

CENTER for  
**STRATEGIC STUDIES**  
STRATEGY • DIPLOMACY • WAR

ANNUAL  
REPORT  
**2024**

**Tufts**  
UNIVERSITY



THE FLETCHER  
SCHOOL

**Center for Strategic Studies**

**The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy**

**Tufts University**

**Annual Report 2024**

**December 2024**

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## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

This academic year has been productive for the Center for Strategic Studies (CSS). We have produced groundbreaking research, engaged with the broader policy community, and brought our expertise to the student body of The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. To accomplish what we have required a focus on fundamentals and some hard choices regarding how to focus our operations to produce the greatest impact with the resources available.

While the Center remains a home of vibrant scholarship, a declining funding base has forced us to tailor our operations to ensure we carry out our mission of bringing top-quality scholarship that influences policymakers and enhances the intellectual environment at The Fletcher School. To do so, we have chosen to target our funds on core scholarship and disseminate it to the broader security community. This has meant shedding some long-cherished programs at The Fletcher School that we determined did not produce the reach in policy-relevant scholarship or student engagement that we were hoping for. Consequently, we shuttered the Engaging Practitioners lunches and Research and Policy Seminars. We still believe in the value of these programs, but their reach was deemed too narrow and their impact on either policy or student engagement too small to warrant resources at present.

This year the Center focused heavily on research, producing four working papers, three from our Afghanistan Assumptions Project and an additional paper on the People's Republic of China's Views of Security. This latter was the result of an academic workshop, which attracted top-tier China scholars and seasoned security practitioners with experience engaging the PRC. Authors leveraged these papers to speak at multiple for a and further disseminate the lessons of our research. Within The Fletcher School, the Center has been instrumental in organizing and supporting multi-disciplinary research that leveraged current events to bring the insights and lessons of CSS scholarship to The Fletcher School's student body and the larger Tufts community. This includes a highly attended book launch event to introduce the Center's book, *Dying by the Sword* to the Fletcher community.

Meanwhile, CSS scholars continue to leverage their time with the Center to move into roles of importance in academia, business, and government. Polina Beliakova accepted a tenure-track position at American University and Scott McDonald accepted a tenure-track position at the University of North Georgia. Zoltan Feher accepted a position as a Visiting Scholar at the Institute for Security and Conflict Studies at the Elliot School of The George Washington University. Meanwhile, Neha Ansari has been hired by the United States (U.S.) Congress's Afghanistan War Commission as a senior analyst.

Please check us out online to learn more about the research and activities taking place at CSS and our take on all things strategic, diplomatic, and war-related happening around the globe. We look forward to your feedback in person and by email.

I wish you all the best in the coming year.

## CSS TEAM AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

In 2024, Director Monica Toft undertook extensive efforts to maintain the CSS team with limited funding. Under Prof. Toft's leadership, the Center chose to emphasize grant-supported research while tailoring our on-campus programming to reach a broader audience. Her selection as Academic Dean has taken a significant portion of her administrative time but that was mitigated by having a dedicated assistant director.

During this academic year, the Center employed an average of four research assistants in support of the Afghanistan Assumptions project. However, the spring semester saw the project fundraising heavily to keep the project going. As a result of our first two working papers and associated policy engagement, Monica Toft secured additional funding from the Stand Together Foundation, as well as a few private gifts, to support the Afghanistan Assumptions project for the next academic year. With a constrained budget, we will be hiring fewer research assistants for the Afghanistan Assumptions project in the coming year, but with processes already in place and some outstanding candidates, we should be able to maintain our publishing cadence.

Assistant Director Scott McDonald also secured a Koch Foundation grant to study perceptions of security in the People's Republic of China. He leveraged these funds to support the assistant director's salary, as well as his research and the hosting of an academic workshop.

Overall, through careful management, a focus on quality research, and partnerships with other research centers at The Fletcher School, CSS was able to continue to produce policy-relevant scholarship and enhance the academic experience with quality programs.

As of December 1, 2024, the CSS team is composed of the following individuals:

### **Monica Duffy Toft**

*Director, Center for Strategic Studies, Academic Dean, Professor of International Politics*

Before joining The Fletcher School, Professor Monica Duffy Toft taught at Oxford University's Blavatnik School of Government and Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. While at Harvard, she directed the Initiative on Religion in International Affairs and was the assistant director of the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies. She was educated at the University of Chicago (M.A. and PhD in political science) and the University of California, Santa Barbara (B.A. in political science and Slavic languages and literature, summa cum laude). Prior to this, she spent four years in the United States Army as a Russian linguist. Monica's areas of research include international security, ethnic and religious violence, civil wars, and demography. She is the author of 12 books, including most recently, *Dying by the Sword* (Oxford 2023), with Sidita Kushi, and *Civil Wars: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford 2024).

## **Scott D. McDonald**

*Assistant Director and Lecturer*

Scott D. McDonald was the Assistant Director at the Center for Strategic Studies until August 2025. He has previously taught at Wellesley College and the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies. He was educated at the The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, where he defended his Ph.D. dissertation during this academic year. He also attended the Naval Postgraduate School (M.A.), The George Washington University (B.A.), Monterey Peninsula College (A.A.), and the Seminar XXI program for national security leaders managed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Scott also has extensive policy, strategic, and operational experience from his time in the US Marine Corps China Foreign Area Office. This included diplomatic tours in Australia and Taiwan, an operational tour in Okinawa, Japan, and over a decade living in the Indo-Pacific. His research interests include the intersection of individual philosophy and foreign policy decision-making. Scott's doctoral research focuses on the extent to which classical Chinese philosophy influences the leadership of the People's Republic of China. His published work focuses largely on security in the Indo-Pacific Region, including co-edited volumes on *The Future of the United States-Australia Alliance* and *China's Global Reach*, both of which include chapters by Scott. He has also published on the impact of traditional ideas on PRC policy in the *Naval War College Review*, and US-China Policy in *The Fletcher Security Review* and strategic Competition in the *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*. In addition, his commentary on US policy has been published by *The Conversation* and *The National Interest*. You can find more information about Scott's research and teaching at <https://sites.tufts.edu/mcdonald/>.

## **Mathew Jie Sheng Yeo**

*Assistant Director*

Mathew Yeo has been serving as the Assistant Director of the Center for Strategic Studies since September 2024. He is a PhD student at the Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy, where his research focuses on hegemonic transitions and strategic relations between the United States and China. Mathew also works as a researcher at the Taejae Future Consensus Institute, a think-tank based in Seoul, South Korea. As part of the US-China team, he examines possible starting points in fostering cooperative relations between the two nations. Mathew holds an MA in International Studies from Seoul National University, Graduate School of International Studies, and completed his undergraduate education in Public Policy & Global Affairs at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.

## **Zachary Udin**

### *Research Assistant Fellow*

Zachary Udin is a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy (MALD) student at the Fletcher School with fields of study International Security and Global Governance & International Organizations. In addition to working for the CSS, Zachary also serves as Managing Editor of the *Fletcher Security Review*. His research interests include U.S. grand strategy, U.S. relations with Pacific Island nations, and defense security cooperation. Prior to attending the Fletcher School, he worked for six years at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government agency that monitors the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad and makes policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress. Zack started as a Government Affairs Intern in 2017 and departed in the role of Research Analyst responsible for monitoring religious freedom in Latin America and Sri Lanka.

## **Cassandra Cronin**

### *Research Assistant Fellow*

Cassandra Cronin graduated from the MALD program in May 2024, after specializing in International Security and International Negotiation & Conflict Resolution. Prior to Fletcher, Cassandra was a summer fellow with the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration and International Economic Policy Subcommittee and worked as the Political Associate at Foreign Policy for America, where she led the organization's political endorsement process and volunteer organizing efforts. Cassandra is a 2022 recipient of the Charles B. Rangel International Affairs Fellowship and will enter the U.S. Foreign Service upon graduation. Cassandra received her BA from Wellesley College, where she majored in Peace and Justice Studies and Spanish.

## **Ariel Daniels**

### *Research Assistant Fellow*

Ariel Daniels graduated from the MALD program in May 2024, after specializing in International Security and International Negotiation & Conflict Resolution. Her regional focus is the Middle East and North Africa, specifically the Maghreb, and she speaks French and Modern Standard Arabic. Ariel received her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and International Affairs from Mercer University and was awarded a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant grant to Morocco. Ariel is a 2021 Thomas R. Pickering Foreign Affairs Graduate Fellow and plans to serve as a Foreign Service Officer after graduation from the Fletcher School.

## Fellows

### James D. Boys

Dr. James D. Boys is a Visiting Scholar at the Fletcher School's Center for Strategic Studies. He was a Senior Visiting Research Fellow at King's College London from 2012-15, and Professor of International Political Studies at Richmond University in London, where he taught from 2006-2019. His current research examines the application of the Madman Theory in U.S. Grand Strategy. He has authored three books: *Clinton's Grand Strategy* (Bloomsbury, 2015), *Hillary Rising* (Biteback, 2016), and *Clinton's War on Terror* (Lynne Rienner, 2018). His research papers have been published in *The Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *Politics, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, *Intelligence and National Security*, and *Congress and the Presidency*. Since 2007 his keen insight into U.S. politics and foreign affairs has made him a regular guest on CNN, the BBC, Sky News, and CNBC. You can view James' publications and media work at [www.jamesdboys.com](http://www.jamesdboys.com) and follow him on Twitter @jamesdboys.

### Michael A. Cohen

Michael A. Cohen is a non-resident fellow at the Eurasia Group Foundation, a columnist at MSNBC and the New Republic, a contributing writer at the Daily Beast, the publisher of the newsletter *Truth and Consequences*, and a prolific writer on international affairs and American politics.

Cohen previously served as a speechwriter at the State Department for the US Ambassador to the United Nations, Bill Richardson, and Undersecretary of Economic Affairs, Stuart Eizenstat. Before that, he served as a speechwriter for US Senator Chris Dodd of Connecticut.

Since then he has worked at a host of policy think tanks including the New America Foundation, where he co-helmed the *Privatization of Foreign Policy Initiative*, the Century Foundation, the American Security Project, and the World Policy Institute.

In 2009-10, he was a prominent dissenting voice on the US surge in Afghanistan, writing numerous articles critiquing US policy, as well as several journal articles on counter-insurgency and military strategy. He traveled to Afghanistan in 2011, where he served as an election observer on behalf of the US State Department.

For the past 15 years, he's been a journalist writing on politics and international affairs for a host of news outlets. From 2014 to 2021, he was a national columnist for the Boston Globe. Previously he has been a columnist at *Foreign Policy* magazine, the *Guardian*, the *London Observer*, and *World Politics Review*. He's also written for the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Atlantic*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The Nation*, *Foreign Affairs*, *World Policy Journal*, *Dissent*, and *Democracy*.

Cohen has written three books, "Live From the Campaign Trail: The Greatest Presidential Campaign Speeches of the 20th Century," (Bloomsbury 2008) *American Maelstrom: The 1968 Election and The Politics of Division*" (Oxford University Press, 2016), and "Clear Present Safety: The World Has Never Been Better and Why That Matters to Americans" (Yale University Press,



2019), co-written with Micah Zenko. The latter book was inspired by their seminal 2012 article in *Foreign Affairs* of the same name.

Cohen has a bachelor's degree from American University and a Master's of International Affairs from Columbia University, where he's also served as an adjunct professor.

### **Christopher Preble**

Christopher Preble is a Senior Fellow and Director of the Reimagining U.S. Grand Strategy Program at the Stimson Center, where his work focuses on the history of U.S. foreign policy, contemporary U.S. grand strategy and military force posture, and the intersection of trade and national security. He has written extensively on counterinsurgency doctrine and state-building, including in the context of the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Previously, Preble was co-director of the New American Engagement Initiative in the Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security at the Atlantic Council; vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute; and director of foreign policy studies from 2003 to 2011. Preble was a commissioned officer in the U.S. Navy and served aboard the USS Ticonderoga (CG-47) from 1990 to 1993.

Preble is the author of four books and co-hosts the “Net Assessment” podcast in the War on the Rocks network. He teaches U.S. foreign policy at the University of California, Washington Center, and has also taught history at St. Cloud State University and Temple University. He is a life member of the Council on Foreign Relations and his work has appeared in many major publications, including the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Financial Times*, *The National Interest*, and *National Review*.

Preble graduated from George Washington University and received a PhD in history from Temple University.

### **Sidita Kushi**

Sidita Kushi is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Bridgewater State University and a Non-Residential Fellow at the Center for Strategic Studies at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. She teaches courses on international relations, U.S. foreign policy, globalization and global governance, and quantitative methods. She served as a research director at the Center for Strategic Studies, where she led the Military Intervention Project (MIP). She is the author of *Dying by the Sword: The Militarization of U.S. Foreign Policy* (2023, Oxford University Press) and academic articles on military interventions, intrastate conflict, and the gendered dynamics of economic crises, published in *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *International Relations*, *Comparative European Politics*, *European Security*, *World Affairs*, *International Labour Review*, *Mediterranean Quarterly*, amongst others. Her second book, *From Kosovo to Darfur: Why Humanitarian Militarism Favors the West*, is forthcoming

from the University of Michigan Press. Sidita also contributes to public scholarship within *Foreign Affairs*, *The Washington Post*, MSNBC, *The National Interest*, and more. Sidita specializes in mixed-methods research and has produced datasets on the regional selectivity of humanitarian military interventions, trends on U.S. military interventions, and policy responses to global economic crises. Sidita previously served as a Lecturer in International Relations and Statistics at Northeastern University, where she won an Outstanding Teaching Award, and as a Poli/Econ researcher at the U.S. Department of State.

## Visiting Scholar

### Wei Hongchi

Dr. Hongchi Wei is a visiting scholar at the Fletcher School's Center for Strategic Studies, Tufts University. She is an associate professor of international studies at China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU). She received a PhD. In international relations from CFAU and a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. Her research focuses on international relations theory, international political discourse, and U.S.-China relations. She is currently working on a project on global internet governance discourse and practice.

## PhD Research Fellows

### Lima Ahmad

Lima Ahmad is a PhD candidate in the fields of International Security and Conflict Resolution at the Fletcher School of Tufts University. She is the Co-Founder of "the I See You Campaign," an anti-corruption campaign in Afghanistan. She also founded Paywand Afghanan Association which focuses on research projects regarding women's issues. She has worked on several development projects with national and international organizations, mainly focusing on Gender Mainstreaming at the policy level. Ms. Ahmad has worked as Monitoring and Evaluation Director with the Administrative Office of President Ashraf Ghani, where she worked on system development and primarily system reforms to ensure accountability in the governmental institutions. Ms. Ahmad organized the South Asian Youth Conference in Kabul in 2017 that focused on Youth and Violence and Gender issues. She also organized the Women's Empowerment Fair in 2017 by USAID for 1500 women participants that showcased women's empowerment programs of international partners in Afghanistan. Ms. Ahmad is an independent researcher with two search reports published, "Women's Penal System in Afghanistan" and "Women's Participation in the Peace Process of Afghanistan." Her coming research projects are concerned with Women's inclusion in the Security Sector, Afghan Peace Talks with the Taliban, and Security Sector Reform. Her areas of expertise: Institutional Reforms, Women and Security, and Conflict Resolution. Her regional areas of expertise are Afghanistan, South Asia, and MENA Region. Her regional areas of expertise are Afghanistan, South Asia, and MENA Region.

## **David Kampf**

David Kampf is a PhD candidate at the Fletcher School at Tufts University. His research focuses on conflict, foreign intervention, migration, terrorism, illicit networks, and humanitarian crises. He previously directed communications for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and oversaw communications for the U.S. Agency for International Development in Rwanda. His writing has appeared in The New York Times, Washington Post, Foreign Policy, War on the Rocks, POLITICO Magazine, and others. He holds an M.A. in international affairs from Columbia University, where he was editor-in-chief of the Journal of International Affairs and a B.A. in political science from Bates College.

## **Faculty Associates**

- Eileen Babbitt, Professor of Practice of International Conflict Management, Director of the Institute for Human Security, and Co-Director of the Program on Human Rights and Conflict Resolution, The Fletcher School
- Michael Beckley, Associate Professor of Political Science at Tufts University and a Jeane Kirkpatrick Visiting Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute
- Daniel Drezner, Professor of International Politics, The Fletcher School
- David Ekbladh, Associate Professor of History, Department of History, Tufts University
- Michael Glennon, Professor of International Law, The Fletcher School
- Alan Henrikson, Lee E. Dirks Professor of Diplomatic History and the Director of Diplomatic Studies, The Fletcher School
- Ian Johnstone, Professor of International Law, The Fletcher School
- Chris Miller, Professor of International History, The Fletcher School
- Richard Shultz, Professor of International Politics and Director of the International Security Studies Program, The Fletcher School
- Jeffrey Taliaferro, Associate Professor of Political Science, Department of Political Science, Tufts University

## CSS STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Following our mission statement, CSS presents “serves as a hub for students, faculty, scholars, and practitioners to engage with one another in a supportive, collaborative, and collegial environment.” Consequently, the Center attempts to organize and participate in events that bring the research community to students at The Fletcher School in fora that are both informative and intellectually challenging. This year, we shifted to developing and creating more events that would reach a wider audience at Fletcher and in the wider Tufts community.

### ***Book Launch: *Dying by the Sword: The Militarization of US Foreign Policy****

To celebrate the publication of Professor and Academic Dean Monica Toft's latest book, CSS organized a book launch event at The Fletcher School. This event consisted of a presentation of the book's findings, followed by a panel discussion and reception. Unfortunately, co-author, Dr. Sidita Kushi, a CSS alumnus now teaching at Bridgewater State University, contracted COVID and was unable to participate. However, Ambassador Donald Heflin moderated an informative panel discussion with Prof Toft and The Fletcher School's own legal scholar, Prof Michael Glennon. The well-attended panel discussed the extent and impact of the militarization of US foreign policy. Following the panel, a lively discussion continued during a reception, at which Prof Toft signed copies of the book.

### **Engaging Practitioners: Ambassador Herman Cohen**

The Engaging Practitioners series welcomes experts in international relations to share their experiences working in the international arena. This year CSS was fortunate to have the opportunity to host Ambassador Herman Cohen to The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. His extensive career in the U.S. Foreign Service, focusing heavily on Africa, as well as continued engagement with Africa as a consultant and educator, proved a strong draw for the school's students, even though the event had to be hosted over Zoom. Amb Cohen was generous with his time, talking extensively and answering student questions on US policy in Africa, as well as the personal and professional rewards of life in the U.S. Foreign Service.

### **Israel, Hamas, and the World**

In the aftermath of the barbaric attacks of 7 October, the news media was awash in coverage, but most were hyper-focused on the events on the ground. The international and Fletcher communities justifiably spent a good deal of time examining all aspects of the conflict itself. However, at this pivotal time in world politics, the impacts of the ongoing war are likely to have effects well beyond Israel or even the Middle East. It was clear that the implications of this attack would have far-reaching consequences on evolving concepts of international order, international law, and human security. Consequently, CSS organized a public event, bringing together several Fletcher-based centers to share their perspectives regarding how the fallout from the attack would change the world.

## Japan's Engagements with Global Challenges

The Consulate-General of Japan in Boston and the Center for Strategic Studies presented a talk by Prof. Daisaku Higashi of Sophia University, Tokyo to discuss Japan's role in the COVID-19 Pandemic, War in Ukraine, and Peacebuilding in South Sudan and Afghanistan. Dr. Higashi is a specialist in Mediation and Peacebuilding. His talk leveraged his extensive field research in South Sudan, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and East Timor, providing students insights into both the scholarly study of international relations and how Japan sees itself operating in these troubled regions. The event was also attended by the new Consul General to the Consulate in Boston, The Hon Mr. Seiichiro Takahashi. After the talk the Professor and Consul General remained at the reception for over an hour, engaging with individual students and sharing thoughts on their careers and the state of the world.

## TEACHING and ADVISING

Education is at the core of the CSS mission to build a team of fellows, faculty, and PhD students around advanced research on issues related to U.S. foreign policy, military intervention, and grand strategy, as well as to become a hub within The Fletcher School, Tufts University, and the broader Boston community for national dialogue. Below is the list of courses taught by Prof. Toft this year:

### International Security

This course surveys scholarly and policy literature on international relations (I.R.) theory, with a focus on international security as it has evolved in the past, the present, and as it might in the future. The first part of the course introduces critical conceptual and theoretical scaffolding. For example, we will problematize the concept of "security," look at the evolution of the state system from its Westphalian and colonial roots, and examine the role of force and how it has changed over time. The second section will then turn to different types of warfare, including conventional, unconventional, and nuclear; as well as civil wars, or large-scale political violence that takes place within states, and terrorism. The third section turns to a series of topics on the future of security and war, including the responsibilities of states and the international community, gender, climate change, and cybersecurity.

The main objective of the course is to provide students with (1) an understanding of how the international system of states manages insecurity, conflict, and cooperation; (2) an identification of the most important features and dynamics in world politics; as well as (3) an awareness of the key challenges to international security in the past, present, and into the future.

Students will read canonical texts from I.R. theory and security fields and debates on such issues as security, strategy, deterrence, polarity, and the role and effectiveness of international organizations on security cooperation and conflict. Students will be provided with an opportunity to critically engage I.R. theory and international security by assessing the state of knowledge and

together identifying new questions and approaches that might help address critical theoretical and policy challenges.

## **Demography and Security**

By 2050, the world's population will be bigger but growing more slowly, shifting to the East and South, older, and more urbanized. What we don't know is how states will adapt and respond to these changes and dynamics; they are new and far-reaching. Just consider that it took 127 years for the global population to reach 2 billion in 1927, but only 32 years to reach 3 billion in 1959. Moving from 6 billion to the current 7 billion (now 7.5 billion) took only 12 years. Global populations continue to grow and change, and the international system of states will need to adapt.

This course will not make you into a political demographer, which takes years of study. It is intended to enable you to understand key demographic concepts and relationships and appreciate their implications at local, national, and global levels.

Population can be a powerful force for both security and insecurity, but the relationship is not pre-determined. Some of these changes contribute to interstate war, mass migration, political conflict, and poverty. Others increase state power and facilitate development. The implications and consequences depend on context and capacity, especially the institutions, governance structures, and political leadership that attempt to address demographic challenges.

Yet, although the makeup of a state's population—its demography—is a critical factor in explaining the stability of states, it is often missed by both policymakers and academics until it is too late. Why is it missed? Policymakers tend to be focused on immediate crises and events, while population change happens over the longer term in slow motion. Academics tend to favor immediate and direct causal factors in explaining political instability, war, and state death. How demography impacts societies and politics is too complex and too messy for contemporary analysis that tends to emphasize the search for causality through formal modeling and statistical methods.

## **Climate and Security**

From sensational news headlines about resource wars to measured, consensus-based reports that warn of potential instability caused by climate change: the discourse around climate and security varies widely. This course will explore the evolution of that discourse from the early environment and security literature of the 1980s and 1990s to current empirical studies and government reports on the impact of climate change on national and global security. Looking at root causes, impacts, and responses to climate insecurity, the course aims to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of this complex field. By the end of this course, students are prepared to think through policy options that consider the evidence-based security implications of issues like climate-induced migration, resource scarcity, and natural disasters.

## Supporting Fletcher's Doctoral Program

Prof. Toft served on dissertation committees of the following students:

- Karst Brandsma, dissertation on burden sharing and military coalition defection.
- Zoltan Ferer, dissertation on United States strategy towards the People's Republic of China in the early post-Cold War period.
- Brendan Hales, dissertation on the role of AI augmentation in military decision-making.
- David Kampf, dissertation on foreign intervention, migration, terrorism, illicit networks, and humanitarian crises.
- Emily Lagarile is examining the new strategic frontier of space.
- Scott McDonald, dissertation on the philosophical underpinnings of the People's Republic of China's foreign policy. Graduated 2024.
- James Vansandt is considering a thesis on alliances.



## PUBLICATIONS

### *Books*

#### **Monica Duffy Toft**

***Dying by the Sword: The Devolution of U.S. Foreign Policy.* With Sidita Kushi. Oxford University Press, 2023.**

- Best book of the year, *Foreign Affairs*
- Shortlisted for the Arthur Ross Prize, Council on Foreign Relations

Through a historical and data-driven review of the U.S.'s dominant foreign policy trends from 1776 until today, *America the Bully* contends that the U.S. seems to have recently become addicted to military intervention. Lacking clear national strategic goals unlike in the past, the U.S. now pursues a security whack-a-mole policy, more reactionary than deliberate. *America the Bully* dedicates a chapter to each defining era of U.S. foreign policy, introducing historical narratives, case study examples, and compelling patterns from the Military Intervention Project (MIP) along the way. Every chapter highlights how the U.S. used and balanced primary tools of statecraft – diplomacy, trade, and war – to achieve its objectives. It showcases, however, that in recent decades, the U.S. has heavily favored war over the other pillars of statecraft. The book concludes with a warning that if the U.S. does not stem the growing trends of kinetic diplomacy, it may do permanent damage to its diplomatic corps, dooming it too costly and often useless wars of choice. It may be doomed to the path of reactionary aggression, increasing its military footprint internationally to the detriment of its diplomatic and economic influence. If this trend continues, it will spell disaster for the U.S.'s image, credibility, and, ultimately, its international and domestic stability.

Ultimately, this book aims to be a concise synthesis of the entire arc of the U.S.'s intervention history, as well as an empirical analysis of the main trends in the unique dataset we are developing (i.e., a comprehensive dataset and case narratives on all U.S. military interventions). As we trace every instance of U.S. military intervention and speak to changing U.S. strategies – comparing military, economic, and diplomacy tools and then gauging outcomes – we also learn more about what the future demands. Our analysis shows that the U.S. does not need to restrain itself from engaging on the world stage fully; it must merely rely on a more extensive array of tools to maneuver successfully.

***Civil Wars: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2024.**

Civil wars are the most common form of large-scale political violence. In the past thirty years, the study of civil wars has been one of the largest growing segments of the international relations field. Civil wars are usually nasty, brutish, and long. Their causes are complex, ranging from fights over access to housing, jobs, and arable land or other resources, to political contests over offices, rights, and representation. Because civil wars tend to drag on, motives and relevant actors may shift.



Groups form, collapse, coalesce, align and realign, and then fight amongst themselves. Governments themselves change through elections, coups, military defeats, or revolutions. Understanding the origins of civil wars and their trajectories therefore demands some appreciation of the economic, political, social, cultural, and geographic order of societies.

Theories about the causes, the nature, and the termination of civil wars have been adapted from both the international relations and comparative politics disciplines, and there are now many databases, cataloging hundreds of cases of civil war, that enable sophisticated statistical analysis and formal modeling. As a result, we now have a better understanding of the conditions under which civil wars generally emerge, how the fighting evolves (sometimes involving interventions by external actors), and then how civil wars end. However, historical understanding—the human dimensions—remains every bit as critical. This *Very Short Introduction* explores current debates on civil wars and how the reasons for fighting (and the nature of belligerents themselves) are changing.

### **James D. Boys**

**Book project:** *An American Madness: The Madman Theory as US Grand Strategy in the Nuclear Age*. Out for review at publishers.

Events instigated by Vladimir Putin in Ukraine have raised questions about the potential madness of world leaders. What are we to make of a sudden, unprovoked invasion of an independent nation-state? Could the perpetrator be mad? What would that mean for international affairs, military planning, and diplomatic initiatives designed to find a peaceful outcome? Moreover, if this could seemingly happen in Moscow, could such a situation arise in the United States? With the increasing age of world leaders, should we fear their senility as we once feared a surprise attack? With Joe Biden's increasing age, and Donald Trump's reemergence as a potential presidential candidate could we be witnessing an American madness? Drawing on interviews, declassified documents, White House recordings, and archival research, *An American Madness* reveals the previously under-examined concept of madness in leadership as exhibited in the United States. Rather than addressing issues of clinical madness, this text explores the under-appreciated concept of the Madman Theory, whereby leaders deliberately feign instability to coerce an international adversary to do their bidding. Through a consideration of the development of the Madman Theory by leading scholars, its adoption by the Eisenhower administration, and subsequent utilization by Presidents Nixon and Trump, the book presents a coherent history of the implantation of this high-risk strategy and the implications this had for the United States and the world at large as the White House sought to redefine U.S. grand strategy in the nuclear age.

## Major Published Works for the Academic Year 2023–2024

- Michael A. Cohen, Christopher A. Preble, and Monica Duffy Toft, “America’s Missed Chance in Afghanistan: How Washington’s Early Insistence on Total Victory Set the Stage for Defeat”, *Foreign Affairs* (15 August 2024).

For many Americans, the dominant image of the United States’ 20-year war in Afghanistan came at the very end: terrified Afghans storming the Kabul airport, clinging to departing planes, some falling to their deaths, desperately trying to flee the country as Taliban insurgents closed in on the capital. Three years ago this month, the longest and most expensive war in U.S. history, a conflict that resulted in 2,459 dead American soldiers and 20,000 more wounded, had ended in spectacular failure. This paper outlines how the early days of the war set the stage for eventual defeat some two decades later.

- Michael A. Cohen, Christopher A. Preble, and Monica Duffy Toft, “The Lessons for Israel of America’s War in Afghanistan,” *Foreign Affairs* (1 November 2023).

Surveying civil war in the world today is striking in terms of how often religious cleavages and grievances have become central to armed conflict. How are the causes and outcomes of religious civil wars different than other civil wars, if at all? Is Islam implicated in the contemporary surge in religious civil war? The first section of this work reviews existing literature and addresses the importance of religion for civil war. A dataset is then introduced to describe key trends in religious civil war. Finally, this work conducts a rigorous test of whether Muslim or Arab Muslim societies in particular are more prone to religious strife. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of the main findings.

- Kushi, S., & Toft, M. D. (2023) “Introducing the Military Intervention Project: A New Dataset on US Military Interventions, 1776–2019” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 67(4), 752-779.

While scholars have made many claims about US military interventions, they have not come to a consensus on the main trends and consequences. This article introduces a new, comprehensive dataset of all US military interventions since the country’s founding, alongside over 200 variables that allow scholars to evaluate theoretical propositions on drivers and outcomes of intervention. It compares the new Military Intervention Project (MIP) dataset to the current leading dataset, the Militarized Interstate Disputes (MID). In sum, MIP doubles the universe of cases, integrates a range of military intervention definitions and sources, expands the timeline of analysis, and offers more transparency of sourcing through historically documented case narratives of *every* US military intervention included in the dataset. According to MIP, the US has undertaken almost 400 military interventions since 1776, with half of these operations undertaken between 1950 and 2019. Over 25% of them have occurred in the post-Cold War period.

- James Boys, “The Clinton Administration’s Policy of Democracy Promotion in Ukraine (1993-2001): An Applied History Analysis.” *Journal of Applied History* 5, No. 2 (December 2023): 150-70. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25895893-bja10039>.

The violence perpetrated against Ukraine has raised questions regarding the direction of U.S. grand strategy since the end of the Cold War, with the Clinton administration’s decision to pursue a policy of democratic promotion in central and eastern Europe coming under specific scrutiny. Was this, as critics suggest, a strategic blunder that prompted Moscow’s apparent attempt to re-establish control over its former satellites, or, as was believed at the time, a necessary step towards political and economic reform of the European continent following the Cold War? This paper reveals how the Democracy Promotion pillar of the Clinton administration’s policy of Engagement and Enlargement aided the development of Ukraine without antagonizing the Kremlin, and the lessons that the Biden administration could glean from this policy thirty years later.

## RESEARCH

The Center for Strategic Studies is dedicated to producing policy-relevant research on strategy, international politics, and US foreign policy. In accordance with our mission statement, we seek to leverage this research and “educate future scholars and practitioners and generate cutting-edge scholarly analysis that broadens the U.S. foreign policy debate, exploring alternative strategies.” There were four major research initiatives.

### Afghanistan Assumptions Project

The official, congressionally mandated investigation into the 20-year war in Afghanistan will focus, disproportionately, on the tactical steps taken by US political and military leaders. Other prominent think tank reviews have followed a similar course—focusing largely on operational issues and military decision-making. But such a narrow investigation risk ignoring the larger questions that US policymakers need to grapple with to understand the nation's 20-year odyssey in Afghanistan. Indeed, any thorough examination of the war requires a more fundamental inquiry: one focused on the assumptions—political, military, economic, cultural, and diplomatic—that allowed the United States to squander more than \$1 trillion, the lives of more than 2400 American troops (and tens of thousands of America's Afghan allies, as well as civilians), and have nothing to show for the blood and treasure expended.

Thus, CSS is conducting a comprehensive examination of the fundamental assumptions that drove US policy in Afghanistan for two decades. Our research will be focused not just on understanding the mistakes made by the United States in Afghanistan but also on applying those lessons to future strategic decision-making by policymakers. Our investigation will focus on what we believe to be the critical inflection points in the US war in Afghanistan when US policy shifted the most dramatically.

- The decision in 2001 to go to war against the Taliban and, even more importantly, the subsequent effort in 2002 to reconstruct Afghanistan's political and military infrastructure.
- The decision in 2009, after eight years of war, to escalate the military campaign in Afghanistan, double the size of the US troop presence, and begin a concerted campaign of counterinsurgency.
- The decision by the Trump Administration in 2019 to negotiate with the Taliban and seek a political settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan.

In 2024, the project generated three Working Papers. The impact of these papers was multiplied by several speaking events that allowed the principal investigators to engage with audiences and expand the breadth of the Center's reach. These included a panel discussion on Capital Hill for congressional staffers, a forum at the Council on Foreign Relations, and a panel at Texas A&M University. The Center also hosted two workshops on the US nation-building and counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, which supported the third and fourth working papers.

## Contested Cross-border Spaces, Illicit Flows, and Order in the Contemporary World

What drives global security threats and how are they related to illicit flows and contested spaces?

This research seeks to illuminate the dynamic interactions of the political, economic, and social dimensions of global security: global order, transnational supply chains, and local experiences of instability.

Networked illicit flows of weapons, drugs, money, and trafficked people span contested cross-border spaces embedded in unstable regions. They can turn local security risks into a globally relevant phenomenon. We study how this mechanism works, and how it helps proliferate cross-border violence, strengthen armed actors, and shift the global balance of power. We expect that, together, these intersecting dynamics undermine global security, influencing order in the contemporary world.

This project thus sheds light on a critical blind spot in national and global security thinking: contested cross-border spaces where armed state and non-state actors such as criminals, insurgents, and terrorists cooperate and compete in governing territory, economic transactions, and populations.

Monica Toft is a co-PI on this Minerva-funded project and is working with Sidita Kushi to marry the data set from the Military Intervention Project with data on cross-border spaces and illicit flows.

## Indo-Pacific Perspectives Project

Ideational variables are playing a larger role both in the academic study of international relations and the policy community's attempts to understand their world. In this spirit, the Center for Strategic Studies is launching the Indo-Pacific Perspectives Project to understand why leaders in this region make the decisions they do. Over the coming years we hope to explore a range of countries and get behind their policies to the ideas that drive them.

Leaders in the United States naturally view the world through the lens of the intellectual tradition in which they were raised. In pursuing "security," the natural tendency is to treat the nature of "secure" as given. However, the Indo-Pacific region is home to an array of cultures that approach the world through varied intellectual traditions. The way national interests and security are conceived in these worldviews may not align with definitions drawn from the Western tradition. Therefore, the US may be talking past partners, allies, and adversaries as it attempts to engage in the region.

The Center for Strategic Studies seeks to assist scholars and policymakers by contributing to our knowledge of concepts of security in the Indo-Pacific. To do so, we are attempting to look at the

region and the world from the perspective of those making decisions in the region and examine what “security” looks like and how it is best obtained from their point of view.

During the last year, leveraging we hired a research assistant and conducted preliminary research into the perspectives and policies of the leaders of the People’s Republic of China. Subsequently, on 8 and 9 February 2024, we gathered a group of respected China scholars, as well as security practitioners from both the State Department and defense establishment with years of experience living in the PRC and working with its representatives. At the ensuing workshop, our collection of experts exchanged ideas and argued about the details regarding how leaders in Beijing think. Over the course of a spirited and collegial exchange, the group achieved a broad consensus—if not always unanimity—on the outlines of how security is viewed in the PRC. These ideas were discussed using the framework of sources, interests, threats, environment, and role.

We then summarized the results of this workshop into a working paper on “The People’s Republic of China’s Vies of Security. Following our own dissemination of the product, it was picked up by the Eisenhower School at the National Defense University and is being used as a text in their mandatory, six-part “China Foundations Workshop,” which is a required part of the curriculum for all students.

## **Trafficking in Persons**

### *Various donors*

Thanks to some funding received from individuals interested in understanding the issues surrounding trafficking in persons, the Center was able to fund a research grant in support of student scholarship at The Fletcher School. Specifically, we solicited applications for research into the topic from master’s students, hoping to support their education, aid in crafting their capstone projects, and improve scholarship on the subject. We subsequently made a grant to Katherine Kikta, who used the funds to conduct research travel to Columbia to explore how the legacies of armed conflict with their long-running insurgency facilitated human trafficking through populations of internally displaced persons.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH PLANS**

### **Comparative Military Interventions Project**

The novel MIP dataset shows that the United States remains increasingly intervention-prone. Therefore, it is necessary to determine what factors facilitate and impede strategic success in U.S. military interventions and what are alternative policy options available. Regional powers (e.g., Turkey, Israel, Iran, Brazil, India) and non-state actors (e.g., terrorist groups, criminal networks, drug cartels) can suffer or benefit from the power shifts that occur as the result of military interventions of major powers in their regions. Moreover, with the rise of China, the increasing influence of Russia, the re-emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, democratic erosion in Turkey, the continuous standoff between Israel and Iraq, and the growing political influence of criminal networks in Latin America, it is crucial to investigate how the use of force by the United States and other major powers affect these regional dynamics that can have tangible consequences for international security. Without additional data and empirical research, the U.S. will be unable to assess how its international militaristic involvements and hostilities are impacting its long-term security interests, power dynamics, and international credibility and normative appeal.

To formulate optimal foreign policy for U.S. interests and security, we must assess how the U.S. compares its militarism to other major powers. After all, the U.S.'s militarism can only be judged relative to its international peers and competitors. If the U.S. is much more hostile than its great power peers, then it requires immediate debate and a reorientation of U.S. foreign policy priorities. Additionally, depending on whether U.S. military interventions prompt or discourage other state interventions, the U.S. government would need to urgently recalibrate its tools of foreign policymaking to promote maximum security to its citizens and those abroad with whom it has commitments.

The Co-MIP project will contribute to these goals by focusing on systematic data gathering on military interventions by the major powers from the end of World War II until today (1945-2021). Funding is being sought to support this research.

### **Future Challenges**

We have been offered a good number of opportunities this past year to develop the center's activities and research. The biggest challenge we face moving forward continues to be a shortage of funding to enable us to sustain our support of Ph.D. fellows and postdoctoral fellows. Perhaps most pressing is the need to have continual funding for an assistant director who can help CSS Director Monica Toft run the day-to-day affairs of the center so that she can focus on the various research projects currently underway and carve out time to mentor her fellows and students. While we managed to cover the position last year with the grant obtained by the current assistant director, his departure to pursue a tenure-track job has ended that line of funding.

