Research Seminar

‘Australia’s Emerging Security Challenges in Northeast Asia’.

By: Professor Andrew O’Neil, Director, Griffith Asia Institute.

Of all the sub-regions in Asia—including Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and South Asia—Northeast Asia is strategically the most important for Australia. While in many respects Australia’s single most important bilateral relationship is with its closest regional neighbour, Indonesia, the most critical countries for Australia in Asia are China and Japan. These two countries are Australia’s most important trading partners and the Sino-Japanese-US triangular relationship will be the critical variable shaping major power dynamics in Asia for the foreseeable future. Australia also has significant interests on the Korean peninsula; South Korea is Australia’s fourth largest trading partner (after China, Japan, and the US) and Australia has a direct stake in the future of North Korea’s nuclear weapons inventory. Although it has important strategic interests in other parts of Asia, what happens in Northeast Asia will shape Australia’s strategic destiny in the twenty-first century like no other part of the world.

In addressing the various multilayered security challenges in Northeast Asia, Australia should avoid the pursuit of long term solutions, or “grand plans”, as part of its strategic policy. Contrary to the rhetoric of successive governments, Australia is not a major player in Asia on security issues. The Rudd government’s ambitious “Asia Pacific Security Community” initiative has encountered opposition in Asia in part because other states do not regard Australia as being in a position to set the regional security agenda. Moreover, importing into Asia ambitious security architectures modelled on the European experience promises much, but is likely deliver very little. In the spirit of Charles Lindblom’s model of policy incrementalism, Australia’s strategic policy in Northeast Asia needs to be modest and fundamentally step-by-step in its approach. Attempts to engineer a security order in Northeast Asia—indeed any part of Asia—are doomed to failure.

Æ Thursday 4 March 2010
Æ N72 Room -1.18
Æ Nathan campus
Æ 12.30 -1.50pm

To RSVP, please contact Natasha Vary on (07) 3735 5322 or n.vary@griffith.edu.au no later than 5.00pm Tuesday 2 March 2010.