Australian National University

Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* (1955)

Friday 25 September 2020, 5.30 – 6.30pm

Speaker:

Prof Mark Kenny,
Australian Studies Institute, ANU

Online Zoom delivery:

https://anu.zoom.us/j/96967247163?
pwd=K3ZDZ29XdGZwL2FlbmN1ckNj
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Eventbrite Registration:

https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/
books-that-changed-humanity-the-
quiet-american-
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This lecture is free and open to the public

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Humanities Research Centre

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The world may yearn for a 'quiet' American in 2020, but 65 years ago, the English novelist, **Graham Greene** presaged its dangers in *The Quiet American*.

In an age where US leadership has all but flamed out, its remnant pyre illuminating mostly failure, Greene's perfectly structured novel warned of the harm to be done in the name of doing good, of getting involved, of bringing salvation. In the journalistic patois of today, Greene skewered the blithe weaponisation of innocence.

The Quiet American is wistfully allegorical and through its characters can be discerned a clear lesson from one fading empire to its competitor, but more pressingly again, to the new global management: ahead lies only failure. Greene's novel is arguably more powerful today for the hubristic naivete it critiqued and the colossal harm he saw as axiomatic in its wake – in Vietnam, where the story is set, on the Korean peninsula, and later, the Middle East.

Mark Kenny is Professor at the Australian Studies Institute at ANU, an appointment following a high-profile journalistic career culminating in six years as chief political correspondent and national affairs editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, and *The Canberra Times*. He is a frequent columnist, and a regular on the ABC's Insiders program, Sky News Agenda, and radio programs across the country.