15th Annual
Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Conference

Co-sponsored by US Army War College

CREATING REVOLUTIONARY ADVANTAGE:
Strategic Alchemy in Global Competition

17-18 June 2025

Joint Base Andrews
The Gen. Jacob E. Smart Conference Center
1359 Arkansas Road

Contents

To receive SMA announcements, publications, and updates, please sign up for our email distro by emailing Mariah Yager (mariah.c.yager.ctr@mail.mil).

Conference Description

We explore how war, conflict, and competition will be influenced by revolutionary changes across multiple fields, including the military, industrial, diplomatic, economic, and technological. Such revolutionary changes profoundly influence emerging patterns of thought, behavior, and action, both now and into the future. Our national security and defense systems are not immune to these revolutions. Indeed, national security and defense systems frequently initiate, reinforce, or adapt to disruptive change with compounding effects. Successfully supporting the warfighter will rest, in large part, on how effectively we can anticipate and generate revolutionary changes—and so transform change into true "revolutionary advantage."

Conference Schedule

DAY 1: TUESDAY 17 JUNE 2025

8:00 – 9:00	Registration (Mezzanine)
9:00 – 9:05	Welcome *James Krakar (SMA)*
9:05 – 9:15	Introduction & Framing *Todd Veazie (Former SMA Director)*
9:15 – 10:30	**SMA Chat: The Mind-Tech Nexus in Creating Revolutionary Advantage**
10:30 – 10:45	BREAK
10:45 – 12:00	**Panel 1: Cooking up the Next Revolutions**
12:00 – 1:15	LUNCH BREAK (Light lunch served in Multi-Function Room)
1:15 – 2:30	**Panel 2: From Base to Gold: How can the United States Create Revolutionary Advantage?**
2:30 – 2:45	BREAK
2:45 – 4:00	**Panel 3: Revolutionary Robots and China as a Manufacturing Superpower**

DAY 2: WEDNESDAY 18 JUNE 2025

8:00 – 9:10	Registration (Mezzanine)
9:10 – 9:15	Welcome *COL Michael Shekleton (US Army War College)*
9:15 – 10:30	**Panel 4: The Alchemy of Military Revolutions for Great Power War**
10:30 – 10:45	BREAK
10:45 – 12:00	**Panel 5: Recipes for Order: Revolutionary Ingredients and the Alchemy of Rules**
12:00 – 1:15	LUNCH BREAK (Light lunch served in Multi-Function Room)
1:15 – 2:30	**Panel 6: SMA Showcase: Strategic Multilayer Alchemy Supporting the Warfighter**
2:30 – 2:45	BREAK
2:45 – 3:45	**Fireside Chat:** Lt Gen Dag Anderson (Joint Staff J7) & Dr. Anthony Pfaff (Army War College)
3:45 – 4:00	Closing Remarks *Rich Butler (Incoming SMA Director)*

Please visit the Graduate Student Poster Session in Multi-Function Room B

Graduate students will be by their posters during breaks and lunch. The Multi-Function Rooms will be open throughout the rest of the day.

Tuesday Panel Descriptions

THE MIND-TECH NEXUS IN CREATING REVOLUTIONARY ADVANTAGE

For two and a half decades, SMA has delivered exquisite problem framing to Commanders and senior defense officials facing complex challenges for which there are few easy answers. In these cases, effective strategy for the warfighter must be informed by heterogeneity of thought from experts across disciplines and from practitioners. SMA helps to connect profound changes in the "human terrain" facing Commanders today, or inescapable changes looming on the horizon, to practical opportunities that can create advantage for the warfighter today and tomorrow. We explore one example in this opening discussion: how human factors can be combined with the revolutionary technologies of our time to create advantage for the warfighter. Humans plus technology in the Mind-Tech Nexus.

Panelists: Lieutenant General Michael Groen (USMC, Retired, GroenTech LLC), Lauren Kahn (Georgetown University's Center for Security and Emerging Technology), Todd Veazie (USN, Retired), Dr. Nicholas Wright (Intelligent Biology)

Tuesday 17 June - Panel 1   10:45 – 12:00

COOKING UP THE NEXT REVOLUTIONS

Change always happens. Most of the time change is slow, meandering, or incremental. Occasionally, change is rapid, transformative, and revolutionary. This panel introduces the concept of revolutions—military, industrial, political, organizational, or fields intertwined—and explores what is happening today that seems most likely to revolutionize the operating environment looking forward from today. Research and recommendations in the military lane, international political economy, and across the other national security levers can provide options for advantage. New technologies are necessary, but technology alone is insufficient to drive transformative advantage. For example, interwar France had cutting edge technology but failed to innovate like the Germans (Blitzkrieg) or the British (RAF Fighter Command). Indeed, the first military revolution around 1600 centered on new organization and training entwined with portable firearms to create standing professional armies—changing the character of the state and society forever. Two centuries later, it was revolutionary France's social and political changes that drove military transformation. This panel is charged with thinking about what is next, and how should we play our gambles as we bridge the Mind-Tech Nexus between humans and new technology.

Moderator: Colonel Rich Butler (U.S. Army, Retired)
Panelists: Major General Bill Hix (U.S. Army, Retired), Dr. Michael Horowitz (University of Pennsylvania), Dr. Melanie Sisson (Brookings Institution)

Tuesday 17 June - Panel 2   1:15 – 2:30

FROM BASE TO GOLD: HOW CAN THE US CREATE REVOLUTIONARY ADVANTAGE

How can the United States create revolutionary changes that help it gain strategic advantage? This could include technological innovation in the military or wider society, the use of radically different trade policies, or new diplomatic moves. Revolutionary changes are often not recognized until they have happened. What are the indicators of revolutionary change—and once recognized, how can the United States harness the benefits of revolutionary changes and mitigate their risks? The US military must, for example, adapt fast enough to compete and be ready to fight tonight. What are the roles of the private sector and government as we go from 0 to 1, to 100, and 10,000,000? What are the impediments to adopting change, especially when it is revolutionary, and how can these be overcome?

Moderator: Alexa Courtney (Frontier Design)

Panelists: Lieutenant General Michael Nagata (U.S. Army, Retired, CACI), Greg Allen (CSIS Wadhwani AI Center), Dr. Frank Hoffman (National Security Scholar)

Tuesday 17 June - Panel 3	2:45 – 4:00

REVOLUTIONARY ROBOTS AND CHINA AS A MANUFACTURING SUPERPOWER

What happens if you've built the Maginot Line—and the other side has developed Blitzkrieg? Or if you have stealth aircraft—and they have quantum sensors? The United States and its allies won't always be the alchemists behind revolutionary surprises. What revolutionary changes may be in the pipeline from competitors like China? One example of how China has the ingredients for revolutionary advantage is its ability to churn out newer and better robotics at revolutionary scale. The same may be true for scaling artificial intelligence. How may these and other revolutionary changes may China leverage to create dominance in manufacturing and the service industry that could potential influence the security sphere? And China is not alone. What other revolutionary surprises may emerge from US competitors, singly or in concert? How can the United States be resilient enough to survive competitors' revolutionary surprises, and adapt fast enough to outmatch them?

Moderator: Dr. Nicholas Wright (Intelligent Biology)
Panelists: Dr. Jude Blanchette (RAND Corporation), Dr. Rob Atkinson (Information Technology & Innovation Foundation), Lieutenant General Michael Groen (USMC, Retired, GroenTech LLC)

Wednesday Panel Descriptions

Wednesday 18 June - Panel 4	9:15 – 10:30

THE ALCHEMY OF MILITARY REVOLUTIONS FOR GREAT POWER WAR

What revolutionary or transformative changes are afoot now or in the near future, that could affect war between great powers such as the United States and China? How might these revolutionary changes affect the ability to conduct strategically desirable offensive operations; or to conduct defensive operations; or affect the offense-defense balance? How might these changes create revolutionary advantage in a great power war at day 30, day 100, and day 2000? How can we better identify and adapt to these potential changes today, before conflict, to better prepare and deter?

Moderator: Dale Rielage (OSD Red Team)
Panelists: Dr. Thomas X. Hammes (Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University), Tom Greenwood (Institute for Defense Analyses), Dean Cheng (Potomac Institute for Policy Studies)

Wednesday 18 June - Panel 5	10:45 – 12:00

RECIPES FOR ORDER: REVOLUTIONARY INGREDIENTS AND THE ALCHEMY OF RULES

Revolutionary change is rarely the intentional work of a single author or innovator but is instead the result of a cacophony of actors and factors that all play a role in creating the opportunity for a revolution to emerge. This integrative panel inquires if the United States can shape the structure of revolutionary change by discerning the unwritten and written ways of operating in the world order. These rulesets can undergo revolutionary change, as the post-World War II order demonstrated. How can the United States anticipate, cope with, and benefit from altering the ruleset to gain advantage as power shifts across the interlocking system of military, broader security, economic, diplomatic, and political power?

Moderator: Todd Veazie (USN, Retired)
Panelists: Dr. Michael Mazarr (RAND Corporation), Josh Kerbel (National Intelligence University), Dr. Michael Vlahos (Institute for Peace and Diplomacy)

SMA SHOWCASE: STRATEGIC MULTILAYER ALCHEMY SUPPORTING THE WARFIGHTER

SMA supported the warfighter in unique ways over the last year. The work requested by the Combatant Commanders and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff showed the utility of analytic support provided by the decision-making sciences. We would like to share our efforts with our community of interest to continue to learn and support each other. Key projects included: Completing Strategic Deterrence Frameworks project; Developing and using our Automated Conditions Modeling Environment (ACME) complex systems model; and developing and using our Defense Analysis Planning Support Environment (DAPSE) model and application. SMA project leads will briefly describe these projects and their key findings to solicit feedback. SMA also anticipates an exciting future providing novel support to the warfighter. COL (Ret.) Rich Butler will offer thoughts on SMA's anticipated projects and propose ways that SMA products can be even more thoroughly integrated into planning processes and DOD software applications. With transformative changes in the strategic environment, SMA will continue to apply decision making sciences research across the seams between national policy, strategy, and operational art—all ingredients for the alchemy that can solve the warfighter's most pressing challenges.

Moderator: Dr. Larry Kuznar (NSI)
Panelists: Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI), Rich Butler (U.S. Army, Retired), Sarah Canna (NSI), Nicole Omundson (NSI)

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Biographies

Keynote Event: Fireside Chat

Lieutenant General Dagvin R. M. Anderson

Lt. Gen. Dagvin R.M. Anderson is the Director for Joint Force Development, Joint Staff, the Pentagon, Arlington, Virginia. The J7 supports the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) and the joint warfighter through joint force development (JFD) in order to advance the operational effectiveness of the current and future joint force. The J-7 is responsible for the six functions of joint force development: Doctrine, Education, Concept Development & Experimentation, Training, Exercises and Lessons Learned.

Originally from Ypsilanti, Michigan, Lt. Gen. Anderson was a distinguished graduate of the ROTC program at Washington University in St. Louis. He has flown the KC-135R, MC-130E, and U-28A operationally in several contingencies globally. He commanded a special operations squadron, an expeditionary squadron, an operations group, a special operations wing, and Special Operations Command, Africa. He was also the Commander of Joint Task Force-Quartz, the repositioning of U.S. forces from Somalia. He was a Fellow at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University and was an Olmsted Scholar in the Czech Republic. Lt. Gen. Anderson has completed six joint staff tours at various echelons.

C. Anthony Pfaff

Dr. Tony Pfaff is currently the Director of SSI & USAWC Press. He has served as the Research Professor for Strategy, the Military Profession, and Ethics at the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI), U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA. and a Senior Non-Resident Fellow at the Atlantic Council. A retired Army colonel and Foreign Area Officer (FAO) for the Middle East and North Africa, Dr. Pfaff recently served as Director for Iraq on the National Security Council Staff. His last active-duty posting was Senior Army and Military Advisor to the State Department from 2013-2016, where he served on the Policy Planning Staff advising on cyber, regional military affairs, the Arab Gulf Region, Iran, and security sector assistance reform. Prior to taking the State Department position, he served as the Defense Attaché in Baghdad, the Chief of International Military Affairs for US Army Central Command, and as the Defense Attaché in Kuwait. He served twice in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, once as the Deputy J2 for a Joint Special Operations Task Force and as the Senior Military Advisor for the Civilian Police Assistance Training Team. He also served as the Senior Intelligence Officer on the Iraq Intelligence Working Group and as a UN observer along the Iraq-Kuwait border. Prior to becoming a FAO, Dr. Pfaff served on the faculty at West Point as an assistant professor of Philosophy. As a company grade Army officer, he deployed to Operation DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM with 82nd Airborne Division and participated in Operation ABLE SENTRY with the 1st Armored Division. Dr. Pfaff has a bachelor's degree in Philosophy and Economics from Washington and Lee University, where he graduated cum laude with Honors in Philosophy; a master's degree in Philosophy from Stanford University, with a concentration in the History and Philosophy of Science and where received a graduate fellowship at the Center for Conflict and Negotiation; a master's in National Resource Management from the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, where he was a Distinguished Graduate; and a Doctorate in Philosophy from Georgetown University.

Masters of Ceremony

James Krakar

Mr. Jimmy Krakar is the Acting Director of the Strategic Multilayer Assessment in the Joint Staff Operations Directorate. His previous government employment was at USEUCOM as the Academic Coordinator. He has a background in Operational Environment analysis in support of Department of Defense clients, serving as the Team leader and lead analyst for the modeling and simulation efforts which provided on-site support to SOCCENT and CJTF-OIR. Before that he worked as a Counterinsurgency Advisor for the COMISAF Advisory Assistance Team (CAAT) in Afghanistan.

Militarily, Jimmy retired from USSOCOM J-8, which he supported as an Army Reservist. He had over 25 years of active and reserve military experience in Infantry, Civil Affairs, and Human Terrain operations, with deployments to Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan. His NATO experience included a tour at NATO Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ), where he served as a Plans Officer.

Jimmy received his BS in Military History from the United States Military Academy and an MS in Intelligence from American Military University, and he graduated the Defense Language Institute as a basic Arabic Linguist. His most recent military periodical publication was "The Civil Engagement Spectrum: A Tool for the Human Domain," published in the Sep/Oct 2015 issue of Military Review.

Colonel Mike Shekleton

Colonel Shekleton was commissioned as an infantry officer in 1996 from the United States Military Academy (USMA) at West Point where he majored in Mathematical Economics. He first served with the 1st Battalion, 508th Infantry (Airborne Battalion Combat Team) in Vicenza, Italy from 1997-2000 as an Airborne Rifle Platoon Leader, Airborne Mortar Platoon Leader, and Battalion S-1. His next operational assignment was with the 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry in the Army's first Stryker Brigade Combat Team where he served as a Battalion S-4, Stryker Infantry Company Commander, and Brigade Force Modernization Officer, to include a deployment to Iraq as part of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in 2003-4.

From 2004-6, he attended Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) where he earned an M.A. in International Relations with a concentration in Strategic Studies and a specialization in Economics and Quantitative Methods. He then taught in the Social Sciences Department at USMA. He designed, directed, and taught the capstone MX400 Officership course as well as the senior economics colloquium The Economics of Sports; he directed and taught the International Economics and Principles of Economics courses; and he taught the Basic Econometrics and Microeconomics courses.

After West Point, he transitioned into the Functional Area 59 (FA59) Strategist career field. He served as a strategic planner on the Army Staff in the Army Transformation and Campaign Plan Directorate from 2009-12. During this time, he deployed to Iraq in 2011 to serve in Operation NEW DAWN with the Iraq Training and Advisory Mission – Police. From 2012-16, he was the Director of the Basic Strategic Art Program (BSAP), the FA59 qualification course, at the US Army War College in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. He then served as the Strategy Branch Chief and later, Campaign Plan Branch Chief, in US Africa Command (USAFRICOM) in Stuttgart, Germany.

Next, Colonel Shekleton served as the Army War College Fellow at the Istituto Alti Studi per la Difesa (Institute of High Defense Studies) – the Italian joint war college – in Rome, Italy in 2018-19 where he also earned a second level Masters in Global Strategy and Security from the University of Torino, writing his thesis on the challenges

and opportunities of Security Force Assistance in Africa. Following this, he next served on the Army's Talent Management Task Force from 2019-21, where he was responsible for planning for the execution and expansion of the Chief of Staff of the Army's Command Assessment Program (CAP). From 2021-24, he served as the Chief of the Office of Defense Cooperation – Italy, where he transformed the office to be better prepared to tackle the challenges of the new European security environment. His latest assignment is as the Director of the Strategic Research and Analysis Department within the Strategic Studies Institute at the US Army War College.

Colonel Shekleton's research interests include Army institutional strategy, security cooperation, governance and security, strategy, and sports. He is married and has four beautiful daughters.

Panelists and Moderators

Gregory C. Allen

Gregory C. Allen is the director of the Wadhwani AI Center at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) where he leads a team of scholars researching AI policy, governance, diplomacy, geopolitics, and national security. Mr. Allen plays an important role in shaping the U.S. and allied AI policy agenda, including at major international fora such as the 2023 and 2024 G7 Summits and the AI Safety Summit series. His recent research focuses on AI and semiconductor export controls and U.S.-China AI competition. The Economist has described Mr. Allen's work in this field as "very much at the center of the formulation of current U.S. policy," and Semafor called him "the most-watched U.S. analyst on the subject." Prior to joining CSIS, Allen was the director of strategy and policy at the Department of Defense (DOD) Joint Artificial Intelligence Center, where he oversaw the development and implementation of the DOD's AI strategy. Before serving in the DOD, he was the head of market analysis and competitive strategy at Blue Origin and a corporate strategy consultant advising executives in the semiconductor, high-performance computing, robotics, and space/satellite industries. Mr. Allen holds a joint MPP/MBA degree from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government and the Harvard Business School.

Allison Astorino-Courtois

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois is President, National Security Practice. She has also served as co-chair of a National Academy of Sciences study, entitled Strategic Deterrence Military Capabilities in the 21st Century, and as a primary author on a study, entitled The Defense and Protection of US Space Assets. For the past 15 years, Allison has served as the Technical Lead on US Joint Staff-directed Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) projects in support of US Combatant Commands and Services. She is an expert in decision analysis, project design, and building conceptual and methodological foundations for quantitative and computational analysis. Projects for Combatant Command leadership have included the development of methodologies and analysis identifying the dynamics driving complex (multi-actor, multi-dimension) regional conflict systems; projecting the expected durability and viability of violent extremist organizations; determining provincial stability on US troop withdrawal in Afghanistan; assessing and tracking future economic, political, and social stability and future trajectories of nation-states and non-state actors; systematic, cognitive decision theory-based methods for identifying what deters specific actors under different conditions; and a variety of deterrence strategy and assessment methods and analyses.

Previously, Allison was a Senior Analyst at SAIC (2004-2007), where she served as a US Strategic Command liaison to US and international academic and business communities. Prior to SAIC, Allison was a tenured Associate Professor of International Relations at Texas A&M University in College Station, TX (1994-2003), where her research focused on the cognitive aspects of foreign policy decision making. She has received a number of academic grants and awards and has published articles in multiple peer-reviewed journals. Allison also taught at Creighton University and as a Visiting Instructor at the US Military Academy at West Point. She earned her PhD in International Relations and MA in Research Methods from New York University. Her BA is in Political Science from Boston College. Finally, Allison has the distinction of having been awarded both a US Navy Meritorious Service Award and a US Army Commander's Award.

Robert D. Atkinson

Dr. Robert D. Atkinson is founder and president of the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation (ITIF), the world's leading think tank for science and technology policy. He is an internationally recognized scholar, a widely published author, and a trusted adviser to policymakers around the world, with expertise in the broad economics of innovation and specific policy and regulatory questions around new and emerging technologies. Rob's most recent book, co-authored with David Moschella, is Technology Fears and Scapegoats: 40 Myths About Privacy, Jobs, AI, and Today's Innovation Economy.
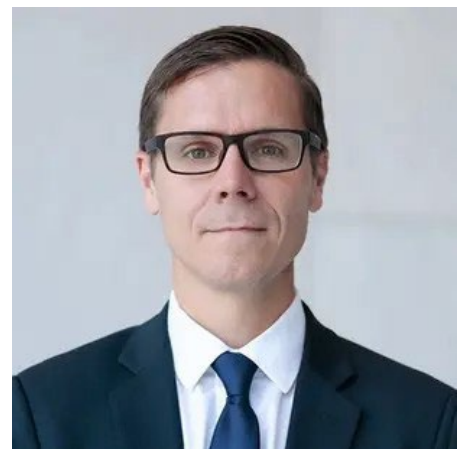
Before founding ITIF, Atkinson was Vice President of the Progressive Policy Institute and Director of PPI's Technology & New Economy Project. He received his Masters in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Oregon and was named a distinguished alumnus in 2014. He received his Ph.D. in City and Regional Planning from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1989.

Jude Blanchette

Jude Blanchette is the Distinguished Tang Chair in China Research, and the inaugural director of the RAND China Research Center. He is a leading expert on China's political landscape and focuses on expanding RAND's focus on China's domestic issues, including social, economic, demographic, and environmental challenges, as well as nonmilitary aspects of competition.

Previously, Blanchette held the Freeman Chair in China Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and served as engagement director at the Conference Board's China Center for Economics and Business in Beijing. He is a prolific writer featured in prominent publications and authored China's New Red Guards: The Return of Radicalism and the Rebirth of Mao Zedong. Blanchette holds a master's degree in modern Chinese studies from the University of Oxford and a bachelor's degree in economics from Loyola University Maryland.

COL (Ret.) Richard D. Butler

Rich Butler is the incoming Director of Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) on the Joint Staff with a mandate to directly support the warfighters. SMA helps resolve their most complex problems using the Decision Making Sciences (human, social, cultural, cognitive, and information) to assist military campaigning and associated senior leader decisions. Prior to joining SMA, he was a career military officer who originally hailed from Rush, New York.

Following his commissioning as a Surface Warfare Officer in the United States Navy in 1995, he held Division Officer and Department Head assignments on USS The Sullivans (DDG 68), USS Nicholson (DD 982), and USS Hopper (DDG 70). During this time, he took part in combat operations in Iraq and Kosovo. He was selected early for command and served twice as the Commanding Officer of USS Firebolt (PC 10) during Operation Iraqi Freedom. He also commanded USS Shamal (PC 13) and USS Thunderbolt (PC 11).

During a joint assignment with III Corps, U.S. Army, he deployed two more times to Iraq as Lead Planner and Deputy Chief of Plans. During these deployments he developed the planning for the surge and wrote the final drawdown plan for the campaign. In 2010, he received permission to change his commission from the United States Navy to the United States Army, where he performed duties as a Strategist.

As an Army Strategist, Rich served at U.S. Army, Pacific, performing duties as both the Southeast and Northeast Asia Plans Division Chief. He also deployed to Jerusalem, where he was the Lead Planner at the United States Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority. After attending the Army War College, he returned to U.S. Army, Pacific and assumed duties as the Assistant Chief of Staff, G5 responsible for strategy, campaigns, and operational plans. He then served as the Director of the Commanders Action Group and the Strategy and Policy Chief at U.S. Indo-Pacific Command before moving to South Korea to assume duties as the Alliance Plans Chief. During his final active duty assignment, he started and led the China Landpower Studies Center, the Army's China think tank.

Rich holds an undergraduate degree from the University of Rochester in history, and master's degrees from the Naval Postgraduate School in National Security Affairs, and the U.S. Army War College in Strategic Studies. He is also a graduate of the U.S. Naval War College. He is married to the former Jennifer Gould of Savannah, GA. They are the proud parents of an adult daughter, Bridget.

Rich's personal awards include the Defense Superior Service Medal (two awards), Legion of Merit (two awards), Bronze Star, Defense Meritorious Service Medal (three awards), and Meritorious Service Medal (two awards), Joint Commendation Medal, Navy Commendation Medal (two awards), Army Achievement Medal, Navy Achievement Medal (two awards), Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal and various campaign, service, and unit awards.

Sarah Canna

Sarah Canna is a Principal Analyst at NSI, Inc. She is responsible for managing research teams, analysis, deliverables, and senior leadership briefings for classified and unclassified US Government human and socio-cultural behavior projects. Recent efforts relate to strategic deterrence, anticipating the future operational environment, geopolitical competition below the threshold of war, information and influence operations, and state stability in the Middle East and Africa. Sarah serves as the research coordinator for the US Joint Staff-directed Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA), which provides decision and planning support to Combatant Command and Service leaders facing complex operational and technical imperatives that require collaborative, multi-agency, multi-disciplinary, and mixed-method analyses. She serves as a lead editor and integrator of reports and proceedings focused on topics, such as strategic competition, integrated deterrence, violent extremism, and adversarial intent. She also developed NSI's Virtual Think Tank (ViTTaTM) capability, designed to help military planners understand complex socio-cultural dynamics at play in evolving conflict situations by rapidly eliciting insights from an extensive expert network. This methodology has been employed in support of the US Joint Staff, USAFRICOM, USSTRATCOM, USCENTCOM, USINDOPACOM, USSOCOM, USEUCOM, USTRADOC, DHS Science & Technology, and the State Department's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization office. Sarah has a MA in Technology and Security from Georgetown University and a BA in Spanish and Latin American Studies from American University.

Dean Cheng

Dean Cheng is currently a non-resident Senior Fellow at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, and a non-resident fellow with the George Washington University Space Policy Institute. He was previously a Senior Advisor to the China program at the US Institute of Peace, after retiring after 13 years with the Heritage Foundation, where he was a senior research fellow on Chinese political and security affairs and wrote on various aspects of Chinese foreign and defense policy.

Prior to joining the Heritage Foundation, he was a senior analyst with the China Studies Division (previously, Project Asia) at CNA from 2001-2009. Before joining CNA, he was a senior analyst with Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) from 1996-2001. From 1993-1995, he was an analyst with the US Congress' Office of Technology Assessment in the International Security and Space Division, where he studied the Chinese defense industrial complex.

He is the author of the book China and the New Moon Race (GWU SPI, 2024), and Cyber Dragon: Inside China's Information Warfare and Cyber Operations (NY: Praeger Publishing, 2016), as well as a number of papers and book chapters examining various aspects of Chinese security affairs.

Alexa Courtney

Alexa Courtney helps organizations maximize performance and radically adapt to a changing world. As the founder and CEO of Frontier Design—an AI and impact advisory firm—she leads interdisciplinary teams of designers, strategists, red-teamers, engineers, and facilitators to deliver bold results for mission-driven clients across the U.S. government, Fortune 500 companies, top universities, and global foundations.

For more than two decades, Alexa has partnered with senior leaders to challenge the status quo, rebuild organizational culture, and co-create user-centered innovations. Passionate about preventing future failures of imagination, she has designed novel monitoring systems in conflict zones to better understand ground truth, developed AI training data pipelines in 280+ languages, and led testing and evaluation of large language models (LLMs) to mitigate catastrophic risk.

A skilled facilitator and network builder, Alexa has delivered over 500 workshops across sectors and geographies and lead assessment, research, and evaluation teams in South Asia, East and West Africa, and Eastern Europe. She brings deep expertise in systems thinking, human-centered design, and data analytics, honed through roles in public service and leadership positions at top consulting firms.

Alexa holds a B.A. from Yale University and an M.Sc. from the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies. She is a Fulbright Scholar, Presidential Management Fellow, Aspen Ideas Fellow, a Council on Foreign Relations Term Member and her innovations have been honored by Chevron and DevEx.

COL (Ret.) Thomas C. Greenwood

Tom Greenwood currently works as a Research Staff Member at the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) in Alexandria, Virginia. His area of focus is strategy, defense policy, and joint warfare. He served 31 years in the U.S. Marine Corps as an infantry officer where he conducted peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance operations (Philippines, Haiti, Sierra Leone, Indonesia and Sri Lanka) and counterinsurgency operations in Iraq. Before retiring in 2008, he commanded the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit and served as the Director of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College. From 2011-2015, he was Director of the Pakistan desk in the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy.

Tom served on the National Security Council staff at the White House under Presidents Clinton, G. W. Bush and Barack Obama where he worked on a diverse array of policy issues that included the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, foresight and drafting of National Security Strategy documents.

LtGen (Ret.) Michael Groen

Michael served over 37 years in the U.S. Marine Corps, culminating his career as the Director of the Joint Artificial Intelligence Center, and the senior executive for AI in the Department of Defense. He has previously served at the National Security Agency, leading Computer Network Operations, and as the Director of Joint Staff Intelligence (JSJ2). In that position he worked closely with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Secretary of Defense and Senior Leaders across the Department. Groen is an experienced Marine commander and multi-tour combat veteran in OIF/OEF. He is the author of, With the First Marine Division in Iraq, No Greater Friend, No Worse Enemy. His awards include the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, the Bronze Star and the National Intelligence Superior Service Medal.

Today, he works with a range of technology companies (Artificial Intelligence, defense, cybersecurity, data), helping them achieve their objectives in a fast-paced and highly competitive marketplace. He also seeks to inform transformational change in military capabilities against a backdrop of digitally enabled warfare, rapidly modernizing opponents, autonomous systems and challenges to American competitiveness. Michael is a graduate of the Naval War College and the Naval Postgraduate School, and has earned Master's Degrees in Electrical Engineering and Applied Physics.

COL (Ret.) Thomas X. Hammes

Dr. T. X. Hammes is a Distinguished Research Fellow at the Institutes for Strategic Studies. His current research focuses on the changing character of warfare. He served 30 years in the Marine Corps to include command of an infantry battalion, an intelligence battalion, and the Chemical Biological Incident Response Force. He served in Somalia and Iraq and trained insurgents in various locations. He is the author of three books and over 200 articles. Hammes holds a Doctorate in Modern History from Oxford University.
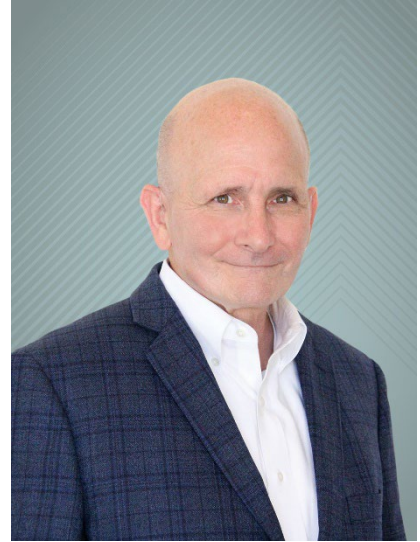
Major General (Ret.) Bill Hix

Bill Hix, a retired major general and formerly the U.S. Army's chief strategy officer, is founder and managing partner of Next Horizon Partners, a strategy and innovation consultancy. Next Horizon Partners provides services to a wide range of companies and organizations across the defense, security, and technology sectors.

A graduate of West Point, Bill's 37 years of service included assignments across much of Asia, as well as North Africa, Egypt, the Middle East, and Afghanistan, and, like many, served in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. He has extensive experience in various regions and with numerous geo-strategic issues around the globe, including leading the U.S. Army's initial engagements with China. He also led a number of Army and Joint strategy, change management, and innovation initiatives.

He was a Hoover Institution National Security Affairs Fellow, a Seminar 21 Fellow, and is affiliated with the Army Strategist Association and the Association of Wartime Allies, the preeminent advocate for Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) eligible persons. Bill recently completed his five-year appointment with the National Academy of Sciences' Board on Army Research and Development as well as serving with the recently divested Army Science Board. In his personal life, Bill and his wife, Sharon, devote time to their grandchildren and taming a hillside of rocks in the foothills of the Shenandoah Mountains.

Bill's research Interests include geo-politics, defense strategy and force modernization, and conflict resolution.

Bill's publications include "Assessing Counterinsurgency: The Iraq War, 2004–5," in Assessing War, from Georgetown University Press; "Accelerating into the Next Fight: The Imperative of the Offense on the Future Battlefield," at the Modern Warfare Institute; and "A Call to Arms on Behalf of Transforming Sustainment," in Army Magazine.

Frank Hoffman

Dr. Frank Hoffman is an independent defense analyst and national security scholar. He recently retired from federal service. His last appointment was as a Distinguished Research Fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University in Washington. His 46 years in the U.S. defense establishment includes 30 years with the U.S. Marine Corps as an infantry officer, program analyst, and concept developer. As a civilian, he has twice served in senior political appointments, including at the Department of Navy and the Department of Defense. In 2017-2018 Dr. Hoffman served as Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense and worked on the 2018 National Defense Strategy task force. As a scholar, Dr. Hoffman maintains a research portfolio in defense strategy and military innovation, and regularly lectures throughout the Joint professional military education system and abroad. He is affiliated with the Foreign Policy Research Institute, the Royal United Services Institute, and the University of South Florida. Dr. Hoffman has published extensively. His last book Mars Adapting: Military Change During War was published in 2021 by Naval Institute Press. His current project, Mars Unbound, deals with military innovation during the Second Industrial Revolution, and the implications of that era for today's policy leaders. Dr. Hoffman graduated from the Wharton Business School at the University of Pennsylvania. He holds Master's degrees from George Mason University and the U.S. Naval War College. He earned his Ph.D. from King's College, London.

Michael C. Horowitz

Dr. Michael C. Horowitz is Director of Perry World House and Richard Perry Professor at the University of Pennsylvania. He is also Senior Fellow for Technology and Innovation at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). From 2022 to 2024, he served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Development and Emerging Capabilities. He is the author of The Diffusion of Military Power: Causes and Consequences for International Politics, and the co-author of Why Leaders Fight. He won the Karl Deutsch Award given by the International Studies Association for early career contributions to the fields of international relations and peace research. He has published in a wide array of peer reviewed journals and popular outlets. His research interests include the intersection of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics with global politics, military innovation, the role of leaders in international politics, and geopolitical forecasting methodology. Professor Horowitz worked for the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy as a CFR International Affairs Fellow. He is a life member at CFR. Professor Horowitz received his Ph.D. in Government from Harvard University and his B.A. in political science from Emory University.

Lauren Kahn

Lauren Kahn is a senior research analyst at Georgetown University's Center for Security and Emerging Technology (CSET), focusing on the national security applications of AI research. Previously, she was a Policy Advisor for Force Development and Emerging Capabilities in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy at the U.S. Department of Defense. At the DoD, she worked extensively with external partners to develop national and international AI and autonomy policies and norms, as well as with internal DoD stakeholders to translate strategy into budget and programming decisions, ensuring the best and most cutting-edge tools and technologies reached our warfighters. Before entering government, she served as a research fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and Perry World House, the University of Pennsylvania's global policy think tank. Her work has appeared in Foreign Affairs, Defense One, Lawfare, War on the Rocks, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, The Washington Quarterly, and the Journal of Conflict Resolution, among other publications, and has been featured in The New York Times and The Economist.

Josh Kerbel

Josh Kerbel is a member of the research faculty at the National Intelligence University where he explores the increasingly complex security environment and the associated intelligence challenges. Prior to joining NIU, he held senior analytical positions at DIA, ODNI (including the NIC), the Navy staff, CIA, and ONI. His writings on the intersections of government (especially intelligence) and complexity have been published in *Foreign Policy, The Washington Post, Studies in Intelligence, Slate, The National Interest, The Hill, War on the Rocks, The Cipher Brief, Defense One, Parameters,* and other outlets. Mr. Kerbel has degrees from the George Washington University and the London School of Economics as well as professional certifications from the Naval War College and the Naval Postgraduate School. More recently he was a post-graduate fellow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Lawrence Kuznar

Dr. Lawrence Kuznar is Director of Cultural Sciences Research at NSI, Inc. He has a background in discourse analysis, decision theory, and mathematical and computational modeling. He has supported many U.S. Joint Staff Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) projects, as well as work for the Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL), the Army Corps of Engineers, and various private sector clients. Larry's discourse work has been used to provide anticipatory insights into violent non-state actors, such as ISIL and the Taliban, as well as state actors as varied as Iran, Pakistan, India, and North Korea. He has also contributed to NSI's computational modeling of social conflict. In addition to his position at NSI, Larry is an Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at Indiana University–Purdue University, Fort Wayne, and his published work can be found in journals, such as Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict, North Korean Review, American Anthropologist, Political Studies, Current Anthropology, Evolution and Human Behavior, and Social Science Computer Review.

Michael Mazarr

Dr. Michael J. Mazarr is a senior political scientist at RAND and a professor of policy analysis at the RAND School of Public Policy. Previously, he worked at the U.S. National War College, where he was professor and associate dean of academics; as president of the Henry L. Stimson Center; senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies; senior defense aide on Capitol Hill; and as a special assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. His primary interests are U.S. defense policy and force structure, disinformation and information manipulation, East Asian security, nuclear weapons and deterrence, and judgment and decision-making under uncertainty. Mazarr holds a Ph.D. in public policy from the University of Maryland.

Lieutenant General (Ret.) Michael K. Nagata

Michael K. Nagata is a Senior Vice President and Strategic Advisor for CACI International, and also owns and operates Hanada Bridge LLC, a national security and counterterrorism consulting firm. Retiring from the U.S. Army in 2019 after 38 years of active duty in the U.S. Army, with 34 years in U.S. Special Operations, his final assignment was Director of Strategic Operational Planning for the National Counterterrorism Center.

A native of Virginia, he graduated from Georgia State University, and first enlisted in the U.S. Army as an Infantry Private, later receiving his Commission as an Infantry Officer in 1982 from the U.S. Army Officer Candidate School. He served in the 2nd Infantry Division in Korea before volunteering for Army Special Forces in 1984. Assigned to the 1st Special Forces Group, he served in both 1st and 2nd Battalions. In 1990, he was selected for a Special Mission Unit and deployed extensively over several assignments there on contingency and combat operations. From 1999 to 2000, he commanded the Army's Special Forces Qualification Course. In 2000, he returned to a Special Mission Unit as a Squadron Commander and was involved in the initial combat deployments after the 9/11 attacks. After graduating from the National War College in 2003, he served in the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence. From 2005 to 2008, as a Special Mission Unit commander, he led multiple Joint Special Operations task forces across more than a dozen countries in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. He then served within the U.S. Intelligence Community in Washington D.C. as a Military Deputy for Counterterrorism until 2009. He then deployed again until late 2011 to Pakistan as the Deputy Chief, Office of the Defense Representative at the U.S. Embassy. Upon returning to the US, he served on the Joint Staff as the Deputy Director for Special Operations and Counterterrorism until 2013. From 2013 to 2015 he commanded U.S. Special Operations Command-Central, was responsible for Special Operations across the Central Command, and was heavily involved in the first two years of combat against the Islamic State. LTG (R) Nagata is a graduate of the Infantry Officer Basic and Advanced Courses, the Special Forces Qualification Course, the United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College, and the National War College in Washington D.C.

He and his wife Barbara have five children, and one granddaughter, who are the lights of their lives.

Nicole Omundson

Nicole Omundson is a Senior Analyst at NSI, Inc. She is responsible for managing research and analytical teams supporting US government clients, ensuring that the team remains within scope, within budget, and on schedule. She also conducts qualitative research and strategic analysis in support of US Joint Staff Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment (SMA) efforts, primarily focused on national security issues relevant to US Combatant Commands and Services. Since joining NSI, Nicole has contributed research and written reports on topics as varied as gray zone activities; terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa; commercial and government activities in outer space; great power competition; key actor interests in the Indo-Pacific and Middle East; and competing narratives in the African media space. She coordinated and hosted SMA's Speaker Series for over 6 years and started SMA's Weekly Newsletter. She was also the former editor of SMA's edited volume series, SMA Perspectives. Nicole began her career at NSI as an undergraduate intern supporting its private sector clients and was subsequently promoted to a full-time Associate Analyst supporting its government clients in 2016. She has since received promotions to Analyst and Senior Analyst. She graduated with honors from the University of San Diego, where she received her BA in Applied Mathematics and a Minor in Accountancy. Nicole also holds a certificate from Villanova University in Applied Project Management.

Melanie W. Sisson

Dr. Melanie W. Sisson is a senior fellow in the Brookings Foreign Policy program's Strobe Talbott Center for Security, Strategy, and Technology where she researches the use of the armed forces in international politics, strategies of deterrence, U.S. national security strategy, defense policy, and defense applications of emerging technologies. She is author of the book The United States, China, and the Competition for Control (2025), and co-editor with James Siebens and Barry Blechman of the book Military Coercion and U.S. Foreign Policy: The Use of Force Short of War (2020). Melanie earned a doctorate in political science from the University of Colorado at Boulder, and a master's from the Columbia University School of International Affairs.

Dale Rielage

Dale Rielage is the founding director of the U.S. Department of Defense's highest-level red team, building on three decades of operational and intelligence community experience to provide senior Defense Department decision-makers with independent insights into strategic competitor perspectives and decision-making, as well as to assess potential competitor responses to departmental plans and activities.

Todd Veazie

Todd Veazie served as Director of the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) office in the Joint Staff's Operations Directorate. Prior to reentering public service, Todd was the Chief Operating Officer at Kiernan Group Holdings, Inc a global consulting firm specializing in law enforcement, risk services, defense, intelligence, emergency management, and critical infrastructure resiliency.

Todd served for thirty years in the United States Navy attaining the rank of Captain. He transitioned to the federal executive service and was assigned to the National Counterterrorism Center. At NCTC he led a talented team that provided dispassionate, whole of government assessments and strategic decision support to the President and his National Security Council staff.
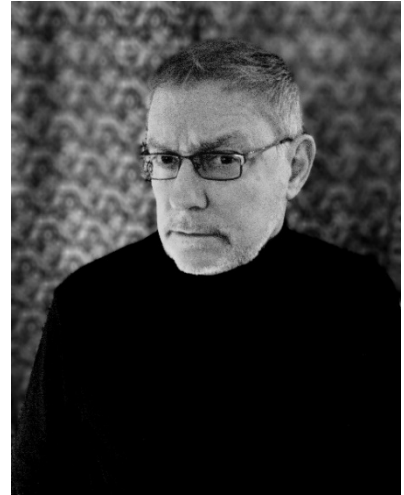

He was born in Washington D.C. and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Marine Science from the University of South Carolina and was commissioned in 1986. After commissioning he reported to Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training. As a Naval Special Warfare (NSW) SEAL officer he served in East and West Coast SEAL Teams and deployed to over fifty countries around the globe. He led Naval Special Warfare formations in the execution of combat and peacetime special operations missions in Latin America, Europe, Africa, the Western Pacific, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Command tours include SEAL Team SEVEN in San Diego, Naval Special Warfare Unit THREE in Bahrain as well as duty as Commodore, Naval Special Warfare Group FOUR in Virginia Beach.

Todd served in numerous staff assignments that include the Executive Director of Joining Forces in the Office of the First Lady at the White House, personnel policy at the Bureau of Naval Personnel, the Assistant Chief of Staff for Resources, Requirements, and Assessments (J8) for the Commander, Naval Special Warfare Command and in the Operations Directorate (J3) on the Joint Staff at the Pentagon. He is a 2003 Graduate of the National War College earning a Master's Degree in National Security Strategy.

Michael Vlahos

Dr. Michael Vlahos is a writer and author of the book *Fighting Identity: Sacred War and World Change*. Over several decades, he has taught war and strategy at Johns Hopkins University, the Naval War College, and Centro de Estudios Superiores Navales (CDMX) and is a weekly contributor to The John Batchelor Show. Dr. Vlahos served as the director of the Center for the Study of Foreign Affairs at the U.S. State Department. He has also authored several books published by Johns Hopkins/SAIS and the U.S. State Department, and his commentary has appeared in Washington Quarterly, Foreign Policy, Foreign Affairs, National Review and the Times Literary Supplement.

Nicholas Wright

Dr. Nicholas Wright uses insights from neuroscience, behaviour and technology to understand competition and conflict. He is an affiliated scholar at Georgetown University, Honorary Senior Research Fellow at University College London (UCL), Consultant at Intelligent Biology, and Adjunct Fellow (Non-Resident) at Washington D.C.'s Center for Strategic and International Studies. His new book, Warhead: How the brain shapes war and war shapes the brain, will be published in October 2025 by Pan Macmillan (UK) and St. Martin's Press (US).

He has advised the Pentagon Joint Staff for over a decade. On artificial intelligence (AI) he advises Europe's largest tech company, SAP. DARPA used his definition of gray zone conflict for their recent AI programme on the gray zone. Foreign Affairs chose his piece on AI for its Top 10 of 2018 on the net. He edited the book Artificial Intelligence, China, Russia and Global Order (Air University Press, 2019), and co-edited Human, Machine, War: How the Mind-Tech Nexus will Win Future Wars (Air University Press, 2025). He has collaborated with Peking University. He has led Track 1.5 dialogues e.g., with the White House, UK Cabinet Office and Australian Prime Minister's office, as well as with the Australian and Canadian Government Chief Scientists.

He previously worked in nuclear policy at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington DC; used functional brain imaging at UCL and the London School of Economics; and was a neurology doctor in Oxford and London. The Economist and The New York Times covered his academic research. He has published in Foreign Affairs, The Atlantic, and appeared on the BBC and CNN.

He has a medical degree from UCL, a BSc in Health Policy from Imperial College London, Membership of the Royal College of Physicians (UK), and an MSc in Neuroscience and a PhD in Neuroscience both from UCL.

Graduate Poster Presenters

Jason Berteotti

Jason is a doctoral student within the Political Science department at Purdue University studying international relations and quantitative methodology. He has a strong background in international economics, macroeconomics, and statistics. His research focuses on how great powers utilize complex interdependence networks such as international financial systems, information systems, and supply chains to engage in power competition with each other - often highlighting economic and security relations between the United States and China. His methodological interests focus on Bayesian, time series, and network analysis, as well as game theory modeling.

Chris Boyington

Chris Boyington holds a Master of Science with a focus in Global Communication from Oklahoma State University, where he served as President of the Graduate Student Association for the School of Media and Strategic Communications. His research focuses on international relations and public diplomacy, with emphasis on narrative framing and thematic analysis. As a Research Assistant with the MESA Group, Chris investigates regional communication dynamics and policy implications. Concurrently, his work with the Euro-Atlantic Initiative involves analyzing information strategies and international relations frameworks in Eastern Europe. These roles have allowed him to develop expertise in stakeholder engagement analysis and strategic communication across complex intercultural contexts. Chris's academic focus is reinforced by his professional background in the technology sector, where he is currently a Senior Account Executive at Oracle. Combining expertise in strategic and mass communication research, his scholarship explores how diplomatic discourse, and emerging technologies reshape the global information environment.

Captain Joshua Hood

Capt Joshua Hood is a Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF) PhD Fellow, currently pursuing a doctorate in Political Science at Northwestern University. His research focuses on strategic competition, alignment behavior, and conflict dynamics in fragile and contested states.

Capt Hood began his military career as an enlisted Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) technician and deployed to Afghanistan in support of combat operations. After commissioning, he transitioned to the Intelligence career field and has deployed multiple times globally in support of special operations and irregular warfare missions. He has served in various roles as an intelligence officer, counterterrorism analyst, and special operations liaison, applying tactical insight to strategic-level planning and analysis.

He holds an MPhil in Public Policy (MPP) from the University of Cambridge. Capt Hood brings a unique blend of operational experience and academic expertise to inform U.S. national security strategy and defense policy.

Please visit the Graduate Student Poster Session in Multi-Purpose Room B

Graduate students will be by their posters during breaks and lunch. The Multi-Function Room will be open throughout the rest of the day.

SMA Conference Graduate Student Poster Session

Location: Multi-Function Room
Poster presenters will be by their posters during breaks and lunch. The Multi-Function Room will be open throughout the rest of the day.

Exorbitant Resilience: The Unyielding Power of the United States Dollar

Jason Berteotti

The United States Dollar (USD) is persistently predicted to be in a state of decline within the global economy which, if true, would be of grave concern due to the currency's strength being the backbone of the U.S. hegemony. Past research has argued that this is largely due to the United States' weaponization of the global economy, particularly through its use of economic sanctions, with an accompanying prediction that other nations will rally to supplant the USD's dominant position if the U.S. continues to engage in economic warfare. This project argues that the privileged position of the USD is a "sticky" institution which holds strong even as the U.S. places record numbers of sanctions. Using time series analysis, the project shows that the reserve currency share of the USD not only remains strong despite the exponential growth in the number of sanctions being placed, but that the demand for the USD as a reserve currency experiences a net increase when the U.S. imposes sanctions. The project also shows that the United States' leveraging of financial institutions such as the SWIFT payment system has not impeded the growth of the SWIFT system, an important mechanism of the USD's dominance, nor has it allowed for the success of competing platforms such as China's CIPS. This shows that the United States has an exceptional advantage when weaponizing financial interdependence networks due to the exorbitantly low costs that it faces in comparison to the goals that can be achieved with this set of foreign policy tools. The project shows that increasing the use of economic warfare in the current mix of defense and foreign policy, especially against revisionists states such as China, would provide the United States with a revolutionary advantage in terms of national security and the global economy.

Balancing Narratives in the Balkans: Strategic Information Engagement in Serbian Media Environments

Chris Boyington

This poster presents findings from my summer 2024 embedded research with the Balkan Security Network in Serbia, examining how competing information operations shape Serbian public opinion and geopolitical positioning. Drawing on direct observation, media analysis, and interviews with Serbian journalists and government officials, I document how Russian information operations leverage historical grievances, religious ties, and economic dependencies to create anti-Western narratives that hinder Euro-Atlantic integration. The research identifies a "dichotomy of perception" in Serbian public opinion where emotional pro-Russian sentiment coexists with rational recognition of potential EU economic benefits. The poster will illustrate successful counter-messaging strategies observed in the field, including how the commemoration of shared US-Serbian historical cooperation (Operation Halyard) provides an effective counter-narrative to anti-Western messaging. These findings offer insights into how strategic communication can create "revolutionary advantage" by addressing both emotional and rational dimensions of target audiences, particularly in regions with complex historical and geopolitical contexts. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing information resilience strategies that can effectively compete in contested narrative environments where traditional power dynamics are rapidly evolving. This research directly addresses the conference theme by examining how revolutionary changes in information environments influence national security outcomes. The case study of Serbia demonstrates how traditional power dynamics are being challenged through strategic information operations, creating new battlefields in the cognitive domain. By identifying patterns in Russian information operations and effective counter-strategies, this research contributes to understanding how Western engagement can adapt in the competition for influence in strategically important regions. Beyond observation and analysis, this research

involved active participation in developing and disseminating counter-narratives through published articles and event planning, demonstrating how proactive engagement can help shape information environments in contested spaces. Methodology: The research employed ethnographic field methods including participant observation, semi-structured interviews with media professionals and government officials, content analysis of Serbian media, and documentation of public information environments in both urban and rural settings. This multi-method approach allowed for triangulation of findings across diverse sources and contexts, providing a comprehensive picture of information operations in practice.

Why States Choose Sides: Alignment Decisions and the Battle for Strategic Influence in Africa
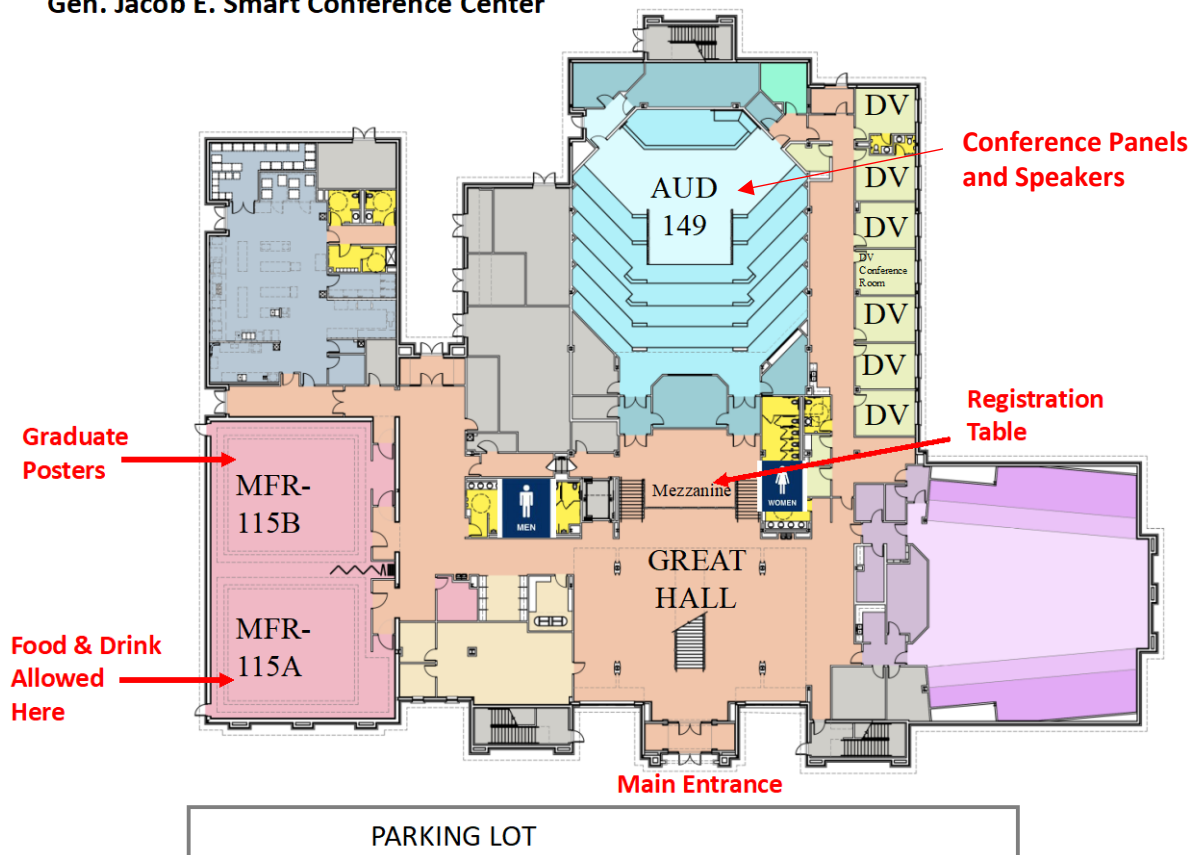
Captain Joshua A. Hood

As strategic competition among great powers—such as the United States, China, and Russia—intensifies, African states face increasing pressure and incentives to align with a specific competitor. Great Power Competition (GPC) actors' efforts to exert influence through military, economic, or political means place African states at unique decision points. While significant analysis has focused on the ambitions and possible repercussions for the great powers, far less attention has been given to the decision-making processes and internal dynamics of the countries being targeted. This poster explores the factors and rationale behind African states' alignment decisions amidst competing GPC pressures. Through multi-method research analyzing varying levels of state capacity and external pressure, the project investigates how omnibalancing, historical norms, and coercion shape alignment outcomes. By examining case studies where multiple GPC actors are present—such as Sudan and Djibouti—the project reveals the underlying drivers of alignment. More importantly, fully understanding the mechanisms behind alignment provides policymakers and the DoD with a practical framework for countering adversaries and sustaining long-term strategic advantage in an increasingly contested environment.

Conference Center Information

General Jacob E Smart Conference Center
1359 Arkansas Rd.
Joint Base Andrews

Gen. Jacob E. Smart Conference Center

<u>Food & Beverages at the Smart Conference Center</u>

- Auditorium: Only beverages with a lid

- Multi-Function Rooms: Food and Drink allowed at all times

- Complimentary tea and coffee and snacks available during morning and afternoon breaks.

- A light lunch will be served.

- Vending machine with snacks and soda for purchase