Center for International Studies

Established in 1951, the Center for International Studies (CIS) is one of the premier organizations of its kind, a leading venue of global research and education. The relevance of the center’s work for problem solving on issues of security, international political economy and technology, Asian security, the Middle East, and other areas is reflected in dozens of programs, projects, and the work of faculty and staff through research, public outreach, and publications. Its international education program for MIT students—the MIT Science and Technology Initiative (MISTI)—is a pioneering effort that has helped bring the world to 3,000 students through internships abroad and educational events on campus.

Richard J. Samuels, Ford International Professor of Political Science, has directed the Center for 18 years with the active participation of about 30 faculty and researchers, 40 staff members, and 30 graduate students, along with numerous distinguished affiliated scholars and practitioners. CIS’s innovative exploration of international issues enriches MIT, the nation, and the world.

Leadership of the center includes Professor Samuels, director; John Tirman, executive director; Chappell Lawson, associate professor of political science and director of MISTI; and Barry Posen, Ford International Professor of Political Science and director of the Security Studies Program (SSP).

Highlights of the academic year include the following:

- CIS hosted two Robert E. Wilhelm Fellows—Admiral Scott Swift (US Navy, retired), former commander of the US Pacific Fleet, and Hala Al-Dosari, a Saudi activist focused on the place of women in the Arab world.
- A new program, Human Rights and Technology, was created and the first cohort of undergraduate fellows selected.
- M. Taylor Fravel, Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor of Political Science, was named to succeed Professor Posen as director of the Security Studies Program.
- Professor Samuels and Principal Research Scientist Eric Heginbotham initiated the Global Dynamics Simulation Lab that will support a coherent research and teaching program aimed at assessing and anticipating international crises.
- Professor Posen received the University of Notre Dame International Security Center’s Lifetime Achievement Award for innovative approaches to grand strategy.
- Faculty engaged policymakers through the CIS Policy Lab, SSP’s congressional aides conference, and the annual briefing of Boston-based consuls general, including frequent appearances in the national news media.
- The center’s Starr Forum reached tens of thousands of people with a rich assortment of speakers, including former US ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul and renowned climate scientist Michael Mann.
Security Studies Program

The Security Studies Program is a graduate-level research and education program. Its senior research and teaching staff include social scientists and policy analysts. A special feature of the program is the integration of technical and political analyses of national and international security problems. Security studies is a recognized field of study in the Department of Political Science, where courses emphasize grand strategy, causes and prevention of conflict, military operations and technology, and defense policy.

NATO Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Relations Seminar


Ruina Nuclear Age Speaker Series

On October 25, 2018, SSP held its Ruina Nuclear Age Speaker Series with guest speaker David Holloway, the Raymond A. Spruance Professor of International History and professor of political science at the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University. Holloway’s speech centered on the international history of nuclear weapons in which Holloway pinpointed specific instances of nuclear provocation and the future of these weapons in turbulent times.

Grand Strategy, Security, and Statecraft Seminar Series

On November 14, 2018, as part of SSP’s new Grand Strategy, Security, and Statecraft fellowship program, SSP hosted the seminar portion of the partnership. In November, SSP brought in Charles Kupchan, senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and professor of international affairs in the Walsh School of Foreign Service and Department of Government at Georgetown University. Kupchan’s talk was titled “The Illiberal Disruption: Temporary Detour or Historical Turning Point?” and he discussed where Western democracy is headed in the coming decades.

General Doolittle Award Dinner

On Tuesday, March 12, 2019, the Security Studies Program hosted its annual James H. Doolittle Award Dinner. This year’s featured speaker and Doolittle award recipient was Alan Epstein, professor emeritus, MIT Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics. Epstein presented “The Nonlinear Futures of Military Aviation.” In his talk, he shared his experience in industry, serving as a vice president with Pratt and Whitney, and also his time as a professor at MIT.

Senior Congressional and Executive Branch Seminar

From April 17–19, 2019, the Security Studies Program hosted its fifth biennial senior congressional and executive branch staff seminar, “Regions and Rivals: American Strategy in a Time of Uncertainty.” Bringing 25 staffers from across the legislative and executive branches to MIT’s campus for an intensive three-day seminar, MIT faculty and
outside speakers presented on nuclear and geographical threats affecting US interests across the globe. The seminar was a project of the Frankel Global Policy Fund.

**Special Seminars**

- December 7, 2018: Daryl Press (Dartmouth College), “Nuclear Deterrence in an Age of Rapid Technological Change”
- April 19, 2019: Scott Sagan (Stanford University) and Benjamin A. Valentino (Dartmouth College), “Public Support for the Use of Nuclear Weapons in the US, UK, France, and Israel”

**“Focus on Russia” Seminar Series**

- November 1, 2018: Ambassador William Hill, former head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova and Global Fellow, Wilson Center, “Russia’s Place in the New World Order”
- February 26, 2019: Brian Taylor, Professor and Chair of Political Science, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, “Putinism”
- March 14, 2019: Ambassador Michael McFaul, former US Ambassador to Russia and senior fellow, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, “From Cold War to Hot Peace”

**Lincoln Laboratory Speaker Series**

- February 7, 2019: Jim Walsh, senior research associate, SSP, “Readout from Riyadh: My Trip to Saudi Arabia”
- May 3, 2019: Joshua Shifrinson (Boston University), “The Rise of China in Historical and Theoretical Perspective”

**Wednesday Seminar Series**

Sustaining a long tradition, SSP continued the **Wednesday Seminar Series** (20 in total), which offers talks on topics relevant to national defense and international relations, including cybersecurity, China, Iraq, national security decision making, military technology, military history, and nuclear topics. Speakers included academics, military officers, and think tank analysts. The speaker series is open to the MIT community and the general public.
SSP publishes an annual report, and a quarterly digital newsletter. In addition, members of the program made themselves available for numerous media appearances. Program research is built around the interests of the faculty, the dissertations of the graduate students, and occasional commissioned projects. Key research areas included the following.

**Nuclear Strategy and Statecraft**

- Examining the underlying logic of current nonproliferation strategies
- North Korea and Iran
- Resource allocation and counter-proliferation policy
- Middle power nuclear strategies
- Nuclear history
- China’s nuclear strategy

**Change and Stability in Asia**

- Preventing conflict in Asia’s territorial and maritime disputes
- China’s military and grand strategy
- US-China relations
- Japan in East Asian security
- The India-Pakistan competition

**U.S. Foreign and Defense Policy**

- Reassessing US grand strategy
- The nature and limits of US military power
- The future of conventional warfare

**Internal Conflict**

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

The Security Studies Program hosts a visiting fellows program in addition to the military fellows that rotate annually from all four US armed services. The Stanton Foundation awarded funds to support several scholars on nuclear issues and a chair in political science. The program just completed its seventh year of the fellowship, which included two postdoctoral fellows, and one predoctoral fellow.
The Charles Koch Foundation is funding a new, two-year joint SSP–Harvard Kennedy School fellowship. It supports research addressing fundamental issues of U.S. grand strategy, foreign policy, and America’s role in the world. SSP hosted one predoctoral fellow.

The program received major support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, which awarded SSP a 24-month, $670,000 grant (July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2020) to support research on the global diffusion of power. It also received funding from the Stanton Foundation, and the Frankel (MIT) Global Policy Fund, among other foundations and donors, and in April 2019 received a one-year award from Lincoln Laboratory.

**Seminar XXI: Outreach to the Washington, DC, Policy Community**

For more than three decades, CIS has hosted Seminar XXI, an educational program for senior military officers, government officials, and executives in nongovernmental organizations in the national security policy community. The program provides future leaders of that community with the analytic skills needed to understand other countries and foreign relations in general. A cohort of about 85 fellows meet throughout the academic year in Washington, DC, and northern Virginia.

Fellows learn to recognize the assumptions that underlie assessments of foreign societies and to explore policy issues critical to American interests through a variety of lenses. At each session, eminent speakers present alternative perspectives from which to understand a given country or problem. The fundamental criterion for choosing fellows is that they currently hold or are expected to hold top posts in the military or government within the next three to five years.

The program just completed its 33rd year and now has more than 2,400 alumni, including the current chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mark Milley. Robert Art, Christian A. Herter Professor of International Relations at Brandeis University and a senior fellow in SSP, directs Seminar XXI.

**MIT Science and Technology Initiative**

The MIT Science and Technology Initiative provides international education opportunities for MIT students and faculty through student internship, research, entrepreneurship, and teaching abroad programs; through faculty funds; through international events on campus; and through partnerships with companies, research institutions, universities, and government agencies around the world.

MISTI operates via 25 country and regional programs. In addition to internships, the Global Teaching Labs program helped to send MIT students to teach in 20 countries. The MIT Global Startup Labs ran workshops in Germany, Ghana, South Africa, and Uganda. Also, the MISTI Global Seed Funds inaugurated new funds in Germany, Belgium, Korea, and India through the Global Partnerships Fund.

**Student Programs**

MISTI offers MIT undergraduate and graduate students opportunities to intern, research, and teach abroad. These experiences are provided at no cost to the students. Students prepare for their placements through MIT courses in the language, history,
and politics of the host country and a series of six to 10 not-for-credit training modules developed by MISTI staff.

In AY2019, MISTI facilitated 1,215 international opportunities. Of these placements, about half were internships or to participate in research at companies, research institutions, or university laboratories.

The Global Teaching Labs program sent 298 students over MIT's Independent Activities Period to Andorra, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Hong Kong, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Mexico, Peru, Russia, South Africa, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

In addition, 54 students taught STEM subjects and entrepreneurship classes during the summer through the China Educational Technology Initiative, Global Startup Labs, and Middle East Entrepreneurs of Tomorrow.

MISTI student placements in AY2019 were as follows:

- 512 internships (companies, research institutions, nongovernmental organizations, government, and universities)
- 311 Global Teaching Labs and other short-term teaching assignments
- 54 long-term teaching assignments
- 69 courses abroad (for credit)
- 45 externships
- 7 graduate school/postdoc placements
- 93 short-term research placements
- 34 trainings facilitated or supported
- 90 workshops

**MISTI Global Seed Funds**

MISTI Global Seed Funds enables MIT faculty and research scientists to launch early-stage international projects and collaboration with colleagues abroad. Through an annual call for proposals, MISTI awards funds for international travel and meetings with international colleagues. Grantees are expected to involve MIT undergraduate and graduate students in their projects.

In AY2019, MISTI offered new funds in Belgium and Germany, as well as in India, Korea, and Latin America (funds in Africa continued) through the Global Partnerships Fund, bringing the total number of funds available to 24. MISTI received 221 applications from faculty and research scientists and awarded nearly $2.1 million to 106 projects in 24 MIT departments.

**Training and On-campus Events**

MISTI’s country programs offer dozens of public and pre-departure events on international topics in politics, culture, science, technology, history, industry, and the
humanities for the MIT community. The trainings for AY2019 totaled over 140 hours. MISTI's robust health and safety training was amplified with the creation of a new app to help students navigate both general and country-specific resources directly from their phones. Global Startup Labs rolled out a new training model for student instructors. These live trainings were also recorded and provided to students digitally with their curriculum materials.

**Program on Emerging Technologies**

The Program on Emerging Technologies (PoET) was founded as a joint venture of CIS, and the Departments of Political Science; Science, Technology, and Society; and Engineering Systems, with support from a National Science Foundation IGERT (Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship) grant. Kenneth Oye, professor of political science and professor of data, systems, and society, serves as director. Current activities focus on assessing and managing the benefits and risks of biological, medical, and information technologies. PoET research, education, and policy work is collaborative, with teams of technologists, scientists, social scientists, and policymakers working jointly on responsible innovation.

In AY2019, PoET activities included the following:

- Served as the hub for the Synthetic Biology Policy Group: a network linking MIT, the National Academy of Sciences, the Engineering Biology Research Consortium, the American Biological Safety Association International, Harvard University, Tufts University, Stanford University, North Carolina State University, Cambridge University, Arizona State University, and National Defense University

- Developed and evaluated safeguards to limit potential security, safety and environmental effects of biological engineering applications, including: (a) gene drive control of vector borne disease, with support from DARPA Safe Genes (with MIT Media Lab) and Fondation Brocher (with the International Risk Governance Center, Lausanne); and (b) industrial chassis for materials production with support from Netherlands NWO (Dutch Research Council) and RIVM (Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment), with Wageningen University and Yale University

- Initiated a study on information hazards associated with potentially dangerous tools and applications of biotechnology; controls on information flows to malevolent actors also limit access to information by scientists seeking to advance knowledge, by benign technologists seeking to avoid inadvertently creating hazards, and by policy communities seeking knowledge to inform deliberation—this project focuses on improving trade-offs across these desirable ends

- Fostered responsible conduct directly by providing leadership for the Broad Institute BioFoundry Safety Committee and iGEM Safety Committee

- Conducted comparative research on planned adaptive management of risks associated with emerging technologies, pharmaceuticals, finance, and security affairs

- Sponsored, designed, and staffed the core MIT course on science, technology, and public policy, serving undergraduate and graduate students from across the Institute
Publications and reports stemming from PoET work included:


**The CIS Policy Lab**

The Policy Lab at the Center for International Studies is a resource for MIT faculty and senior research scientists who seek to inform public policy with their research. Specifically, the Policy Lab identifies policy-relevant research, works with faculty to articulate the policy implications of their work, provides mentorship and staff support to create and implement outreach strategies with relevant policymakers, provides coaching and communication training to make engagement effective, and reimburses expenses that cannot be covered in a typical research grant.

The success of the CIS Policy Lab comes not just by synthesizing and translating research to bridge the gap between academics and policymakers. Instead, by arranging face-to-face meetings and other events, the CIS Policy Lab builds long-term relationships and two-way dialogues to narrow the gap between the two communities. The overall goal is to bring MIT-generated knowledge to bear on pressing policy issues at all levels of government and to help researchers identify projects that will have a policy impact while also making a scholarly contribution.

In 2015, the CIS Policy Lab selected eight projects for support, working with faculty members who were familiar with the policy community. The CIS Policy Lab has since conducted four Institute-wide calls for proposals, which produced 14, 22, 42, and 17 submissions respectively. In total, at the end of its fifth year, the CIS Policy Lab will have worked on 91 projects involving 55 principal investigators representing all five schools at MIT.

Unlike a competitive grant program, the CIS Policy Lab seeks to support and add value to as many policy outreach efforts as possible. In each call for proposals, projects are divided into those that receive full support (unlimited staff assistance and fully reimbursing project expenses, up to $10,000) and partial support (limited staff assistance and, on average, reimbursements up to $3,000).
This year the CIS Policy Lab began to expand its reach outside of MIT by developing a collaboration with Harvard Medical School’s Scientific Citizenship Initiative (SCI). To date SCI has provided financial support to co-sponsor Policy Lab activities and has worked with the Policy Lab to submit a grant proposal to co-develop policy outreach projects.

In the past year, the CIS Policy Lab also received significant donations from two MIT alumnae as well as internal funding from the Center for International Studies, Vice President for Research, Office of Digital Learning, and an individual faculty member’s account. External support came from two foundations and one professional society. The Center for International Studies and the Technology and Public Policy Program have provided office space and administrative assistance.

Finally, the CIS Policy Lab launched an online course MITx: 17.TAE1x Tools for Academic Engagement in Public Policy. This short course distills the past five years of Policy Lab experience into a series of videos that provide an essential introduction to the policymaking process through the lens of the US federal government, specific steps researchers can take to engage policy stakeholders, and training to articulate the policy implications of their work.

**Persian Gulf Initiative**

This initiative, established in 2005, produces new knowledge about Gulf states and US foreign policy. Several workshops employing critical oral history methods have yielded two books and several articles, among other activities. In this academic year, the work includes a third and culminating book on US-Iran relations, and a highly innovative website that utilizes several hundred documents produced for the critical oral history conferences. The co-authors of the book, including the initiative’s director, principal research scientist John Tirman, presented findings at the University of Hamburg conference on narratives in international relations.

Stemming from his work on the human costs of war, Tirman also advised a documentary project investigating civilian casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan.

**Human Rights and Technology**

This new program was created to take advantage of MIT’s premier place as a technology educator. Combined with the need for human rights education and practice, the program is designed to enable students to devise an innovative project of their own that explores the relationship between human rights and technology. Both the positive relationship, where technology enhances the application of human rights norms, and the negative aspects of the relationship, where technology uses may spark human rights concerns, are considered.

The first cohort of MIT undergraduates brought six projects that were selected from an open, Institute-wide competition. They ranged from examining technological innovations in health care to discerning hate speech on the internet. Tirman co-directs the program with Professor Anat Biletzki of Quinnipiac University. They began work during the academic year to convene a conference on the state of the field.
Seminar Series
Each year, the center sponsors several seminar series that are scholarly and open to the public. SSP sponsors two series—its Wednesday seminar series, and the Focus on Russia series. The center’s offerings include South Asia Politics, co-sponsored with Harvard and Brown universities. Associate Professor of Political Science Vipin Narang is co-chair. The Myron Weiner Seminar, organized by the Inter-University Committee on International Migration, which CIS hosts, is the other major offering. Justin Steil, associate professor of law and urban planning, is co-chair. The center also sponsors the Emile Bustani Seminar on the Middle East, a longtime effort headed by Associate Provost Philip Khoury. In addition, the center sponsors working groups that are organized by graduate students.

South Asia Politics Seminar
- Francesca Jensenius (University of Oslo), September 7, 2018: “Constructing a Majority: A Micro-Level Study of Voting Patterns in Indian Elections”
- Sonalde Desai (University of Maryland), October 19, 2018: “Does Rising Education Lead Changing Gender Norms in India?”
- Vijayendra Rao (World Bank), November 2, 2018: “Deliberative Inequality: A Text-as-Data Study of Tamil Nadu’s Village Assemblies”
- Alyssa Ayres (Council on Foreign Relations), December 7, 2018: “India on the US Foreign Policy Agenda”
- Bilal Baloch (Centre for the Advanced Study of India), February 8, 2019: “Crisis and Credibility: The Politics of Ideas in India and Developing Democracies”
- Gowri Vijayakumar (Brandeis University), March 1, 2019: “The Mobilizing State: HIV/AIDS and Sexual Identity in India”
- Sarah Khan (Yale MacMillan Center), April 12, 2019: “De Facto Suffrage: A Field Experiment to Improve Women’s Turnout in Pakistan’s General Elections”

Myron Weiner Migration Seminar
- Van C. Tran (Columbia University), December 2, 2018: “Asian Americans and Affirmative Action Policy”

Emile Bustani Seminar on the Middle East
- Taner Akçam (Clark University), October 23, 2018: “Erdoğan’s Second Republic (2018) Compared to Ataturk’s First Republic (1923)”
- Bernard Avishai (Dartmouth University), November 6, 2018: “Confederation: The Only Possible Two-State Solution for Israel and Palestine”
- Denis Sullivan (Northeastern University), February 12, 2019: “Worst Humanitarian Crises of Our Time: Displacement and Destruction in Syria and Yemen”
Djavad Salehi-Isfahani (Virginia Tech), March 5, 2019: “No Country for Young Men (and Women): Education, Employment, and Inequality in the Middle East and North Africa”

Working Groups

- Humanitarian and Disaster Relief
- Asian Security
- Global Sustainability
- Women in International Security
- Security Studies
- Chinese Politics Research
- Nuclear Politics
- Latin America

Public Programs

In AY2019, CIS offered a diverse and enriching public education program. The center’s Starr Forums and public lectures continued to offer events on pressing global issues with leading academics, policymakers, and journalists. The 11 events this past academic year were well attended by the MIT community and beyond, and the dialogues were spirited and informed.

Strong attendance and live webcasts provide for large audiences, and videos of the events are posted on the center’s YouTube channel. Several forums are watched online by thousands of viewers. When possible, the program involves like-minded organizations on campus and the local community, as well as local media outlets. Often our events are covered by the MIT News Office and featured on their newsfeed.

This spring, the program supported an event organized by an MIT undergraduate student. The student, the first Uyghur woman to attend MIT, spearheaded a conference on the Uyghur human rights crisis.

Below is a snapshot of the past year’s Starr Forum events:

- “MIT-Harvard Conference on the Uyghur Human Rights Crisis,” moderated by MIT undergraduate Zulkayda Mamat. Speakers were Sean R. Roberts (George Washington University), Darren Byle (University of Washington), Rian Thum (Loyola University New Orleans), Jessica Batke (ChinaFile), Gene A. Bunin (Xinjiang Victims Database), and Joi Ito (MIT)

- “From Cold War to Hot Peace,” with MIT co-chairs, Carol Saivetz and Elizabeth Wood. Guest speaker: Michael McFaul, former US Ambassador to the Russian Federation
• “The Madhouse Effect,” with renowned climate scientist Michael Mann (Penn State)

• “Abolish ICE?” featuring Juliette Kayyem, former homeland security official now at the Harvard Kennedy School; the program was moderated by Professor Chappell Lawson

• “NATO, the Balkans, and Ukraine: The Geopolitical Implications of the European Periphery?” featuring Neuffer Fellow Una Hajdari

• “Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress,” with guest speaker Steven Pinker (Harvard University)

• “The Rise of Populism,” with associate professor of history Sana Aiyar (MIT), Pippa Norris (Harvard Kennedy School), Aysen Candas (Bogazici University), and Elizabeth Leeds (Washington Office on Latin America and former CIS executive director)

• “Citizenship under Attack,” with Peter Spiro (Temple University)

The CIS biannual newsletter, précis, a 30-plus page booklet on the center’s research, was published electronically and in print. A new publication, the Starr Forum Report, was also offered in fall and spring both in print and electronically. Starr Forum Report and précis are circulated across the Institute, and to hundreds of like-minded research centers, non-governmental organizations, policymakers, and journalists.

In an effort to promote this large volume of work, CIS staff members manage the external website, the intranet site, email newsletters for both external and internal communications, and live streaming of our public events via Facebook. In addition, they provide ongoing media support through news releases, direct media promotion, outreach, and news features, and they also produce video shorts promoting CIS scholars and are active on social media, including—but not limited to—Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter.

John Tirman
Executive Director