

FELLOWS



MCKENZIE ARATA

Texas A&M University '28

McKenzie is a first-year student in Texas A&M School of Law's Master of Legal Studies program with an emphasis in Cybersecurity Law and Policy. She graduated from Baylor University in May with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and minors in Spanish, Corporate Communications, and Legal Reasoning and Analysis. McKenzie has been interested in pursuing law school for many years and became interested in national security, cybersecurity, and foreign policy through coursework, internships, and involvement in the Alexander Hamilton Society. After completing an internship with the Department of Defense, McKenzie is eager to continue learning about defense policy and affairs through the National Defense Fellowship. She is excited to learn from leading practitioners and engage with fellow participants. Over the next five years, McKenzie will be pursuing her JD and hopes to serve as a lawyer working within government and national security.



COOPER BLEE

Xavier University '25

Cooper is a senior at Xavier University, pursuing a double major in Philosophy, Politics, and the Public, and Political Science with a minor in International Studies. At Xavier, Cooper is an Army ROTC cadet and serves as President of the Pi Sigma Alpha political science honor society. He has completed internships with the U.S. House of Representatives, the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority, and participated in the American Enterprise Institute's "Thinking about War" summer honors program seminar. Additionally, Cooper has engaged in an intensive Russian language program through the Defense Foreign Language and National Security Education Office. He is interested in American grand strategy, the dynamics of military leadership, and near-peer competition with Russia. He is eager to learn from his peers and experienced defense leaders through the National Defense Fellowship. Upon graduation, Cooper plans to commission as an officer in the active duty component of the United States Army.



CONNER BOLANOS

Johns Hopkins University '24

Conner is a recent graduate of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) where he received a Master of Arts in Strategy, Cybersecurity, and Intelligence. Previously, he attended Hillsdale College where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in History and Politics. During his time at SAIS and over the summer, Conner has served as an intern at the National Security Innovation Network, a component of the Department of Defense. As an intern, Conner has been at the center of the Department's efforts to leverage the innovative power of the American industrial base and academia to deliver the capabilities needed to confront emerging challenges on the global stage. Through the National Defense Fellowship, Conner hopes to continue to build his knowledge in the field with the goal of leveraging his knowledge and skills to pursue a career in public service.



THADDIAN BURSON
Cedarville University '25

Thaddian is a senior studying political science with emphases on law and Middle Eastern affairs at Cedarville University. Thaddian's passion for these fields, ignited during high school, has been further cultivated through immersive experiences abroad, including a program in Cairo and a term as a State Department Gilman Scholar at the University of Oxford. Beyond the classroom, Thaddian has honed his skills through competitive debate, Model United Nations, and internships with the Hudson Institute, the State Department, and the House Committee on Homeland Security. As the founding president of Cedarville's Alexander Hamilton Society chapter, Thaddian aims to leverage his skills at the intersection of foreign affairs and law to serve others. He plans to pursue a joint JD and Master of International Relations in graduate school before seeking a career in the federal government or with an international NGO.



ABIGAIL CARR
Harvard University '25

Abigail Carr is a rising senior at Harvard University, pursuing an AB in Government with a focus on Law and Justice. She is currently completing a political theory research thesis on constitutional unamendability, advised by Harvard Law Professor Adrian Vermeule. With a strong interest in the intersection of law and national defense, she has interned at the Heritage Foundation's Edwin Meese III Center for Legal and Judicial Studies and in the office of Senator Tim Scott. Abigail is actively involved on campus as the former Athletics Officer for the Harvard Undergraduate Association and co-chair of the Conservative Coalition at the Institute of Politics. A dedicated athlete, she competed in the 2021 Olympic Swimming Trials and competes on Harvard's varsity swimming team. Abigail's passion for defense policy, particularly as it relates to legal frameworks, drives her pursuit of the National Defense Fellowship and further studies in international relations and defense strategy.



ETHAN CHIU
Yale University '26

Ethan Chiu is a junior at Yale University studying Global Affairs and History. On campus, Ethan is a Kerry Fellow and Yale Law School Information Society Project Student Fellow, and he serves as Yale's Alexander Hamilton Society Co-President along with the Geopolitics of Technology Initiative's Events Chair. He has previously interned at the Department of Defense, American Enterprise Institute, and American Red Cross. As a National Defense Fellow, Ethan hopes to learn how best to serve the warfighter and ensure peace through strength from fellow Hamiltonians and distinguished practitioners. Over the next five years, Ethan hopes to serve in the U.S. Navy and work toward a PhD in Science, Technology, and Society.



CAITLIN DAVIS

The University of Texas, Austin '25

Caitlin is a second-year master of global policy studies student at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, specializing in diplomacy, law, and security with a graduate portfolio in security studies from the Clements Center for National Security. She has bachelor's degrees in journalism and Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures with a minor in Arabic. Her experience includes program coordination at Refugee Services of Texas, a political affairs internship with the United Nations, and will be interning with the Department of State during the 2024-2025 academic year. Her research interests include the U.S.-Saudi Arabia relationship, U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and south Asia, and the role of state fragility in contributing to violent conflict and extremism in the Middle East. Caitlin looks forward to being further equipped by the NDF Fellowship in the hopes of serving in the Department of State or United Nations following graduation.



EMMA FULLERTON

University of Florida '26

Emma Fullerton is a third-year Honors student at the University of Florida studying political science and minoring in French. Inspired by her long-time passion for American and world history, she is interested in foreign and defense policy, specifically great power politics and U.S. policy in the Indo-Pacific. On campus, Emma founded and currently leads the UF chapter of the Alexander Hamilton Society. She is also involved in UF Homecoming and Gator Growl, Florida Blue Key Divisions, and her sorority. Emma has pursued her interests in politics and national security through various professional endeavors in Washington DC. She has interned on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and for the BGR Group's international and defense lobbying practices. She is looking forward to being a part of the 2024 NDF cohort and hopes the program will allow her to dive deeply into the intricacies of defense affairs while building connections with like-minded peers.



BENJAMIN KELLEY

Columbia University '25

Benjamin is a senior at Columbia University studying Political Science and Statistics with a concentration in International Relations. His program also includes concentrations in the history and politics of the modern Middle East and the Arabic language. He has interned in the fields of journalism and foreign policy and has held a variety of research positions throughout his time at college. Benjamin is excited to be joining the Ronald Reagan Institute for the National Defense Fellowship and is eager to gain an understanding of strategic priorities and resource allocation processes in the modern military. After graduation he hopes to take a job in journalism and live in the Middle East, where he recently spent a summer, and become fluent in Arabic.



BRIDGET LUCAS

The Catholic University of America '25

Bridget is currently a third-year undergraduate student at The Catholic University of America, majoring in Political Theory within the 3+3 BA-JD Program. Her academic journey has been profoundly shaped by a passion for exploring the philosophical foundations of governance and their practical application in public policy. Bridget serves as Chair of the College Republicans at both The Catholic University of America and the DC Federation of College Republicans, and her experience includes working at The Heritage Foundation and her current role at The Ronald Reagan Institute. Her intellectual pursuits lie at the intersection of political theory, law, and national defense policy. Bridget intends to pursue a career as an attorney with the Department of Defense or within a private defense law firm. She is particularly interested in how political philosophies inform and guide the development of defense strategies that both safeguard national security and uphold democratic principles.



UCHECHI MBA

University of Maryland, College Park '27

Uchechi is a sophomore at the University of Maryland-College Park studying Government & Politics and Global Terrorism Studies on the pre-law track. Her interest in the national security aspect of government started in high school when she participated in the Homeland Security and Criminal Justice program at her county's technical school. Since learning the intricacies of securing our nation's borders, she has become immensely interested in advancing Homeland Security. As a part of the National Defense Fellowship, Uchechi hopes to learn about varying careers within the realm of Homeland Security and the roles that each play. In the future, Uchechi plans to go to law school and hopes to intersect her interests between policy and Homeland Security in her future career.



ROBERT MOORE III

Georgetown University '26

Robert is a rising junior at Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service studying International Politics with a concentration in Security Studies. He is also minoring in Spanish and pursuing a Diplomatic Studies certificate. Robert previously interned on the Middle East Team of the American Enterprise Institute's Critical Threats Project, focusing on open-source intelligence collection, analysis, and writing concerning Iran-related national security issues. CTP's work aims to better inform policymakers and the public on Iranian strategic thought and the activities of Tehran's "Axis of Resistance." Through RNDF, Robert hopes to gain a deeper understanding of subject-matter knowledge on defense policy and grand strategy while using this information to emphasize the continued importance of regions like the Middle East and the Western Hemisphere to U.S. national security in an era of great power competition. In the long-term, Robert wishes to serve his country in a senior intelligence, diplomatic, or military capacity.



NOLAN MUSSELWHITE
Princeton University '25

Nolan is a rising senior at Princeton University majoring in History with planned minors in African Studies, European Studies, Hellenic Studies, and Humanistic Studies. Originally from Washington, DC, Nolan has interned for three U.S. Senators, the U.S. Senate HELP Committee, and the U.S. Department of Defense. Nolan is also a research assistant for the Irregular Warfare Initiative and previously completed the Hertog-ISW War Studies Program in Washington, DC. Nolan is proficient in Swahili and has worked or studied in Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, and Tanzania and is interested in irregular warfare, African history and politics, and U.S.-Africa policy. Nolan is eager to improve his understanding of defense policy, military analysis, and the professional national security community over the course of the 2024 National Defense Fellowship. After graduating from Princeton, Nolan eventually hopes to work on U.S. policy towards Africa



PRANAV PATTATATHUNADUVIL
Yale University '25

Pranav is a senior majoring in Global Affairs at Yale University as a Coolidge Scholar. He is passionate about Indo-Pacific geopolitics, especially U.S.-India relations and U.S.-China tech competition. Pranav became interested in the region after interning at the Hudson Institute, where he researched imperial China's regional influence and India-U.S. relations, and the State Department, where he worked on issues tied to India-Pakistan and China-Pakistan relations. His passion for technology emerged through his internship at the Special Competitive Studies Project and his ongoing leadership of the Geopolitics of Technology Initiative. Through NDF, Pranav hopes to understand how America's grand strategy can balance the security needs of different theaters, building on his insights from the Hertog War Studies Program. In 2026, Pranav will receive his MPP in Global Affairs from the Yale Jackson School. In the future, he aims to work at the Department of State or the Department of Defense.



LOGAN PINEDA
Rutgers University '25

Logan is a rising senior at Rutgers University pursuing a double major in political science and criminal justice with a minor in Spanish. Interested in U.S. foreign policy in Latin America, Logan interned at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for the Majority Staff on the Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights and Global Women's Issues subcommittee this past summer. He completed a forty page research report, "Discourse of Crime Control: Mano Dura, State Power, and Civil Liberties in Bukele's El Salvador", a qualitative content analysis regarding criminal justice reform and democracy in El Salvador under the Nayib Bukele administration. The labeling of crime as a national security issue as well as US-China competition in Latin America propelled him to deepen his knowledge through the RRI-AHS fellowship. Logan plans on pursuing law school to find a career in foreign policy law.



JOSHUA PLATTE
Hofstra University '25

Joshua is a rising senior triple major at Hofstra University studying public policy and public service concentrating in federalism, global studies, and rhetoric and public advocacy concentrating in political communication. Joshua became interested in public service through his experiences as an Eagle Scout and became specifically interested in education policy while serving as one of three students on a thirty-person redistricting committee for his local school district in Everett, Washington. His experiences studying the Belfast Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland and completing the Ronald Reagan Academy for Civic Education and Democracy have deepened these interests. He hopes to leave this fellowship with a deeper understanding of the relationship between the national defense sector and the education system. In the next five years, he intends to return to his home state of Michigan and work in state politics for a few years before attending graduate school.



KATIE ROUSE
Boston University '26

Katie is a rising junior at Boston University studying international relations and Russian. Her regional focus on Eastern Europe and Russia emerged after spending the summer of 2022 studying Russian in Riga, Latvia with the U.S. State Department. Witnessing the fallout of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on a NATO partner solidified her passion for international security and defense. Her topical interests include emerging space-based military technologies, counterterrorism, and nuclear politics. She has completed internships at the Defense Department's National War College, the U.S. Diplomatic Security Service, and the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission. The daughter of a U.S. naval aviator, she is considering a career in the military or intelligence community. She looks forward to connecting with a diverse array of distinguished national security officials, policymakers, and peers during the National Defense Fellowship, and she aspires to deepen her understanding of critical issues in foreign policy and defense.



JAMES SWEET
American University '25

James is a senior at American University studying business administration, specializing in international business. He is interested in the roles and responsibilities of corporations during periods of great power competition. Moreover, James seeks to better understand American geo-economic policy toward the Middle East. James's internships at the American Enterprise Institute, Metrea, and Peraton gave him insight into the numerous actors involved in crafting and executing defense policy, and he previously studied the history of American grand strategy as a Hamilton National Fellow (HNF). During the National Defense Fellowship, James desires to build upon his HNF experience and learn more about defense planning, military strategy, and the future of warfare. After graduating from American University, James hopes to analyze vulnerabilities in the national supply chain and defense industrial base before attending graduate school and studying the intersection of finance and security in the Middle East.



MATTHEW TWEDEN

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill '25

Matthew is a senior Robertson Scholar studying public policy and peace, war, and defense at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and political science at Duke University. His study of foreign and defense policy focuses on U.S. grand strategy in the Indo-Pacific and the role of financial instruments within geopolitical competition. He previously interned at Patomak Global Partners, the Hudson Institute, and the Centre for Security, Diplomacy, and Strategy; he was a 2023 AEI Summer Honors Academy fellow and 2024 Hamilton National Fellow. After graduation, Matthew plans to pursue a law degree before working in public-sector national security law. Matthew is grateful for the opportunity to learn about defense policymaking from experienced professionals and intellectually-curious peers through the RRI-AHS National Defense Fellowship.



ZACHARY WELCH

Wheaton College '25

Zach is a fourth-year Aequitas Fellow and track athlete at Wheaton College, triple-majoring in International Relations, Economics, and Urban Studies with a minor in history. Zach's intellectual interest lies in the U.S.-Sino Relationship within a broader interest in great power competition and the Western Just War tradition. During college, he has interned for the International Trade Administration, the Vandenberg Coalition, a non-profit in Costa Rica, and a start-up strategy consultancy. Zach has participated in competitive fellowships with organizations including AEI, TFAS, the Mercatus Center, Hertog Foundation, and IWP. A proud Kentuckian, Zach was a 2024 Harry S. Truman Scholarship finalist. When not buried in a book or running around the track, Zach is an avid traveler, particularly enjoying backpacking through his beloved Adirondack Mountains. After graduation, Zach hopes to contribute to advancing a U.S. defense policy based on the core principles that he and AHS find so compelling—that the world remains a dangerous place and that U. S. leadership in global affairs will make the world a better, safer, and more prosperous place.