

Harvard Law School launches new initiative on national security law and policy

Guided by Harvard Law faculty and former senior U.S. national security officials, the new initiative will convene experts to help address current and future challenges

Harvard Law School has launched the [National Security Law & Policy Initiative](#), a dedicated effort to bring together scholars, policymakers, practitioners, and students to address some of the most pressing issues in national security. [Kristen E. Eichensehr](#), Balthrop Cassidy Professor of Law, will serve as the initiative's faculty director.

The initiative will strengthen Harvard Law School's ability to help shape the future of U.S. national security at this moment of disruption, both in the U.S. constitutional system and in the post-World War II international order. The initiative will support teaching, conferences, and events on these and other topics, with the aims of contributing to public debate and building expertise and pathways for students who seek to practice in the national security realm. Support for this initiative was provided by a philanthropic grant from the [Andrew Carnegie Foundation](#).

"Questions of national security are among the most consequential — and most difficult — that lawyers and policymakers confront," said [John Goldberg](#), the Morgan and Helen Chu Dean and Professor of Law. "Harvard lawyers have been at the forefront of debates about national security policy and the global order for more than two centuries and our law school is uniquely positioned to bring together scholars, practitioners, public officials, and students to examine those questions with intellectual rigor and from multiple perspectives. The National Security Law & Policy Initiative builds on that tradition while helping prepare the next generation of leaders in the field."

The new initiative will draw on the expertise of [Harvard Law faculty affiliates](#), including [Jack Goldsmith](#), the Learned Hand Professor of Law, and of a bipartisan advisory board chaired by Hon. Jane Lakes Harman '69 and composed of former senior government officials whose experience spans all three branches of government, presidential administrations of both parties, the private sector, and academia.

Eichensehr said, "Harvard Law School has a long tradition of leadership on national security. Its faculty and alumni helped to design the laws and institutions that have undergirded the national and international security system for decades, and the initiative positions HLS to help shape the next era of national security by producing actionable reform proposals and training our students as future leaders."

“The National Security Law & Policy Initiative will consolidate and deepen Harvard Law School’s many strengths in national security law and policy,” said Goldsmith. “It will also provide institutional space through which the law school’s deep alumni bench of national security practitioners and theorists can contribute to the life of the law school. It is above all an amazing opportunity for our students.”

Addressing a changing national security landscape

The initiative launches at a time when the practice and academic study of national security are at an inflection point. The decades-long expansion of executive power in the United States now raises profound questions about issues such as war powers, emergency powers, and new technologies, including artificial intelligence. On the international level, the international institutions that arose in the post-World War II and post-Cold War eras to manage security and interdependence are increasingly marginalized, and fundamental tenets of international law are under assault. Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney [declared](#) earlier this year that the international system is “in the midst of a rupture, not a transition.” What comes next is unclear.

By bringing together experts from government, academia, and the private sector, the initiative aims to foster research, dialogue, and practical policy proposals to address these evolving challenges. The initiative’s first year will focus on the domestic separation of powers and Congress’ role in national security policymaking, while the second will focus on rebuilding an international legal order. The initiative will supplement Harvard Law’s robust curricular offerings and student organizations focused on national security, and it builds on a legacy of Harvard Law faculty, including Louis B. Sohn, Abram Chayes, and Philip B. Heymann, whose work helped shape earlier eras of national and international security.

Convening leaders and experts across government and law

The initiative’s bipartisan advisory board includes members who have served in senior roles in all three branches of the federal government and across presidential administrations, including those of Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama ’91, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden.

Board chair Harman ’69 served as a United States congresswoman for nine terms and was ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee for four years after 9/11, influencing national security policy at a pivotal moment. During her time in Congress, she served on all

major security committees, including Armed Services, Intelligence, and Homeland Security. She also chaired the Commission on the National Defense Strategy, authored “Insanity Defense: Why Our Failure to Confront Hard National Security Problems Makes Us Less Safe,” and is President Emerita of the nonpartisan Woodrow Wilson Center.

“I am honored to chair an advisory board with such distinguished practitioners and HLS alumni,” said Harman. “For years, I have believed that the biggest failure in national security isn’t a lack of understanding, it’s a lack of will to actually solve hard problems rather than just talk about them. That is the spirit behind this new initiative. Our goal is to teach law students and policy students the skills to solve, instead of just admiring, hard national security problems. I learned from HLS professors exemplary in both government and academia, including the late Abram Chayes, Phil Heymann, and Jack Goldsmith. This initiative will start by tackling the legal issues essential to reforming Congress, no small task, and then turn to the international issues that are crucial if we hope to bring some order to the disordered world we face today.”

[Advisory Board members](#) include Michael Chertoff ’78, Courtney Simmons Elwood, Michael E. Leiter ’00, Matt Olsen ’88, Jake Sullivan, and Katherine Tai ’01. Among other roles in government, the private sector, and academia, advisory board members have served as national security adviser, secretary of homeland security, U.S. trade representative, director of the National Counterterrorism Center, general counsel of the CIA, assistant attorney general for national security, and national security practice group chairs at major law firms.

The initiative will host several events in its first year. Its inaugural event in November will be a Distinguished Lecture by former Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines. In spring 2027, the initiative will convene a conference on Congress’ role in national security and welcome its first visiting fellow, Margaret Taylor, who previously served as the legal adviser of the U.S. Department of State and as the Democratic chief counsel and deputy staff director for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

###