

# SARA PLANA

splana@upenn.edu | splana@mit.edu  
[www.saraplana.com](http://www.saraplana.com) | [LinkedIn](#) | [@saraplana](#)

## EDUCATION

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**Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)**, Cambridge, MA, 2015–2021

PhD, Department of Political Science, Security Studies Program, expected September 2021

- Dissertation: “The Proxy Paradox: Explaining (Lack of) Control over State-Sponsored Proxy Armed Groups”
- Committee: Roger Petersen (chair), Barry Posen, Fotini Christia

**Harvard University**, Cambridge, MA, graduated May 2012

- Bachelor of Arts, magna cum laude, Government, secondary in English
- Thesis: “Civil-Military Criminals: An Analysis of Wartime and Postwar Violence Variation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia” (awarded summa cum laude)

## FELLOWSHIPS, HONORS, AND AWARDS

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| 2021-2022 | Perry World House Postdoctoral Fellowship, <i>The Future of Global Order: Power, Technology, and Governance</i> , Perry World House, University of Pennsylvania                                 |
| 2021-2022 | U.S. Foreign Policy and International Security Postdoctoral Fellowship, John Sloan Dickey Center, Dartmouth University ( <i>declined</i> )  |
| 2021-2022 | Postdoctoral Fellowship in Technology and International Security, University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, University of California San Diego ( <i>declined</i> ) |
| 2020–2021 | Predocorral Fellowship, International Security Program, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School   |
| 2020–2021 | <u>Jeanne Guillemin Prize</u> , MIT Center for International Studies<br>Awarded to women studying international affairs   |
| 2019–2020 | World Politics and Statecraft Fellowship, Smith Richardson Foundation   |
| 2019      | Political Methodology Research Grant, MIT Political Methodology Lab   |
| 2018–2019 | Jennings-Randolph Peace and Security Scholar, United States Institute of Peace and Minerva Research Initiative ( <i>declined</i> )  |
| 2016–2021 | National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Research Fellowship, NSF   |
| 2016      | Ithiel de Sola Pool Fellow, MIT Political Science Department<br>Awarded to an outstanding first-year student in MIT Political Science   |
| 2015      | Hispanic Scholarship Fund (HSF) Scholar, HSF Scholarship Program  |
| 2012      | Thomas T. Hoopes Prize, Harvard University<br>College-wide award for outstanding scholarly work and research for senior thesis  |
| 2012      | Eric J. Firth Prize, Harvard University<br>Awarded for best undergraduate thesis on democracy’s relationship to defense of peace and freedom  |

## PUBLICATIONS AND MEDIA

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### Working Papers

[“Band of Brothers’: Explaining Military Defection during Civilian Uprisings against Autocracies”](#)

[“Anatomy of a Safe Area: The Military Requirements of Humanitarian Protection during Civil Wars”](#)

[“‘Proxies’ and the Public: Public Support for Military Aid to States and Militias”](#)

[“If at First You Don't Succeed: Explaining the Puzzle of Unchanging Russian Counterinsurgency Doctrine”](#)

(work in progress) “How Proxy Wars End,” with Meg Guliford

### Reports and Monographs

Forthcoming Report on the causes of proxy warfare, RAND Corporation (with 10 coauthors)

### Policy Commentary and Appearances

- July 1, 2021 *Interviewed for:* Kristen de Groot, [“U.S. airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, explained.”](#) Penn Today, University of Pennsylvania
- Feb 17, 2021 [“Rocket Attacks on Erbil.”](#) Crisis Response Council
- Sept 13, 2020 [“Seven Bad Options to Counter State Sponsorship of Proxies.”](#) in Lawfare
- May 20, 2020 [“War Isn’t \(Quite\) the Right Metaphor for COVID-19.”](#) with Sanne Verschuren in Political Violence at a Glance
- May 8, 2020 [“Why Proxy Wars Endure & Why They End.”](#) in Proxy Wars Initiative, a Carnegie Corporation-funded project
- Mar 17, 2020 [“Proxy War: The ‘Least Bad Option’ or the ‘Second-to-Last Resort’?”](#), as part of “Book Review Roundtable: Understanding Proxy Warfare,” in the *Texas National Security Review*
- Jan 24, 2019 [“Trump Wants a Safe Zone in Syria. Is That Even Possible?”](#), in the Monkey Cage blog, the *Washington Post*
- Jun 4, 2018 [“Podcast: The Future of Force.”](#) in War on the Rocks
- Dec 19, 2017 [“Civil-Military Relations under President Trump.”](#) for *Précis*, a student newsletter for MIT’s Center for International Studies
- Oct 25, 2017 [“What Political Science Tells Us about the Risk of Civil War in Spain.”](#) in War on the Rocks
- Apr 21, 2017 [“Rationality and Sarin Gas: What Social Science Tells Us about Assad’s Chemical Weapons Attack.”](#) with Matthew Cancian in Modern War Institute
- Aug 16, 2016 [“Maybe U.S. Police Aren’t Militarized Enough. Here’s What Police Can Learn from Soldiers.”](#) with Rachel Tecott in the Monkey Cage blog, the *Washington Post*

## **LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE**

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Reviewer *International Security*  
*International Studies Quarterly*

Oct 2020-present Senior Associate (Non-Resident), International Security Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

- Sept–Dec 2019 Graduate Student Representative, International Relations/Security Studies Faculty Search Committee, MIT Political Science Department  
Reviewed applications and helped hire two junior faculty members in security studies
- Nov 2018–present New Era Fellow, New Era Workshop, Bridging the Gap Project  
Organize yearly workshop for graduate students interested in policy-relevant research, including reviewing applications, designing breakout sessions and other programming, and leading discussion at the workshop itself
- Jan 2018–present Co-Founder and Organizer, Future Strategy Forum  
Founded annual conference series that brings together prominent female academics and practitioners in international relations to discuss major themes in US foreign policy, with the dual aims of bridging the academic-policy divide and empowering women in this field. Secured sponsorship from CSIS's Smart Women, Smart Power and Kissinger Center at John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Responsible for determining yearly theme and programming details, including panelist and speaker invitees; seeking and managing other sponsors; and managing a team of graduate-student organizers. Published podcasts and policy writing series.
- Sept 2017–Sept 2019 Co-Chair, Women in International Politics and Security, MIT  
Organized events in the Boston area to connect women in academic and policy-related careers in international politics and security, including panels, workshops, and informal gatherings
- Sept 2017–May 2018 Co-Chair, Security Studies Working Group, MIT  
Organized weekly student presentations on works in progress related to security or conflict
- May 2016–May 2018 Mentorship Coordinator, MIT Political Science Graduate Student Council  
Organized mentorship programs for political science graduate students, including institutionalizing advice to incoming students and connecting mentor-mentee pairs
- 2014–2018 Vice President, Harvard Student Agencies Alumni Graduate Board  
Organized outreach programs and events to connect current students and alumni; gave advice and mentorship to current students

## RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

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- Jun–Aug 2017 Research Assistant, for Professor Roger Petersen, MIT
- Jun–Aug 2016 Research Assistant, for Professor Fotini Christia, MIT
- Oct 2012–Jan 2013 Research Assistant, for Professor Stephen Rosen, Harvard University  
Researched autobiographies and speeches of Egyptian presidents to identify Egyptian perceived threats and fears that could contribute to a formulation of nuclear policy; wrote paper with findings and created a set of maps showing trend analysis of geographic threats to Egypt since 600 CE, which were provided to the Department of Defense's Office of Net Assessment

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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- Jan 2020 Instructor, "All the President's Generals: Civil-Military Relations in the US and Beyond," MIT  
Designed syllabus and taught course on comparative civil-military relations; topics included the causes and consequences of coups and military governments, legacy of military rule, public trust in the military, and the military-industrial(-tech) complex

Jan–Jun 2018 Teaching Assistant, “US Military Power” (Professor Barry Posen), MIT  
Ran discussion sections for course on US conventional military operations and advised students on research papers using the campaign analysis method; conducted lecture on theories of counterinsurgency and cases of US counterinsurgency campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan

## INVITED TALKS AND PRESENTATIONS

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Sept 10, 2021 Facilitator, *Unconventional Warfare Breakout Session*, [Irregular Warfare Initiative Conference](#), Modern War Institute at West Point and Empirical Studies of Conflict

May 11, 2021 Moderator, [Panel on Emerging Technology and Warfighting](#), Future Strategy Forum 2021, “[Future of National Security and Technology](#)”

Feb 4, 2021 “Cooperative Coercion: Explaining (Un)Reliability of State-Sponsored Armed Groups,” International Security Program Seminar Series, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School

Mar 31, 2021 Lecture, Unconventional Warfare, Office of Special Warfare, 1st Special Forces Command

Oct 30, 2020 Guest Lecture on coercion, compellence, and deterrence, Social Science 311: International Security Studies (Professor Danielle Gilbert), U.S. Air Force Academy

Sept 15, 2020 Guest Lecture, International Affairs Capstone Pro-Seminar (Professor Rachel Whitlark), Sam Nunn School of International Affairs, Georgia Institute of Technology

August 2020 [A Seat at our Table: A Conversation with Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security](#), podcast, Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security

May 28, 2020 [Enhancing Diversity and Strengthening Inclusion in Efforts to Bridge the Academia-Policy Gap](#), Bridging the Gap Project, virtual panel

April 29, 2020 Guest Lecture on Interview Best Practices, Qualitative Methods course (Professor Chappell Lawson), MIT Political Science

May 2018 Guest Lecture on third-party counterinsurgency theory and history of US counterinsurgency campaigns, US Military Power (Professor Barry Posen), MIT Political Science

## WORKSHOPS AND CONFERENCES

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Apr 2021 International Studies Association Conference, virtual

- Organized panel, “Interactions between State and Non-State Actors in a Changing International Order”
- Presented dissertation chapter

Aug 2020 American Political Science Association Conference, virtual

- Organized panel, “Conduct of Warfare: Perceptions and Beyond”
- Presented two working papers

Aug 2019 American Political Science Association Conference, Washington, DC

Mar 2019 International Studies Association Conference, Toronto, Canada

2018–2019 Carnegie International Policy Scholars Consortium and Network

Jun 2018      Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research, Syracuse, NY  
Apr 2018      International Studies Association Conference, San Francisco, CA  
Apr 2018      Harvard-MIT-Yale-Tufts Political Violence Conference, Medford, MA  
Feb 2018      Boston International Security Graduate Conference, Boston, MA  
Jul 2017      Olympia Summer Academy, Conflict & Political Violence Course, Nafplio, Greece  
Mar 2017      New Era Foreign Policy Conference, Bridging the Gap Project, Washington, DC

## **PROFESSIONAL SKILLS**

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Fluent Spanish (written, spoken, reading proficiency). Beginner Modern Standard Arabic.  
Proficient in R, LaTeX, Shiny, Adobe CS Suites (InDesign, Illustrator, Photoshop, Acrobat Professional).  
Familiar with Python, ArcGIS.