The Middle East After the War on Gaza:

Navigating the Impact of Regional Rivalries, the US Mid-East Policy, and the Future of Authoritarianism

October 7-8, 2024

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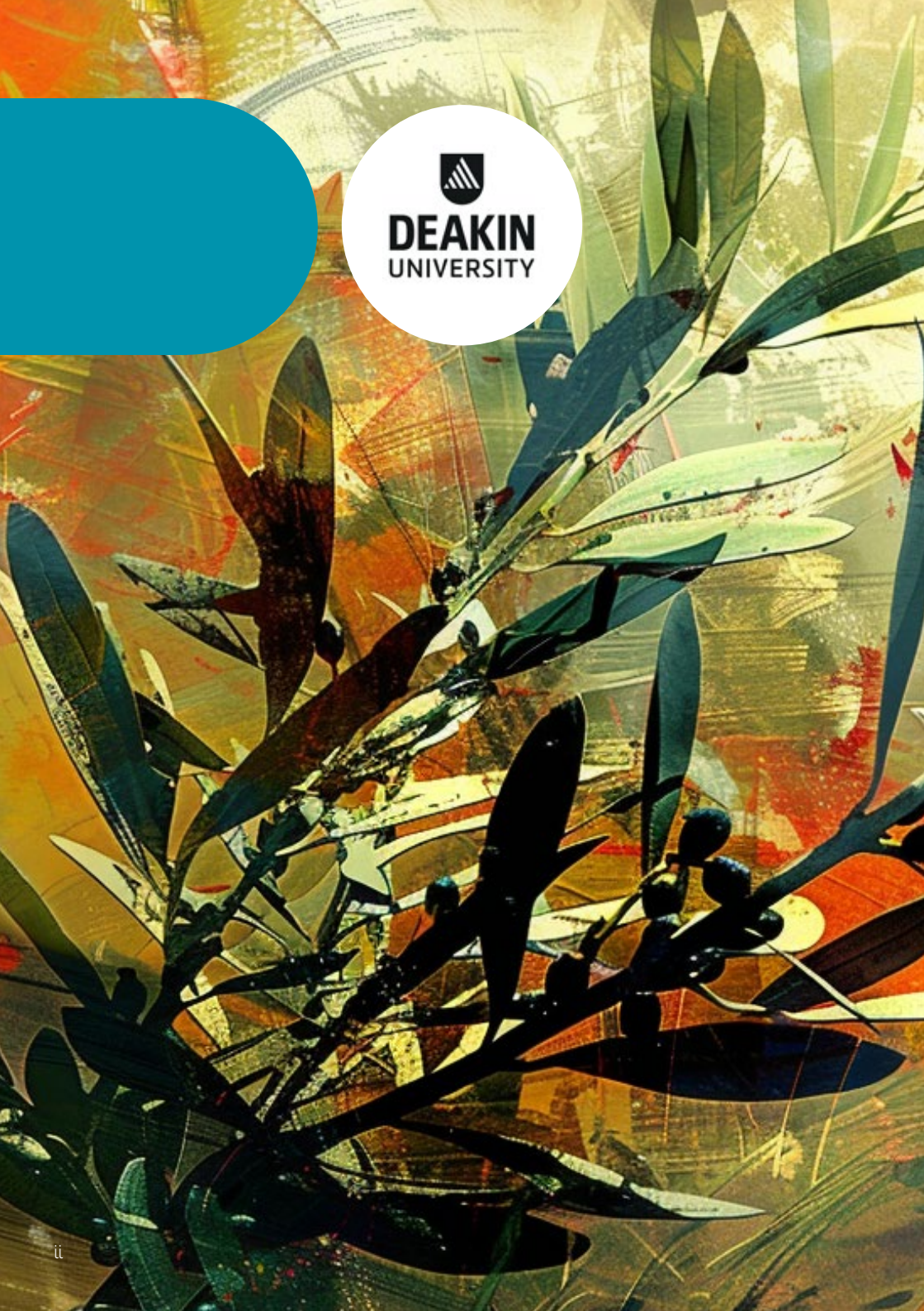Burwood Corporate Centre (BCC)
221 Burwood Highway Burwood, VIC 3125

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MIDDLE EAST STUDIES FORUM

ADI
ALFRED DEAKIN INSTITUTE FOR
CITIZENSHIP AND GLOBALISATION

WELCOME

The devastating war on Gaza has reverberated across the Middle East and the world. Beyond the immediate human toll and destruction, this conflict has highlighted the urgent need for sustainable solutions, legally-binding mechanisms towards a ceasefire, and meaningful dialogue towards Palestinian statehood.

This conference aims to provide a platform for scholars and policymakers to engage in a profound exploration of the multifaceted challenges facing the Middle East. We seek to foster constructive conversations that contribute to a deeper understanding of the root causes for conflict, strategies for lasting peace, and the critical role of international cooperation.

This conference will tackle a diverse range of topics, including the socio-economic impact of the conflict, the humanitarian crisis, the role of regional and global powers, prospects for governance and democratization, and the complexities of cultural heritage and identity.

We will also delve into the crucial role of media and information dissemination, the environmental and health implications of the conflict, and the intersectional impacts on women and marginalized groups. Through insightful discussions and collaborative engagement, we aim to chart a path forward that is grounded in compassion, justice, and the collective pursuit of lasting peace in Gaza and the broader Middle East.

MESF is once again honoured to host this conference, bringing scholars together for exchanges of ideas and new thinking. We look forward to an engaging and enriching conference experience.

PROFESSOR SHAHRAM AKBARZADEH,
MIDDLE EAST STUDIES FORUM CONVENOR

PROGRAMME

DAY ONE
October 7, 2024

9.15 - 10.00
Plenary

Commencement Speech & Keynote Address

Opening Remarks and Chair:
Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh

Prof. Shiri Krebs (Deakin University)
Algorithms, Avatars, and the Remaking of Warfare in Gaza and Beyond

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Morning Tea

10.30 - 12.00
Plenary

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Qatar's Mediation and the War on Gaza:
Balancing Regional Dynamics and Global Alliances

Prof. Ahmed Hashim (Centre for Defence and Future Security)
The Evolution of Iranian Forward Defense and
'Axis of Resistance'

Dr. Marika Sosnowski (Research Fellow at the University of Melbourne)
The Legal Afterlife of War and Revolution

12.00 - 13.00

Lunch

13.00 - 14.30

Panel B (Parallel Session)

Chair: Prof. Benjamin Isakhan

Dr. Zouhir Gabsi (Senior Lecturer, Arabic and Islamic Studies, School of Humanity & Social Science at Deakin University)

Irony and Hyperrealism in Media Discourses:
Examining the Israeli-Palestinian 'Conflict'

Dr. Mohsen Solhdoost (Assistant Professor of International Relations at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University)

Israel's Gaza Incursions: Challenges to Holocaust Legacies in National Identity

Aisya Zaharin (PhD Resercher at the University of Queensland)

Birds of the Colonial Feather Flock Together: Unravelling Global North Complicity and Historical Amnesia in Israel's Imperialism

13.00 - 14.30

Panel C (Parallel Session)

Chair: Prof. Shiri Krebs

Dr. Maliheh Rezaei (Teaching Assoc. at Monash University)

Disruptive Empathy: a Barrier to the Israel-Palestine Peaceful Relationship

Shadi Rouhshahbaz (Assoc. Research Fellow at Deakin University / PhD Candidate at the Universoty of Melbourne)

The Futures of the Middle East: a Participatory Foresight Approach

Assoc. Prof. Waseem Ishaque (National University of Modern Languages (NUML) Pakistan)

Gaza War and the Evolving Balance of Power in the Middle East: Navigating a New Era of Great Power Cooperation Amid Competition

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Panel D:
Afghanistan and Global Politics

Chair: Emeritus Professor William Maley (Professor of Diplomacy at The Australian National University)

Dr. Niamatullah Ibrahimi (Researcher at La Trobe University)
Afghanistan, Social Imaginaries and Globalisation

Dr. Farkhondeh Akbari (Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Monash University)
Geopolitical Narratives of Withdrawal and the Counter-Narratives of Women's Rights Activism in Afghanistan

Dr. Abbas Farasoo (Researcher at La Trobe University)
Afghanistan and the Transformation of War

PROGRAMME

9.15 - 10.00

Plenary

Keynote Address

Chair: Shadi Rouhshahbaz

Prof. Sarah Phillips (University of Sydney)
Knowledge Production and Transparency in Times of Secrets

10.00 - 10.30

Morning Tea

10.30 - 12.30

Plenary

Panel A

Chair: Dr. Zouhir Gabsi

Dr. Andrew Thomas (Lecturer in Middle East Studies at Deakin Univeristy)
Global Norm Reconstruction from the Global South: South Africa's Case Against Israel at the ICJ

Dr. Eric Jeunot (Teaching Fellow at Victoria University of Wellington/Te Herenga Waka)
Domestic Tribal Norms and Interstate Conflict Settlement – How the 1930-1934 Saudi-Yemen Conflict Provides an Alternative Approach to Conflict Settlement with the Houthi

Benedict Moleta (PhD Candidate at The Australian National University)

The Non-Failure of Political Islam: from Olivier Roy in Theory to Hamas in Practice

Dr. Rodger Shanahan (Research Fellow at the Australian National University)

Once Lost Never Regained? Israel and the Doctrine of Deterrence

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Lunch

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Chair: Afsaneh Seifinaji

Ziba Akbari (PhD Candidate at Deakin University)

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Dr. Arif Saba (Assoc. Research Fellow at Deakin University)

US-China Soft Power Rivalry in the Middle East:
Views from the region

Dr. Elliot Dolan-Evans (Lecturer at Monash University)

Conflict for Fuel or Fueling Conflict?
Energy During the War in Gaza

Panel C: Digital Authoritarianism (Parallel Session)

Chair: Prof. Ihsan Yilmaz

Dr. Galib Bashirov, Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh and Prof. Ihsan Yilmaz (Deakin University)

From Beijing to Islamabad and Tehran:
the Spread of Digital Authoritarianism

Dr. Ali Mamouri, Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh and Prof. Ihsan Yilmaz (Deakin University)

Weaponizing Digital Technologies and Anti-Western Conspiracy
Theories to Empower Authoritarian Regimes: the Case of Egypt

Amin Naeni and Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh (Deakin University)

Manipulating Perceptions: Iran's Strategic Disinformation
Campaigns Against Dissidents

Dr. Ali Mamouri, Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh and Prof. Ihsan Yilmaz (Deakin University)

Digital War between Israel and Iran in Post-Gaza Conflict:
a Study of Tactics, Practices and Narratives

15.00 - 15.30	## Afternoon Tea

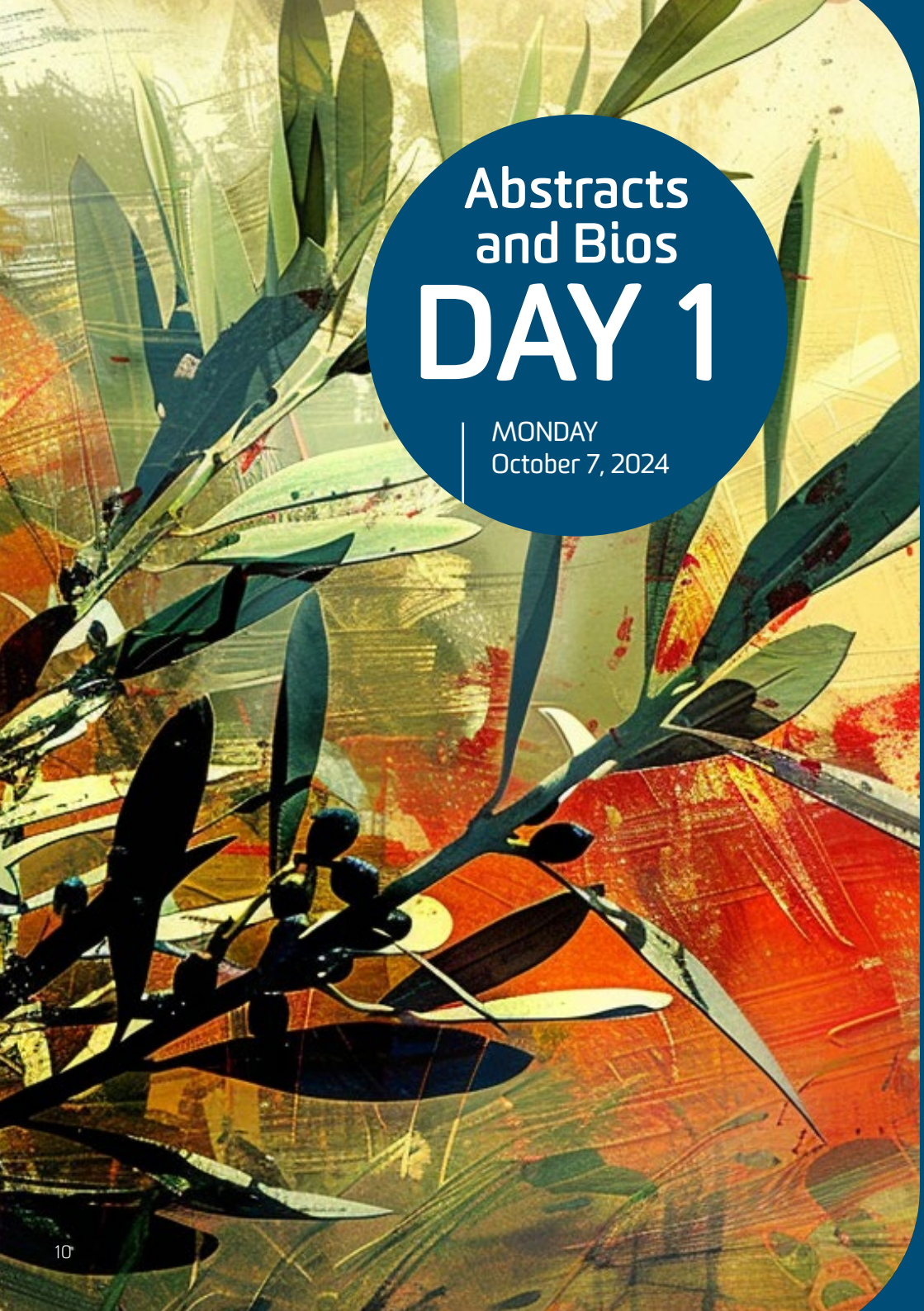|	
15.30 - 17.00 Plenary	## Panel D: ## The Politics of Heritage in the Middle East Chair: Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh ### Prof. Ben Isakhan (Deakin University) Attitudes to Foreign-led Heritage Reconstruction After Conflict: a Public Opinion Survey of Aleppo ### Eleanor Childs ### (PhD Candidate at Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University) International Inaction and Impunity for Crimes Against Heritage Sites ### Dr. Ali Mozaffari ### (Senior Fellow at Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University) Mutual Entanglements of Cultural Heritage and Borders in West Asia

Abstracts and Bios
DAY 1

MONDAY
October 7, 2024

Keynote Address

Algorithms, Avatars, and the Remaking of Warfare in Gaza and Beyond

Advanced military digital technologies are reshaping warfare, including in the current violence in Gaza. These digital technologies, including AI-powered algorithms and drone sensors, inform military decision-makers in real time, adding relevant and time-sensitive information. At the same time, however, their outputs construct an imperfect representation of people and spaces, placing additional burdens on military decision-makers, and creating a persuasive virtual representation of the actual conditions on the ground. Based on interdisciplinary analysis of critical security studies, behavioural economics, and international law literature, as well as rich data from the current war in Gaza, this presentation identifies three types of challenges stemming from the mounting reliance on advanced technologies to inform military operations: technical challenges, relating to the scope, error rates, design, and capabilities of the selected technologies; cognitive challenges, relating to decision-making biases affecting human decision-makers; and human-technological challenges, relating to the human-machine interaction or interface. Together these human-technical limits suggest that new AI and drone warfare technologies serve to legitimise data-centred violence, disguising normative choices as inevitable, and erasing non-Western narratives and preferences. The presentation concludes by offering ways to unveil the effects of avatars on the application of the law of war, providing better protection for people, animals, and the environment during armed conflicts.

Prof. Shiri Krebs
Professor of Law and Director, Centre of Law as Protection, Deakin Law School

Dr Shiri Krebs is a Professor of Law at Deakin University and Director of the Centre for Law as Protection. She is the Co-Lead of the Law and Policy Theme at the Australian Cyber Security Cooperative Research Centre (CSCRC), the Chair of the ASIL Lieber Society on the Law of Armed Conflict, and an affiliate scholar at Stanford Center for International Law and Cooperation (CISAC). Additionally, in 2024-2025 Professor Krebs is a Visiting Legal Fellow at the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and an Alexander von Humboldt Experienced Researcher at the University of Hamburg.

Qatar's Mediation and the War on Gaza:
Balancing Regional Dynamics and Global Alliances

Gendered narratives are political narratives that frequently frame decisions to go to war or broker peace. Such geopolitical narratives both enable the protection of women's rights and violate them. Women's rights, specifically, have been used as a rhetorical device by security policymakers to persuade people of the urgency and legitimacy of foreign intervention or withdrawal. In this paper, we explore how gendered, geopolitical narratives work to construct understandings of political reality and delimit foreign policy options and how counter-narratives contest them, transforming the available policy options. Drawing on narrative analysis frameworks, we examine the shifting narratives invoking "Afghan women" that facilitated the change in US policy on Afghanistan between 2018 and 2021 and the consequent return of the Taliban. In response to the US withdrawal, we investigate the counter-narratives of Afghan women that emphasise universal human rights, inclusive peace, and international recognition of the situation of 'gender apartheid.' We argue that counter-narratives supported by political strategies are an effective instrument for empowering marginalized women and legitimizing their activism that protests the continuation of war against women despite the end of military war.

Dr. Steven Wright
Assoc. Prof. at Hamad bin Khalifa University

Dr. Steven Wright is an Associate Professor of International Relations and an Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. He previously served as an Associate Dean and the Head of the Department of International Affairs at Qatar University. His area of research expertise relates to three main areas: US foreign policy toward the Gulf region, Energy Geopolitics, and the International Relations and Political Economy of the Arab Gulf states. He has also held research fellowships at the London School of Economics, Exeter University, and the University of Durham. He obtained his PhD in International Relations from the University of Durham.

The Evolution of Iranian Forward Defense and 'Axis of Resistance'

Is it a sustainable strategy? In the recent past, it garnered Iran much success as exemplified by its articulation and practice by General Qassem Soleimani. It now has drawbacks. First, Iran is waging Forward Defense on too many fronts. It did so in the past and this was not easy to coordinate and control as part of an integrated strategy. Secondly, the axis of resistance includes groups, clients, and proxies that 'do their own thing,' as Hamas did on October 07, 2023. This was not orchestrated by the IRI, and the indications are Tehran was incensed, not least because an important pillar of the axis has been virtually destroyed. Third, it is costly and has occasioned significant debates within the Majlis about Iran's 'mini-Vietnams' on behalf of ungrateful Arabs. Fourth, it is obvious that it does not deter the most powerful enemies, namely Israel and the U.S. Fifth, Iran controls neither the horizontal nor vertical escalatory processes.

Prof. Ahmed Hashim
Centre for Defence and Future Security

Dr. Ahmed S. Hashim is an Associate Professor of War Studies at Deakin University and the Australian War College in Canberra. He is a specialist on the militaries of the Global South, particularly those of the Asian continent from the Middle East — with a focus on the Persian Gulf — to the Indo-Pacific region. He has also published extensively on insurgency and counterinsurgency. His most recent work is Iranian Ways of War: from Cyrus the Great to Qassem Soleimani (NY: Oxford University Press and London: Hurst and Company (December 2024).

The Legal Afterlife of War and Revolution

This paper does two things. First, it aims to better understand how Syrians understand the law in the aftermath of mass violence and revolutionary events. These events began in the public consciousness in 2011 with the revolution and subsequent Syrian civil war, but really Syrians' relationship to violence and the law extended well before into the half-century reign of the al-Assad regime and will, no doubt, proceed in various ways, regardless where they are now located, for many generations to come. The second aspect of the paper conjoins the experiences of Syrians with ideas, dialogue, documents and stories from my own Jewish family who escaped Nazi violence and oppression in Europe. In doing this I hope to bring "above the horizon of history" many "unknown unknowns" as a way to better understand how violence and the law interrelate across geographies and time.

Dr. Marika Sosnowski
Research Fellow at the University of Melbourne

Dr. Marika Sosnowski is an Australian-qualified lawyer, a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Melbourne Law School and a Research Associate at the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg. Her works sits at the intersection of socio-political-legal anthropology. Her primary research interests are 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.

Irony and Hyperrealism in Media Discourses:
Examining the Israeli-Palestinian 'Conflict'

As a powerful discursive trope, irony is used to interpret the recent Israeli-Palestinian 'conflict' since October 7, 2023. Hinging on various political discourses, the paper examines the workings of the political language with emphasis on irony tinged with hyperrealism, where the boundaries between what is real and imaginaire are forever blurred. The paper's aims are threefold. First, it stresses the importance of language in understanding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and how language is used to manufacture consent, especially in media discourses. Second, the paper argues that the use of irony surpasses the classic pragmatic interpretations, and it is rooted in cognitive processes. Third, the paper explains how the use of language in political media discourses aims to score ideological goals.

Dr. Zouhir Gabsi

Senior Lecturer, Arabic and Islamic Studies, School of Humanity & Social Science at Deakin University

Dr. Zouhir Gabsi is a senior lecturer in Arabic and Islamic studies at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. Zouhir's recent publications on Islamophobia, the Arab Spring and religious and political discourses demonstrate the importance of language in sociological and political narratives. His contributions and broad interests push the boundaries of knowledge and fill a vacuum generally overlooked by researchers.

Israel's Gaza Incursions: Challenges to Holocaust Legacies in National Identity

The legacy of the Holocaust – constituting the core element of Israel's national identity – has played a major role in mapping out the Jewish state's functioning in the international arena since it was established in 1948. Recognizing Israelis' traumatic experience of the Holocaust, the international community has since viewed the WWII mass murder of Jews as a worldwide point of reference and comparison for crimes against humanity. Major powers, such as U.S., have even gone beyond such benchmarking and have often supported Israel's aggressive policies toward Palestinians in light of the Holocaust memory. Yet, Israel's military actions in Gaza since 07 October 2023, particularly regarding civilian casualties, have been criticized internationally. To name but a few examples, U.S. has unprecedentedly mulled sanctions against some Israeli army units, the International Criminal Court prosecutor has applied for arrest warrants for Israeli PM Netanyahu, and some members of the European Parliament have referred to Israel as a "genocidal apartheid regime." Israel's Gaza invasion seems to have posed considerable challenges to Holocaust legacies of Israel's national identity.

This study seeks to explain how Israel's latest invasion of Gaza has undermined Israel's national identity, which often draws on the Holocaust as a foundational event for the state's existence and security. Using role theory, I argue that the Israeli military campaign, Operation Swords of Iron, undermines the legacies of the Holocaust in Israel's national identity by raising ethical and legal concerns, damaging Israel's international reputation, distorting historical narratives, and creating divisions within the Jewish community.

Dr. Mohsen Solhdoost
Assistant Professor of International Relations at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

Dr. Mohsen Solhdoost is an Assistant Professor of International Relations in the Department of International Studies, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University. Prior to joining XJTLU, Mohsen was teaching International Relations courses at the University of Queensland and the Australian Catholic University. Mohsen's main program of research includes foreign policy analysis and diplomacy. In his work he focuses on complex security issues such as states' interactions with non-state actors and examines issues around identity politics. His research has been published in leading journals such as Global Policy Journal (GPJ), Journal of the Indian Ocean Region (JIOR), and Journal of Asian and African Studies (JAAS).

Birds of the colonial feather flock together: Unravelling Global North Complicity and Historical Amnesia in Israel's Imperialism

Australia's exclusion from global consensus in recognizing Palestine undermines its position as a defender of human rights and its ability to contribute meaningfully to resolving one of the world's most protracted and painful conflicts. This paper offers a critical examination of the complicity and historical amnesia of the Global North in the context of Israel's imperialistic invasion and violence against Palestinians. By dissecting the role of Western governments and institutions such as the ICC, NATO and the United Nations, the paper explores how these entities have not only supported but actively facilitated the systemic oppression and occupation of Palestinian territories. Furthermore, the paper delves into the historical amnesia prevalent in the Global North, which conveniently overlooks colonial histories and Israel's imperialistic ambition. Through a comprehensive review of socio-political, and historical frameworks, this study aims to illuminate the mechanisms by which the Global North perpetuates and benefits from Israel's imperialism, ultimately contributing to the continuous marginalization and suffering of the Palestinian people. It then calls for a reevaluation of historical narratives and the recognition of Palestine in Australia, to join a significant global consensus in reinforcing international efforts to pressure Israel into negotiating a fair and lasting peace. Such recognition is not only a fulfilment of Australia's commitment to a two-state solution but also a necessary step in addressing the longstanding issues of colonization and dehumanization against the Palestinian people. In conclusion, this paper seeks to galvanize support and outline actionable steps for Australia to take this bold and principled stand for an honest engagement of the Global North to foster a more inclusive and just global society.

Aisya Zaharin

PhD Reasercher at the University of Queensland

Aisya A. Zaharin is a PhD researcher who focuses on navigating Asian values and media responsibility from a decolonial approach. Her research covers various fields such as political science, history, decolonization, LGBTQI+ and Islam, with a special focus on improving social inequality and promoting cultural relativism. As an intersectional feminist, Aisya understands how social identities can create overlapping inequalities and discrimination. She works to amplify the voices of those who experience intersecting discrimination and integrates these with her own lived experiences. Aisya comes to the academic-activist from her lived experience as a progressive Muslim and as a trans woman of colour, she refuses to allow her identity to be used as a pretext for the continued carnage in Israel's pinkwashing propaganda. For her, It's absrd to think that queer and trans liberation should come from a campaign of bombings on defenceless civilians by the apartheid ethno-religious state of Israel, which predates October 7th and has continued for more than 75 years. Having been raised in a British post-colonised nation herself, she recognises the same dehumanising terminology to characterise any resistance group as savages and pengganas (terrorists) to maintain their colonial authority. She believes that decolonization is an ongoing process and that the LGBTQIA people in Gaza are equally in danger of dying from Israeli bombings (read: genocide) if they haven't unalived already.

Disruptive Empathy: a Barrier to the Israel-Palestine Peaceful Relationship

With the ongoing Palestine-Israel conflict and humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the world is witnessing global solidarity with Gaza indicating that the ethics of care is extending to broader spaces; however, Israel continues to demonstrate a severe lack of compassion towards Palestinians as indicated by the flagrant violation of human rights and growing catastrophic death tolls in Gaza. This paper is focused on empathy as a crucial component of positive peace and explains that although empathy can lead to mutual understanding and cooperation, developing empathy towards an adversary can be disruptive, particularly during a conflict. Lack of empathy serves as a defensive mechanism to protect Israelis' (in-group) psychological well-being and their righteousness; therefore, empathising with the Palestinians (out-group) can be considered an admission to the guilt and portrays Israelis as occupiers. Moreover, whilst acknowledging the traumas experienced by Jews during the Holocaust, this paper argues that politicising the memory of this genocide has taken the form of competitive victimhood, leaving little room for empathy which is a necessary condition for peaceful conflict resolution. Conversion of the sense of victimhood to sympathy requires Israeli Jews to contextualise their past traumas in the right historical and political frame, re-examine their relationships with Palestinians, and reinterpret their narrow religious, ethnic and nationalistic views.

Dr. Maliheh Rezaei
Teaching Assoc. at Monash University

Dr. Maliheh Rezaei is a teaching associate in Peace Education at Monash University and Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia. She specialises in critical approaches to peace education, and academic freedom specifically in higher education contexts.

The Futures of the Middle East: a Participatory Foresight Approach

The Middle East faces complex challenges such as gender discrimination, climate hazards, wars, civil conflicts, economic decline, and immigration crises. Traditional linear political analysis often fails to address these interconnected issues effectively. The failures of the international community in Palestine, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan further demonstrate the inadequacies of these conventional methods. This paper argues that participatory foresight and futures thinking offer a more effective analysis framework for the future of the Middle East. By engaging diverse stakeholders, including governments and foreign policy experts, in collaborative scenario planning, foresight explores multiple futures and identifies hidden opportunities and risks that have gone missed. Participatory foresight promotes a holistic and adaptive method for envisioning potential futures, enhancing the legitimacy and relevance of outcomes, and improving readiness for various scenarios. Recent events, like the war in Gaza and the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement, underscore the necessity of foresight. These movements highlight the need to address underlying causes and future implications proactively. Already valuable in urban planning and regional development, foresight methods can be transformative in the Middle East as has been used by the UAE. By empowering diverse voices and fostering a shared vision, participatory foresight and futures thinking can help the region achieve a sustainable, equitable, and resilient future. Integrating these approaches into policy design is crucial for effectively addressing the Middle East's challenges.

Shadi Rouhshahbaz

Assoc. Research Fellow at Deakin University and PhD Candidate at the University of Melbourne

Shadi Rouhshahbaz (she/her) is an Associate Research Fellow at The Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation (ADI). She is a PhD student at the University of Melbourne and holds a Double- Joint Master's degree in International Development – Migration and Mediation from the Ca Foscari University of Venice and Paul Valery University, Montpellier 3. Shadi has previously worked with UN Women HQ, UNICEF, the Agency for Peacebuilding and the United Network of Young Peacebuilders. Her research focuses on the intersections of foresight studies, youth, gender, peace and security, the Middle East and multilateral institutions. Shadi is committed to conducting research that influences policy by bridging the gaps between the lived experience of individuals and the required developments of systems and academia.

Gaza War and the Evolving Balance of Power in the Middle East: Navigating a New Era of Great Power Cooperation Amid Competition

The unfolding developments in the Middle East are reshaping the regional dynamics, giving rise to new geopolitical realities with significant implications for regional stability and power structures, which could fundamentally alter the balance of power in the region. USA has traditionally dominated the Middle East policies with unstinted support to Israel, balancing relations with Arab countries and preventing rise of Iran through a coalition of friendly Arab countries; however, October 7, 2024, have jolted the Western led security architecture in the region and three new realities have emerged in the shape of shattering of the status quo that had been built by Israel and US; resurgence of terrorism and a new cold war between US, China, Russia, and Iran. Israel's right to self defence after October 7, 2024, has gradually diminished due to massacre unleashed in Gaza. Repeated appeals by UNGA and SCR on cessation of hostilities and protection of civilians, rulings by ICJ on worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza and Israeli defiance have jolted the post WW II international system. Iran's tit for tat response to Israel, Hezbollah and Houthi's new frontiers against Israel have exposed Israel's myth of invincibility.

In the evolving strategic and security landscape of ME, a new security order involving all regional countries and great powers is needed to avoid great power competition. Like successful Iran-Saudi rapprochement, a collaborative efforts of US, China, Russia and regional Arab countries with support of Isreal can create a new security architecture ensring inclusivness for enduring stability.

Assoc. Prof. Waseem Ishaque
National University of Modern Languages (NUML) Pakistan

Dr. Waseem Ishaque is an Associate Professor at National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad. He is Senior Fellow of Taihe Institute Beijing and has completed D.3 Senior Fellowship (SFHEA) from Advance HE (UK). Before joining NUML, he has served at NDU Pakistan in the Department of Security Studies and International Relations. He is a graduate of NDU Pakistan and China and Command and Staff College Pakistan and Australia. He has served in UN Peace Missions in Bosnia and Darfur. He is a keen researcher on Transformation in ME, Asia -Pacific, BRI, CPEC. Dr. Ishaque has 3 international and 43 national publications and is a regular speaker at conferences.

Afghanistan, Social Imaginaries and Globalisation

This paper examines Afghanistan's complex relationship with globalisation. It argues that common perceptions of Afghanistan as isolated and resistant to external influence are simplistic and overlook the country's long history of interconnectedness. The paper first discusses Afghanistan's historical experiences with Silk Road globalisation, highlighting its role as a hub of trade and religious and cultural exchange. It then explores how the formation of Afghanistan as a buffer state between British India and Tsarist Russia in the 19th century led to a rupture in these connections, resulting in decades of imposed isolation. Finally, the paper analyses Afghanistan's experiences with globalisation in recent decades, characterised by both top-down, state-led modernisation efforts and bottom-up social changes resulting from increased global connectivity. It concludes by arguing that the tensions between these top-down and bottom-up forces have contributed to the political and social conflicts that have affected the country.

Dr. Niamatullah Ibrahimi
Researcher at La Trobe University

Dr. Niamatullah Ibrahimi is a Senior Lecturer in International Relations at La Trobe University. He teaches subjects on Middle East politics, international organisations, and security. His research interests include political violence, peacebuilding, post-conflict political orders, social movements and contentious politics, nationalism and ethnic politics, and human rights and transitional justice. Dr. Ibrahimi completed his PhD in 2018 at the Australian National University where his doctoral research examined the dynamics of contentious politics in the context of the post-2001 international intervention in Afghanistan. From 2018 to 2020, he worked as an Associate Research Fellow at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation at Deakin University. Previously, he worked for several leading think-tanks and international organisations, including the International Crisis Group and the Crisis States Research Centre of the London School of Economics.

Geopolitical Narratives of Withdrawal and the Counter- Narratives of Women's Rights Activism in Afghanistan

Gendered narratives are political narratives that frequently frame decisions to go to war or broker peace. Such geopolitical narratives both enable the protection of women's rights and violate them. Women's rights, specifically, have been used as a rhetorical device by security policymakers to persuade people of the urgency and legitimacy of foreign intervention or withdrawal. In this paper, we explore how gendered, geopolitical narratives work to construct understandings of political reality and delimit foreign policy options and how counter-narratives contest them, transforming the available policy options. Drawing on narrative analysis frameworks, we examine the shifting narratives invoking "Afghan women" that facilitated the change in US policy on Afghanistan between 2018 and 2021 and the consequent return of the Taliban. In response to the US withdrawal, we investigate the counter-narratives of Afghan women that emphasise universal human rights, inclusive peace, and international recognition of the situation of 'gender apartheid.' We argue that counter-narratives supported by political strategies are an effective instrument for empowering marginalized women and legitimizing their activism that protests the continuation of war against women despite the end of military war.

Dr. Farkhondeh Akbari
Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Monash University

Dr. Farkhondeh Akbari is a postdoctoral research fellow at Monash University where she researches inclusive peace, diplomatic actors, feminist foreign policy and the women, peace, and security agenda. She has recently published papers focusing on the Taliban's gender-apartheid regime in Afghanistan. Farkhondeh completed her PhD in diplomatic studies at the Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs at 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 studied the cases of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.
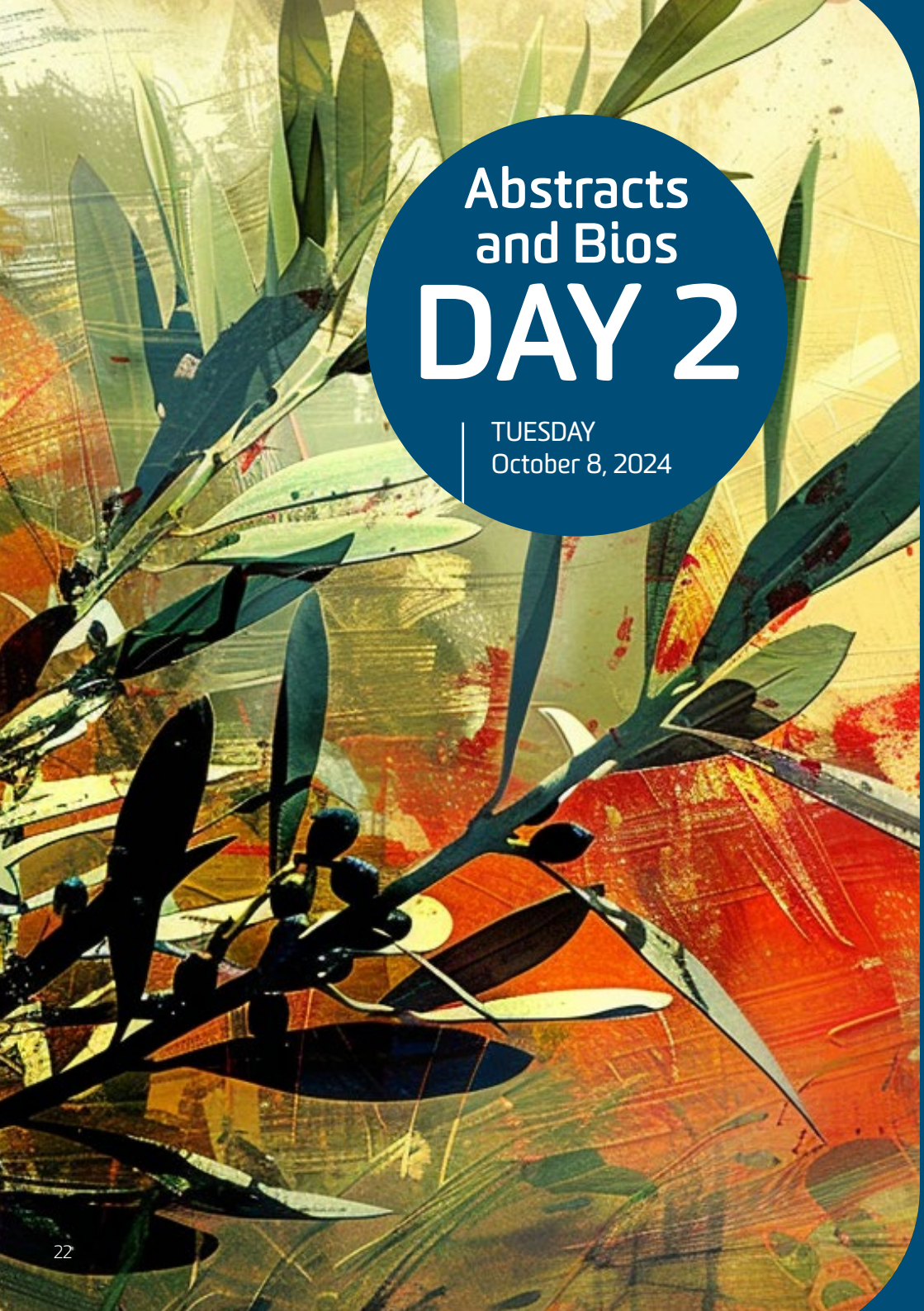

Afghanistan and the Transformation of War

In this paper, I will examine the transformation of war within the international system, focusing on Afghanistan in the post-2001 era. Factors such as the proliferation of non-state actors, the blurring of military and civilian domains, unconventional tactics, new technologies like drones and cyber warfare, the rise of regional powers, identity conflicts, terrorism, and proxy wars characterize the dynamics of wars in the twenty-first century. With a focus on Afghanistan, the paper, however, argues that politics and strategic understanding of war are key determinants of the dynamics and outcomes of war. The Afghan conflict highlights modern warfare's complexities and the limitations of military power in winning a war without addressing its proxy dynamics. Proxy war strategies, notably supported by Pakistan and Iran, played a crucial role in sustaining the Taliban's war against the US in Afghanistan, leading to the collapse of the Afghan state in 2021. In this paper, I argue that proxy war strategies prevailed over US-led counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency strategies in Afghanistan. Given this, proxy war remains a vital strategy in international politics, allowing states to achieve strategic objectives while avoiding the costs and risks of direct conflict.

Dr. Abbas Farasoo
Researcher at La Trobe University

Dr. Abbas Farasoo is a researcher at La Trobe University and previously worked as a Lecturer in Political Science at the University of Melbourne, Australia. He holds a PhD from Deakin University, and his research has centered on diplomacy, proxy wars, state formation crises, and ethnic conflict in Afghanistan, South Asia, and the Middle East. He has published in numerous journals, including International Study Reviews, Millennium: Journal of International Studies, and Journal of Critical Realism. Additionally, Dr. Farasoo has worked as a diplomat and policy analyst in Afghanistan and Australia for years.

Abstracts
and Bios

DAY 2

TUESDAY
October 8, 2024

Keynote Address

Knowledge Production and Transparency in Times of Secrets

Information is powerful. As academics we know this, and it animates our professional lives. We uncover, collate, verify, and disseminate knowledge. And once we do, it is out of our hands. This presentation is an attempt to think through the afterlives of our work, particularly the clash between the impulse to transparency and the increasing authoritarianism of the spaces where we work.

Prof. Sarah Phillips
Professor of Global Conflict and Development at the University of Sydney

Sarah Phillips Professor of Global Conflict and Development at the University of Sydney, where she is an ARC Future Fellow. She is the author of three books, the latest of which, 'When There Was No Aid: War and Peace in Somaliland' (Cornell University Press, 2020) was awarded the Australian Political Science Association's biennial Crisp Prize for the best political science monograph. Her research draws from years of in-depth fieldwork in Yemen, Somalia, Iraq, Kenya, and Jordan, and focuses on international intervention in the global South, knowledge production about conflict-affected states, authoritarianism, and non-state governance.

Global Norm Reconstruction from the Global South: South Africa's Case Against Israel at the ICJ

Members of the Global South often engage in 'norm entrepreneurship' – efforts to mould the normative framework of global politics – as the status quo of power relations rarely serves their interests. However, we rarely explore contexts in which the Global South seeks to reinforce international principles and frameworks in the event of what they see as a moral abdication from members of the Global North. One such example is South Africa's charge under the genocide convention against Israel for its war on Gaza submitted to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). This paper explores this case with the hope to better understand attempts at the reconstruction of human rights norms in conflict, and the potential legacy of these efforts "after Gaza."

Dr. Andrew Thomas
Lecturer in Middle East Studies at Deakin Univeristy

Dr. Andrew Thomas is a lecturer in International Relations and Middle East studies at Deakin University. He coordinates the Middle East Studies Programme of Deakin University.

Domestic Tribal Norms and Interstate Conflict Settlement – How the 1930-1934 Saudi-Yemen Conflict Provides an Alternative Approach to Conflict Settlement with the Houthi

After ten years of civil war in Yemen, the country is now de facto divided between a theocratic Shia Houthi state in the North and a South Yemen state marked by political instability. Since 2015, attempts at conflict settlement and peace negotiations with the Houthi through the United Nations have been ineffective.

This paper argues that the exercise of international norms of conflict settlement has not been appropriate to engage in peace negotiations with current rivalries in the Middle East. I argue that a unilateral approach, based on the sole exercise of international norms of conflict settlement, cannot ensure lasting peace or the full implementation of agreements unless domestic norms are equally exercised. In other words, this paper argues that an interplay between international and domestic norms is required to ensure that agreements are fully implemented and are long-lasting.

A review of the settlement of the 1934 Saudi-Yemen territorial conflict provides insights into an alternative approach to engaging with the Houthi. The settlement of the 1934 territorial conflict between the theocratic North Yemen Imamate and the Al-Saud monarchical regime resulted from an interplay between the exercise of domestic tribal norms and international norms of conflict settlement. This interplay established long-lasting stability between the two states. Due to the dependency of the ruling regime on the tribes-state relations in Yemen, the review of this case provides insight into the role that domestic tribal norms could play in engaging with the Houthi theocratic regime and fostering conflict settlement.

Dr. Eric Jeunot
Teaching Fellow at Victoria University of Wellington/Te Herenga Waka

Dr. Eric Jeunot is an International Relations and Middle Eastern Studies scholar. His interests and research look at the interplay between domestic tribal norms and international norms in the settlement processes of interstate territorial conflicts. Eric researches the role that tribal governance and customs of Arab societies play in such processes. His geographical areas of research are Yemen, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Horn of Africa. Eric's particular expertise is Arab tribal norms in historical and contemporary Yemen's international relations. Eric's academic interests follow a decade of humanitarian experience with Médecins Sans Frontières working in Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen.

The Non-Failure of Political Islam: from Olivier Roy in Theory to Hamas in Practice

In 1992 Olivier Roy defined the "failure of political Islam" as failure in the transition from Islamist insurgency to political government. Islamist movements can come to power, but, when they do, the parameters of politics will ineluctably supersede Islamist ideology as a guide to government. Islamism is thus "condemned to serving as a mere cover for the political logic that eludes it."

Roy was drawing on his experiences in Afghanistan and considered the Iranian revolution as paradigmatic. After the Arab Spring, Roy's thesis seemed to remain valid, the author remarking in 2014 that political Islam is "doomed to fail as soon as it takes power, as the examples of Tunisia and Egypt demonstrate all too well … the exercise of power marks the failure not only of the Islamist ideology but of the very idea that religion offers a program for governing."

I propose a different perspective on the failure or success of political Islam today, by considering the conditions catalysed in Israel by Hamas, in the months following its attack of October 7, 2023. I suggest the non-failure of Hamas' political Islam is evident in the divisions between state and society that have developed in the polity of Israel. While struggling to achieve a military victory and bring its hostage citizens home, Israel's government has become internally divided, and also divided against its citizenry. Predominance over Hamas' political Islam will require the restoration of political authority and social cohesion within Israel, that Hamas seems to have successfully challenged.

Benedict Moleta
PhD Candidate at the Australian National University

Benedict Moleta is a PhD candidate in international relations at the Australian National University, researching Australian foreign policy and the work of Coral Bell. His MA thesis (2020, University of Sydney) was on relations between the European Union and Palestine and focussed on the position and prospects of Hamas. He has written several pieces on the Israel-Hamas war for the Australian Institute of International Affairs' "Australian Outlook," including on the prospects for post-war government in Israel and Gaza. Benedict's BA was in German and European Studies (2001, University of Western Australia), with interests from Lessing to Lenin. He enjoys learning languages.

Once Lost Never Regained? Israel and the Doctrine of Deterrence

Deterrence has historically played a key role in Israel's defence strategy, and one of the stated aims of the Israeli response to the October 7 terrorist attack was to restore deterrence. Yet despite the overwhelming use of force in its military campaign in Gaza, Israel has continued to face attacks on multiple fronts from state and non-state actors utilizing a range of platforms. As a result, questions have been raised about whether a continued reliance on military deterrence is a realistic option for Israel. This paper will argue that while the way in which advances in technology and the ability of external actors to coordinate military action within the region poses fundamental challenges for the way in which deterrence is perceived, the enduring foundations of deterrence remain little changed.

Dr. Rodger Shanahan
Research Fellow at the Australian National University

Dr. Rodger Shanahan has MAs in International Relations and Middle East Studies from the ANU, and a PhD in Arab and Islamic Studies from the University of Sydney. He is a former associate professor at ANU's National Security College and a research fellow at the Lowy Institute. He is a former army officer with operational service in East Timor, South Lebanon and Syria, Afghanistan and in Beirut during the 2006 war. He has also served in the Australian Embassies in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

He is a frequent commentator on Middle East issues for Australian and international media, and is the author of Clans, Parties and Clerics: The Shi'a of Lebanon and Islamic State in Australia.

Strategic Adaptations and Voices of Dissent: Kurdish Political Action in Iran

This paper critically examines the diverse strategies employed by Kurdish political actors in Iran with a particular emphasis on the past decade. The study utilizes both Netnography and qualitative interviews to investigate the political engagements of institutional and non-institutional actors among Kurds in Iran. Through the application of Hirschman's Exit, Voice, and Loyalty (EVL) framework, complemented by the analysis of social media content, this paper explores how traditional and emergent political actions are formulated and executed. Interviews with Kurdish academics and activists residing outside Iran offer unique insights into the dynamics of resistance and negotiation. By situating current activism within its historical continuum, the paper identifies evolutionary shifts in tactical responses to oppression and highlights the adaptability of Kurdish strategies under fluctuating political conditions. This research contributes to the literature on political agency in stateless nations, underlining the complexities of advocating for rights and recognition in oppressive regimes.

Ziba Akbari
PhD Candidate at Deakin University

Ziba Akbari is a PhD candidate in Political Science at Deakin University. Her doctoral thesis examines Kurds as a marginalized group, focusing on the complex dynamics of statelessness and human security in the Middle East. Her academic background includes a master's degree in human security in Iraq, which provided her with analytical skills, qualitative research methods, and a comprehensive understanding of policy analysis. She has authored three publications and is currently engaged in a research project analysing the 2022 protests in Iran.

US-China Soft Power Rivalry in the Middle East: Views from the region

This article presents a comparative analysis of the US-China rivalry in the Middle East, focusing on their soft power strategies. Soft power is increasingly seen as a victor in the ongoing geopolitical competition between the two rivals, each employing distinct strategies to court regional partners, shaping perceptions and relationships in the region. While the US has historically dominated, China's multifaceted engagement has positioned it as a formidable contender, expanding beyond resource acquisition to diplomacy, investment, security cooperation, and cultural outreach. Drawing on public opinion surveys from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the findings highlight a clear preference for China over the US. China's multifaceted engagement has garnered widespread approval, with a majority of respondents viewing China favourably across various domains. In contrast, the US faces diminishing favourability, particularly regarding its role in regional conflicts and as a reliable partner. This trend reflects a broader transition towards a multipolar regional order, challenging traditional US dominance. Moreover, the surveys also underscore the agency of regional countries in shaping this evolving regional order, with implications for regional stability and cooperation.

Dr. Arif Saba
Assoc. Research Fellow at Deakin University

Dr. Arif Saba holds a PhD in International Relations from Deakin University and is an Associate Research Fellow at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University. His research interests, more broadly, include rising powers, international order, international norms, and norm contestation in International Relations. His research has been published in academic journals, including International Peacekeeping and International Politics.

Conflict for Fuel or Fueling Conflict? Energy During the War in Gaza

Access to energy resources for social reproduction has been a central concern for displaced populations in Gaza. This paper analyses the political economy of fuel consumption during contemporary warfare, especially that conducted by internally displaced populations in Gaza, Palestine. Deploying an everyday feminist political economy, this chapter argues that military efforts to destroy or restrict energy access for war-affected populations in Gaza has had a highly gendered impact on displaced populations, which have violently affected their capacity for individual, familial, and community social reproduction. Most literature on the role of energy in conflicts focus on the scramble for resources, though much less investigated and understood are the gendered impacts that the control, restriction and manipulation of the means of energy have on the most vulnerable conflict-affected populations. In contemporaneous conflicts, such as in Gaza, internally displaced populations have rapidly fallen down the 'energy ladder', endangering the quotidian social reproduction possibilities of these vulnerable people and their communities. This has necessitated severely negative coping mechanisms that are similar across contexts, which have been unaddressed by the rapacity of war-capitalism or the humanitarian aid industry, and may negatively impact future peacebuilding and reconstruction.

Dr. Elliot Dolan-Evans
Lecturer at Monash University

Dr. Elliot Dolan-Evans is a Lecturer in the Faculties of Arts and Law at Monash University. Elliot's research focuses on peacebuilding, the political economy of economic restructuring during conflict, the work of the International Financial Institutions, and questions of capitalism and health.

From Beijing to Islamabad and Tehran: the Spread of Digital Authoritarianism

This paper examines the diffusion of digital authoritarian practices from China to its junior partners in South and West Asia, Iran and Pakistan. We investigate how legal frameworks, online censorship, and urban surveillance have been adopted in these countries. An analytical framework identifies three diffusion mechanisms: emulation, learning, and cooperative interdependence. Our findings indicate that learning, both internally and externally driven, is the most significant mechanism for the spread of these practices. Both governments adapted their strategies from experiences with early 2010s protests, facilitated by China's promotion of digital authoritarianism. Emulation, influenced by cultural and political alignment and China's role as an authoritarian model, significantly shaped the adoption of internet restriction norms and surveillance infrastructures. Cooperative interdependence, through trade relationships and loans under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), enabled the transfer of censorship and surveillance technologies. The paper concludes with broader implications of these findings.

Dr. Galib Bashirov, Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh and Prof. Ihsan Yilmaz
Deakin University

Dr. Galib Bashirov is an Associate Research Fellow at Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalization, Deakin University, Australia. His research examines state-society relations and the impact of digital technologies on political processes in the Middle East and Central Asia. His previous works have been published in Review of International Political Economy, Democratization, and Economy & Society.

See the next page for the bios of Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh and Prof. Ihsan Yilmaz.

Weaponizing Digital Technologies and Anti-Western Conspiracy Theories to Empower Authoritarian Regimes: the Case of Egypt

Since the 2013 military coup, Egypt's authoritarian regime has extensively utilized social media and digital technologies for citizen control, surveillance, and prosecution of opposition leaders, activists, human rights defenders, and journalists. The government has acquired various programs and technologies from Western companies to enhance its surveillance capabilities. Additionally, it has enacted legislation enabling security forces to increase surveillance and prosecute individuals for online activities. This paper shows how the regime has mobilized state and non-state actors in the digital sphere to spread propaganda, conspiracy theories, and fake news, while harassing independent journalists and social media activists.

Dr. Ali Mamouri, Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh and Prof. Ihsan Yilmaz
Deakin University

Dr. Ali Mamouri is a scholar and journalist in the fields of philosophy and theology. He serves as a Research Fellow at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalization at Deakin University. Dr. Mamouri has previously held positions as a lecturer at the University of Sydney (2014 – 2015), the University of Tehran (2008 – 2011), and Al-Mustansiriyah University (2009 – 2011). From 2020 to 2022, he served as a strategic communication advisor to the Iraqi prime minister, contributing to regional dialogue efforts between Iran and Saudi Arabia within Iraq. Dr. Mamouri also served as the editor of Iraq Pulse at Al-Monitor from 2016 to 2023, where he covered Iraq's political development during this crucial time. His work focuses on themes such as political Islam, secularism and religiosity, religious minorities, and interfaith dialogue. His writings and analyses have been featured in publications including Al-Monitor, The Conversation, the Washington Institute, BBC Persian, and Al-Jazeera, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, among others.

Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh is the Convenor of the Middle East Studies Forum (MESF) and Deputy Director (International) of the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalization, Deakin University (Australia). He co-leads the Gerda Henkel Foundation (Germany) project "Smart Digital Technologies and the Future of Democracy in the Muslim World" (2022-2025) with Prof. Ihsan Yilmaz. He held a prestigious ARC Future Fellowship (2013-2016) on the Role of Islam in Iran's Foreign Policy-making and recently completed a Qatar Foundation project on Sectarianism in the Middle East. Prof. Akbarzadeh has an extensive publication record and has contributed to the public debate on the political processes in the Middle East, regional rivalry and Islamic militancy. In 2023, he joined the Middle East Council on Global Affairs (Doha) as a Non-Resident Senior Fellow.

Prof. Ihsan Yilmaz is Research Professor and Chair at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalization, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. He is also a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at Oxford University's Regent College and the European Center for Populism Studies, Brussels. He co-leads the Gerda Henkel Foundation (Germany) project with Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh titled: "Smart Digital Technologies and the Future of Democracy in the Muslim World" (2022-2025). He also leads two ARC Discovery Projects: "Civilizationist Mobilization, Digital Technologies, and Social Cohesion: The Case of Turkish & Indian Diasporas in Australia" (2022-2025) and "Religious Populism, Emotions, and Political Mobilization: Civilizationism in Turkey, Indonesia, and Pakistan" (2023-2026).

Manipulating Perceptions:
Iran's Strategic Disinformation Campaigns Against Dissidents

The 2022 "Women, Life, Freedom" protests have led to an escalation in state-sponsored disinformation campaigns in Iran. This study investigates how the Iranian regime, facing a mounting legitimacy crisis, has employed a "Big Lie" strategy to undermine influential dissidents and prevent the formation of an effective opposition. The strategy primarily targets three groups: celebrities, domestic political dissidents, and notable exiled opponents. Through an analysis of state-owned media content and tweets, this paper uncovers a systematic pattern of character assassination against dissidents. The regime aims to instil a sense of public hopelessness about alternatives to the Islamic Republic. By examining the Big Lie in the context of online platforms, this research sheds light on mechanisms of control in modern despotism within the digital age.

Amin Naeni and Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh
Deakin University

Amin Naeni is a PhD candidate and Research Assistant at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalization (ADI) at Deakin University in Australia. He works on the relationship between the rise of digital technologies and socio-political developments in Iran. Amin is a Fellow at the Center for Middle East and Global Order (CMEG). He has contributed to publications including the Middle East Policy Journal, the Middle East Institute, The Conversation, the Brookings Institution, and the Atlantic Council, among others. He completed his MA in Middle East and North Africa Studies at the University of Tehran in 2018 and participated in two research projects at the same university between 2019 and 2021.

See the previous pages for the bios of Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh.

Digital War between Israel and Iran in Post-Gaza Conflict:
a Study of Tactics, Practices and Narratives

The ongoing conflict between Israel and Iran has exceeded the battlefield, creating a broad range of digital war through various tactics and practices and forming narratives and propaganda. This paper examines the digital war that has intensified between Israel and Iran following the Gaza conflict. By analyzing the whole digital war machine developed by both sides, the study explores how mass media and social media are utilized as tools of warfare to influence domestic and international audiences. Through a comparative analysis of Israeli and Iranian digital conflict, including news reports, social media campaigns, and official statements, the paper investigates the themes, tactics, and effectiveness of their respective media strategies. The findings highlight the role of digital space in shaping the ongoing conflict between the two countries, reinforcing political agendas, and sustaining the ideological battle between the two countries. This study contributes to understanding modern information warfare and the complexities of media influence in international conflicts.

Dr. Ali Mamouri, Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh, Prof. Ihsan Yilmaz
Deakin University

See the previous pages for the bios of Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh, Prof. Ihsan Yilmaz and Dr. Ali Mamouri

Attitudes to Foreign-led Heritage Reconstruction After Conflict: a Public Opinion Survey of Aleppo

The destruction of heritage in conflict has emerged as a key challenge to global security and the prospects of peace. In response, the international community has undertaken several large-scale heritage reconstruction projects on the assumption that they would foster development and promote cohesion. However, to date very little is understood about how local populations value their heritage, how they perceive its destruction, whether they view reconstruction as a priority, and the extent to which they support foreign efforts to rebuild. This article addresses this lacuna by focusing on the case study of Aleppo and documenting the results of an original public opinion survey of 1600 residents. The results hold several implications for heritage projects in Aleppo, namely that locals prefer that heritage reconstruction: not be privileged over security, development and peace; includes the rebuilding of their local religious sites as much as significant non-religious sites; transforms sites into more useful structures for the community; and they want domestic control and agency over the future of their heritage. The article concludes by noting that such findings hold important implications for heritage projects in other (post-)conflict contexts where mass heritage destruction has taken place.

Prof. Benjamin Isakhan
Deakin University

Dr. Benjamin Isakhan is a Professor of International Politics and Founding Director of POLIS, a research network for Politics and International Relations Research in the Alfred Deakin Institute at Deakin University, Australia. He is also Adjunct Senior Research Associate at the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa and Consulting Scholar at the Penn Cultural Heritage Centre, University of Pennsylvania, US.

International Inaction and Impunity for Crimes Against Heritage Sites

Despite receiving increasing attention from multilateral organisations, effective prevention, deterrence, and punitive polices for crimes against heritage sites have remained elusive. In no region are the consequences of these systemic shortcomings more widely felt than in MENA.

From the Taliban's demolition of the Bamiyan Buddhas and Ansar al-Dine's targeting of mosques/mausolea in Mali, to Al-Qaeda's transnational attacks on Sufi shrines and Da'esh's cultural cleansing against Shi'as, Christians, and Yazidis, the region has seen immense losses to its treasured heritage. The same can be said for the looting of the Iraq National Museum (abetted by US forces), the aerial bombardment of Aleppo's Old City (backed by Assad), and the airstrikes on Sana'a (led by Saudi Arabia).

Israel's war on Gaza has resulted in the mass destruction of archaeological/religious heritage, with UNESCO confirming in April that over 43 sites had been damaged in a manner that contravened international law. Given this has doubled since the organisation's first warnings in January, it appears that impunity towards crimes against heritage is ongoing.

This paper questions the international protection regime for heritage and its ability to safeguard sites from violence. It positions Israel's impunity as a litmus test for heritage mechanisms in place at UNESCO, the UNSC, and the UNHRC. It argues that the UN needs to reconsider its approach to crimes against heritage, especially in the context of the 'day after' scenario in Gaza, which will have ongoing consequences for the treatment of heritage sites in MENA and the world at large.

Eleanor Childs
PhD Candidate at Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University

Eleanor Childs is a third year PhD Candidate at the Alfred Deakin Institute. Her research focuses on the destruction of cultural heritage at the hands of Da'esh during the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts. Specifically, she is interested in the lack of gender recognition in international heritage norms and the ways in which gender neutrality in heritage discourse obscures the security concerns and rights violations experienced by women when their heritage is intentionally attacked. Eleanor's background is in International Relations, and she has been researching and writing on the intricate political landscapes of Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Syria since 2017.

Mutual Entanglements of Cultural Heritage and Borders in West Asia

Borders and heritage are two fundamental devices for designating group identities. Here, borders indicate processes of asserting sovereignty, territorial demarcation and spatial differentiation created through various forms of human and collective practices. Comparably, heritage refers to the process of collective (re)imaginings and uses of the past in the present. It underpins group identities and their associations and claims over territories. As such, it is also an important justification for bordering processes. This paper will draw on various examples from within West Asia to explore and illustrate the mutual relationship between borders and heritage. Referring to these examples, the paper will reflect on the various kinds of heritage-border relationships and their implications for the parties involved on the ground.

Dr. Ali Mozaffari
Senior Fellow at Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University

Dr. Ali Mozaffari is a Senior Fellow at Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University, Australia. His current research interests include geopolitics of the past as well as culture and the built environment with a specific focus on West Asia. His publications include Heritage Movements in Asia: Cultural Heritage Activism, Politics, and Identity (edited volume with Tod Jones, Berghahn 2020), and Development, architecture and the formation of heritage in late-twentieth century Iran: A vital past (Manchester University Press 2020). Dr. Mozaffari is the founding co-editor of Berghahn's series Explorations in Heritage Studies and co-founder of the Heritage and Transnationalism Network (HTN) with the Association of Critical Heritage Studies.

Organising Committee

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Prof. Shahram Akbarzadeh (Chair)

Ms. Shadi Rouhshahbaz

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Dr. Andrew Thomas

About MESF

The Middle East Studies Forum (MESF) is a leading centre of scholarship on the Middle East at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation (ADI) at Deakin University. MESF hosts world-class projects and scholarship in the field of Middle East and Central Asian 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 Prof. 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).
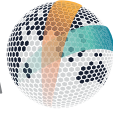
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