

Mark Urban, Hon DLitt

Friday 18 July 2025

Orator: Professor Richard Aldrich, Department of Politics & International Studies

Chancellor

It is a great pleasure this afternoon to introduce our honorary graduand, the esteemed journalist, broadcaster and historian: MARK URBAN.

Mark's career in journalism and broadcasting spans some 40 years. His field of expertise is international affairs – he has a degree in International Relations from the London School of Economics focusing on diplomacy and security. With the exception of four years in the late '80s as defence correspondence of the newly launched newspaper *The Independent*, Mark's career has been at the BBC. He started as an assistant producer and in 1995 became Diplomatic Editor for its flagship news and current affairs programme, *Newsnight*, a position which he held for almost 30 years. He has reported on the biggest international upheavals of recent times: the Gulf War; the 1991 coup in Moscow and the 'October coup' of 1993; the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo; the Afghan war and the war in Iraq, where in 2005 he was an embedded reporter with British and US troops. His analysis of international affairs and his authoritative comment have made him one of our most trusted journalists and broadcasters. He has developed world-leading expertise on intelligence services and clandestine operations, subjects that are difficult to research, and which require particular patience and skill to unravel. He retired from the BBC last year, when the Corporation decided to make radical changes to the *Newsnight* format, and since then has covered diplomacy, defence and security for *The Sunday Times*.

Mark is also a highly respected military historian. He has personal experience in the British army, having served in the Royal Tank Regiment and in the Territorial Army. His subjects range from the Napoleonic Wars to the Second World War and beyond, and he always writes from a new and distinctive angle: for instance, in *The Man Who Broke Napoleon's Codes* (2001), he explores the crucial work of a hitherto unknown British code-breaker, while *The Tank War* (2014) reassesses the role of the British tank regiments in the Second World War. He has also investigated some of the most secret aspects of espionage and special forces. In *Big Boys' Rules* (1996), Mark explored the British security forces' covert operations during the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland, while in 2010 he published the first account of the clandestine war waged by British and US special forces in Iraq (incurring, in the process, the wrath of the Ministry of Defence). In perhaps his most famous book to date, *The Skripal Files* (2018), he told the story of the poisoning of Sergei Skripal, the Russian spy turned British agent, in March of that year.

Mark's account was based on hours of exclusive interviews with Skripal that had begun in June 2017 and contained many previously unknown details about his life. The book was chosen by *The Sunday Times* as one of the best politics books of 2018. Meticulously researched and insightful, all these books are used the world over by undergraduate and postgraduate students studying courses in international security who value his insights. These books are also eloquently written and a pleasure to read, so well-thumbed copies sit on the shelves in the University Library at Warwick.

Today, we honour Mark Urban as a historian, broadcaster and journalist whose scholarly analysis and authoritative comment are particularly valuable in today's world of false news and misinformation. We are delighted to welcome him to Warwick.

Chancellor: in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, MARK URBAN.