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Legal scholar to focus on terrorism at Harvard

KYLAR LOUSSIKIAN

The University of Sydney's Ben Saul will be the next person to hold the chair of Australian studies at Harvard University, which was set up more than three decades ago.

Professor Saul, who currently holds the Challis chair of international law, will be the first legal scholar to take up the position since Helen Irving, another Sydney University academic, 10 years ago.

He told the HES that the Harvard Law School, where he will sit during the year, had "a very rich tradition of legal scholarship and teaching".

"Having previously taught at Oxford and visited other leading institutions, because of its remoteness Australia can sometimes feel a long way away from the action in international law, despite having outstanding universities relative to its size," he said.

"A year at Harvard is a fabulous opportunity to refresh professional networks, disseminate my research to a wider expert audience, and learn from the world's leading law academics."

Professor Saul intended to work on more effective tools to suppress terrorism.

"American legal scholars, including at Harvard, have been closely involved in debates shaping US government leadership of global counter-terrorism efforts since September 11," he said.

"Despite killing and imprisoning terrorists for the last 15 years, there now seem to be more terrorists than ever, so there are some really hard questions about whether current approaches are working. I'm also interested in wider debates that are of common

interest to Australia and the US, such as the implications for international law of the rise of China, and the strengthening of compliance mechanisms in international humanitarian law and human rights law."

Professor Saul is an associate fellow of the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London and has held a number of Australian

Research Council grants. He said he would complete a book about the reasons why different terrorist groups respect or disre-

spect basic humanitarian rules during armed conflicts, based on field interviews with diverse armed groups, from FARC in Colombia and Maoists in Nepal to insurgents in the Syrian war.

And the importance of the Australian studies post?

"In some ways I think the intellectual relationship between our two countries is less well developed than, say, our political, economic and security alliances, or

certain areas of popular culture," he said. "It can be harder for Australian scholars, whose universities are also smaller than the big US ones, to be heard in a crowded US marketplace of ideas ... It is important for distinctive Australian voices to be heard in the American debates, and to broaden the horizons of American students, and for Australians to bring back a deeper knowledge of American scholarship and teaching."

Former chairs of Australia studies at Harvard University

Gough Whitlam
Mick Dodson
Manning Clark
Geoffrey Blainey
Alison Bashford

Nicholas Jose
Chris Wallace-Crabbe
Paul Kelly
Dame Leonie Kramer
Tim Flannery.



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JOHN FEDER

The University of Sydney's Ben Saul, who has been appointed to the chair of Australian studies at Harvard University