

## FELLOWS



**PRESLEY BAKER**  
Georgetown University '23

Presley is a recent graduate of Georgetown University's master's program in American government. She completed her BA in journalism at the University of Southern California in 2022 before moving to DC. While at Georgetown, Presley developed a great interest in how national security and defense policy are influenced by choices in political and presidential communications. Her master's thesis, "The Rhetorical Reagan," focused on the Brandenburg Gate address and how President Reagan used rhetorical techniques to effectively communicate "peace through strength." Presley hopes to expand on her knowledge of defense policy and its deep connection to public opinion and presidential communication strategy through the National Defense Fellowship. Her journalism experience, combined with her previous internship at the Ronald Reagan Institute, are essential in inspiring her to pursue a legal and strategic communications career in the defense space. After completing law school, Presley will pursue a career at the NSA.



**TRISTIN BLACK**  
University of Louisville '24

Tristin is a senior studying political science at the University of Louisville. He conducts research at the Louisville Center for Asian Democracy, focusing on democratic backsliding in the region. Tristin's interest in Indo-Pacific politics began in 2019 when he studied abroad in Jakarta, Indonesia. This past summer, he interned at the Department of State in the Office of Multilateral Affairs, focusing on U.S.-ASEAN relations and maritime security in the South China Sea. Through the U.S. Foreign Service Internship Program, Tristin will complete an internship at the U.S. embassy in Tokyo next summer. He is a proud native of Georgetown, Kentucky, a first-generation college student, and the product of a military family. Tristin's commitment to public service inspired him to apply for the National Defense Fellowship, as he hopes to gain a more holistic understanding of national security to guide his career in foreign policy.



**ANYA CARAIANI**  
Georgetown University '24

Anya is a senior at Georgetown University studying science, technology, and international affairs with a concentration in international security and a minor in Russian. Her interest in security was piqued when a history professor explained the complex political tensions of the Cold War and modern arms control, and currently studies nuclear non-proliferation. Anya hopes to gain a hands-on understanding of how national security policy is created from the fellowship. She aims to learn about current threats that the United States faces from leaders in the field, as well as the future of U.S. foreign policy in her regional focuses, Russia and Iran. She hopes to create long-lasting relationships with future colleagues and explore opportunities in national security throughout the fellowship. After graduation, she plans to pursue her interest in international law and work for the U.S. State Department as a senior policymaker.



**ATHENA CHANG**  
**Stanford University '24**

Athena is a master's student and Air Force ROTC cadet at Stanford University studying mechanical engineering. Born and raised in the Bay Area, she's passionate about bridging the technology innovation gap between the Department of Defense bureaucracy and the Silicon Valley high-growth startup cycle. At Stanford, she prototyped autonomous drones for special operations forces with Hacking for Defense and learned about entrepreneurial leadership as a Mayfield Fellow in a nine-month work-study program. She also researches autonomous weapons policy and munitions production and procurement at the Hoover Institution and Gordian Knot Center for National Security Innovation. She has previously worked in business/product strategy at Skydio, Air University's Innovation Accelerator, AFWERX, J.P. Morgan, and Microsoft. After graduation, she hopes to pursue her lifelong dream of becoming a fighter pilot in the U.S. Air Force. Her long-term goal is to inform defense tech innovation policy for the military.



**ASHTON FERRIER**  
**Catholic University of America '24**

Ashton is a senior at The Catholic University of America studying politics while double minoring in the Intelligence Studies Certificate Program and sociology. Upon graduating, he hopes to work within the intelligence community or another government agency. His experience includes working in politics at both the grassroots and federal levels, including in the United States House of Representatives and in the United States Senate. To aid in his public service goals, Ashton has completed fellowships and serves as the president of the Alexander Hamilton Society at the Catholic University of America as well as the vice president of the Catholic University Intelligence Club. By participating in this fellowship, Ashton hopes to explore paramount topics of defense and national security and build new relationships to assist in his goals of public service in the fields of defense, intelligence, and national security.



**LUCAS DE GAMBOA**  
**Columbia University '25**

Lucas is a junior at Columbia University studying political science and pursuing a special concentration in Business Management and Administration. He is currently interning abroad at the Council of American Enterprises in Bogotá, Colombia. Lucas is interested in Sino-US competition, transatlantic relations, and in economics and finance. At Columbia, Lucas has conducted research on China's economy and on U.S. economic statecraft during the Global War on Terror. He is also a staff writer at Columbia Political Review, where he has written on the Chinese economic slowdown, Cross-Strait relations, Transatlantic China policy, and Sino-Russian relations. At the Hamilton National Fellowship, he is eager to learn about the defense industrial base and its impact on American national security policy. After graduation, he hopes to pursue a JD and later work in the federal government.



## **ALEXANDER HUGHES**

**Harvard University '25**

Alexander is a junior at Harvard College studying government with a focus on political theory. A childhood fascination with Abraham Lincoln developed into a passion for the study of statesmanship and America's role as the leader of the free world. Through the National Defense Fellowship, he plans to explore how America's defense industrial base can be strengthened to better prepare for great power competition. He spent the past summer as an editorial intern at National Review and previously worked in the office of Michigan State Representative Andrew Beeler. After graduation, Alexander hopes to work in public service contributing to U.S. efforts to prepare for a rising China.



## **CONNOR JOHNSON**

**Vanderbilt University '25**

Connor is a junior at Vanderbilt University studying political science with minors in Arabic, data science, and business. He is primarily interested in counterterrorism and policy efforts that divert adversaries' exploitation of the Middle East and Africa. He serves as the outreach and community engagement chair for the Vanderbilt Service Council, which connects student organizations with community partners throughout Nashville and promotes students' service learning. Additionally, he is the vice president of the Vanderbilt Sailing Club and an officer for Vanderbilt's Alexander Hamilton Society chapter. Previously, Connor was a Hamilton National Fellow, an intern for the office of Senator Tom Cotton, and a Hertog Security Studies Fellow. Upon graduation, he hopes to pursue a career in government, working to aid in counterterrorism efforts.



## **KEVIN LENTZ**

**University of Texas, Austin '24**

Kevin is a master's student of Global Policy Studies and Asian Studies at the LBJ School for Public Affairs. There, he leads the Cyber Pacific project at the Global Disinformation Lab, which investigates the changing character of Indo-Pacific militaries in the cyber domain. He became interested in the way that unconventional threats like influence and cyber operations were affecting international relations and how allied militaries in the Indo-Pacific have begun adapting to meet these threats as a student at the University of Sydney in 2020. As a National Defense Fellow, Kevin is looking forward to meeting policy practitioners working on these and related issues and connecting with the next generation of national security policymakers. After the LBJ, his goal is to contribute to Indo-Pacific policy in the areas of information strategy and alliances in the Department of State or Defense.



**RACHEL LYNCH**  
Tufts University '25

Rachel is a master's student at The Fletcher School at Tufts University studying international security and law, with a focus on maritime strategy in the Indo-Pacific. Her interest in security studies began while she was an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she spent two years researching historic and contemporary geopolitics for US foreign policy. As a former intern with the Ronald Reagan Institute, she developed a greater interest in defense policy and is looking forward to continuing defense research while in grad school. She is excited to join this year's cohort of students to further explore critical issues in national defense from industry professionals. Upon graduation, Rachel will pursue a career in national security related to the Indo-Pacific.



**THOMAS MAHNKEN**  
College of William and Mary '24

Thomas is a senior at the College of William & Mary studying international relations and history. Having been exposed to international relations and foreign policy from a young age, he has always had an interest in defense issues. While in high school, he worked as an intern at the National Museum of the Marine Corps. He has also interned at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, where he supported studies on military innovation and Chinese assessments of the Pacific War. This past summer, he worked at the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command in the Security Cooperation Directorate, where he assisted in writing the command's Country Security Cooperation Plans. Upon graduation from college, he hopes to pursue to a career in defense and national security. He hopes this fellowship will help deepen his understanding of strategy and national defense issues.



**ETHAN MINKOFF**  
Brown University '24

Ethan is a senior at Brown University studying international and public affairs and economics. Ethan is the co-founder and president of Brown's Alexander Hamilton Society chapter. He cites frequent trips as a child with his father to the Lexington Battle Green and the Old North Bridge in Concord, the birthplaces of the American Revolution, to be an early source of his interest in American national security. This summer, Ethan worked as an associate at Sachem Strategies, a consulting firm that advises small to mid-size defense and technology companies on government relations and business development. This role gave him insight into how innovative private sector firms work with the federal government to broaden and strengthen the U.S. defense industrial base. Through the National Defense Fellowship, Ethan hopes to further enhance his comprehension of important factors shaping U.S. national defense policy. He is also looking forward to forging meaningful connections with peers and thought leaders centered on American defense affairs. After graduation, Ethan envisions a career centered around American national defense.



## **ZACARIAS NEGRON**

**Vanderbilt University '25**

Zacarias is a Chancellor's Scholar at Vanderbilt University studying political science (international track) and law, history, & society alongside minors in Russian studies and Islamic studies. He studies American grand strategy with regional emphases on Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Zacarias is currently interning with the Uyghur Human Rights Project, following a stint at the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security, where he staffed the Counterterrorism, Law Enforcement, and Intelligence Subcommittee and Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Protection Subcommittee. He has also served as a Justice Sector Intern with the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent, Uzbekistan and in various posts at Vanderbilt University. He looks to pursue a Master of Diplomatic Arts, and enter the U.S. State Department in the coming years. The National Defense Fellowship provides a necessary venue to hone defense policy acumen alongside the current and next cohort of its authors.



## **EMMA NILAND**

**James Madison University '24**

Emma is a senior at James Madison University studying political science and Spanish. She is the founding president of the Alexander Hamilton Society chapter at JMU and is a Democracy Fellow with the Madison Center of Civic Engagement for the 2023-2024 Academic Year. Her passion for current events began when she was in an eighth-grade Civics and Government course studying the 2016 Presidential Election. This year, she has extensively studied U.S. military and foreign policy through her internships with U.S. Senator Joni Ernst as well as the Center of Political-Military Analysis under Dr. Richard Weitz of the Hudson Institute. Her post-graduation aspirations include a career in public service and being awarded the Fulbright scholarship grant to the University of Salamanca's Masters in Global and International Studies to continue her research of the role of the U.S. in the rules-based international order with a specific focus on the role of NATO and the EU in maintaining transatlantic security. She is incredibly grateful to AHS for the opportunity to participate in the AHS-RRI National Defense Fellowship and learn from America's foremost leaders in national security and defense.



## **KAY ROLLINS**

**Harvard University '25**

Kay is a junior at Harvard studying history and government. In the realm of national defense, Kay is interested in counter-extremism and homeland security. Specifically, she aims to understand the recruitment strategies of violent extremist organizations and how these terrorist groups, whether foreign or domestic, pose threats to American national security. As a history major, she is also passionate about the importance of historical knowledge in shaping foreign policy, and she currently works as a Research Assistant to Graham Allison on the Applied History project at the Harvard Kennedy School. She also serves as the President of the Alexander Hamilton Society and Deputy Director of the Harvard Undergraduate Foreign Policy Initiative, where she has led projects for US AFRICOM and CYBERCOM. Kay is thrilled to enhance her understanding of national security by engaging with high-level defense experts through the RRI-AHS National Defense Fellowship.



## **ELIZABETH SIEGER**

**University of Michigan '25**

Elizabeth is a junior at the University of Michigan studying political science, French, and international studies, with a specialization in international security, norms, and cooperation. She is particularly interested in the dissension between (and within) foreign and regional responses to conflict, and the role of supra-national authorities on the world stage. Moreover, as a writer for multiple on-campus foreign affairs publications, she has engaged in extensive research concerning Russian geopolitical strategy and the responsibility of the United States and its allies to thwart Russian aggression prior to its full culmination. She is pursuing a summer internship with the National War College, where she would conduct research to supplement the courses being taught there. The National Defense Fellowship will be an excellent opportunity to learn more about the collection and application of intelligence to defense strategy and the potential dangers involved with a myopic approach to conflict resolution. She aspires to grow into a career that focuses on the intersection of international law and regional sociopolitics.



## **ANDRII UMANSKYI**

**American University '24**

Andrii is a senior at American University studying international studies and a minor in applied physics. He grew up in Ukraine, learning the history of the Eastern European region while gradually expanding his interest in science, economics, and politics before focusing on foreign affairs. In the near future, he plans to graduate and find employment conducting research for a think tank or private sector. Andrii believes the National Defense Fellowship will deepen his understanding of the factual material involved in crafting thoughtful defense policy and peace-building initiatives through its coursework and meeting established professionals. Overall, he hopes the Fellowship will become a profound amplifier of what he will have to offer as an international relations scholar and practitioner.



## **AXEL DE VERNOU**

**Yale University '25**

Axel is a junior at Yale University studying global affairs and history with a Certificate of Advanced Language Study in Russian. An AHS seminar on the evolution of Eurasian geostrategy and his fascination with Russia's various overtures and renunciations from the West inspired him to follow this academic path. As he pursues a career in government, Axel aims to understand what great power competition looks like concretely by exploring defense planning, budgeting, logistics, and cooperation—the foundations of a comprehensive grand strategy. His professional ambition is to merge expansive strategic recommendations with an acute grasp of financial, technological, and industrial constraints to guide policymakers with realistic assessments of the United States' capabilities.



## **PIETER VAN WINGERDEN**

**Claremont McKenna College '24**

Pieter is a senior at Claremont McKenna College and a 2023 Truman Scholar. As an American who grew up abroad, he has experienced firsthand the important role our nation's foreign policy plays in protecting and promoting international peace and security. His time in Hong Kong during the 2014 and 2019 pro-democracy protests sparked his desire to enter public service. On campus, he is a left-handed pitcher for the CMS baseball team and runs the Claremont McKenna AHS and AEI chapters. He currently interns for the House Select Committee on China, and is an alumnus of the Project 2049 Institute, the Department of Defense, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and the Los Alamos National Laboratory.



## **LUCA ZISLIN**

**University of California, Berkeley '24**

Luca is a senior at the University of California, Berkeley studying political science with a concentration in international relations. She is passionate about international security and diplomacy. Previously, she has interned at the Council of Foreign Relations where she was a Blavatnik U.S. Foreign Policy Intern and was a Travers Fellow at the Commonwealth Club of California, the nation's oldest public affairs forum. After college, she would like to continue her education before joining the U.S. Foreign Service. Luca is extremely grateful to the Alexander Hamilton Society and the Ronald Reagan Institute for giving her the opportunity to learn from American leaders about national security.