

# précis

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MIT CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

# editor'snote

The Center shares with deep sadness that our valued colleague and dear friend, John Tirman, passed away on the morning of August 19, 2022, after suffering cardiac arrest.

Since 2004, Tirman served as the executive director of and principal research scientist at the MIT Center for International Studies (CIS).

During this time, he was a prolific and thoughtful—but always modest—leader of many of the Center's initiatives.

He spearheaded several projects on US-Iran relations, and convened conferences and published on the regional dimension of the Iraq War, the role of terrorism in upsetting diplomatic relations, and the challenges of political instability in the Gulf. He also wrote extensively on the human costs of war to civilian populations in war zones and about forced migration.

“John was an exceptionally able and reliable partner in the leadership of CIS. Apart from managing a large swath of administrative responsibilities, he sustained a steady and prolific agenda of research and publishing. The Center and the larger intellectual community benefitted immeasurably from John's commitment to explore the intersection of human security and international affairs—what he referred to as ‘the consequences of war for the innocent people caught up in conflict.’ What was there not to admire in this fine public intellectual?” shared Richard Samuels, director of CIS and Ford International Professor of Political Science.

## National narratives and the US-Iran conflict

John Tirman



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Iran and the United States have been at odds for forty years, locked in a cold war that has run the gamut from harsh rhetoric to hostage-taking, from crippling sanctions to targeted killings. In a new book "Republics of Myth," published by John Hopkins Press, April 12, 2022, the authors Hussein Banai, Malcolm Byrne, and John Tirman argue that a major contributing factor to this tenacious enmity is how each nation views itself. Our main feature is an excerpt written by John Tirman.

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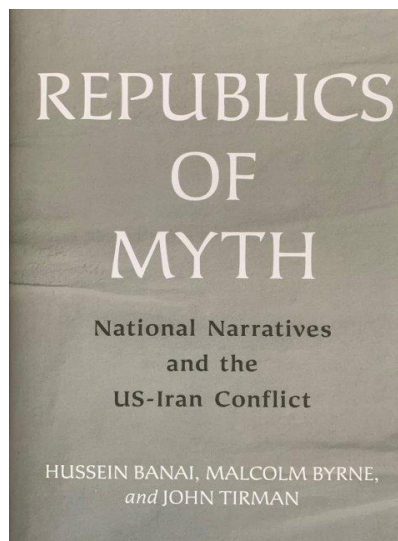
## National narratives and the US-Iran conflict

John Tirman



John Tirman served as the executive director of and a principal research scientist at CIS.

Tirman died suddenly on August 19. The Center will be hosting a memorial at the MIT Chapel on November 4. For more information, contact [english7@mit.edu](mailto:english7@mit.edu).



Tirman's most recent book, "Republics of Myth," was published on April 12 by Johns Hopkins University Press.

Every nation and nation-state has a narrative, a story that defines what the nation is—its origins and history, characteristics, claims to legitimacy, values, mission, and destiny. These defining stories are an essential component of nationalism, sometimes contrived by a state needing to establish its bona fides, sometimes more gradual and organically grown. They typically convey a sense of belonging, pride, and unity. In all cases, narratives are "socially constructed," often filled with fictitious claims, populist in tone, and readily manipulated by elites to gain some political advantage.

Both the United States and Iran have well-formed national narratives, very different from each other and with several internal inconsistencies. Each has a powerful grip on national consciousness, discourse, and political behavior—not a comprehensive grip, not always a decisive grip, but remarkably strong and durable. Even in this age of a multiplicity of voices via new media, which are global in scope and richly multicultural, the longstanding national narratives continue to define much of our countries' deliberations, policy making, and practice in the domestic and world arena. They are cohering ideologies and moral guides to action, for better or for worse, and serve as a bedrock of identity and self-realization.

National narratives and nationalism itself grew often from the dissolution of kingdoms and other forms of personalized political authority. These "imagined communities," in Benedict Anderson's reckoning, were made possible by vernacular printed communications, the printed language serving as a common bond as well as a revolutionary social and political invention. Nationalism can also rise within empires and monarchy, as Iran itself shows; the conveyed sense of national unity and identity braced the crown and its legitimacy, with the monarch representing nationhood rather than deriving authority from his own divinity or power. In other instances, monarchy was gradually giving way to popular sovereignty, and nationalism was an engine of that change, as was the case in Britain's Glorious Revolution. Anderson's focus on nationalism's appearance in colonies and post-colonial states is notable in the American case because colonies possessed defined territories, a common (imperial) language, and institutions of governance—all essential to state building and to the emergence of liberatory nationalism.

A nation typically has territory and a state; it also has cultural characteristics common to the many who see themselves as belonging to that nation. In addition to language, such characteristics may include religion, traditions of everyday life, ceremonies and rituals, and a shared history. It may or may not have a single "ethnicity," although this is frequently contested in everyday politics: in the United States, African-Americans and some other groups are targets of bigotry that include denying their place in the American nation; in Iran, the Baha'i and some other groups face similar discrimination by the Persian majority. The divisiveness over ethnicity—"purity," in effect—besets any definition of nationhood. National narratives, however, tend to gloss such difference and speak of the nation as a unified body, no matter how badly ruptured, as was the case of slavery and Jim Crow in the United States. With ethnicity also comes language, and the unifying power of language is at the core of nationhood. The use of Spanish in America, is, as a result, one of the most tendentious aspects of public debates over immigration and belonging.

All of these cultural symbols and practices make up the features of particular nations, but nationalism—the adulation of a particular nation—also requires a story. The mundane rituals and social practices must be enlivened and ennobled by a national narrative, customarily a mix of the mythological and an elaborated set of historical assertions. This story serves many purposes. It describes the uniqueness of the nation, its particu-

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"One might say that the narrative is the story, ideology is the exegesis, and nationalism is the sentiment or moral fuel."

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lar characteristics that explain a certain greatness. All members of the nation share in that greatness. "The task of nationalists is to rediscover the unique cultural genius of the nation and restore to a people its authentic cultural identity," observed Anthony D Smith, a leading scholar of nationalism. "This emphasis upon national individuality helps to explain why nationalisms are so often accompanied and fueled by the labors of intellectuals intent on tracing the 'roots' and 'character' of the nation through such disciplines as history, archeology, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, and folklore." The objectives for nationalists, he noted, is "to achieve the fullest expression of all three national ideals," that is, of autonomy, unity, and identity.

Those nationalists, moreover, must be able to exert political as well as cultural power to shape and sustain a national narrative. In complex societies, such as America and Iran, more than one narrative can be detected. The history of black people in America or that of indigenous tribes are very different stories from the dominant, white European settler account. The master narrative, which accumulates mountains of details to nourish its main themes, can encompass some difficult truths and contradictions in the national tale. Racism in America, and the Civil War itself, are alkalinized by placing art like Huckleberry Finn and "Gone with the Wind" in a nationalist canon, or making the lives of Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr, indisputably heroic. The normative trauma of slavery becomes, in this telling, a story ultimately about American "values" prevailing and healing. The American narrative palette, you see, is wide and diverse.

So, too, in Iran. One icon of Iran's national self-regard is the Cyrus cylinder, an artifact of the reign of Cyrus the Great in the sixth century BCE, and held to be among the first declarations of human rights—specifically, a right of return of displaced peoples and the right to worship freely (both claims, however, are disputed by scholars). Undoubtedly a remarkable document, its placement in the Iranian national narrative is unabashed. Yet it was discovered only in 1879 and, more importantly, had no continuous political or cultural resonance in Iran, as did, in contrast, the Magna Carta's influence on English political evolution. The last shah used the cylinder to celebrate the 2500th anniversary of Cyrus' reign, and much was made of its supposed human-rights originality. The Islamic Republic also exalted the cylinder and displayed it (on loan from the British Museum) in 2010. The wound of Iran's deplorable human rights record, indefensible under any of its regimes, is somehow partly repaired or obscured by the presence of the cylinder.

Political exigencies and political actors inevitably influence national narratives and the way they are used. Nationalism, and by implication, national narratives, include ideological statements, understandings, prescriptions, and warnings—ways to interpret the world as agents of destiny. Ideology in this sense is not merely a particular lens used to grasp the meaning of life and the world around us, but a guide to action, a prompt to fulfill the mission or purpose of one's nation. (It would be the rare national narrative that depicts the nation as passive.) One might say that the narrative is the story, ideology is the exegesis, and nationalism is the sentiment or moral fuel. They are not the same and they will not always appear in the same way: one can take a narrative, even one with fabulous features, interpret its ideas in different ways, and be moved by different parts of the story at different times. As is discussed later, the high regard given to the pioneer in the American narrative can be taken as idolizing the covered-wagon settlers battling Indians to civilize the frontier; one could also, alternatively, promote as paragon a pioneer in science or exploration or art. Even within the former, the pioneer could evoke feelings of national pride for subduing the savages or for exploiting the land—for adventurousness or husbandry. The

political actors seizing the narrative device of the courageous pioneer typically use it to enliven an ideology of rugged individualism in the service of a certain kind of nation building.

While national narratives and nationalism are made up of bits and pieces of cultural things, their purpose is almost always political—defining and legitimating a politically powerful class, using symbols but not being merely symbolic. Defining political power and those who legitimately can exercise it also means creating boundaries and markers for political action. The Greek myths, for example, were in part folklore and religion, and a legitimation of a certain group of invaders whose system of monarchical or elite rule was integrated through mythology into a universal template of (divine) justice.

The US-Iran confrontation, as argued later, is rooted in conflicting narratives, and it also has a narrative of its own—a national-security narrative about the two nations' relationship. Because narratives have historically contingent origins, events such as the overthrow of Mohammad Mossadeq by the CIA in 1953 and the 1979 US embassy hostage taking resonate prominently. It is not sentimentally charged nationalism that is clashing, although nationalist feelings are roused, but very different interpretations of events—a story—which is told and retold and fit into broader, richer tales that pose the other as an existential enemy.

These stories and sentiments nourish national self-consciousness—identity, norms, goals—while also serving to preserve power relations internally. One can see a good amount of subterfuge inherent in national narratives. “Nationalist ideology suffers from pervasive false consciousness,” Ernest Gellner asserted in “Nations and Nationalism”. “Its myths invert reality: it claims to defend folk culture while in fact it is forging high culture; it claims to protect an old folk society while in fact helping to build up an anonymous mass society.” It holds itself “as a manifest and self-evident principle . . . violated only by some perverse blindness.” And, perhaps most important, “it preaches and defends cultural diversity, when in fact it imposes homogeneity both inside and, to a lesser degree, between political units.” This fundamental deception—myth making, corruption of history, and imagined community—is rarely if ever haphazard or randomly contrived. Though it may be woven by many hands and appear in many forms, it is constructed in such a way to embrace popular sentiments of all social and economic strata in the service of national prominence and, typically, a privileged class.

The popularity and acceptance of the narrative derives from many sources—pride in one's people and place, the sense of specialness it conveys, a defense against obscurity or meaninglessness. As we shall see, the American and Iranian national narratives serve different purposes for each nation. But the myths, legends, historical episodes, cultural artifacts, and blandishments that comprise narratives all are fueled by sentiment—an essential glue to bind the nation together. Sentiment at the core of nationalism and as a fruit of the national narrative is not necessarily inspiring or heartwarming. It can be a relentless shadow of pessimism. As the British philosopher Isaiah Berlin explained, “Nationalism is an inflamed condition of national consciousness,” he wrote in his 1972 essay, “The Bent Twig”:

*It usually seems to be caused by wounds, some form of collective humiliation. It may be that this happened in German lands because they had remained on the edges of the great renaissance of Western Europe . . . To be the object of contempt or patronizing tolerance on the part of proud neighbors is one of the most traumatic experiences that individuals or societies can suffer. The*

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"Did the national narratives—and the emergent national-security narrative—shape political behavior, or did political actors merely use national narratives to justify their actions?"

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*response, as often as not, is pathological exaggeration of one's real or imagined virtues, and resentment and hostility toward the proud, the happy, the successful.*

Berlin explored in a number of books and essays the rise of German nationalism, an outgrowth of Romanticism and a reaction to French universalism, beginning in the eighteenth century. That is, the philosophes' insistence on reducing all social and political thought and action to a common standard (whether derived by rationalist or empiricist means) deprived specific nations of their unique cultures and character. The first theorist of nationalism, in Berlin's reckoning, was Johann Gottfried Herder, the late eighteenth century German philosopher, who "rejected the absolute criteria of progress then fashionable in Paris: no culture is a mere means towards another; every human achievement, every human society is to be judged by its own internal standards . . . Cosmopolitanism is the shedding of all that makes one most human, most oneself." This acclaim for the unique value of local or national cultures is the stuff of nationalism and national narratives alike as they became the dominant political thrust in Europe a century later and in Africa and Asia two centuries later. "Germans must be Germans and not third-rate Frenchmen; life lies in remaining steeped in one's own language, tradition, local feeling; uniformity is death. The tree of (science-dominated) knowledge kills the tree of life."

The power of national myths, social and cultural practices, and language in shaping a narrative that is politically animated by patriotic fervor became obvious in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But not all aspects of a national narrative are as salient as others at any given time. Why was the US-Iran confrontation so much more belligerent after 1979 than before? Did the national narratives—and the emergent national-security narrative—shape political behavior, or did political actors merely use national narratives to justify their actions? "Only some narratives," wrote Ronald Krebs, "become dominant, an accepted 'common sense' about the world, and thus set the boundaries of what actors can legitimately articulate in public, what they can collectively (though not individually) imagine, and what is politically possible." Dominant narratives, he continued, "privilege a range of policies and impede the legitimation of others, and fundamental change in national security policy—in its basic orientation, as opposed to the effort expended or the means employed—hinges on change in the dominant narrative."

The national narratives that animate nationalism are, in sum, socially constructed over time, tend to serve the interests of specific elites, are populist in tone and lit by sentiment, and honor particular cultural myths and social practices. How narratives affect political behavior and international relations, particularly alongside or juxtaposed against state interests or global norms, is our pivotal question. The United States and Iran, especially in their relationship to each other, provide some insights. ■

Excerpted from Chapter 1 of "Republics of Myth: National Narratives and the US-Iran Conflict," by Hussein Banai, Malcolm Byrne, and John Tirman, and published by the Johns Hopkins University Press.

specialfeature

From South Africa, a success story for democracy

Peter Dizikes



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In a new book, MIT political scientist Evan Lieberman examines a quarter-century of post-Apartheid government and finds meaningful progress.

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**B**ack in April 1994, the world watched a remarkable event: South Africa's first democratic election with universal suffrage. The country whose Apartheid system had legalized racial segregation since the late 1940s went to the polls and elected a new national assembly. In turn, that assembly picked a Black president: Nelson Mandela, who, after decades in prison, became the South Africa's new leader.

Those events were a major part of the global 1990s-era shift toward democratic rule. But in recent years, critics have increasingly questioned the success of South Africa's democracy, citing uneven economic development, malfeasance, and more. One post-Mandela president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, notoriously doubted the links between HIV and AIDS, exacerbating a health crisis in the country; another, Jacob Zuma, was beset by multiple corruption charges.

Today, with democracy being threatened in many countries around the world, the stakes seem higher than ever for a clear-headed assessment of the South African experiment. And MIT political scientist Evan Lieberman, a career-long scholar of the country, thinks South Africa's quarter-century of democracy has been a success. Despite various setbacks, Lieberman contends, the government has delivered material gains while ensuring rights and liberties far beyond what most people could have imagined 30 years ago.

"The most unjust society on the planet was South Africa," Lieberman says. "How did this get fixed? With a democracy that's open to people of all races."

Now Lieberman makes that case at length in a new book, "Until We Have Won Our Liberty: South Africa after Apartheid," which was published in June by Princeton University Press. (The title refers to a phrase from the 1955 "Freedom Charter" backed by the country's best-known anti-Apartheid group, the African National Congress.)

In the book, Lieberman contends that South Africa has successfully pursued "dignified development," material growth along with a respect for the rights and inherent equality of people; and, despite the foibles of some corrupt officials, has been building a robust set of democratic practices, in stark contrast to the Apartheid era.

"We can acknowledge the problems but also highlight the fact that so much has gone right," Lieberman says. "If we fail to appreciate that, then we're missing some really important things," he adds. This includes "overall levels of service provision, the function of democratic practice, and the civil exchange of ideas," all things Black South Africans had largely been denied before the 1990s.

"To me that's the big picture of this incredible story that is so important," Lieberman says. "There is a vast improvement in how things were, which has been obtained through democratic measures."

## **On the ground in Mogale City**

"Until We Have Won Our Liberty" does not entirely have the typical form of an academic book. In it, Lieberman interweaves a reporting narrative from the eve of South Africa's 2019 elections, talking to citizens in Mogale City municipality, centered in the midsize gold-mining city of Krugersdorp, where he was doing research.

“I wanted to see what I could learn and how well I could capture what was happening along the way,” Lieberman says. “I thought this would be a nice way for readers to see what I saw.”

As it happens, in 2019 the African National Congress (ANC)—the party descended from the Apartheid-era opposition group—retained power but with a narrowed majority. As Lieberman details in the book, there is plenty of discontent on the ground with the ANC. In one survey Lieberman conducted in Mogale City, near Krugersdorp, 55 percent of whites said life was worse today than in the Apartheid era—but 50 percent of Blacks, did, too.

To an extent, Lieberman notes, that level of sentiment is partly explained by a widespread human tendency to be nostalgic about the past. More broadly, it may speak to the way democracy can suffer from an expectations problem.

“It’s easy for everyone everywhere to look back on the past with rose-colored glasses,” Lieberman says. “I think particularly in recently democratized countries, there’s a pervasive problem of democratic disappointment—which is that there’s a buildup of expectations that a major change in regime is going to change everything.”

Black South Africans have in general not caught up to the European-level standard of living that white South Africans have long enjoyed. But progress is demonstrable in other ways. In 1996, only 58 percent of South Africans had access to electricity. Today, 90 percent of South Africans are on the grid. There have also been substantial gains in access to housing, water, refuse removal, and more.

Moreover, Lieberman says, a substantial part of dignified development “is not just about economic growth, but about being treated like humans in everyday life,” where he believes South Africa has performed well.

“Political parties organize and compete for power, people vote, the allocation of power reflects those votes, and people are free to speak their voices,” Lieberman says. “When the government does something wrong, lawyers can take the government to court, and the court frequently rules against the government, and the government has to comply. That’s democracy working, and it’s what we hoped for, that this society might have that, rather than what they had before, which was racial oligarchy where a small minority of white people ruled.”

## Curbing inequality and violence

Still, as global events in recent years have shown, democracy, once constructed, does not always remain standing. If South Africa has had a successful 25 years (as of the 2019 elections) of democracy, what factors are most crucial in ensuring another 25 years of democratic rule?

“The biggest threats to democracy [in South Africa] are profound inequality and the tendency to resolve disputes and frustrations through violence,” Lieberman says.

On the first point, he adds, “I think much more has to be done, not just through the public sector, but through the private sector, to improve opportunities for material gain.” On the second matter, he observes, “the propensity for people to resolve disputes through violence is really troubling, [and] one thing I would hope to consolidate

through democracy would be a reduction of [that]. Overall there's been a significant reduction in violence, compared to the 1980s and 1990s in South Africa — but there have been some upticks that are troubling.”

Other scholars say “Until We Have Won Our Liberty” is an important contribution to both political science and recent political history.

Daniel Ziblatt, a professor of political science at Harvard University, has called the book an “evocative personal narrative and judicious empirical analysis,” leaving readers with not only “a new appreciation for the momentous accomplishments of post-Apartheid South Africa, but also with a moving and powerful defense of democracy’s enduring value.”

For his part, Lieberman hopes readers will both absorb the substantive case for regarding South African democracy as a success, while also considering that speaking up about the value of democracy is a part of sustaining it.

“In some ways, that’s one of the hopes for the book,” Lieberman says. “It’s not an A+ report card for South African government. It’s not saying government officials have all acted well or citizens have all acted well. But it’s trying to recognize the fact that this democratic experiment has gone very well. Lots of people have worked hard to build a better life and society out of a very divided past. I hope those who risked their lives [and] resisted the temptation to enrich themselves will take some comfort in having someone acknowledge that their work is not for nothing, and should be recognized.” ■

## CIS honors Robert Wilhelm

Michelle English



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The Robert E Wilhelm Fellows Program brings real-world experience and new scholarship to CIS and is a vital part of its research community.

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Robert Wilhelm SB '62 supports the Robert E Wilhelm Fellows Program at CIS. The program was established in 2004 with the goal of bridging the worlds of the scholar and the policymaker. Wilhelm served on the MIT Corporation from 1997 to 2007.

Photo courtesy Jake Belcher

The Center for International Studies (CIS) has long been valued as one of the world's premier, university-based global research and education centers. A hallmark of the Center's many programs is the opportunity for academics and practitioners to work together on policy-relevant problems.

The Robert E Wilhelm Fellows Program is among the Center's most prestigious fellowships and is reserved for individuals who have held senior positions in public life. It has brought to campus heads of international non-governmental organizations, national security advisors, US military leaders, senior diplomats, and retired cabinet ministers — including one former prime minister.

Since its inception in 2004, the Center has hosted 18 Wilhelm Fellows from around the globe, including Egypt, India, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, United Kingdom, and the United States.

A generous gift from Robert E Wilhelm SB '62 supports this annual fellowship.

CIS recently welcomed Wilhelm and his wife, Gena Whitten, to campus to express gratitude and to inaugurate a new conference room named in his honor. His visit on May 26 coincided with his 60th class reunion at MIT.

Richard Samuels, the Ford International Professor of Political Science and director of CIS, commenced the event by thanking Wilhelm for conceptualizing and funding the fellowship at CIS.

"Bob's idea for—and generous support of—bringing seasoned professionals on the international stage to engage with the faculty and graduate students at CIS was

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"For us, the Wilhelm fellows have been a daily reminder of the value of MIT's commitment to its core mission of 'mens et manus,'" said Samuels.

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inspired. Each of us at the Center—and in the MIT community generally—benefits from this engagement, however formal or casual. It informs our understanding of how the world works, refreshes our sense of service, and helps guide our hopes to make the world a better place. For us, the Wilhelm fellows have been a daily reminder of the value of MIT's commitment to its core mission of 'mens et manus,'" said Samuels.

Lourdes Melgar SM '88, PhD '92, and a Wilhelm Fellow in 2016, was among the many attending guests.

"I have the privilege to be part of the Robert E Wilhelm Fellow tribe. I had to be here today to thank Bob for his foresight, generosity and for bestowing me the gift of time and space to re-imagine my life," said Melgar, who was Mexico's deputy secretary of energy for hydrocarbons and undersecretary for electricity leading up to the fellowship.

Melgar also was a member of Mexico's foreign service from 1997 to 2005.

"As a Wilhelm Fellow, I came to realize the importance of the continuous dialogue between academia and policymakers. It must be a dialogue: knowledge without a reality check can become empty words. I see it when proposed technical solutions to accelerate the energy transition do not consider the social and political challenges of energy systems transformation. So, I thank you for giving me the chance of spending a whole year at MIT, learning and testing ideas," concluded Melgar.

Additional remarks were shared by Steven Simon, the current Wilhelm Fellow at CIS. Simon served as the National Security Council (NSC) senior director for the Middle East and North Africa during the Obama Administration and as the NSC senior director for counterterrorism in the Clinton White House. These assignments followed a 15-year career at the U.S. Department of State.

"The opportunity provided by Robert Wilhelm to think deeply, or at least as deeply as I am able, about questions raised by our government service but imponderable while we were in it, is such a blessing. In my case, it's enabled me to finish a book about a phase in the history of the US and Middle East that began when I entered government and seemed to fade out as I left it. While the outcome was something less than inspirational, my thinking about US policy was transformed through the writing of the book."

A celebratory toast to Wilhelm was provided by Agustín Rayo, the Kenan Sahin Dean of the MIT School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences and professor of philosophy at MIT.

"Excellent work is being done at CIS. But in order to achieve this level of excellence we need partners—people like Bob and Gena," concluded Rayo. ■

précisinterview  
Steven Simon

Eyal Hanfling



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Steven Simon joined CIS in 2021 as its Robert E Wilhelm Fellow. He joined CIS following an illustrative career in government, including appointments in both the Obama and Clinton Administrations. He sat down with précis to discuss his research at MIT, assess our nation's security challenges, and offer advice to students pursuing careers in national security.

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Steven Simon is the Robert E Wilhelm Fellow at CIS. He served as the National Security Council (NSC) senior director for the Middle East and North Africa during the Obama Administration and as the NSC senior director for counterterrorism in the Clinton White House. These assignments followed a fifteen-year career at the US Department of State. In addition to government appointments, he worked in the private sector and in academia.

**précis: What have you been working on during your time at CIS?**

**SS:** I am putting the finishing touches on a book about the US and Middle East from 1979 to the present, working on a grant-funded project related to the liquidation of imperial commitments, sketching out an MIT funded project about a 19th century British archeologist in Iraq, and writing about current domestic and foreign policy issues. For the first project, I am using case studies and fieldwork to identify the key things that imperial powers get wrong—and in a few cases, right—when they liquidate their security commitments and depart for home. I recently returned from Iraq, where I interviewed a range of Iraqis and US diplomats as part of this project. My other project explores the political activities on behalf of British interests in Iraq during the 1840s by the storied Victorian archeologist, Henry Austen Layard. This will entail dipping into the vast body of Layard's papers at the British Museum and interviewing Iraqi, British and European scholars who specialize in that place and time.

**précis: How do you assess the Biden administration's response to the war in Ukraine?**

**SS:** I think President Biden's use of sensitive intelligence to publicize Putin's intentions to invade Ukraine was important to a larger effort to mobilize international opposition to Russian aggression. And he organized the swift transfer of weapons that proved crucial to the Ukrainian effort to limit Russian gains and secure the capital. He was—thus far—less successful in judging the impact of sanctions and—so far as is known—in not probing Moscow's willingness to stop shooting and start talking. And, although one can see why the administration is proclaiming its unwillingness to impose conditions on the transfer of weapons to Ukraine, it's in US interest and global stability to stanch the fighting sooner rather than later. At some point, the US might consider using its support for Ukraine as leverage to enter ceasefire talks, assuming, of course, the Russians have also signaled their readiness.

**précis: In April, you wrote "The United States and NATO should be less deferential to Mr. Putin's attempt to wield the threat of nuclear weapons — not only for the sake of supporting Ukraine but also to ensure global geopolitical stability in the future" ("Why Putin Went Straight for the Nuclear Threat," New York Times, April 1, 2022). Has your thinking on this changed? What is your assessment of the likelihood of nuclear use as the conflict drags on?**

**SS:** Thoughtful international relations specialists have made a good case for caution, which runs a bit counter to the NYT essay. In their view, we don't know much about the circumstances that would cause a nuclear armed state would unleash a nuclear weapon—thankfully there has been only case—but it would be reasonable to assume that such conditions might look a lot like the current situation vis a vis Russia. The country, after all, is under tremendous pressure while its army has suffered terrible losses. And Putin's state of mind and the nature of command-and-control arrangements raise questions as well. So, while I think the argument in the NYT holds up, I do agree that the potential for escalation is there.

**précis:** Earlier this year, you reflected on the one-year anniversary of the January 6 storming of the US Capitol and recommended “War games, tabletop exercises, operations research, campaign analyses, conferences and seminars on the prospect of American political conflagration” (“We Need to Think the Unthinkable About Our Country,” *New York Times*, January 13, 2022). What was the response to your article and have you seen progress on preparedness?

**SS:** To be sure, the Biden administration is on the case. It is focusing Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and FBI on domestic terrorism and not incidentally the number of weapons in production and circulation. And the Supreme Court leak relating to *Roe v. Wade* has spurred a greater recognition of centrifugal forces at work in American society. Some scholars, like Kathleen Belew, are doing useful work on the organizational and ideological dimensions of radical Right politics. Awareness will get a boost with the release of the Congressional J6 committee report, while events like the Buffalo massacre concentrate the national mind. Senator Schumer’s letter to Rupert Murdoch connects the dots by noting the overlap between Fox viewers and believers in the replacement narrative, like the killer in Buffalo. But with headlines grabbed by the Ukraine crisis, the state of American democracy has not yet generated an all-hands-on-deck research program.

**précis:** How would you characterize the relationship between the events of January 6 and the recent mass-shootings?

**SS:** There’s a lurking variable that probably explains both episodes. The impetus for them is entrenched in American history but seems to be expressed on and off under certain conditions. Recently, these conditions have included Donald Trump’s rhetoric, a surge in conspiracy thinking, social and mainstream media that incite violence, and a large cohesive segment of the political class that validates conspiracy theories and legitimizes racism while explicitly calling for the abandonment of democracy.

**précis:** What lessons from your career working on counterterrorism in the Middle East would you apply to current US domestic terrorism challenges?

**SS:** The first is that the government can’t police this too aggressively or indiscriminately because it will force fence-sitters to pick up their guns. Second, there needs to be a robust, carefully considered national counter-radicalization effort designed and carried out by civilian agencies; you do not want law enforcement to be the face of the state. Third, those who are guilty of crimes must be prosecuted with full regard for due process. Fourth, and I’m quite hesitant about this, of course, is the need for tools that can spot the online activity of plotters like the Buffalo shooter. The only other thing I’d add is that we should refrain from passing domestic terrorism legislation, lest we provide dangerous tools to a future administration seeking to criminalize political opposition.

**précis:** In May, the Biden administration announced the redeployment of US ground forces into Somalia, reversing a Trump administration withdrawal (<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/16/us/politics/biden-military-somalia.html>). Does this decision signal a change in the administration’s counterterrorism strategy, and what are some of the implications of this move?



**SS:** As far as I'm aware the administration has not released its counterterrorism strategy. The redeployment of US forces to Somalia suggests a readiness to engage militarily, at least in Somalia, but primarily in an advisory and special operations role geared to a "kingpin strategy," which targets Shabaab leaders. There is no talk about winning, or defeating the Shabaab, or defending the new Somali government, let alone stabilizing or democratizing the country. The Shabaab have attacked at least one local US installation and might harbor greater ambitions. So, this is just the sort of satisfying approach that will yield temporary benefits on the ground and withering criticism from the Right and Left here at home.

**précis: Do you have any advice for MIT students interested in pursuing a career in national security?**

**SS:** Take the foreign service exam, check out the intelligence community, consider the military as an option, look into the presidential internship process, or try for a staff job on one of the foreign affairs or defense committees on the Hill. As a starting point, I'm readily available to speak with any student who would like to further explore these options. ■

## Blame Games: Malattribution and the Madrid train bombings

Nina Miller



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"After an act of political violence, the first question most people ask is who is responsible. Blame can be a powerful political force that spurs anger and mobilizes people. When leaders shape the public narrative about blame, it can allow them to deflect criticism and pursue policy goals," explains Nina Miller

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Plaque (left) in memory of the casualties in the 11-M terror attack in Madrid: In memory of the victims of the attacks of 11 March 2004, who were transported to the field hospital established here in the Municipal Sports Centre of Daoiz y Velarde. As an expression of sympathy from Madrid's citizens, and of gratitude for the courage and generosity of all the services and people who came to their aid.

Photos courtesy Wikipedia and the MIT Department of Political Science

On the morning of March 11, 2004, ten bombs detonated on four commuter trains in Madrid, killing 192 and injuring 1,400.<sup>1</sup> The next day, two million people gathered in Madrid's Cibeles plaza in a silent protest. When the president and royal family arrived, the silence was finally broken by a whistle and shouts of "Who was it? Who was it?"<sup>2</sup> Two days later, on the morning of the national election, the Spanish people learned that despite official claims that the Basque terror group ETA was responsible, the attack had actually been the work of Al-Qaeda affiliates.<sup>3</sup>

Why do leaders sometimes blame the wrong group for attacking their state? After an act of political violence, the first question most people ask is who is responsible. Blame can be a powerful political force that spurs anger and mobilizes people. When leaders shape the public narrative about blame, it can allow them to deflect criticism and pursue policy goals. What happened in Madrid is an example of what I call malattribution, or deliberate misattribution. Malattribution is a puzzling and potentially risky choice for leaders to make, because blaming the wrong group can make it more difficult to punish the true perpetrators. Leaders also risk getting caught in their deception, thereby decreasing their international credibility and domestic trust and support.

### What is attribution?

Leaders often have to decide how to publicly respond to high-profile acts of violence, such as bombings or assassinations. The public is generally intolerant of uncertainty and seeks cognitive closure about what happened, who did it, and why.<sup>4</sup> Given this demand for an explanation, leaders need to decide what secret information they share, when to update the public on progress in the investigation, whether or not the leader personally weighs in on the situation, and the degree of confidence with which they state their conclusions. Elite cues can shape how the public thinks and feels about a complicated and ambiguous situation.<sup>5</sup> By framing the public narrative about the event, how a leader responds can affect support for the leader and their policies and perceptions about the leader's legitimacy and credibility.

Attribution is a key aspect of the investigation and public narrative. If attribution were a purely technical process, a state's primary focus would be to establish reasonable confidence in the perpetrator and communicate this to their citizens. However, attribution is also a political choice about how to deliberately and publicly communicate secret information about who is responsible for an attack. Even if two states experienced the same attack, possessed the same evidence, and used the same investigative apparatus, we would expect to get different attribution outcomes. Leaders affect attribution outcomes by resourcing and shaping the investigation, helping to draw conclusions, and then communicating those conclusions to third parties and the public.<sup>6</sup>

### Strategies of malattribution

There is a greater variety of deliberate attribution choices than whether or not to blame a bad actor. Leaders have private information about who is likely or unlikely to be responsible for an attack. However, they may selectively share or distort this private information in order to overstate the likelihood a group is—or is not—involved.

In other words, leaders may find it politically advantageous to deviate from the body of evidence available to them in order to publicly claim that an innocent group is involved or that a guilty group is not. I use the term malattribution to refer to this deliberate public distortion of private information to overstate or understate confidence that a group is responsible for a negative event.

I identify four different strategies for leaders to shape the public narrative in the aftermath of political violence: true attribution, linking, exoneration, and substitution. Leaders can publicly blame the actor who is most likely responsible for the attack—true attribution. They can also claim that an innocent actor aided the true culprit, thereby falsely linking them to the attack. Alternatively, leaders can deflect blame from the true perpetrators in an attempt to exonerate them. The Madrid case is an example of substitution, when leaders focus blame on an innocent actor and exonerate a guilty one.

I argue that leaders select a malattribution strategy based on the magnitude of the threat to the regime and policy goals. Public perceptions about what has happened and why can either bolster regimes, providing support to pursue domestic and foreign policy goals, or they can be destabilizing and existentially threatening.<sup>7</sup>

In general, I argue that leaders publicly under-state their true beliefs that a guilty actor is involved when they anticipate that telling the truth will threaten their political survival. Political leaders prioritize threats that could remove them from power, because survival in office is necessary for them to pursue any other policy goals.<sup>8</sup> In democracies, leaders will worry that this opposition will translate into electoral losses. Responsiveness to public opinion is not limited to democracies, however. Autocrats also face threats to their survival and depend on a narrow, loyal portion of the public to stay in power.<sup>9</sup> Regimes face a political threat when the true perpetrator is a foreign group that the leader's own policies have antagonized or otherwise failed to contain. Additionally, leaders face a threat to their legitimacy when the true perpetrator is a domestic group with which the leader or their base has supported or participated.

I expect leaders to over-state their true beliefs that an innocent actor is involved when they anticipate that the deception will help them achieve pre-existing policy goals. Scapegoating can deflect criticism of the leader by mobilizing supporters against a common outgroup, like a domestic ethnic minority or a foreign adversary.<sup>10</sup> This logic will be especially strong when the scapegoated group is perceived as a competent but cold actor that is both capable and willing to harm the ingroup.<sup>11</sup> Blaming a political opponent can improve one's own electoral competitiveness by creating perceptions that the opponent was involved or responsible for the attack. Shifting blame can also generate "rally-around-the-flag" effects with increased support for military action or certain legislation.

## Malattribution in Madrid

Hours after the attack in Madrid, Minister of the Interior Ángel Acebes blamed Euzkadi ta Askatasuna (ETA or "Basque Homeland and Freedom"), militant separatists from the northern territory of Basque Country.<sup>12</sup> When asked if it could possibly be an actor like Al-Qaeda, Acebes reiterated the government's confidence that "we have no doubt [that it was ETA], nor do I believe that the overwhelming majority of Spaniards

do, when we have seen that little over a week ago [ETA] were looking for this exact attack.”<sup>13</sup> Other members of the conservative Partido Popular (PP, or “People’s Party”) repeated the attribution over the next 56 hours, including PP presidential candidate Mariano Rajoy.<sup>14</sup> Hours before polls for the national elections opened on March 14, Acebes finally admitted Al-Qaeda had credibly claimed responsibility and that five individuals affiliated with Al-Qaeda had been arrested in Madrid.<sup>15</sup>

There is only suggestive evidence about when Spanish leadership knew Al-Qaeda was responsible and to what extent the incorrect attribution was deliberate. Hours after the attacks, Prime Minister José María Aznar called then-director of *El País* Jesús Ceberio to emphasize multiple times that there was “absolute certainty” about ETA’s guilt.<sup>16</sup> Journalists at the state-run news agency EFE later said they had information about Al-Qaeda’s involvement the morning of the attacks, and accused director Miguel Platón of imposing “a regime of manipulation and censorship” to favor the PP ahead of the election.<sup>17</sup> Spanish diplomats pressured the United Nations Security Council to adopt Resolution 1530, which “[c]ondemns in the strongest terms the bomb attacks in Madrid, Spain, perpetrated by the terrorist group ETA.”<sup>18</sup> Spanish diplomats insisted they acted in good faith, but the resolution was adopted quickly and with uncharacteristic certainty about the bombers’ identity. Members of the Security Council later complained they “were utilized for political maneuvering” and felt the council had been “hijacked.”<sup>19</sup>

The conduct of the investigation provides additional evidence that PP elites may have deliberately shifted blame away from Al-Qaeda and towards ETA. Members of the police reported speaking with Minister of the Interior Ángel Acebes and other People’s Party politicians about evidence pointing to Al-Qaeda, yet minutes after these conversations, Acebes held a press conference to declare ETA was responsible.<sup>20</sup> The head of the bomb disposal unit Tedex Juan Jesús Sánchez Manzano insists that he knew with certainty that Al-Qaeda was responsible the afternoon of March 11.<sup>21</sup> Then-director of the National Intelligence Center Jorge Dezcallar has described how the government asked him to publicly declare on March 13 that ETA was still under investigation—despite the arrest of suspects in connection with Al-Qaeda—and felt the PP was trying to use him for partisan advantage.<sup>22</sup>

What explains PP decision-making in the aftermath of the Madrid train bombings? The imminent election increased the salience of public opinion and created an imminent threat for Aznar and other PP leadership. Spain had joined the US-led coalition in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, despite a full 90 percent of Spaniards opposing the war.<sup>23</sup> Given the domestic unpopularity of the war, conservative leadership may have anticipated angry voters would blame them for entering Iraq and failing to prevent the Madrid attack. Subsequent analysis has suggested that the Partido Popular would have won the 2004 elections if not for the attacks.<sup>24</sup> In surveys from after the election, a full thirty percent of Spaniards said the attack affected their vote.<sup>25</sup>

Spanish leadership also had good reasons to prefer blaming ETA. The Partido Popular had a hardline anti-ETA platform,<sup>26</sup> and Aznar himself had survived an ETA assassination attempt in 1995.<sup>27</sup> As journalist Giles Tremlett noted at the time, Aznar and Rajoy would benefit if ETA were responsible, because “both support a ‘no negotiating’ stance on ETA, and the group has seen its operational capacity seriously reduced by police action during Mr Aznar’s eight years as prime minister.”<sup>28</sup> PP leadership could

also have expected their base of conservative voters to believe their claims about ETA's guilt and support hardline policies. A February 2004 poll found that 43.2 percent of Spaniards thought ETA's terrorism was one of Spain's top three problems.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion

The weaponization and manipulation of blame is an issue central to the study of politics. Leaders make strategic decisions about attribution in a variety of contexts, including cyber competition, terrorism, financial crises, false flags, and accidents. Studying malattribution offers insight into key junctions in domestic politics and international relations. How and why do leaders use secrecy, collusion, and deception to achieve policy goals? Why are comparatively small acts of violence sometimes the catalyst for long-lasting and costly wars? How can elite cues unify a country after political violence—and when do these events become divisive, polarizing symbols?

Aznar and other PP politicians appear to have gambled that substitution would pay off in an electoral victory. Although any single factor likely would not have motivated malattribution, Spanish leaders faced significant political threats—including the overwhelming domestic opposition to the Iraq war and imminent election—as well as an opportunity to pursue hardline policies against ETA due to widespread uncertainty about what had actually happened.

However, insisting on ETA's guilt provoked a public backlash that may have cost the Partido Popular an election. The Madrid attacks were a turning point in Spanish politics and foreign policy. Immediately after taking office, the new socialist administration withdrew from Iraq. U.S. officials raised concerns that the withdrawal might motivate future attacks if Al-Qaeda drew “the wrong lesson” about the success of terror in Madrid.<sup>30</sup> Soon after the election, members of the People's Party began claiming that ETA and Al-Qaeda had acted in collaboration. This apparent strategy of linking ETA and Al-Qaeda has cast a long, conspiratorial shadow on Spanish politics and sowed mistrust in official explanations.<sup>31</sup> Nearly two decades after the Madrid attacks, the attribution question remains contentious. ■

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## What Russia's invasion of Ukraine means for the world

Peter Dizikes, MIT News



The "Starr Forum: The Wider Implications of the War in Ukraine" was held Monday, April 4. Top row, left to right: Jacqueline Bhabha, Joel Brenner, and Taylor Fravel. Bottom row: Roger Petersen and Jim Walsh.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has global implications. A panel of MIT foreign policy experts convened late spring to examine those reverberations—on European domestic politics, the refugee crisis, great-power relations, and nuclear security.

Currently Ukraine has experienced widespread devastation, and millions of Ukrainians have fled their homes as refugees. Many countries have allied to enact stiff sanctions on Russia, and global sentiment has been with Ukraine. But as the event discussion made clear, the global effects of the war may depend on how it evolves. If Russia ends up waging a "frozen conflict," occupying some areas of the country indefinitely, with less visible devastation, it could produce a different long-term response.

Even in the current climate, Hungarian President Viktor Orban claimed an electoral victory this week, perhaps showing some limits to the European backlash against leaders with connections to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"One idea was that this war was going to end illiberalism in European states," observed Roger Peterson, Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor of Political Science at MIT, during the event. "I think that's probably overblown."

Indeed, Petersen added, even though Ukrainians have "won the information war" over the invasion, generating massive international sympathy, their struggle could soon become "routinized," generating a less energized response in other countries.

"If it [turns] into some frozen conflict, this could be years and years of war," Petersen said.

The event, "The Wider Implications of the War in Ukraine," took place online on April 4, 2022, as an installment of MIT's Starr Forum, an ongoing series of public discussions on pressing foreign policy issues, held by the Center for International Studies (CIS).

Besides Petersen, the participants on the panel were Jacqueline Bhabha, a professor of the practice of health and human rights at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health; Joel Brenner, a senior research fellow at CIS and former head of US counter-intelligence under the Director of National Intelligence; Taylor Fravel, Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor of Political Science at MIT and director of the MIT Security Studies Program (SSP); and Jim Walsh, a research associate in SSP.

The panel's co-chairs and moderators were Carol Saivetz, senior advisor in SSP; and Elizabeth Wood, professor of history at MIT and co-director of the MISTI MIT-Russia Program.



## Refugees and cyber issues

An estimated 4.5 million Ukrainians have been displaced since the war started in late February, with many becoming refugees in other European countries. But the European Union is allowing many Ukrainians to stay in other countries for a year or longer, a policy Bhabha endorsed.

“The EU’s response is something which sets a wonderful precedent for refugee flows and will at least in part mitigate the tragedy,” Bhabha said. At the same time, she noted, “The challenge is immense, because of the scale of arrival [of refugees], and the scale of harm and devastation are huge.”

Moreover, whether the war in Ukraine sets a precedent for openness toward refugees is still quite uncertain. Bhabha noted that Venezuelans, Syrians, and Afghans, among others, have not received the same welcome in Europe as refugees of European origin. In any case, she added, national leaders should be prepared for further refugee crises.

“States should anticipate unpredictable needs [regarding refugees] rather than always being behind the curve,” Bhabha said.

Brenner, focusing his remarks on cyber warfare, noted that Russia has not really deployed the kind of disruptive technology attacks many expected.

“This looks like a puzzle at first, but it’s really not,” Brenner said. “If you’re blowing up the hospital, and if you’re blowing up the power plant, taking out its cyber network really is sort of beside the point.” He added: “We’re in a war that has cyber aspects to it, and it’s anything but a standalone cyber event.”

At the same time, Brenner noted, Russia is not having unqualified success in the cyber arena at the moment. Ukraine has obtained data about Russian military operations, and the US Congress passed new measures recently that may “make resilience greater” against Russian operations.

## Aligned with China

One of the most pressing issues in global geopolitics is how the relationship between Russia and China will be affected by the war in Ukraine. China has not joined the economic sanctions against Russia, but it has not undercut them, either.

“Even though China opposes the sanctions, China so far does not appear to be helping Russia to circumvent or overcome them,” Fravel said. “And, in fact, [China] has been quite cautious, seeking to understand the limits of these sanctions, so that its companies and firms do not get entangled in them, because that ultimately would be bad for Chinese business, and [that’s] something that China wants to avoid.”

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## 3 questions: The future of international education

Anna-Rose Stember

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Evan Lieberman is the Total Professor of Political Science and Contemporary Africa in the MIT Department of Political Science. He conducts research in the field of comparative politics, with a focus on development and ethnic conflict in sub-Saharan Africa. He directs the Global Diversity Lab (GDL) and was recently named faculty director of the MIT International Science and Technology Initiatives (MISTI), MIT's global experiential learning program.

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Evan Lieberman is the faculty director of the MIT International Science and Technology Initiatives (MISTI).

### **Q: Why is now an especially important time for international education?**

**A:** The major challenges we currently face—climate change, the pandemic, supply chain management—are all global problems that require global solutions. We will need to collaborate across borders to a greater extent than ever before. There is no time more pressing for students to gain an international outlook on these challenges; the ideas, thinking, and perspectives from other parts of the world; and to build global networks. And yet, most of us have stayed very close to home for the past couple of years. While remote internships and communications have offered temporary solutions when travel was limited, these have been decidedly inferior to the opportunities for learning and making connections through in-person cultural and collaborative experiences at the heart of MISTI. It is important for students and faculty to be able to thrive in an interconnected world as they navigate their research/careers during this unusual time. The changing landscape of the past few years has left all of us somewhat anxious. Nonetheless, I am buoyed by important examples of global collaboration in problem-solving, with scientists, governments and other organizations working together on the things that unite us all.

**Q: How is MIT uniquely positioned to provide global opportunities for students and faculty?**

**A:** MISTI is a unique program with a long history of building robust partnerships with industry, universities, and other sectors in countries around the world, establishing opportunities that complement MIT students' unique skill sets. MIT is fortunate to be the home of some of the top students and faculty in the world, and this is a benefit to partners seeking collaborators. The broad range of disciplines across the entire institute provides opportunities to match in nearly every sector. MISTI's rigorous, country-specific preparation ensures that students build durable cultural connections while abroad and empowers them to play a role in addressing critical global challenges. The combination of technical and humanistic training that MIT students receive are exactly the profiles necessary to take advantage of opportunities abroad, hopefully with a long-term impact. Student participants have a depth of knowledge in their subject areas as well as MIT's one-of-a-kind education model that is exceptionally valuable. The diversity of our community offers a wide variety of perspectives and life experiences, on top of academic expertise. Also, MISTI's donor-funded programs provide the unique ability for all students to be able to participate in international programs, regardless of financial situation. This is a direct contrast with internship programs that often skew toward participants with little-to-no financial need.

**Q: How do these kinds of collaborations help tackle global problems?**

**A:** Of course, we don't expect that even intensive internships of a few months are going to generate the global solutions we need. It is our hope that our students—who we anticipate being leaders in a range of sectors—will opt for global careers, and/or bring a global perspective to their work and in their lives. We believe that by building on their MISTI experiences and training, they will be able to forge the types of collaborations that lead to equity-enhancing solutions to universal problems—the climate emergency, ongoing threats to global public health, the liabilities associated with the computing revolution—and are able to improve human development more generally.

More than anything, at MISTI we are planting the seeds for longer-term collaborations. We literally grant several millions of dollars in seed funds to establish faculty-led collaborations with student involvement in addition to supporting hundreds of internships around the world. The MISTI Global Seed Funds (GSF) program compounds the Institute's impact by supporting partnerships abroad that often turn into long-standing research relationships addressing the critical challenges that require international solutions. GSF projects often have an impact far beyond their original scope. For example, a number of MISTI GSF projects have utilized their results to jump-start research efforts to combat the pandemic. ■

# briefings

## Traveling the world to make a global impact

Anna-Rose Stember



Left to right: James Lin, Yuka Machino, and Holden Mui wear customized kente stole during their time in Ghana for IAP 2022.

For decades, MIT students have traveled abroad over Independent Activities Period (IAP) or in the summer for enriching global experiences through MIT International Science and Technology Initiatives (MISTI). This year, dozens of students became MISTI's first IAP travelers abroad since the start of the pandemic.

"We got very good at being spontaneous and rolling with the punches," says MIT-Israel student Marilyn Meyers. "I knew that given the rising cases of the new Covid variant that things in Israel would be a bit chaotic and that I would have to be prepared to go with the flow. I decided to take a chance and go ... because I had a feeling that it would still be a transformative experience. I was right about that."

MISTI students are extensively prepped before they take their trips abroad, with program managers advising on logistics such as visas and foreign bank accounts and training students on regional

workplace culture and travel safety. While the pandemic added some additional elements to the process, a solid infrastructure was already in place to support them.

"Safely sending students abroad has always been our top priority, even prior to Covid," says Griselda Gomez, MISTI's assistant director of health and safety. "That constant commitment is what has made it possible for us confidently navigate the pandemic and reopen programs."

The Global Teaching Labs (GTL) program is one of MISTI's most in-demand opportunities, where MIT students teach STEM courses in high schools and universities abroad. On top of the standard preparation, GTL students are trained about teaching materials, platforms, and communication techniques, as well as introduced to the host country's education system and culture. Thirty-seven students took part in GTL this year, sharing the MIT style of education and unique approach to problem-solving around the world.

"GTL Israel was really an incredible experience," gushes Meyers. "One of the highlights of my experience was playing English games with the students. Seeing the [students] push themselves to use the English that they knew and to learn more English words despite making mistakes [made it] a really special event."

Yuka Machino and Holden Mui went to Ghana with the MIT-Africa GTL program to work on a unique mathematics project. "The mission for our MISTI program was two-fold. One of our goals was to train their nation's top mathematics students in preparation for the International Math Olympiad. The second goal was to inspire stu-

dents from Ghana's top public schools to prepare for and participate in mathematics competitions," says Mui. "It was exhilarating to watch the students reach their 'aha!' moments when working through problems."

Machino agrees that interacting with the students was the highlight of the trip. "They were all very engaged and interested, and I felt a lot of satisfaction in being able to share the kind of math that I found most fun and beautiful."

Students also gained valuable experience to bolster their academic and professional careers. "This MISTI program definitely helped me improve my ability to explain complex concepts in a simple way. Though I'm not sure what my career will be, this ability will be helpful in almost any career, from working with others in the workplace to one in academia," says Mui.

"Compared to my life during the semester, it was a very different and enriching experience for me to work with other people on a project like this," adds Machino. "I'm really thankful for MIT for this opportunity and for our host for making it such an enjoyable and exciting experience."

There are more student opportunities like this on the way. Now that the students have returned to campus, planning at MISTI is already full steam ahead for the next group of students. Says Gomez, "We anticipate having even more countries open this summer, and we are positive that our staff and students will be ready." ■

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MISTI is MIT's hub for global experiences, providing immersive international programs that bring MIT's one-of-a-kind learning model to life in countries around the world. MISTI empowers students to build cultural connections, make an impact in the world, and gain valuable perspectives that inform their education, career, and worldview.

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# briefings

## Mobilizing across borders to address global challenges

MISTI



Mark Jarzombek (right) poses with MIT students in Jerusalem at a MISTI Workshop in June 2019.

Photo courtesy Mark Jarzombek

For the most creative minds to work together to solve the world's greatest challenges, it is essential for global collaboration to be unencumbered by distance. The MIT International Science and Technology Initiatives (MISTI) Global Seed Funds (GSF) program enables participating faculty teams to collaborate across borders with international partners to develop and launch joint research projects.

MISTI GSF is comprised of a general fund, open to any country, and a number of country-, region-, or university-specific funds. The resulting partnerships allow access to environmental resources, cutting-edge laboratory equipment, and perspectives not available on the Cambridge, Massachusetts, campus. GSF has made global research partnerships

possible since 2008.

"[Our] collaboration was extremely fruitful," says 2018 Israel fund recipient and MIT professor of architectural history and theory Mark Jarzombek. "The insights and knowledge brought to architecture students, both from local experts and particularly from the field of archeology, allowed them to approach the project from a unique perspective and disciplinary lens."

Ellen Roche, the WM Keck Career Development Professor in Biomedical Engineering at MIT, had a similar experience with her 2018 collaboration with Spain: "Sending prototypes from one country to another and communicating transfer of manufacturing was sometimes challenging. However, working with Jose and his team was invaluable for their particle image velocimetry expertise."

The 27 funds that comprise the MISTI GSF 2021-22 cycle awarded over \$1.6 million to 75 projects from 20 departments across all of the schools in the Institute. This year's awards bring the total amount to \$22.6 million funding 1,113 projects over the 14-year life of the program. This year, new funds helped MIT faculty collaborate further into Eastern Europe; funds in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia were met with a large number of excited applicants. Over 70 percent of all MIT faculty members have submitted a GSF proposal, with many receiving multiple awards.

"We have applied for [another] Global Seed Fund to facilitate a similar project in Berlin," shares Jarzombek. "We hope to expand the breadth and goals of the method we developed and to continue to examine and explore its pedagogical and scholarly implications for the field of architectural history and pedagogy in various sites across the globe."

Faculty seed funds also provide meaningful educational opportunities for students. The majority of GSF teams include students, contributing to both the Institute's educational mission and commitment to encouraging intercultural learning.

"It was my intuition when I [applied for a] GSF project that we need to engage students," says MIT associate professor of metallurgy Antoine Allanore of his 2017 UK collaboration. "It is the way to make this a meaningful experience for all."

On top of building their expertise, students are often able to contribute to the faculty member's groundbreaking research at a high level. "Two of [our] students were extremely involved and helpful in the fieldwork and study of the site," says Jarzombek. "We could not have achieved what we have without them."

Helping unite top academics from around the globe to address the most pressing critical issues, GSF fosters lasting connections between MIT and other leading research institutions. Most GSF projects have often culminated in published research and many have leveraged their early results to obtain additional research funding.

"We are submitting a paper this year on the work on single ventricle disease, and we have also recently started a collaboration with another group in Barcelona," says Roche. The collaborators also secured additional funding from La Caixa Bank and have submitted an additional application to the National Science Foundation.

"[Our] highly successful seed grant resulted in a publication in the premier conference in bioinformatics and in an awarded BSF [United States-Israel Binational Science Foundation] grant proposal," says Bonnie Berger, the Simons Professor of Mathematics at MIT and a 2020 Israel fund recipient. "We thank MISTI for funding us with the seed grant, which allowed us to achieve these goals."

The next call for proposals will be in mid-September. "Now that global travel has nearly fully reopened, we expect even more applications next year," says MISTI assistant director Alicia Raun. "We can't wait to see what innovative ideas our faculty bring to us next." ■

# briefings

## Congressional seminar introduces MIT faculty to 30 Washington staffers

Security Studies Program



SSP Director M. Taylor Fravel (center, with red tie) poses with SSP staff and participants in the 2022 Executive Branch and Congressional Staff Seminar.

Photo courtesy Christopher Burns

More than 30 congressional and executive branch staffers were hosted by MIT's Security Studies Program (SSP) for a series of panels and a keynote address focused on contemporary national security issues.

Organized by the Security Studies Program, the Executive Branch and Congressional Staff Seminar was held late April, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The program, supported by a generous grant from the Raymond Frankel Foundation, is hosted by MIT every other year to encourage interaction and exchange between scholars studying national security and policymakers.

Staff members from the US House of Representatives, the Senate, and the Congressional Research Service were joined by more than 15 MIT SSP faculty members and research affiliates. Each of them is an expert on one of a

broad range of topics, from China's ambitions to great-power competition.

This year's program included a guided tour of the MIT Lincoln Laboratory in Lexington, Massachusetts, four intensive panels with SSP faculty and affiliates, and a keynote address by Admiral John Richardson, the former chief of naval operations.

### Keynote address

In his address, Richardson argued the United States is facing two simultaneous revolutions that have the potential to reshape the world. First, a political revolution of rising powers is returning the world to multipolarity and spreading authoritarianism. Second, a technological revolution of interconnected new technologies, from artificial intelligence to quantum computing, promises not only to increase speed and efficiency, but also to allow for entirely new capabilities.

Richardson compared the current moment to two points in history: the turn of the 19th century and the beginning of the Cold War. In both periods, he said, the United States faced intertwined political and technological revolutions.

In each case, he said, the US and its allies prevailed. This success was won in both the political and technological spheres.

In those areas, there was a sense of existential urgency that enabled a more adaptable and learning-based approach to the rapid changes of the Cold War, he said. In the end, the United States benefited from a coherent strategy to address worldwide changes.

The current challenges, Richardson said, demand a similar sense of urgency, adaptability, and learning if the US is to prevail in preserving its influence in the world, and its quality of life.



## The changing international order

During a panel on the “Changing International Order,” staffers heard from Ford International Professor of Political Science Barry Posen, SSP Senior Advisor Carol Saivetz, and Jonathan Kirshner, a professor of political science and international studies at Boston College.

Posen focused his remarks on Russia and China’s growing power relative to the United States, in the context of the 2008 financial crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine. Kirshner identified the domestic politics of key participants in the international order, especially domestic dysfunction in the United States, as the chief driver of change. Saivetz offered several hypotheses on the cause of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, which include pushing back against the expansion of NATO and the European Union, the desire for great power status, concerns about a liberal democracy on its borders, and the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church.

## New tools of statecraft

A panel on “New Tools of Statecraft” featured remarks by Richard Nielsen, associate professor of political science at MIT, Mariya Grinberg, assistant professor of political science at MIT, and Joel Brenner, senior advisor to MIT SSP. MIT’s R David Edelman, director of the Project on Technology, Economy and National Security and Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory affiliate, chaired the panel.

Nielsen discussed the role of US influence in a world beset by misinformation. He emphasized that the internet is more fragmented than it has ever been, and America’s ability to shape people’s opinions through the internet is extremely limited. Grinberg, an expert on conflict economies, addressed what policy changes are necessary—and what policy changes were unnecessary—in response to the Covid-19 pandemic’s effects on markets. Brenner observed that many existing tools of statecraft are not “new,” but the speed, coordination, and synchronization of tools is new, as demonstrated by both the Russians and the Ukrainians in the ongoing war.

## China’s growing ambitions

A panel on “China’s Growing Ambitions” featured remarks by MIT SSP director and Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor of Political Science M Taylor Fravel along with two SSP alumni: Joseph Torigian PhD ’16, an assistant professor with the School of International Service at American University, and Fiona Cunningham PhD ’18, an assistant professor of political science at the University of Pennsylvania.

Torigian suggested that Chinese General Secretary Xi Jinping’s views are likely a balance between pursuing the Communist Party’s ideals and mission with a deep skepticism of radical policies, and the kind of leftism and radicalism associated with events such as the Cultural Revolution. Xi is ideological, he said, but is flexible. Cunningham spoke broadly on China’s ambitions, and concluded with an argument that the US needs to do more work to implement a more competitive Indo-Pacific policy, espe-

## Eleanor Freund receives Jeanne Guillemin Prize

Michelle English



Eleanor Freund is an MIT PhD candidate in security studies and international relations, with a focus on Chinese statecraft and security policy.

The daughter of an American diplomat, Eleanor Freund spent most of her childhood living abroad in such places as Madagascar, Ghana, South Africa, and Austria. These experiences, she explains, led to an early interest in politics and international relations.

“Whether in South Africa, which was emerging from decades of racial discrimination and violence under apartheid, or Austria, which seemed practiced at navigating Cold War divisions between East and West, I was captivated by the import and impact of politics. I started college knowing that I wanted to major in political science and never doubted that decision.”

Freund, a PhD candidate in the MIT Department of Political Science, is the recipient of this year’s Jeanne Guillemin Prize at the MIT Center for International Studies (CIS).

The annual prize supports women pursuing doctorate degrees in international relations—a field that has long been dominated by men.

Jeanne Guillemin, a veteran colleague of CIS and a senior advisor in the Security Studies Program (SSP), endowed the fund shortly before her death in 2019. An expert in biological warfare, Guillemin’s groundbreaking work included an epidemiological inquiry into the 1979 anthrax outbreak in the Soviet Union and an investigation into the 2001 anthrax letters attack in the United States.

The funds from the prize will be used to support Freund’s dissertation research on Chinese foreign and security policies.

Through case studies, fieldwork abroad, and archival research, Freund aims to produce one of the first comprehensive historical studies on China’s alliances with other states.

This information could help contribute to a better understanding of how Chinese leaders evaluate threats and cooperate with other states to address these threats. It could also serve as an important resource for policymakers as they attempt to evaluate China’s current behavior, anticipate its future behavior, and avoid miscalculating during moments of crisis.

### Embracing the China challenge

Freund became interested in China through international relations classes at college, when it became apparent that China would define the 21st century and dominate the attention of American diplomacy.

“I quickly realized that ensuring the relationship between the United States and China was peaceful and productive would require contending with a relationship defined

by decades of mistrust. For anyone interested in foreign policy, there could hardly be a more meaningful challenge,” she says.

Shortly after graduating from the University of California at Berkeley, Freund moved to Beijing to study Chinese. This led to a host of other experiences, including jobs at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and at Harvard’s Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, a master’s degree from Tsinghua University as part of the Schwarzman Scholars program, and time at the US Embassy in Beijing.

When considering PhD programs, MIT was a clear first choice.

“First, the political science department, like the rest of the Institute, is imbued with the guiding principle of education in service of practical application. That’s an important orienting philosophy for me. Second, the department offers substantial faculty expertise in my areas of interest—Chinese foreign policy and Asian security—and first-rate training in international relations and security studies more generally.”

MIT is among the few universities in the United States that provides the opportunity for graduate students in political science to specialize in security studies. A unique feature of SSP is its integration of technical and political analysis of national and international security problems.

This training is crucial to producing the civilian expertise that enables effective oversight of the military and clear-eyed foreign policy decision-making, explains Freund.

SSP also has a long track record of recruiting and training women interested in security studies. Many of these women have gone on to become successful academics and policymakers, including the current US deputy secretary of defense, Kathleen Hicks PhD '10.

That legacy is a source of inspiration to Freund, who envisions a lifelong career in academia or government helping the United States navigate its relationship with China.

“It is an honor to receive an award named for Jeanne Guillemin,” says Freund. “I am particularly inspired by the tenacity and compassion she demonstrated while investigating the cause of the 1979 anthrax outbreak in Sverdlovsk. Although I never had the chance to meet her, the written account of her fieldwork in Russia illustrates her dedication to the principles of scientific research, her perseverance in overcoming the obstacles she encountered along the way, and her deep empathy for the victims and their families. I plan to use the award to fund my own fieldwork in Asia next year and hope to bring some of her passion and persistence to that experience.” ■

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### **"War in Ukraine" compendium**

The Center is closely involved in the war in Ukraine via analysis, advice, and informing the public. Coverage from our Russia scholars and security studies faculty on the invasion that began on February 24, 2022, is available on our web site on our "War in Ukraine" web page.

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### **CIS awards 17 summer study grants**

Seventeen doctoral students in international affairs at MIT were awarded summer study grants. Each will receive up to \$3,500. The summer study fellowship competition is open to advanced doctoral students in international affairs, regardless of home department. The awards were made to an outstanding cohort of MIT students from across the Institute.

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### **Inspired by Israel: Arts education, and innovation at MIT**

The MISTI MIT-Israel program together with the office of the Consulate General of Israel to New England hosted an event in late April called, "Inspired by Israel: Arts Education, and Innovation at MIT." The event featured Joshua Angrist, Ford Professor of Economics at MIT, as a keynote speaker. Israeli artist Shuli Sade was in attendance and spoke to guests about the inspiration behind her artwork that is hanging at MIT.

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### **MIT x TAU webinar series returns for its second year**

CIS and the MIT-Africa Program partnered for the second year with TRUE Africa University (TAU) to host a webinar series focusing on sustainable development in Africa. MIT alumnus and CIS research affiliate Claude Grunitzky, who spearheaded the series, interviewed the thinkers, shapers, and doers whom he sees as the inventors of the future of Africa. Highlights from this year's series include: "The Africa we want," featuring Claude Grunitzky; "Africa's growth prospects," featuring Thabi Leoka, economist; "Africa's innovation in education," featuring David Moinina Sengeh, Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and Chief Innovation Officer in Sierra Leone; and "Africa's information technologies," featuring Cina Lawson, Minister of Digital Economy and Transformation in Togo.

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### **CIS congratulates the graduates**

Among those who graduated from the Department of Political Science this past year were eight graduate students focused on international relations and security studies, including Sean Atkins (PhD), Matthew Cancian (PhD), Helen Landwehr (SM), Emma Campbell-Mohn (SM), Andrew Halterman (PhD), Sara Plana (PhD), Erik Sand (PhD), and Rachel Tecott (PhD).

Visit our website and events calendar for a complete listing of spring and summer 2022 activities. Many of our events are captured on video and available to view on our YouTube channel.

## FEATURED

### MIT-France celebrates seed fund anniversary

The MIT-France Program celebrated the 20th anniversary of its seed fund program with a symposium in Paris, France, on July 12 and 13. The event brought together experts from France and MIT on artificial intelligence and its implications for health, environment, privacy, work and governance. French Minister for Digital Transition and Telecommunications Jean-Noël Barrot opened the symposium, followed by introductory talks by MIT President Rafael Reif and the directors of leading French research institutions. Faculty participants from MIT included professors Daniela Rus, Regina Barzilay, Caroline Uhler, Jeff Grossman, Elsa Olivetti, Aleksander Madry, Marzyeh Ghassemi, Antonio Torralba and Suzanne Berger, and senior lecturer Luis Videgaray. Since 2002, the MIT-France Seed Fund has provided more than \$2 million to 142 research projects spurring collaboration between MIT faculty and scientists and counterparts in France.

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#### Emile Bustani Middle East Seminar

Each semester the Bustani Seminar invites scholars, journalists, consultants, and other experts from the Middle East, Europe, and the United States to present recent research findings on contemporary politics, society, and culture, and economic and technological development in the Middle East. Recent talks included: "The US and the Middle East: What went wrong?" with Steven Simon (MIT) and "The racial Muslim: When racism quashes religious freedom," with Sahar Aziz (Boston University).

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#### SSP Wednesday Seminar

The Security Studies Program weekly seminar series featured talks on campus for the MIT community and virtually on YouTube for the public. The spring talks included: "The civilian casualty files," with Azmat Khan (Columbia University); The logic and impacts of rebel public services provision: evidence from Taliban courts in Afghanistan, with Renard Sexton (Emory University); "Nuclear deterrence in a multipolar world," with Stacie Pettyjohn (Center for a New American Security); "Words of war: Diplomacy as a tool of conflict," Erin Min (UCLA); "Spies, lies, and algorithms: The history and future of American intelligence," Amy Zegart. (Stanford University); "Israel and the Middle East: Challenges for 2022," Amos Yadlin (Harvard University); and "Born in blackness: Africa, Africans, and the making of the modern world, 1471 to the Second World War," Howard French (Columbia University).

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#### Starr Forums

The Center hosted multiple virtual Starr Forums on global issues, including: "Republics of myth: National narratives and the US-Iran conflict," with John Tirman (MIT), Hussein Banai (Indiana University-Bloomington), and Malcolm Byrne (George Washington University). "The collapse of the Soviet empire and the seeds of the new European war," with Vladislav Zubok (London School of Economics and Political Science), Carol Saivetz (MIT), and Elizabeth Wood (MIT). "The wider implications of the war in Ukraine," with Jacqueline Bhabha (Harvard), Joel Brenner (MIT), Taylor Fravel (MIT), Roger Petersen (MIT), Jim Walsh (MIT), Carol Saivetz (MIT), and Elizabeth Wood (MIT). "Autocracy's assault on press freedom," with Ada Petriczko (MIT), Valerie Hopkins (NYT), Paulina Milewska (European University Institute), and Veronica Munk (Hungarian journalist); and "The future of US-China relations," with Taylor Fravel (MIT), Eric Heginbotham (MIT), Ketian Zhang (George Mason University), and Ali Wyne (Eurasia Group).

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# notes

## PEOPLE

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SSP Military Fellow **Pete Atkinson**'s research project, "From air to space: The perils of domain parochialism" received an Army War College writing award. The project, advised by SSP's **Erik Lin-Greenberg**, has been submitted for publication and peer review.

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CIS Senior Research Fellow **Joel Brenner** joined the editorial advisory board of the *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*. He was a featured speaker at the Starr Forum/Focus on Russia: "The wider implications of the war in Ukraine, China, cybersecurity, nukes, insurgency, refugees," on April 4, 2022; he was quoted extensively in "After Biden's warning, how might Russian cyberattacks play out in the US?" *Boston Globe*, March 25, 2022.

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PhD Candidate **Suzanne Freeman** received a Carnegie/Harriman Research Grant for doctoral students in the social sciences.

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PhD Candidate **Eleanor Freund** was awarded the 2022 Jeanne Guillemin Prize to help support her dissertation research on Chinese foreign and security policy.

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CIS Senior Research Scholar, Visiting Professor, and Director of the Seminar XXI Program **Kelly M Greenhill** presented the following talks: "The diplomacy of forced migration," (with F Adamson), British International Studies Association, Newcastle on Tyne, UK, June 2022; and the International Studies Association Annual Meeting, Nashville, TN, April 2022; "Fear and present danger: Extra-factual sources of threat conception and proliferation," Tower Center, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX, April 2022; she was a panelist for "The politics of migration and asylum," University of Cambridge (UK) May 2022; "Weaponizing migration," UK House of Lords, London, UK, June 2022; and "Migration, borders and security," Policing Border Spaces, Netherlands Defense Academy, Dutch Ministry of Defense, Breda, Netherlands, June 2022.

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CIS Research Affiliate and SSP Alumnus **Eugene Gholz** discussed the defense industry supply chain, especially for Javelin missiles for *NPR's Morning Edition* on May 27, 2022.

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SSP PhD Alumnus **Andrew Halterman** received the Lucian Pye Award for Outstanding PhD Thesis from the MIT Department of Political Science.

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CIS Principal Research Scientist **Eric Heginbotham** participated in the "3rd Track 1.5 US-Australia Indo-Pacific Deterrence Dialogue." He was a panelist at a Starr Forum/Focus on Russia: "The wider implications of the war in Ukraine, China, cybersecurity, nukes, insurgency, refugees," on April 4, 2022.

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CIS Elizabeth Neuffer Fellow **Maham Javaid** moderated a Starr Forum: "#Viral potentials: How South Asian women use TikTok," on June 24, 2022.

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SSP Assistant Director **Laura Kerwin** started her new position in SSP on July 15, 2022. She transitioned to SSP from CIS Headquarters where she coordinated programs and events. She succeeds Joli Divon Saraf who served as the SSP Assistant Director for more than fourteen years.

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Frank Stanton Professor of Nuclear Security and Political Science **Vipin Narang** was named Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy for the Department of Defense on March 28, 2022. He is on public service leave of absence from his faculty position while working for the DoD.

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Associate Professor of Political Science **Rich Nielsen** presented a talk, "Data science and racist influencers on YouTube," at HubSpot, a developer and marketer of software products for inbound marketing, on June 7, 2022.

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Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor of Political Science **Roger Petersen** made multi-

# end notes

ple speaking appearances including: "Combating terrorism: From conflict to prevention," Political Science Department, Nahrain University, Baghdad, Iraq, May 16, 2022; "State-building in Iraq: Learning from other cases," Iraqi Institute for Dialogue, Baghdad, Iraq, May 6, 2022; at a Starr Forum/ Focus on Russia: "The wider implications of the war in Ukraine, China, cybersecurity, nukes, insurgency, refugees," April 4, 2022; and was co-organizer and co-presenter, MIT Security Studies Program Special Seminar "The strategic use and misuse of emotions: Lessons from the American civil war," April 1, 2022. He was featured in an article in *Suddutsche Zeitung* at the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war, March 8, 2022.

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MIT-Japan Managing Director **Christine Pilcavage** received a SHASS Infinite Mile Award in recognition of her professional accomplishments.

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Ford International Professor of Political Science **Barry Posen** spoke on "Ukraine war: Is Russian defeat nothing but a 'fantasy'?" for *DW News* on July 11, 2022; he was a featured panelist on "What will be the impact of the war in Ukraine for the future of European security?", for the Cato Institute, on June 29, 2022; he participated in "Ukraine's war: Experts debate NATO's role," for Munk Debates Podcast, March 22, 2022; was a signatory to "We call on Biden to reject reckless demands for a no-fly zone," *The Guardian*, March 11, 2022; and was featured on "Russia, Ukraine, and European security," for Cato's Power Problems podcast on February 22, 2022.

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SSP Senior Advisor **Carol Saivetz** made multiple media appearances to discuss the war in Ukraine including: "Ukraine entering sixth month," *NECN*, on July 25, 2022; "Is Russia failing in its fight In Ukraine?" *NECN*, on April 25, 2022; "What are the implications of the Russian attack on Ukraine," *10 Boston*, February 24, 2022. She also participated in and/or moderated four Starr Forums/Focus on Russia webinars including: "The collapse of the Soviet Empire and the seeds of the new European war," on April 25, 2022; "The wider implications of the war in Ukraine," on April 4, 2022; "The war in Ukraine: A reporter's view," on March 14, 2022; and "The Russian-Ukrainian conflict: A prologue to WWII or another frozen conflict?" on January 28, 2022.

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Ford International Professor of Political Science and Director of CIS **Richard Samuels** was featured in multiple media outlets to discuss the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe including: "Why Shinzo Abe was such a towering



figure in Japan," *The Hill*, July 8, 2022; "What was Shinzo Abe's political influence on Japan?" *New York Times*, July 8, 2022. He also contributed a gallery label for "Picturing the Invisible," a photography exhibit sponsored jointly by the Royal Geographical Society (UK) and the Munich Centre for Technology in Society, memorializing the tenth anniversary of the Great Northeastern Japan Disaster at the Royal Geographical Society (UK) (2021-2022) and Deutsches Museum Munich, (2022- ). The exhibit, curated by Makoto Takahashi of Cambridge University, was awarded the 2022 Ziman Award for Public Engagement by the European Association for the Study of Science and Technology.

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CIS Research Affiliate and SSP Alumnus **Erik Sand** appeared on the @ConvSix podcast to discuss sanctions against Russia after its war of aggression against Ukraine.

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CIS Robert E Wilhelm Fellow **Steven Simon** was featured in "As war drags on in Ukraine, is it time to talk compromise?" *WBUR On Point*, June 21, 2022; and "Will the transfer of advanced weapons to Ukraine lead to a widening war?" *PBS Newshour*, on June 1, 2022.

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CIS Principal Research Scientist and Executive Director **John Tirman** was featured in multiple media outlets in response to his new book, "Republics of myth: National narratives and the US-Iran conflict," co-authored with CIS Research Affiliates **Hussein Banai** and **Malcolm Byrne**, including: "America's Iran follies," *Foreign Policy*, June 9, 2022; "When dueling narratives deepen a divide," *MIT News*, May 16, 2022; "The clashing narratives that keep the US and Iran at odds," *DAWN*, May 10, 2022; "Why the US and Iran hate each other," *Responsible Statecraft*, May 2, 2022; "Republicans will quit any nuclear deal with Iran, scholar predicts," *Tehran Times*, March 11, 2022. He was a featured speaker, along with his co-authors, at a Starr Forum: Republics of myth; National narratives and the US-Iran conflict, on May 11, 2022.

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SSP Senior Research Associate **Jim Walsh** made several media appearances including for "Shangri-La dialogue opens in Singapore," *The Heat*, on June 11, 2022; "Biden's move to send advanced weapons to Ukraine raises questions about US involvement in the war," *NPR*, June 2, 2022. He was a featured speaker at the

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Starr Forum: Focus on Russia: China, cybersecurity, nukes, insurgency, refugees, on April 4, 2022.

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Professor of History and Co-Director of the MIT-Eurasia Program **Elizabeth Wood** made multiple media appearances and talks to discuss the war in Ukraine, including: w/ Ruth Green, International Bar Association, London, June 22, 2022; *Voice of America*, June 22, 2022; CTV News (Canada); Newsy (TV news program), March 28, 2022; *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, March 7, 2022; *GBH Radio News*, February 27, 2022; *Expresso* (Portugal weekly newspaper), February 25, 2022. She also participated in and/or moderated four Starr Forums/Focus on Russia webinars including: “The collapse of the Soviet Empire and the seeds of the new European war,” on April 25, 2022; “The wider implications of the war in Ukraine,” on April 4, 2022; “The war in Ukraine: A reporter’s view,” on March 14; and “The Russian-Ukrainian conflict: A prologue to WWII or another frozen conflict?” on January 28, 2022.

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\_\_\_\_\_ (with **Theo Milonopoulos**) "Boots on the Ground, Eyes in the Sky," *Foreign Affairs*, May 2022.

\_\_\_\_\_ (with **Brian Blankenship**) "Trivial Tripwires?: Military Capabilities and Alliance Reassurance," *Security Studies*, Vol. 31, no. 1 (2022)

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\_\_\_\_\_ (with **Erik Sand**), "The Russian Sanctions Regime and the Risk Of Catastrophic Success," *War on the Rocks*, March 8, 2022.

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MIT Visiting Professor and Director of the MIT Seminar XXI Program **Kelly M Greenhill** (with F. Adamson) "Global Security Entanglement and the Mobility Paradox," *Current History*, January 2022.

\_\_\_\_\_ "When Migrants Become Weapons: The Long History and Worrying Future of a Coercive Tactic," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2022.

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CIS Principal Research Scientist **Eric Heginbotham**, (with **Rachel Odell**, et al) "Active Denial: A Roadmap to a More Effective, Stabilizing, and Sustainable U.S. Defense Strategy in Asia." *Quincy Institute* paper, No. 8, June 2022.

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Stanton Nuclear Security Fellow **Doreen Horschig**, "Israeli Public Opinion on the Use of Nuclear Weapons: Lessons from Terror Management Theory," *Journal of Global Security Studies*, May 2022.

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CIS Executive Director and Principal Research Scientist **John Tirman**, (with **Husein Banai** and **Malcolm Byrne**) "Republics of Myth National Narratives and the US-Iran Conflict" John Hopkins University Press, April 12, 2022.

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## Blame games: Malattribution and the Madrid train bombings

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## What Russia’s invasion of Ukraine means for the world

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Diplomatically, Fravel added that China has hurt its stature among many countries in Europe due to its relationship with Russia. “China has managed very successfully to annoy the one group of countries it was seeking to cultivate as part of its broader response to the United States,” he said.

Finally, there has been rampant speculation that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine might embolden China to initiate military action against Taiwan. But the problems Russia has encountered in Ukraine might equally well quell China’s likelihood of taking action, Fravel noted.

“Though of course China is not going to abandon any of its ambitions with respect to Taiwan, it may be more cautious, perhaps, in thinking about using the military,” Fravel said.

### Rebuilding the relationship, versus the alternative

Walsh noted that Russia’s invasion, and Putin’s comments emphasizing Russia’s ability to use its nuclear arsenal, have heightened nuclear fears among more the public more than anything else in the last couple of decades—something that can be quantified through Google search patterns, for instance.

Moreover, Walsh added, “I think the odds of us removing tactical nuclear weapons from Europe have diminished significantly for a period of time.”

Still, Walsh said, he would not rule out the US and Russia restarting a diplomatic dialogue over nuclear issues eventually.

“I think this [the war] is going to go on for a while, and I think that will continue to impede those conversations, but eventually—quietly perhaps at first, but eventually—the two countries will be pressed to talk again to reduce mutual dangers,” Walsh said.

Brenner also presented a similar conclusion. At the moment, it is hard to see common ground between Russia, on the one hand, and the US and Europe, on the other. But in the future, at some point, with shifts in the situation in Ukraine, the US and Europe might try to reestablish a semblance of normalcy with Russia, if only to prevent an even more troublesome sense of division.

“This [war] is going to be long, it’s going to be nasty, and could involve a lot of human suffering,” Brenner said. “Remember, it’s hard to think about this, given what the Russians are doing now. But in the long run, we’re not interested in isolating Russia. The question is, can Russia be incorporated into what we in the West think of as a civilized international order? Because, if not, we’re either driving them permanently ... into the arms of the Chinese, which is not in our interest, or [Russia may remain] a volatile unsatisfied revanchist state which will continue to cause trouble. We don’t want that.” ■

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## **Congressional seminar introduces MIT faculty to 30 Washington staffers**

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adversaries, but stated that this was fundamentally not much more than top-level cosmetic changes to the 2014 military strategy in order to help cement Xi's role as a military leader.

### **The new nuclear era**

The "New Nuclear Era" panel featured three MIT faculty and affiliates: senior research associate Jim Walsh, principal research scientist Eric Heginbotham, and Caitlin Talmadge PhD '11, an associate professor with the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University and an SSP alumna.

Heginbotham discussed the increasing number and variety of roles that nuclear weapons play in international affairs, emphasizing how multipolarity and nuclear proliferation create "nested security dilemmas." Talmadge similarly highlighted the complexity of the deterrence environment with multiple, multi-sided nuclear competitions occurring at once. Walsh framed the war in Ukraine as a reminder of nuclear danger that motivates the public both to "hug nuclear weapons more closely in a more dangerous world" and to "reduce nuclear danger before unimaginably bad things happen." ■



**précis** n. a concise summary of essential points, statements, or facts.

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