

ANDREW VINCENT MEMORIAL ADDRESS, 11 OCTOBER
2011

Ross Burns, former Australian Ambassador to Syria, Lebanon, South
Africa and Greece

‘Australia and the “New” Middle East’

Ross Burns looks back over the recent history of Australia’s Middle East policy to seek clues as to how Australia might adapt to the tumultuous events in the region over the last year. Australia’s past involvement has followed a fitful pattern and its attempts to become more involved have largely reflected a black and white reading of the Arab-Israel confrontation. Monochrome perspectives allowed little understanding of the pressures threatening the stability of the Middle East. It is now clear that the region is evolving towards a considerably more nuanced environment that demands more complex choices.

Speaking from the point of view of a former foreign policy practitioner, the speaker will argue that a shallow understanding of the region, marked by little informed public debate, is a prime reason for Australia’s tentative and sporadic approach. Political responses to events in the region have often shown little understanding of their dynamics or their likely outcomes. To correct this, academic programs can provide the essential groundwork to building greater depth of understanding of the fundamentals of Middle Eastern societies. It is this context that Andrew Vincent and the Macquarie Centre for Mid East and North African Studies has played an invaluable role in harnessing diverse perspectives to provide a fuller picture of the Arab and Islamic world. Much more needs to be done, however, to stimulate a broader debate on the challenges — and even more so, the opportunities — of the Arab world for Australia.

Venue: E7B Theatre 5

Time: 6.30 for 7pm