

# Center for International Studies

The mission of the Center for International Studies (CIS) is to educate the next generation of global citizens and leaders and to advance the Institute's international research and education efforts. While anchored in the social sciences, the Center also works closely with science and engineering faculty across campus. We aim to empower students, faculty, and other researchers and visitors to bring MIT's interdisciplinary style of research and scholarship to address complex global challenges.

CIS is a growing ecosystem that hosts more than 20 country and regional programs spanning Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. These centers of activity and expertise are hubs that power international scholarship and engagement at MIT through student global education; seed funds for international faculty research; events and seminars; convening scholars and collaborations; and much more. It is home to the prestigious Security Studies Program (SSP), a leader in security research and analysis, which recently launched a Center for Nuclear Security Policy (CNSP); and the MIT Science and Technology Initiatives (MISTI), which has provided international internships, study and teaching opportunities to thousands of students. Other priorities for CIS include research on democratic development, global diversity, emerging powers, and climate adaptation, education for national security leaders, and policy translation.

The Center's community includes approximately 70 faculty and researchers, 50 staff, and 30 graduate students, along with numerous distinguished affiliated scholars and practitioners.

The Center's leadership is composed of Evan Lieberman, Total Professor of Political Science and Contemporary Africa, Director of CIS and MISTI; April Julich Perez, Deputy Director and Executive Director of MISTI; Nadie T. Brathwaite, Director of Administration and Finance; Michelle English, Director of Communications; and Mihaela Papa, Director of Research. Faculty directors of key programs within CIS include M. Taylor Fravel, Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor of Political Science, Director of the Security Studies Program; and Kelly Greenhill, Visiting Associate Professor, Director of the Seminar XXI Program

The Center and its programs offer fellowships, funding and resources to scholars and students studying international affairs. Its prestigious Robert E. Wilhelm Fellowship brings senior leaders in public affairs to campus to help facilitate and augment research on policy-relevant questions. Recipients have included prime ministers, foreign ministers, senior military officers, and leaders in the NGO community from around the world. In 2024-25, the Center hosted John Githongo, a Kenyan journalist and noted anti-corruption advocate who served under then-president Mwai Kibaki. The Center welcomes Dafna Rand, Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, for the upcoming year.

The Center also hosts the Elizabeth Neuffer Fellowship, offered to a human rights reporter who completes research and coursework at the Center and journalism internships at the *Boston Globe* and the *New York Times*. In 2025, Alicia Chen, a Taiwanese journalist and filmmaker, focused her time on reproductive rights, labor violations and political repression in Taiwan and China.

The Center offers funding to support student research in the field of international affairs. The CIS PhD Student Research Grant and Jeanne Guillemin Prize are open to advanced doctoral students in international affairs at MIT, regardless of their home department. This year, 20 students received funding to support their international field research.

The Center sponsors several interdisciplinary working groups that enable the MIT community to tackle research issues that are not confined to a single department or discipline. Several groups are structured to link the efforts of social science professionals with those of engineers and natural scientists on problems of academic and policy significance. They also encourage collaboration between graduate students and faculty members. This year, nine working groups received funding.

The Center offers other grants and hosts visitors through its various programs, which are described below.

## **Country and Area Programs**

CIS is home to 24 country and area programs that are hubs for understanding and connecting with countries and cultures around the world. Each is led by an MIT faculty member and a program manager with deep ties to the region. These programs provide opportunities for students to learn abroad (via MISTI); for faculty and researchers to collaborate with peers around the world (including via Global Seed Funds); and for the community to engage with global ideas and research through public events and outreach efforts. Last year, the country and area programs launched M3, a biannual newsletter bringing together information about research and education opportunities for the MIT campus focused around five world regions: Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America and MENA. Each newsletter reaches hundreds of MIT faculty and researchers.

### **MIT International Science and Technology Initiatives (MISTI)**

MISTI creates applied international learning opportunities for MIT students that increase their ability to understand and address real-world problems. MISTI offers MIT undergraduate and graduate students opportunities to intern, research, teach, and study abroad. MISTI's fully funded experiences are carefully designed to complement on-campus coursework and research. Rigorous country-specific preparation ensures students build lasting cultural connections while abroad and gain invaluable perspectives that shape their education, career, and worldview.

In 2024-25, MISTI offered a total of 1,308 international opportunities to MIT students. Approximately half of these placements were summer internships or research opportunities with a variety of host organizations, including companies, research institutions, NGOs, governments, and university laboratories. Nearly 400 students traveled abroad through Global Teaching Labs over IAP to lead collaborative STEM workshops for high school students. Over 140 students participated in Global Classroom, which are two- to three-week faculty-led courses or workshops abroad. During the same period, MISTI facilitated the arrival of 55 inbound exchange students to MIT.

### **MIT Global Seed Funds (GSF)**

MIT Global Seed Funds enables MIT faculty and research scientists to launch early-stage international projects and collaborate with colleagues abroad. Through an annual call for proposals, GSF awards funds that can be used for international travel and meetings with colleagues around the world. Grantees are expected to involve MIT undergraduate and graduate students in their projects.

In 2024-25, GSF offered a general fund open to projects in all countries and 29 different country, region, or university-specific funds. 228 applications were received, and over \$2.8 million was awarded to 102 projects from 29 departments across the Institute. These awards bring the total amount awarded to \$30.0 million.

## **MIT-Empowering the Teachers (MIT-ETT)**

The MIT-Empowering the Teachers (MIT-ETT) teaching fellowship immerses Nigerian engineering faculty in MIT's "mind-and-hand" teaching philosophy, emphasizing active learning, real-world problem-solving, and student-centered methodologies. The goal of the program is for the fellows to become agents of change in their institutions ensuring their graduates are industry-ready problem solvers from day one after graduation.

Under the leadership of Prof. Ibitayo Akinwande (EECS) and management by Yoav Danenberg (M.Ed.), the MIT-ETT is sponsored by TotalEnergies Upstream Companies in Nigeria and the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd).

In the Spring semester of 2025, the program hosted five Nigerian faculty from electrical, mechanical, petroleum and agricultural and bioresources engineering. A major component of the program was a curriculum design course developed to address the unique requirements and challenges in the Nigerian higher education system. Throughout the spring semester, ETT alumni provided updates describing their achievements and impact on their students and institutions resulting from revising their curriculum and developing relationships with local industry.

## **MIT Global At-Risk Fellows (GMAF)**

Since AY2023-2024, CIS's MIT-Ukraine Program has been coordinating the launch of the Global MIT At-Risk Fellows (GMAF), a semester-long scholarly exchange program initiated and supported by the Office of the Vice Provost for International Activities. As part of the program, a total of seven Ukrainian scholars have visited MIT campus thus far, with nine more expected to complete their GMAF fellowships over AY2025-2026.

In addition to providing a temporary refuge for the duration of one semester, the program is designed to enhance the educational and research experiences of university faculty and researchers by introducing them to MIT campus methods and strategies in their areas of specialty. GMAF-Ukraine is particularly designed to have a multiplier effect by engaging scholars working on topics that are at the cusp of Ukraine's most pressing needs and MIT's technical expertise. Scholars selected to participate in the program have represented a broad range of fields, including computer science, chemistry, economics, urban planning, nuclear physics and environmental engineering.

## **CIS Public Events and Outreach**

In 2024–25, CIS delivered a robust public education program, including five Starr Forums, two Focus on Eurasia events, and the launch of Global Research & Policy (GR&P) seminars. In-person Starr Forums remained popular, averaging ~200 attendees. Event recordings are archived on the CIS YouTube channel, which gained 1.3K new subscribers and reached 81.7K views, bringing total subscribers to nearly 20,000.

The public events and outreach team also supports MISTI and other programs, producing flagship events like the MISTI GO Fair and a week-long annual conference. The team manages strategic communications for both CIS and MISTI, including websites, newsletters, and print/digital materials (e.g., the CIS magazine). Three regular newsletters target regional CIS activities, MISTI students, and alumni.

Outreach efforts span video production, social media, news releases, and campus-wide campaigns—such as the MISTI PiDay campaign, which raised \$53K from ~300 donors.

A major achievement this year was the launch of the redesigned CIS website, which drew ~122,000 visitors. Next year's focus will be a new MISTI website, which receives 220,000+ annual visits.

Social media growth continues across platforms: CIS LinkedIn reached ~3K followers since launching in spring 2024; its X account surpassed 5K. MISTI's LinkedIn and Instagram each have ~4K followers, and its YouTube channel logged 13K+ views.

## Policy Lab

The MIT [Policy Lab](#) leverages MIT research and expertise to inform and improve public policy. We provide specialized guidance to MIT researchers to identify and build trusted relationships with relevant policy stakeholders, as well as training and support to effectively translate scientific evidence into policy-relevant, timely, concise, and actionable information. MIT researchers are empowered to deploy their existing body of academic work and learn to incorporate policymakers needs into future research design for greater impact. The Policy Lab supports all research disciplines, from aeronautics to urban planning, and engages at all levels of public policy, from city councils to the United Nations.

**Drew Story, PhD** is the managing director of the Policy Lab.

**Ford Professor of Economics, Jon Gruber**, replaced Associate Professor of Political Science, J. Chappell H. Lawson as the faculty director of the Policy Lab in late 2024.

In response to limited funding, the managing director position for the Policy Lab has been reduced to a 0.5 FTE position. The current managing director has been appointed as the Policy Director for the MIT Climate Policy Center at 0.5 FTE.

In FY2025, the Policy Lab supported 7 MIT PIs in developing and executing policy impact projects. Activities included:

- Providing recommendations and advice to US federal agencies, Congressional offices, state agencies, the European Commission, the European Parliament, and foreign ministries
- Synthesizing and translating academic research into policy briefs and policy memos
- Public comments filed for pending regulations
- Congressional testimony in front of the House Natural Resources Committee
- Improving research grant proposals, including major NSF proposals and private foundation proposals, by incorporating policy implications into the research design and dissemination.
  - The Policy Lab is a collaborator on a newly funded, 6-year, \$18M NSF Research Center: Analysis and Prediction of Pandemic Expansion. Professor Lydia Bourouiba is the lead MIT PI on the grant.
  - The Policy Lab is a collaborator on a newly funded, 2-year, \$400K project funded by Arnold Ventures. Dr. Fabio Duarte is the lead MIT PI on the grant.

The Policy Lab provided education and resources to students and postdocs by providing a training session for the [MIT Science Policy Initiative's Congressional Visit Days](#), and giving guest lectures within and beyond MIT. The Policy Lab's online training course, "[Tools for Academic Engagement in Public Policy](#)," is available on MIT Learn. For FY2025, the course had nearly 700 learners enrolled.

The Policy Lab has previously been financially supported by the provost, private donors, and CIS, but no new funding from the Institute was secured in FY2025. The Policy Lab continues to solicit funding to increase the volume of MIT research that can be brought to bear on public policy, but the program is expected to exhaust all funds by end of FY2026.

## **Security Studies Program**

The Security Studies Program (SSP) is a graduate-level research and education program. Its senior research and teaching staff include social scientists and policy analysts. Security Studies is a recognized field of study within the Department of Political Science, and its courses emphasize grand strategy, causes and prevention of conflict, military operations and technology, and defense policy. A special feature of the program is the integration of technical and political analyses of national and international security problems. M. Taylor Fravel, Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor of Political Science, is the director of the program.

SSP publishes an [annual report](#) and a [quarterly digital newsletter](#). In addition, members of the program have regularly made themselves available for a variety of [media appearances](#), both in print and online.

### **Ruina Nuclear Age Speaker Series**

The SSP Ruina Nuclear Age Speaker Series (named in honor of SSP's founding director, Professor Jack Ruina) was held on October 29, 2024. This year's speaker was SSP's own Vipin Narang, Frank Stanton Professor of Nuclear Security and Political Science and director of the Center for Nuclear Security Policy (CNSP). Narang most recently served as Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy at the Department of Defense, for which he was awarded the Department of Defense Medal for Distinguished Public Service. Narang addressed several topics, including how he became the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy, the portfolio that space policy covered, the difference between academia and the government, and the role of academia in policymaking. Narang was adamant that academic work has a value for policymakers.

### **General Doolittle Award Dinner**

The General James Doolittle Award Dinner was held on April 3, 2025. This year's featured speaker and Doolittle award recipient was former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy Dr. John Plumb. Dr. Plumb discussed a host of issues related to space and national security, including the importance of space for military operations, the opportunities and risks of military competition in space, and how the Department of Defense has sought to work with the private sector and allied countries to enhance US space capabilities. In April 2017, SSP received a generous gift from the Pierre ('88) and Amy Chao Fund to support and sustain SSP's annual Doolittle Award dinner.

### **SSP Special Seminars**

SSP faculty and scholars frequently participate as moderators and guest speakers in the Center for International Studies (CIS) Starr Forum event series. Please refer to the CIS event listing for a complete list.

March 11, 2025

“Vulnerabilities & Resilience of Electrical Grids in Wartime: Lessons from Ukraine”

Speakers: Volodymyr Kudrytskyi, the former CEO of Ukraine's electric grid operator Ukrenergo

Dr. Mariana Budjeryn, Senior Research Associate at Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs

April 8, 2025

“The B-21 Theory of Victory”

Speaker: Lt. Col Shane Praiswater, US Air Force

April 29, 2025

Book Talk — *The New Nuclear Age: At the Precipice of Armageddon*

Speaker: Ankit Panda, Stanton Senior Fellow in the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie endowment for International Peace

### **Lincoln Laboratory Speaker Series**

May 12, 2025

“PLA Blockade of Taiwan: Analysis and Preliminary Findings from research conducted in 2024-25”

Eric Heginbotham, Principal Research Scientist

May 29, 2025

“Grand Strategy in the Trump Administration—Reading the Tea Leaves”

Barry Posen, Ford International Professor of Political Science

June 10, 2025

“Power transitions and territorial disputes: The South China Sea and Taiwan in US-China relations”

M. Taylor Fravel, Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor of Political Science and Director, Security Studies Program

### **Wednesday Seminar Series**

Sustaining a long tradition, SSP continued the Wednesday Seminar Series, with twenty in total. These seminars offer talks on topics relevant to national defense and international relations, including cyber security, China, Iraq, national security decision making, military technology, military history, and nuclear security. Speakers included academics, military officers, and think tank analysts. The [speaker series](#) is open to the entire MIT community for in-person attendance, and the live-stream is available to the general public. The SSP YouTube channel received over 43,000 views during the past academic year and added over 700 new subscribers. SSP’s LinkedIn page added over 2,900 new followers, nearly tripling its growth from the previous year. LinkedIn engagements increased over 400% during the same period.

### **Research and Education**

Program research is built around the interests of the faculty, the dissertations of the graduate students, and occasional commissioned projects. Key research areas are:

#### Asian Security

- Preventing conflict in Asia’s territorial and maritime disputes
- China’s military and grand strategy
- Conflict over Taiwan
- US-China relations
- China’s economic statecraft

- Japan's foreign and security policies
- Competition between India-Pakistan and India-China
- Nuclear Strategy and Proliferation
- Examining the underlying logic of current nonproliferation strategies
- North Korea and Iran
- Resource allocation and counter-proliferation policy
- The nuclear strategies of middle powers
- The history of nuclear issues, especially proliferation
- China's nuclear strategy

#### Grand Strategy and Tools of Statecraft

- Reassessing US grand strategy
- The nature and limits of US military power
- The future of conventional warfare
- Economics and security
- Technology and escalation

#### Civil and Internal Conflict

- Identity politics
- Political violence
- Civil war
- Counterinsurgency
- Post-conflict reconstruction

The program hosts several groups of fellows each year. With support from the Stanton Foundation, SSP has hosted three pre- and post-doctoral fellows working on various topics related to nuclear security. In addition, SSP also hosts up to six military fellows from the US armed forces, with at least one from each service (US Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines).

The Paul ('69) and Melonie Brophy Fellows Program is generously funded by an alumnus and seeks to develop the next generation of thought leaders in Russian foreign and national security policy. The two-year residential fellowship program is for scholars of post-Cold War Russian foreign and national security policy, to include any aspect of Russia's foreign relations including economic, political, military, or intelligence efforts. SSP hosts a postdoctoral fellow during the fellowship.

The program receives substantial support from external sources. In June 2024, the program received major support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, which awarded SSP a 24-month grant to support our research on the global "Diffusion of Power." It also received funding from the Stanton Foundation and the Anne and Paul Marcus Family Foundation, among other foundations and donors, and in May 2025 received a one-year award from Lincoln Laboratory.

### **SSP Wargaming Lab**

With support from the Anne and Paul Marcus Family Foundation, the SSP Wargaming Lab was established in fall 2022. The lab held several events this past year including: a five-day Summer Wargaming Institute at Endicott House in July 2024, a workshop in Washington, DC on November 15, 2024 in collaboration with Bridging the Gap and the Berkeley Risk and Security Lab, hosted a new iteration of its Taiwan game in December 2024, partnered with Brunel University for the first UK Wargaming Institute in February 2025, and ran a larger formal wargame from June 27-28, 2025. This portrayed a resumption of hostilities between Russia, Ukraine, and NATO in 2030 and was one of the most complex scenarios modeled by the Lab to date.

The lab is co-directed by SSP's Eric Heginbotham, Principal Research Scientist, and Erik Lin-Greenberg, Leo Marx Career Development Associate Professor. It is an independent and university-based initiative aimed at developing the use of wargames and simulations as rigorous accessible and transparent tools to enhance understanding of international politics and security. Leveraging SSP's expertise in security studies and its extensive network of scholars and national security practitioners, the Wargaming Lab engages policymakers, inform public policy, and advance academic research on critical national security issues. Significant funding has been secured to continue and expand the lab's activities over the next academic year.

### **Center for Nuclear Security Policy**

The Center for Nuclear Security Policy (CNSP) within SSP was established in July 2024 through a \$45 million gift from The Stanton Foundation. The center aims to be a global hub for advancing policy-relevant research on nuclear security and promoting the development of the next generation of thought leaders in nuclear security. In addition to keeping our nuclear security postdoctoral fellowships, the gift will enable CNSP to hire junior and senior fellows and to create an international fellows program for early to mid-career foreign and defense policy officials. Vipin Narang will serve as the center's inaugural director, and our first Senior Nuclear Fellow, Pranay Vaddi, joined us in February 2025. It will fully launch this coming academic year.

The center will pursue educational and research activities to better understand the many challenges this new era poses and use that knowledge to help inform policies to mitigate these challenges. CNSP will focus on a broad range of topics, including nuclear deterrence, escalation, conventional-nuclear integration, extended deterrence, emerging technologies and nuclear security, proliferation and non-proliferation, and arms control.

Core activities include:

- Stanton Nuclear Security Fellows
- Annual Nuclear Security Fellows Workshop
- Senior Researchers and Fellows
- Nuclear Security Junior Fellows
- International Policy Fellows

## Seminar XXI

For four decades, CIS has hosted Seminar XXI, an educational program for senior military officers, government officials, and executives in non-governmental organizations in the US national security community. The program provides these future leaders with the contextual knowledge and analytical skills needed to more broadly understand other countries and foreign relations.

Each year, a cohort of approximately 80 fellows meets nine times—six evening sessions and three multi-day weekend sessions—between September and May in Washington, DC, and northern Virginia. The fundamental criterion in choosing Seminar XXI fellows is that they currently hold or are expected to hold top posts in the military or government within the next five to seven years. Over the course of the year, fellows learn to recognize and respond to the assumptions underlying foreign society and other security-related assessments, as well as to explore policy issues critical to US interests through various lenses and viewpoints. At each session, eminent speakers present alternative perspectives to give a comprehensive view of a country or policy challenge.

The program has been in existence since 1986 and boasts over 2,900 alumni, including a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as well as current and former ambassadors, deputy secretaries of defense, heads of CINCPAC and SACEUR, and directors of government agencies such as the NSA, CIA, and AID. The Director of Seminar XXI is Dr. Kelly M. Greenhill, Associate Professor of Political Science, International Relations, and Civic Studies at Tufts University; Senior Research Fellow and Visiting Associate Professor at MIT's Center for International Studies; and Senior Research Fellow at the Niskanen Center. The Program's Assistant Director is Tisha Voss.