



Media release

Tuesday, February 7th, 2012

Seminar: Risks and opportunities in the Middle East featuring expert from Sydney-based Lowy Institute

Australia Arab Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AACCI) and Thomsons Lawyers host major business event in Adelaide

The Sunni-Shi'a Islamic divide has been a main contributor to the sea change gripping the Middle East and North Africa, as evinced in the tumultuous Arab Spring. This religious divide has implications for Australia too, as it directly impacts the socio-economic status within the country and also external trade and commerce with the rest of the world.

To further highlight the importance of this dichotomy between Sunni and Shi'a Islam, and its impact on Australia, AACCI and Thomsons Lawyers are hosting a major event in Adelaide on Tuesday, February 14th February. Titled, "*Business Risks and Opportunities in the Middle East*", this event will provide key insights into the various opportunities and threats for Australian business in the Middle East and North Africa.

"This is one of the most salient events of this nature to be hosted in Adelaide," said Chris Heysen, the executive director for AACCI in South Australia. "We are lucky to have Dr. Rodger Shanahan of the famed Lowy Institute for International Policy provide us with a detailed presentation at the event."

Dr. Shanahan is a non-resident fellow at the Lowy Institute and was an Australian Army officer on operational service in South Lebanon and Syria with the United Nations. He also served in East Timor and Afghanistan, and worked with Australian embassies in Saudi Arabia (Riyadh) and the United Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi).

Dr. Shanahan has masters' degrees in International Relations and Middle Eastern Studies from the Australian National University (ANU). He also has a PhD in Arab and Islamic Studies from the University of Sydney. Dr. Shanahan's main research interests include Shi'a Islamic politics, and security policy in the Arabian Gulf. He has written numerous journal articles, policy papers and opinion pieces and has regularly spoken on Middle East issues on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and Voice of America. He is the author of *Clans, Parties and Clerics – the Shi'a of Lebanon*.

“This is must-not-miss event for South Australians, especially the business and public sector communities who work with Middle Eastern clients or have operations overseas,” said Raymond Najar, the national chairman of AACCI. “It is rare to have someone of Dr. Shanahan's caliber provide a comprehensive presentation on such an important topic. The Sunni-Shi'a divide has had major implications in the Middle East region and beyond. Numerous shifts in power dynamics in the Arab World and the wider Islamic world is centred on this divide.

“Anyone who is interested in understanding more about the Arab World, the Middle East, Islam, and current global and regional issues, including Iraq and Iran, should make the effort to attend this important event.”

Entry to *Business Risks and Opportunities in the Middle East* is priced at \$50 for AACCI members and \$75 for non-members. This event will be presented from 5:30pm to 7:00pm at Thomsons Lawyers premises Level 17, 19 Gouger Street, Adelaide CBD.

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