent interactions with its immediate neighbours. In the last 12 months, Turkey has sparred with Greece over Aegean islands, continued its support of anti-Assad forces in Idlib, hit Kurdish 'terrorist' targets in Syria and Iraq, and made incremental steps towards opening the Armenian border. The paper will analyse these developments in light of Turkey's 'legitimate security concerns', its regional goals and the shifting dimensions of its domestic political landscape.

Biography

William Gourlay is a lecturer at the School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies at Monash University and was previously a Research Associate at the Middle East Studies Forum at Deakin University. His research focuses on issues of nationalism, ethnic identity and intercommunal relations in Turkey, the Balkans and the Middle East. He has previously worked as a teacher, editor and journalist in London, Izmir (Turkey) and his native Melbourne. He is the author of *The Kurds in Erdoğan's Turkey* (Edinburgh University Press).

Dr Nelia Hyndman-Rizk

Lebanese Women at the Crossroads: Caught between Sect and Nation

Thirty years after the end of the civil war, Lebanese women are still struggling for gender equality. This study builds on recent scholarship on women's activism in the Arab world, in the context of the Arab Spring. It examines how discourses of secularism and equal civil rights have informed the contemporary Lebanese women's movement in their campaigns for a domestic violence law, women's nationality rights, a women's quota in parliament, the reform of personal status law and the recognition of civil marriage. This book argues that women are caught between sect and nation, due to Lebanon's plural legal system, which makes a division between religious and civil law. While both jurisdictions allocate women relational rights, guided by the logic of patrilineal descent, women's inequality is central to the reproduction of sectarian difference and patriarchal control within the confessional political system, as a whole.

Biography

Dr Nelia Hyndman-Rizk is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Business at UNSW Canberra. Her research has focused on the Lebanese Diaspora in Australia and the USA. Her most recent work considers the dynamics of the Lebanese women's movement and the question of secular citizenship: *Lebanese Women at the Crossroads Caught between Sect and Nation?*

For full details of publications see:

<https://research.unsw.edu.au/people/dr-nelia-nacima-hyndman-rizk>.

Dr Niamatullah Ibrahim

Understanding Shifts in U.S. Policies Towards the Taliban: A Critical Analysis

The 'war on terror' produced discourses, which elevated terrorism as a primary threat to international peace and security and justified the overthrow of regimes that were suspected of supporting terrorism. After two decades, the United States seeks to wind down the war, including through negotiations with groups that it once regarded as terrorist or complicit in terrorism. This paper takes a critical approach to examine these shifts in U.S. policy in relation to the Taliban in Afghanistan. It conceives the Taliban as a networked movement that consisted of local roots, transnational jihadist ties and connections to Pakistan's proxy war in Afghanistan. The paper then identifies and problematises key assumptions of American discourses by assessing them against local patterns of terrorism and (in)security and the Taliban's violent tactics. Drawing on U.S. sources, it finds that the U.S. discourses shifted over time between various aspects of the Taliban movement as signifiers of its identity to justify shifting Washington's priorities in Afghanistan. These discursive shifts, which reflected U.S. policy priorities, introduced uncertainties and contradictions that contributed to the failure of the war efforts in Afghanistan.

Biography

Dr. Niamatullah Ibrahim is a Lecturer in International Relations at La Trobe University (Australia). His research interests include the dynamics of contentious politics, political violence, and external interventions in fragile and conflict-affected states, with a focus on Afghanistan, and the Middle East region. He is the author of *The Hazaras and the Afghan State: Rebellion, Exclusion and Struggle for Recognition* (London: Hurst & Co. 2017) and co-author of (with William Maley) *Afghanistan: Politics and Economics in a Globalising State* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

Dr Anas Iqtait

Economic Outlook in Non-Oil Exporting Arab Countries

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed serious challenges to the already-strained government budgets and health services of non-oil exporting Arab countries. More recently, the war in Ukraine and sanctions on Russia have hit economies around the globe and disrupted global food and energy markets, which has had a significantly negative effect on the economies of non-oil Arab countries. Shocks in the food and energy markets, coupled with inflation, have worsened structural economic imbalances across Arab states and have sharply reduced living standards. In the face of these economic shocks, governments in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia have attempted to restructure their economies by balancing their budgets and reducing public expenditure. This fiscally conservative approach is generating significant downward economic pressure on Arab populations who have been particularly exposed to shocks and fluctuations in the prices of necessary goods and services. This paper will shed light on the public economics of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia in the face of mounting external fiscal and economic challenges. It will further provide an analysis on the economic outlook of these economies taking into account societal and political changes in place since the 2011 Arab uprisings.

Biography

Dr. Anas Iqtait is a lecturer in economics and political economy of the Middle East at the Australian National University's Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies. He is the co-founder and chief editor of the ANU based Near East Policy Forum. Anas serves as a non-resident scholar with the Middle East Institute, Washington D.C. He is the author of *Funding and the Quest for Sovereignty in Palestine* (Palgrave, 2022).

Prof Benjamin Isakhan

Rebuilding Mosul: Public Opinion on Foreign-Led Heritage Reconstruction

Following the devastation of the northern Iraqi city of Mosul by the Islamic State various foreign actors launched initiatives to reconstruct the heritage sites of the city. However, such efforts are underpinned by assumptions about how locals value their heritage, how they perceive its destruction, whether they view reconstruction as a priority, and the extent to which they support foreign-led efforts to rebuild their heritage. This article holds these assumptions up to empirical scrutiny via an original survey of 1600 Mosul residents and their attitudes towards heritage. The results hold four key implications for current and future heritage projects in Mosul, namely that while locals want to see heritage sites reconstructed they prefer that heritage reconstruction: not be privileged over humanitarian aid, development and peace-building; includes the rebuilding of their local religious sites as much as iconic and/or non-religious sites; transforms sites into new and more useful structures to the community; and, while they acknowledge the work of foreign actors, they want agency and control over the future of their heritage. The article concludes by noting that such findings hold important implications for future foreign-led heritage projects in (post-)conflict environments where mass human suffering and heritage destruction has taken place.

Biography

Benjamin Isakhan is Professor of International Politics in the Alfred Deakin Institute at Deakin University, Australia. Ben is also Adjunct Senior Research Associate, Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa and Consulting Scholar at the Penn Cultural Heritage Centre at the University of Pennsylvania, US. Ben is currently Chief Investigator on a large international research project funded by the Australian Research Council and titled 'After Islamic State: Heritage Dynamics in Syria and Iraq'.

Prof Lukas Kieser

The Future of the Lausanne Treaty

The 1923 Lausanne Treaty is the outcome of the Near East Peace Conference in Lausanne in 1922-1923. The 'Near East Peace of Lausanne' proved a remarkably enduring pact between powers at the end of the Ottoman Empire. Although a lasting fundament, it was never a peace among peoples for people. The Treaty of Lausanne liquidated the Ottoman Empire and is the only still fully valid post-WWI treaty (the last one of the 'Paris treaty system'). In addition to its centrality in the current Turkish-Greek tensions over borders and maritime resources, there are various conflicts related to the Treaty of Lausanne. Topical conflicts involve Syria, Iraq, the Caucasus, Kurds and Armenians, as well as the construction and constitution of Turkey itself. Inspired in part by R.T. Erdoğan's open criticism of the Treaty and his promise of a new 'Turkey 2023', many Middle Easterners mistakenly believe that the Treaty of Lausanne expires in 2023, hundred years after its conclusion. A look on the questioned future of Lausanne's fundament of the post-Ottoman space offers important insights into the current tectonic changes in the Middle East.

Biography

Hans Lukas Kieser is a modern historian at the University of Newcastle, Australia, and at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. His current research focuses on the emergence of the post-Ottoman Middle East and the Turkish nation-state, analysing political and religious biographies and the relationship between state formation, violence and historical-political thought. His books in English include *Talât Pasha: Father of Modern Turkey and Architect of Genocide* (2018), *Nearest East: American Millennialism and Mission to the Middle East* (2010) as well as several edited volumes, most recently *Remembering the Great War in the Middle East: From Turkey and Armenia to Australia and New Zealand* (2022).

Mr Amin Naeni

Domestic Incentives for the Pivot to the East Among Middle Eastern Powers: The Case of Iran's Ambitious Digital Authoritarianism

While the hegemony of authoritarian governance ought to be seen as the main source of various problems—civil war, terrorism, sectarianism—in the Middle East, nondemocratic regimes are still attempting to strengthen their position in power. To this end, a "pivot to the East" is emerging in the Middle East countries, improving ties with China and Russia. This political shift is mainly investigated by focusing on foreign policy. However, the ever-increasing importance of the East-ward strategy would be its domestic attainments for the Middle East's political leaders. In the domestic realm, the pivot to the East quests for authoritarian learning through which autocratic leaders change their policies by observing and learning from the success and failure of other authoritarian regimes. Currently, Russia and China are perceived as the most powerful undemocratic regimes by autocrats around the world. Specifically, the success of Beijing and Moscow in controlling the internet and creating digital authoritarianism has influenced Middle Eastern powers. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and mainly Iran have become interested to follow the Eastern global powers in restricting the free flow of information, which empowers authoritarian governance against democratic movements in the region's future. In this vein, this abstract sheds light on the domestic goals of the "look to the East" strategy for Iranian leaders. Amid the growing regional power of Iran, the abstract presents that Iranian authorities aim to build a "National Internet Network", strengthening their own model of authoritarian governance based on the experiences in China and Russia.

Biography

Amin Naeni is a Ph.D. candidate at Deakin University and will start my project in early November 2022. I have published articles in the *Middle East Policy Journal*, the Brookings Institute, the Middle East Institute, and the Atlantic Council. As a research assistant, I worked on two projects at the University of Tehran where I also obtained my master's degree in Middle East and North Africa Studies in 2018.

Dr Virginie Rey

Muslim Museums: Curating Islam in Multicultural Societies

This paper discusses my DECRA research project, expected findings and personal experience in the field of Islamic museums. The past 15 years have seen a well-documented renaissance of Islam-related displays in museums across the global north, including the renovation of existing galleries and the creation of new ones. Another remarkable aspect of this museographic revival of Islam in Europe, North America and Australia has been the creation of museums led by Muslim communities themselves. Little research has been done on Muslim-operated museums. This very fact shows the extent to which the study of Islamic material and visual cultures in museums has been dominated continues to prioritise Western constructions of Islamic material and visual cultures in museums. My DECRA research proposes to bridge this gap. Based on ethnographic research at four museum locations across Australia, Western Europe, and North America, it aims to assemble and interpret new evidence on how contemporary Muslim communities use museums as a medium to think about and display their collective identities in non-Muslim-majority societies. I hope this research will provide scope for a richer and more nuanced account of the process of cultural production and open new analytical perspectives about 'Islamic' as a museum typology and a collection taxonomy, one that considers Islam in light of local and global dynamics.

Biography:

Virginie Rey is a museum anthropologist. Her research interests include heritage and museums in the MENA region, museum epistemologies, community activism and Islamic art. She is the author of *Mediating Museums: Exhibiting Material Culture in Tunisia 1881-2016* (Brill, 2019) and editor of *The Art of Minorities: Cultural Representations in Museums of the Middle East and North Africa* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020). She is a Senior Research Fellow at ADI and a Lecturer in Critical Heritage and Museum Studies at Deakin University.

Dr Marika Sosnowski

Fear and Violence, Loyalty and Treason: Settlement of Status in Syria

This paper examines the arbitrary and oftentimes violent nature of loyalty and belonging in the wake of civil war through the case of Syria. It shows how the new "settlement of status" process is an extension of the governmentality of violence used by the Syrian regime to delineate loyal citizens from traitors. However, the paper argues that this process actually serves to undermine the regime in the long-run, potentially sowing the seeds for greater dissent and the possibility of the regime's downfall. The Syrian case offers broader insights into the various social and political permutations of a citizen's relationship to the state in the period after large scale violence has ended and how the state attempts to use fear and violence as mechanisms for social control.

Biography

Dr Marika Sosnowski is an Australian-qualified lawyer and Research Fellow with the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg. Her primary research interests are in the fields of critical security studies, local/rebel governance and legal systems. Her geographical area of specialisation is the Middle East, particularly Syria.

Dr Andrew Thomas

The Need for Non-Western IR in Understanding a Changing Iran

Scholars have long pointed out that mainstream analysis of Iran and the Middle East has been dominated by Western ideas since the time of early European explorers. Though these ideas have certainly shaped the Islamic Republic, relying solely on Western understandings of geopolitics is counter to the goal of International Relations scholars. Valiant efforts from those drawing out native perspectives from Iran have addressed this to an extent, but Western narratives still dominate - often leading to 'orientalist' assumptions. This paper serves to remind us that non-Western perspectives are accessible to all scholars and help return the needed context of identity to our exploration of Iran's relationship with the West. With its continued pivot away from cosmopolitan Europe, its nuclear program at a political crossroads and domestic pressures on the government, we must not fall into the trap of removing identity, history and native experience from our analysis of Iranian foreign policy in this formative period for Iran.

Biography

Dr Thomas is an Associate Lecturer of Middle East Politics at Deakin. He chairs the Middle East studies course, covering everything from ancient Middle Eastern history to the contemporary Arab-Israeli conflict. He graduated with a PhD from Monash in 2019, studying critical non-Western approaches to Iranian foreign policy. His research interests include Iranian native scholarship, Middle Eastern sanctions policy and the intersection of IR theory and practice in the Middle East.

Dr Daniel Tower

The Survival of Assyrians and the Continuance of Conflict in Post-ISIS Iraq

This paper looks at ISIS from the perspective of a local Assyrian population dealing with its effects in the post-conflict period. Based on research conducted both during and after ISIS, this paper highlights how the international intervention to defeat ISIS creates a dualistic perception of terrorism, one that is not shared amongst the general population. Since the defeat of ISIS in Iraq in late 2017, research in this area tends to focus on taking stock of the conflict and mitigating the ongoing effects from it. The tendency is to consider ISIS as an especially novel event, one that we direct significant amount of research and resources to prevent from reoccurring. To Assyrians, an ethno-religious minority and indigenous people of northern Iraq, the conflict is ongoing and has taken an even more insidious form since the decline of ISIS. This has resulted in a shift in demographics and in local politics. The overwhelming sentiment is of abandonment and the fear of a future that may not include them.

Biography:

Dr Daniel J. Tower (FRAI) is an academic, engineer, and researcher, whose work focuses on the intersection between the anthropology of religion and the geopolitics of armed conflict. He has done extensive field work in the Middle East including in Iraq during the ISIS conflict. Daniel completed his PhD at the University of Sydney in the Department of Studies in Religion. His doctoral thesis investigated the territoriality of religious violence during the rise of ISIS in northern Iraq. Alongside his academic work he volunteers for the non-profit organisations Iraq Body Count (IBC) and the Etuti Organisation.

Mr Rachmiel Travitz

The Self-Identification of Middle Eastern and North African Jews: Language, Labels, Peoplehood and Poetry

Jews from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have a unique, but not fully understood, identity. My research analyses how MENA Jews have chosen to identify themselves and how they perceived their identity through their history in exile and diaspora. This is done by reference to their language, being the unique Judeo-Arabic forms of speech and writing that they used, the labels that they used to describe themselves and that others have used to describe them, their notions of peoplehood and exile, and especially focuses on case studies of MENA Jewish poetry. The research fills a gap in scholarly research of the subject, where a lot of what has been said has not taken into account how MENA Jews themselves perceived their identity. In particular, these perceptions of identity can be expressed in mediums that are not often analysed, such as poetry, Rabbinic literature, novels, and the like. This research particularly focusses on poetry. The findings of my research are that MENA Jews significantly adopted Arabic culture whilst nevertheless emphatically maintaining a separate identity from Arabs. This self-identification equates to a particular form of non-European nationhood, in a pre-modern sense, as particularly highlighted in the poetry of three MENA Jewish poets.

Biography

I am an Honours candidate at Deakin University, completing my thesis 'The Self-Identification of Middle Eastern and North African Jews: Language, Labels, Peoplehood and Poetry' in the Middle East Studies field under the supervision of Dr James Barry. I hold degrees in Law and International Studies, as well as holding diplomas and qualifications in other areas including Arabic and Jewish Studies. My research interests include minorities and minority rights in the Middle East, semitic languages and linguistics, and Middle Eastern religions.

Ms Neda Zeyghami

Continuity And Change in Iranian Foreign Policy

Iran's foreign policy has evolved throughout its history and under several presidents. While President Mohammad Khatami was known for his efforts to enhance Iran's reputation with the outside world and establish trust, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency was distinguished by ideologically charged statements about Iran's adherence to the values of the Islamic Revolution. There were, however, fewer noticeable changes in Iran's foreign policy when it came to the country's ties with Russia. Successive Iranian presidents kept a constant stance on Russia. In other words, even though it appears paradoxical given its revolutionary character, the Islamic Republic of Iran tries to maintain good relations with Russia. When it comes to the apparent contrasts between each Iranian president, this tendency to maintain cordial ties with Russia poses some challenges. Under President Hassan Rouhani and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran experienced vast changes on certain issues like the nuclear problem, which had a significant impact on its relationship with the rest of the world. Incorporating evidence from interviews, official speeches, official documents, and newspapers, this study demonstrates, towards Russia, always followed a continuous line.

Biography

Neda Zeyghami is a PhD student in International Relations at Deakin University. Her work focuses specifically on Iran's Foreign Policy and the Iran-Russia relationship. Her interest area of research will include foreign policy, Political science, and Women's roles in leadership and politics. She is currently working as an Associated Research Fellow for Prof. Akbarzadeh.

ABOUT SESSION CHAIRS

Dr James Barry, Deakin University

James Barry is an Associate Research Fellow with Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University, currently working on the project “After Islamic State: Heritage Dynamics in Iraq and Syria”. He is the author of *Armenian Christians in Iran: Ethnicity, Religion, and Identity in the Islamic Republic* (Cambridge University Press, 2018) and speaks Arabic, Armenian and Persian. His first documentary film, *Crescent under the Southern Cross: Muslim Anzacs in World War Two*, premieres in late 2022.

Dr Galib Bashirov, Deakin University

Galib Bashirov is an associate research fellow at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University, Australia. He does research on state-society relations in the Muslim world. His previous work has been published in *Review of International Political Economy*, *Third World Quarterly*, and *Democratization*.

Dr Dara Conduit, University of Melbourne

Dr Dara Conduit is an Australian Research Council DECRA Research Fellow in Political Science at the University of Melbourne, and a Non-Resident Scholar at the Middle East Institute in Washington D.C. Her research sits at the intersection of authoritarian politics and cyber technology, she has a regional specialism in the Middle East, particularly Syria and Iran. Her work has been published in journals including *Democratization*, *Political Geography*

and *The Middle East Journal*. Her book *The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria*, which was published by Cambridge University Press, won the 2020 Oceania Book Prize for International Studies.

Dr William Gourlay, Monash University

William Gourlay is a lecturer at the School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies at Monash University and was previously a Research Associate at the Middle East Studies Forum at Deakin University. His research focuses on issues of nationalism, ethnic identity and intercommunal relations in Turkey, the Balkans and the Middle East. He has previously worked as a teacher, editor and journalist in London, Izmir (Turkey) and his native Melbourne. He is the author of *The Kurds in Erdoğan's Turkey* (Edinburgh University Press).

Prof Benjamin Isakhan, Deakin University

Benjamin Isakhan is Professor of International Politics in the Alfred Deakin Institute at Deakin University, Australia. Ben is also Adjunct Senior Research Associate, Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa and Consulting Scholar at the Penn Cultural Heritage Centre at the University of Pennsylvania, US. Ben is currently Chief Investigator on a large international research project funded by the Australian Research Council and titled 'After Islamic State: Heritage Dynamics in Syria and Iraq'.

Dr Ali Mozaffari, Deakin University

Ali Mozaffari (<https://heritageinwestasia.com/>) is Australian Research Council (DECRA) Fellow and Senior Fellow with the Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University. He researches heritage politics and geopolitics of the past with a specific focus on West Asia. His books include *Heritage Movements in Asia: Cultural Heritage Activism, Politics, and Identity* (Berghahn 2020), *Development, architecture and the formation of heritage in late-twentieth century Iran: A vital past* (Manchester University Press 2020), *World Heritage in Iran; Perspectives on Pasargadae* (Routledge 2016). Mozaffari co-edits Berghahn's *Explorations in Heritage Studies* series.

Dr Virginie Rey, Deakin University

Virginie Rey is a museum anthropologist. Her research interests include heritage and museums in the MENA region, museum epistemologies, community activism and Islamic art. She is the author of *Mediating Museums: Exhibiting Material Culture in Tunisia 1881-2016* (Brill, 2019) and editor of *The Art of Minorities: Cultural Representations in Museums of the Middle East and North Africa* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020). She is a Senior Research Fellow at ADI and a Lecturer in Critical Heritage and Museum Studies at Deakin University

Dr Andrew Thomas, Deakin University

Dr Thomas is an Associate Lecturer of Middle East Politics at Deakin. He chairs the entire Middle East studies course, covering everything from ancient Middle Eastern history to the contemporary Arab-Israeli conflict. He graduated with a PhD from Monash in 2019, studying critical non-Western approaches to Iranian foreign policy. His research interests include Iranian native scholarship, Middle Eastern sanctions policy and the intersection of IR theory and practice in the Middle East.

ABOUT THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE

The Middle East in Transition conference is organised by the Middle East Studies Forum at the Alfred Deakin Institute of Citizenship and Globalisation at Deakin University. It was made possible by the generous support of the Alfred Deakin Institute

Prof Shahram Akbarzadeh

Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh is Research Professor in Middle East and Central Asian Politics at Deakin University (Australia) and Deputy Director (International) of the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation. He held a prestigious ARC Future Fellowship (2012–2016) and completed projects researching the region funded by the Qatar Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation. Professor Akbarzadeh has published extensively in this field.

Ms Neda Zeyghami

Neda Zeyghami is a PhD student in International Relations at Deakin University. Her work focuses specifically on Iran's Foreign Policy and the Iran-Russia relationship. Her interest area of research will include foreign policy, political science, and women's roles in leadership and politics. She is currently working as an Associated Research Fellow for Prof. Akbarzadeh.

Dr James Barry (Conference Convener)

James Barry is an Associate Research Fellow with Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University, currently working on the project "After Islamic State: Heritage Dynamics in Iraq and Syria". He is the author of *Armenian Christians in Iran: Ethnicity, Religion, and Identity in the Islamic Republic* (Cambridge University Press, 2018) and speaks Arabic, Armenian and Persian. His first documentary film, *Crescent under the Southern Cross: Muslim Anzacs in World War Two*, premieres in late 2022.



ABOUT THE ALFRED DEAKIN INSTITUTE

The Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation (ADI) is an internationally recognised and highly regarded social sciences and humanities research institute.

For nearly a decade, the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation (ADI) has conducted research of local and global significance, motivated by an ambition to improve the lives of people around the world.

The institute's commitment to addressing the significant challenges of our time is underpinned by a critical mass of leading scholars and a robust interdisciplinary research agenda.

The Institute hosts a number of research networks, including The Middle East Studies Forum, which provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and international collaboration, helping to strengthen our local and global partnerships.



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The event hashtag is #MESF2022

ABOUT THE MIDDLE EAST STUDIES FORUM

MESF ranked the top institution for Middle East and Islamic studies research in Australia in 2020 and 2022

The Middle East Studies Forum (MESF) is a network of world-class researchers and educators hosted by the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation at Deakin University in the field of Middle East and Central Asia studies and languages.

MESF manages a number of high-profile international grants and teaching initiatives, regularly hosts international and national events and seminars, and runs a biannual Middle East studies conference.

MESF is convened by Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh.

We are a collaborative network open to researchers, research students, policymakers, media professionals and anyone interested in the region.

We are well-placed to conduct and collaborate on high-profile international research and teaching initiatives relating to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

MESF focuses on the following topics in relation

to contemporary Middle East and Central Asia:

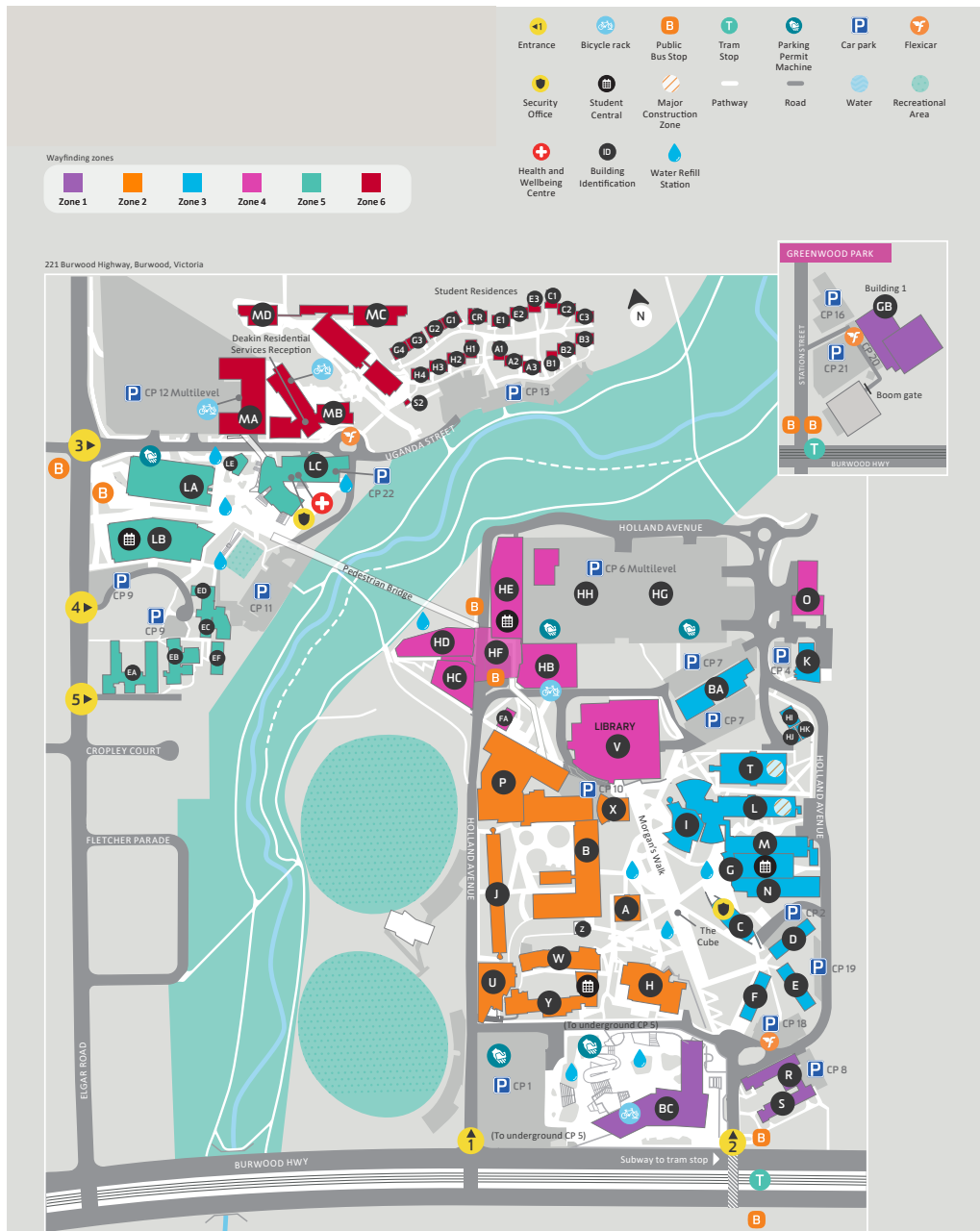
- International Relations, security and foreign policy dynamics
- The rapidly changing nature of civil society and democracy
- The emergence of sub-state groups
- Defining the 'Middle East' and examining how it has been constructed and understood in the 'West'
- The role of minorities and women across the regions
- The complex and overlapping histories of the region and its myriad languages, cultures and political movements
- Utilising interdisciplinary approaches and methodologies as the basis for understanding the complexities of the region
- The need for innovative teaching and the supervision of higher degree work in the field.



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