

**20 Years of the Michael Hintze Security Studies
Professorship**
The Hintze Lecture
University of Sydney

Vice-Chancellor, distinguished guests, colleagues, students, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a very great pleasure — and a profound honour — to join you this evening to mark twenty years of the Michael Hintze Security Studies Professorship at the University of Sydney, and to deliver the Hintze Lecture.

Twenty years is long enough for an idea to prove its worth.

It is long enough to see whether foresight was justified.

And in this case, I believe it unquestionably was.

This initiative began because two extraordinary men — Vice-Chancellor Gavin Brown and Chancellor Kim Santow — believed that Australia needed something it did not yet fully possess: a serious, sustained, intellectual capability in security studies, anchored in one of its great universities.

They are no longer with us. But their clarity of thought and sense of national responsibility remain with us.

They approached me with a simple but compelling proposition: that the University of Sydney should not merely teach international relations, but should build a centre of gravity in security and geopolitics — one that would shape national debate, inform policy, and train future leaders.

They asked me to help make that possible.

I was very happy to do so.

I confess that I was initially reluctant to attach my name to the Chair. But Gavin and Kim were persuasive. They argued that attaching a name was not about vanity; it was about signalling commitment. It would demonstrate that major philanthropic support for the University of Sydney was again possible and desirable.

Many of you will know that the University once had a powerful tradition of endowed Chairs through the Challis legacy. But when tertiary education became free, fundraising efforts were understandably put aside. Over time, the culture of major giving faded. The University endured a long drought.

This professorship was one of the early signs of renewal — not only an investment in security studies, but a signal that the University was prepared once again to combine public mission with private initiative.

I am told — and I take quiet satisfaction in this — that the existence of this Chair helped catalyse other major initiatives, including American Studies and beyond.

But philanthropy was never the core issue.

The core issue was necessity.

Twenty years ago, we were still intellectually living in the optimism that followed 1989.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, many believed that history had turned a decisive corner. Liberal democracy appeared ascendant. Economic integration accelerated. Supply chains lengthened across continents. “Just in time” logistics became doctrine. Efficiency replaced redundancy. Strategic risk was often discounted.

The prevailing assumption was that trade and interdependence would reduce conflict.

But history did not end.

Terrorism reminded us that ideology could still shape violence. Financial crises exposed fragility beneath global integration. Cyber conflict emerged as a new domain of power. The pandemic revealed the vulnerability of extended supply chains. And the war in Ukraine has demonstrated, with brutal clarity, that territorial aggression and hard power remain central to international affairs.

We now live in a period of renewed strategic competition — particularly in the Indo-Pacific, which has become the centre of global economic gravity and geopolitical tension.

It is here that Australia finds itself not on the margins, but at the centre.

And before I speak further about that, it may help to explain why this subject matters to me personally.

Geopolitics has shaped my entire life.

It is not an abstract discipline to me. It is lived history.

My grandfather fought in the White Russian cavalry as a very junior subaltern during the Russian Civil War. He was wounded and made his way to Vladivostok, where in

1922 — amid collapse and upheaval — he completed a degree in Far Eastern languages.

He later worked in China for Lidell Brothers, a British trading company. When 1949 came, and the political order changed, that enterprise was effectively destroyed. He came to Australia to join his brother Victor and began again. He invested in Dutch New Guinea — and again geopolitics intervened. The territory was absorbed into Indonesia, and he lost everything once more.

On my grandmother's side, her family came from the Volga region. They too lost everything in revolution and war.

My mother's maternal grandfather was a businessman in Harbin. He built a life and enterprise there — and when the war ended, that too was swept away.

So when I speak of geopolitics, I do so as someone whose family history was written by it.

Borders shift. Regimes change. Policies alter the fate of nations — and of families.

Governments, through their decisions, can create prosperity — and they can extinguish it.

If one wishes to understand how wealth can disappear, how security can evaporate, how stability can collapse — one must understand geopolitics.

Security is not the opposite of prosperity. It is its foundation.

And that is why this Chair mattered to me.

The first holder of this Professorship, Professor Alan Dupont, established a tone that was outward-looking, policy-engaged, and serious. He ensured that security studies here would not be insular or purely theoretical.

Professor James Der Derian has built upon that foundation, creating a vibrant research community that engages government, industry, and academia. The Centre for International Security Studies has grown into a meaningful contributor to debates on cyber conflict, emerging technologies, hybrid warfare, and strategic risk.

In today's world, security is no longer confined to military doctrine.

It encompasses cyber resilience, energy systems, maritime security, space capabilities, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, rare earths, and the resilience of supply chains.

It encompasses economic statecraft.

Economic statecraft is the defining feature of our era.

The control of technology, access to critical minerals, resilience in advanced manufacturing, digital infrastructure, energy transition — these are instruments of national power.

Trade is no longer merely commercial. It is strategic.

And this is particularly true in the Indo-Pacific.

From my vantage point in the United Kingdom — where I am now based — it is striking how central Australia has become to global strategic thinking. Australia is not seen as peripheral. It is seen as pivotal.

Australia understands Asia. It is geographically Indo-Pacific. It is institutionally Western. It is economically connected to China. It is allied to the United States. It has deepening ties with India, Japan, Southeast Asia, and Europe.

Australia sits at the intersection of the century's defining dynamics.

And in this context, AUKUS stands out as a remarkable strategic innovation.

Pillar I — the nuclear-powered submarine program — represents a generational commitment to deterrence and maritime stability. It is visionary in scale and seriousness.

But Pillar II may prove even more transformative.

Pillar II recognises that technological superiority will define strategic advantage. Cooperation in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, advanced cyber capabilities, undersea systems, hypersonics — this is not simply defence collaboration. It is the creation of an integrated innovation ecosystem across trusted partners.

It links academia, industry, and government.

It integrates strategy with science.

It aligns national security with economic capability.

From London, one sees clearly how significant this is. Australia is not simply participating. In many respects, it is driving momentum, demonstrating seriousness of intent, and committing real resources.

This is leadership.

It is also realism.

Now, let me turn — respectfully and diplomatically — to China.

China is a civilisation of immense depth and sophistication. Its economic transformation over recent decades has been extraordinary. Hundreds of millions have been lifted out of poverty. Its re-emergence as a major power is historically understandable.

China will remain central to global affairs for generations to come.

The challenge is not to deny this reality, nor to dramatise it unnecessarily, but to manage it intelligently.

In my view, three principles must coexist.

First, stability through credible deterrence. Balance reduces miscalculation.

Second, competition — economic, technological, and intellectual. Competition within rules and norms is legitimate and inevitable.

Third, cooperation. Climate change, global health, financial stability, non-proliferation — these challenges require engagement.

Containment alone is insufficient. Competition alone is destabilising. Cooperation alone is naïve. Statecraft requires managing all three simultaneously.

That requires disciplined thinking.

It requires institutions capable of sustained analysis beyond political cycles.

It requires universities.

For students here tonight: you will live your professional lives in a world defined by the Indo-Pacific. You will face technological transformation, geopolitical rivalry, and strategic complexity. But you will also live in an era of extraordinary opportunity.

Australia is not a bystander in this century. It is a shaper of it.

For policymakers: intellectual depth is strategic infrastructure.

For academics: engagement with real-world challenges strengthens scholarship.

And for me personally, the University of Sydney — and St John's College within it — were critical in my own development. They provided not only education, but community, discipline, debate, and lifelong friendships. They shaped how I think, how I question, and how I engage with the world.

Twenty years ago, two visionary leaders believed that Australia needed deeper capability in security studies.

They were right.

Today, security underpins prosperity. Stability underpins opportunity. Strategy underpins sovereignty.

I am proud to have helped begin this journey. I am proud that the University of Sydney has nurtured it. I am proud of St John's College and the role it played in shaping me. And I am proud to be a graduate of this great institution.

The next twenty years will demand resilience, clarity, courage, and imagination.

I have every confidence that this University — and the Hintze Lecture — will continue to provide all four.

Thank you.