

# SARA PLANA

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## ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

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- 2021-2022 Postdoctoral Fellow, The Future of Global Order: Power, Technology, and Governance, Perry World House, University of Pennsylvania
- 2020-2021 Predoctoral Fellow, International Security Program, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School

## EDUCATION

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

PhD, Department of Political Science, Security Studies Program, 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 U.S. Foreign Policy and International Security Postdoctoral Fellowship, John Sloan Dickey Center, Dartmouth University (declined)
- 2021-2022 Postdoctoral Fellowship in Technology and International Security, University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, University of California San Diego (declined)
- 2020–2021 [Jeanne Guillemin Prize](#), MIT Center for International Studies  
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 (declined)
- 2016–2021 National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Research Fellowship, NSF
- 2016 Ithiel de Sola Pool Fellow, MIT Political Science Department  
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  
College-wide award for outstanding scholarly work and research for senior thesis
- 2012 Eric J. Firth Prize, Harvard University  
Awarded for best undergraduate thesis on democracy’s relationship to defense of peace and freedom

## PUBLICATIONS AND MEDIA

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### Book Manuscript

- Why Proxies Defy: America's Quest for Control in Proxy Wars since World War II (*working title*)

### Working Papers

- "Proxies, Not Puppets: Explaining (Lack of) Control Over State-Sponsored Armed Groups"
- ["Proxies' and the Public: Public Support for Military Aid to States and Militias"](#)
- ["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"](#)
- ["If at First You Don't Succeed: Explaining the Puzzle of Unchanging Russian Counterinsurgency Doctrine"](#)

### Reports and Monographs

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

### Policy Commentary and Appearances

- Mar 3, 2022 ["Keep the Spark from the Tinderbox: Infuse Escalation Risk into U.S. Military Education, Training, and Doctrine,"](#) Center for a New American Security
- Nov 8, 2021 Contribution to ["The Lessons of Two Decades of War: A Review of IWT's Inaugural Conference,"](#) compiled by Andrew Maher, in Modern War Institute at West Point.
- July 1, 2021 Interviewed for: Kristen de Groot, ["U.S. airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, explained,"](#) Penn Today, University of Pennsylvania
- June 15, 2021 Finalist and People's Choice Award for "Prioritize Escalation Risk In US Military Training," [The Pitch 2021 Competition](#), Center for New American Security
- 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

## 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)
- Nov 2018-present Fellow, [Bridging the Gap Project](#)  
Organize yearly [New Era Workshop](#) for graduate students interested in policy-relevant research, including reviewing applications, designing and running breakout sessions and other programming; facilitated discussion.
- 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–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
- 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

## 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, 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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- Mar 2, 2022 “Proxies, Not Puppets: Explaining (Lack of) Control over State-Sponsored Armed Groups,” Penn Identity and Conflict Lab, University of Pennsylvania
- Oct 5, 2021 “Proxies, Not Puppets: Explaining (Lack of) Control over State-Sponsored Armed Groups,” Perry World House Seminar Series, University of Pennsylvania
- Oct 4, 2021 “Proxies, Not Puppets: Explaining (Lack of) Control over State-Sponsored Armed Groups,” Institute for the Study of War and Strategy Seminar Series, University of St. Andrews
- 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, 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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Feb 18-19, 2022 Invited contributor and panelist, Civil War and Intervention: U.S. Foreign Policy in International Perspective, Clements Center for National Security at the University of Texas at Austin

- Presented “Mission (Im)Possible?: Record of American Sponsorship of Non-State Armed Groups During the Cold War”

Oct 2, 2021 American Political Science Association Conference, virtual

- Organized panel, “Causes and Conduct of Proxy Warfare”
- Presented “Proxies, Not Puppets: Explaining (Lack of) Control over State-Sponsored Armed Groups”

Sept 23, 2021 Conflict Delegation and Proxy Wars in International Security Conference, virtual

- Presented dissertation findings, “The Proxy Paradox: Explaining (Lack of) Control over State-Sponsored Armed Groups”

Apr 2021 International Studies Association Conference, virtual

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

March 23, 2021 “American Control of Arab Groups in the Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Program,” CSPP Working Paper Working Group, International Security Program, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School

Aug 2020 American Political Science Association Conference, virtual

- Organized panel, “Conduct of Warfare: Perceptions and Beyond”
- Presented dissertation theory chapter
- Presented “‘Proxies’ and the Public”

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. Familiar with ArcGIS, Python.