

FIONA S. CUNNINGHAM
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ACADEMIC POSITIONS

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Assistant Professor of Political Science, 2021-
Faculty Fellow, Perry World House
Faculty Affiliate, Center for the Study of Contemporary China
Faculty Associate, Browne Center for International Politics

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Assistant Professor of Political Science and International Affairs, 2019-21
Member, Institute for Security & Conflict Studies

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Post-Doctoral Fellow, Center for International Security and Cooperation, 2018-9

EDUCATION

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Ph.D., Political Science, 2018
Member, Security Studies Program

UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Bachelor of Laws (Honors), 2010

UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Bachelor of Arts (Honors), Politics and International Relations, 2008

BOOKS

Under the Nuclear Shadow: China's Information-Age Weapons in International Security,
Princeton Studies in International History and Politics (Princeton University Press, 2025)
Winner, Edgar S. Furniss Book Award, 2025
Winner, Peter Katzenstein Book Prize, 2026
Reviewed in *Arms Control Today*, *Binding Hook*, *China Books Review*, *Choice*, *China Quarterly*, *H-Diplo RJSSF Roundtable* (forthcoming), *International Affairs*, *Naval War College Review*, *Pacific Affairs*, *Political Science Quarterly*, *Politique Étrangère*
Coverage in *The Wire China*, *Global China*, *ChinaTalk*, *New Books Network*, *Thinking the Unthinkable*, *China Leadership Monitor*

PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL ARTICLES

10. Fiona S. Cunningham and Kristin ven Bruusgaard, “Escalate to Survive? Nuclear Weapons in Contemporary Great Power Conflict,” *International Security* Vol. 50, No. 4, (2026): 74–127
9. Fiona S. Cunningham, “Other than Law: Legitimizing China’s Nuclear Strategy,” *Security Studies* Vol. 34, No. 5 (2025): 899–932
8. Fiona S. Cunningham, “China’s Test of the Nuclear Revolution: Technology, Great Power Competition, and the Nuclear Balance,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 48, No. 2 (2025): 510–557
7. Fiona S. Cunningham, “Strategic Substitution: China’s Search for Coercive Leverage in the Information Age,” *International Security*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (2022): 46–92
6. Fiona S. Cunningham, “The Maritime Rung on the Escalation Ladder: Naval Blockades in a U.S.-China Conflict,” *Security Studies* Vol. 29, No. 4 (2020): 730–768
 - Runner-up for the 2021 Best Research Article on U.S. Foreign Policy and Grand Strategy Prize awarded by the America in the World Consortium
 - Also published in Jonathan D. Caverley and Peter Dombrowski (eds), *Security Studies in a New Era of Maritime Competition* (Routledge, 2023)
5. Ben Buchanan and Fiona S. Cunningham, “Preparing the Cyber Battlefield: Assessing a Novel Escalation Risk in a Sino-American Crisis,” *Texas National Security Review*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Fall 2020): 54–81
 - Revised version published in Robert Chesney, James Shires and Max Smeets (eds), *Cyberspace and Instability* (Edinburgh University Press, 2023): 60–98
4. Fiona S. Cunningham and M. Taylor Fravel, “Dangerous Confidence? Chinese Views on Nuclear Escalation,” *International Security*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Fall 2019): 61–109
 - Reviewed in *H-Diplo/ISSF*
3. Fiona S. Cunningham and M. Taylor Fravel, “Assuring Assured Retaliation: China’s Nuclear Posture and U.S.-China Strategic Stability,” *International Security*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Fall 2015): 7–50
2. Fiona S. Cunningham and David Kinley, “The Trinity and the Dragon: Reconciling Finance, Human Rights and the Environment in China,” *Journal of Human Rights and the Environment*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2012): 116–140
1. Fiona S. Cunningham, “The Stellar Status Symbol: True Motives for China’s Space Program,” *China Security*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2009): 73–88

BOOK CHAPTERS

Fiona S. Cunningham, “The Long Game of U.S. Missile Defense: China’s Reaction to SDI and its Successors” in Aaron Bateman and Anthony Eames, eds., *Racing for Technology: An International History of the Strategic Defense Initiative* (under contract with Cornell University Press)

Fiona S. Cunningham, “The Maritime Rung on the Escalation Ladder: Naval Blockades in a U.S.-China Conflict,” in Jonathan D. Caverley and Peter Dombrowski (eds), *Security Studies in a New Era of Maritime Competition* (Routledge, 2023)

Ben Buchanan and Fiona S. Cunningham, “Preparing the Cyber Battlefield: Assessing a Novel Escalation Risk in a Sino-American Crisis,” in Robert Chesney, James Shires and Max Smeets (eds), *Cyberspace and Instability* (Edinburgh University Press, 2023): 60–98

Fiona S. Cunningham, “The Role of Nuclear Weapons in China’s National Defence,” in Rory Medcalf et al. (eds), *The Future of the Undersea Deterrent: A Global Survey* (Canberra: Australian National University, 2020): 22–27

UNDER REVIEW

Fiona S. Cunningham, “The Rise of China and International Security,” conditionally accepted at *Annual Review of Political Science*

WORK IN PROGRESS

When China Writes the Rules (book project)

“China’s Nuclear Arguments: Building a Domestic Consensus for Arsenal Modernization” (article manuscript)

“China’s Belated Rise in the Nuclear Domain” (article manuscript)

“China’s Rejection of Tactical Nuclear Weapons in the Late Cold War” (article manuscript)

“Updating Strategic Deterrence: China’s Lessons from the Ukraine War” (working paper)

“Reunification Without Fighting” (working paper, with Jennifer Lind)

“Cultural Heritage as Leverage in Contemporary East Asia” (in preparation, with Lynn Meskell)

OTHER SCHOLARLY WRITING

Policy Journal Articles

“The Unknowns About China’s Nuclear Modernization Program,” *Arms Control Today*, Vol. 53 (June 2023): 6–14

“Cooperation Under Asymmetry? The Future of U.S.-China Nuclear Relations,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Summer 2021): 159–180

- Earlier version published by the University of Pennsylvania’s Project on the Future of U.S.-China Relations, September 2020

Invited Reviews and Essays

“The Pedagogy of Owen Coté,” essay for RJISF Tribute to the Scholarship and Legacy of Owen R. Coté, Jr., H-Diplo, June 2025 (with Lena Andrews)

“Chinese Assessments of Starlink and U.S.-China Space Relations,” Commentary, *CSIS Interpret: China*, December 2024

“Accommodative Signaling and the Role of Risk,” response to Erica Lonergan and Shawn Lonergan, “Cyber Operations, Accommodative Signaling, and the De-Escalation of International Crises,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (2022)

Review of Brendan Rittenhouse Green, *The Revolution that Failed: Nuclear Competition, Arms Control, and the Cold War*, for H-Diplo Roundtable XXIII-11, November 2021

Policy Briefs and Reports

“Managing U.S.-China Nuclear Risks: A Guide for Australia,” Policy Brief, United States Studies Centre, University of Sydney, September 2020

“Nuclear Command, Control, and Communications Systems of the People’s Republic of China,” NAPSNet Special Reports, Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability, 2019

“Alliances, Extended Deterrence, and Managing Escalation in East Asia,” in Sharon Stirling (ed) *Shifting Dynamics: Next Generation Assessments on Asian Security* (Washington, D.C.: German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2016) (with Rupal N. Mehta)

“Why China Won’t Abandon its Nuclear Strategy of Assured Retaliation,” Policy Brief, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, December 2015 (with M. Taylor Fravel)

Disarming Doubt: The Future of Extended Nuclear Deterrence in East Asia (Sydney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2012) (co-edited with Rory Medcalf)

MEDIA COMMENTARY

“The Risks of Getting Russian and Chinese Nuclear Strategy Wrong,” *Lawfare*, August 19, 2026
(with Kristin Ven Bruusgaard)

“More Than Just Nuclear: Risk Reduction in the China-US Relationship,” *The Diplomat*,
November 10, 2023

“China’s nuclear arsenal is growing. What does that mean for U.S.-China relations?” *The
Monkey Cage/Washington Post*, November 11, 2021 (with M. Taylor Fravel)

“Was China Behind Last October’s Power Outage in India? Here’s What We Know,” *The
Monkey Cage/Washington Post*, April 29, 2021

GRANTS AND FELLOWSHIPS

External

2026-8	Longview Philanthropy & Pax Sapiens Nuclear Consortium Grant (with Prof. Michael Horowitz)
2025-6	Stanton Foundation Nuclear Security Grant
2025-7	Korean National Commission for UNESCO Grant (with Prof. Lynn Meskell)
2024	Korean National Commission for UNESCO Grant (with Prof. Lynn Meskell)
2024-5	Visiting Fellow, Department of Political Science, Yale University
2023-4	Paul Olum Grant, Ploughshares Fund
2022-3	John H. McArthur Research Fellowship, Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada
2022-3	Defense Threat Reduction Agency grant subaward (main award to the National Bureau of Asian Research)
2022-3	Carnegie Corporation of New York grant subaward (main award to Prof. Charles Glaser, GWU)
2020-1	Stanton Foundation Nuclear Security Junior Faculty Fellowship, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
2018-9	Post-Doctoral Fellowship, Princeton-Harvard China and the World Program (declined)
2018-9	Post-Doctoral Fellowship, Dickey Center, Dartmouth University (declined)
2017-8	Pre-Doctoral Fellow, Cyber Security Project, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University
2017-8	Stanton Nuclear Security Pre-Doctoral Fellowship, RAND Corporation (declined)
2016	Smith Richardson Foundation World Politics and Statecraft Fellowship
2015-16	China Confucius Studies Program Ph.D. Research Fellowship, Renmin University
2007	Chinese Government Scholarship

Internal

2024-6	Penn Global Research and Engagement Grant (with Prof. Lynn Meskell)
2021-6	Perry World House Faculty Fellowship
2015	MIT Center for International Studies Summer Research Grant
2013	MIT Center for International Studies Summer Research Grant
2012-3	Walter A. Rosenblith MIT Presidential Graduate Fellowship
2008	University of New South Wales Honors Year Scholarship
2007	University of New South Wales Harvard Travel Scholarship

AWARDS AND HONORS

2026	Edgar S. Furniss Book Award for 2025
2026	Peter Katzenstein Book Prize
2026	Kelleher Forum speaker, Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland, University of Maryland
2021	Runner-up, Prize for Best Research Article on U.S. Foreign Policy and Grand Strategy, America in the World Consortium
2019	Lucian Pye Award for best dissertation, MIT Political Science Department
2010	University of Sydney Undergraduate Academic Merit Prize

AFFILIATIONS

2025-	Affiliate, Center for Nuclear Security Policy, MIT
2023-	Expert Associate, National Security College, Australian National University
2021-	Nonresident Scholar, Nuclear Policy Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
2020-	Research Affiliate, Security Studies Program, MIT
2019-	Affiliate, Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University
2020-6	Nonresident Fellow, Foreign Policy and Defence Program, United States Studies Centre, University of Sydney
2017-20	Futures Council, National Security College, Australian National University
2017-9	Carnegie International Policy Scholars Consortium and Network
2016	German Marshall Fund Young Strategists Forum
2015-9	CSIS Pacific Forum Young Leaders Program

MEMBERSHIPS

2014-	International Studies Association
2014-	American Political Science Association
2012	Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory (admitted to practice law)

TEACHING

University of Pennsylvania

PSCI 6401 Strategic Studies, PhD seminar
PSCI 4450 Chinese Foreign Policy, undergraduate seminar
PSCI 1401 International Security, undergraduate lecture

George Washington University

IAFF 6168 Coercion in Peacetime and War, MA seminar
PSC 2449 International Security Politics, undergraduate lecture

Summer Workshop on the Analysis of Military Operations and Strategy (SWAMOS), Columbia University (2022-2025)

ADVISING

PhD Committees: Zoe Jordan (Penn, in progress); Brian Mueller (Penn, in progress); Natasha Williams (Penn, in progress); Sarah Gerstein (Penn, 2025); Rachel Hulvey (Penn, 2024)
David Logan (outside reader, Princeton, 2022); Kendrick Kuo (outside reader, GWU, 2021); Brian Radzinsky (outside reader, GWU, 2020)

Undergraduate Thesis Advisees (* indicates winner of departmental thesis prize): Hannah Bases* (Penn, 2024); Xiuqi Shen (Penn, 2024); Emily Kweit* (Penn, 2023); Yuanchen Liu (Penn, 2023); Lachlan Cormie (co-adviser, Penn, 2022)
Anshul Rajwashni (GWU, 2021)

INVITED TALKS

Academic

- 2026 Seminar XXI, Center for International Studies, MIT; China Governance Lab, Munk School, University of Toronto; Center for Indo-Pacific Affairs, University of Hawaii; Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland, University of Maryland; Center for International Security Studies, Princeton University
- 2025 S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University; Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University; International Relations Seminar, Political Science, Stanford University; Project on Managing the Atom, Harvard University; Center for International Security Studies, Princeton University; Nuclear Security Program & Brady-Johnston Book Series, Yale University; Center for International Security and Strategy, Tsinghua University; Burkle Center for International Relations, UCLA; Seminar XXI, Center for International Studies, MIT; British International Studies Association

- 2024 Initiative for U.S.-China Dialogue, Georgetown University; Nuclear Policy Working Group, University of California, Berkeley; Columbia University International Politics Seminar; Seminar XXI, Center for International Studies, MIT
- 2023 Program on Science & Global Security, Princeton University; Center for International Security and Strategy, Tsinghua University; Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University; Lansing Lee/Bankard Seminar in Global Politics, University of Virginia
- 2022 International Relations & International Security Studies Joint Seminar, Yale University; Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, Harvard University; Notre Dame International Security Center Seminar, University of Notre Dame; International Relations Seminar, Dickey Center, Dartmouth College
- 2021 Workshop in International Politics, University of Chicago; Monday International Relations Thought Series Colloquium, University of California, Berkeley; Strategic and Operational Research Department Workshop, Naval War College; Forum for International Institutions and Global Governance, Temple University; Changing Character of War Centre, Oxford University; Centre for International Security, Hertie School
- 2020 Browne Center & Center for the Study of Contemporary China, University of Pennsylvania; Center for International Security Studies, Princeton University; Center for the Study of WMD Spotlight Seminar, National Defense University; Oslo Nuclear Project, University of Oslo
- 2019 Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University; Nuclear Policy Working Group, University of California, Berkeley; Georgetown University International Theory & Research Seminar; Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute for International Studies
- 2018 Strategic & Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University; Political Science Department, Brown University; Political Science Department, George Washington University; Schar School, George Mason University; School of International Studies, American University; Bush School, Texas A&M University
- 2017 Cyber Security Project Seminar Series, Belfer Center, Harvard University

Non-Academic

- 2026 Australian Department of Defence
- 2025 Nuclear Weapons Philanthropy Summit, Longview Philanthropy; Deterrence Seminar, RAND Europe; U.S. Department of Defense; Australian Department of Defence; Aerospace Security Project, Center for Strategic and International Studies; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Center for Global Security Research, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory

- 2024 Visiting Lecture Series, Defence Attaché Office, Australian Embassy in China; U.S. Cyber Command
- 2023 Norwegian Intelligence School; Sasakawa Peace Foundation (Tokyo); Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States
- 2021 Institut Français des Relations Internationales; U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (testimony)
- 2017 Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

INVITED CONFERENCES, PANELS & WORKSHOPS

- 2026 IFS-National Institute for Defense Studies (Tokyo), University of Wisconsin-Madison; Center for International Security Studies, Princeton University; Seminar XXI, Center for International Studies, MIT; Hoover Institution
- 2025 Center for Nuclear Security Policy, MIT; Project on Nuclear Issues, Center for Strategic and International Studies; Public Policy and Nuclear Threats Boot Camp, UC Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation; Seminar XXI, Center for International Studies, MIT; Nuclear Security Program, Yale University; Asia New Zealand Foundation; Council on Foreign Relations
- 2024 Center for American Studies, Fudan University; MacArthur Foundation and Project on Managing the Atom, Harvard University; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Grand Strategy and Nuclear Security Program, Yale University; Stanley Center for Peace and Security and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Sasakawa Peace Foundation and Hudson Institute; National Institute of Defense Studies, Tokyo; China and International Politics Conference, Yale University; Seminar XXI, Center for International Studies, MIT; Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, Harvard University; Oxford Institute for Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict; Space Policy Institute, George Washington University
- 2023 Norwegian Institute for Defense Studies; Beijing Xiangshan Forum; Deterrence Workshop, Bridging the Gap-U.S. State Department; Center for Peace, Hiroshima University; NATO Nuclear Policy Symposium; China Power Project, Center for Strategic and International Studies; Australia-Japan-U.S.-UK Track 1.5 Strategic Dialogue; *World Politics*, Princeton University; Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University; Center for Global Security Research, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory; Nuclear Security Symposium, International Security Studies, Yale University; Center for International Security and Strategy, Tsinghua University; Security in Asia Program, Norwegian Institute for Defense Studies & Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, Harvard University; Seminar XXI, Center for International Studies, MIT; HQ Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, NATO; School of International Studies, American University; Cyber Strategy Symposium, Georgia Institute of Technology; Initiative for U.S.-China Dialogue, Georgetown University; Hague Program on International Cybersecurity; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

- 2022 Sigur Center for Asian Studies, George Washington University; Institute for Security & Conflict Studies, George Washington University; Judith Reppy Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, Cornell University; Oxford Institute for Ethics, Law, and Armed Conflict; Future Warfighting Symposium, Naval War College; Los Alamos National Laboratory; Center for Global Security Research, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory; Hague Center for Security Studies; East Asia Strategy Forum, Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada & Institute for Peace and Diplomacy
- 2021 Strategic Deterrence Exercise Workshop, Naval War College; Asia Studies Program Roundtable, Georgetown University; Initiative for U.S.-China Dialogue, Georgetown University; Nuclear Planning Directorate, NATO; Hoover Institution and U.S. Cyber Command; Center for Global Security Research, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory
- 2020 Stanton Foundation Nuclear Security Seminar; Strauss Center, University of Texas; Hague Centre for Strategic Studies; Center for Global Security Research, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory
- 2019 Young Scholars in International Relations Conference, Browne Center, University of Pennsylvania; Nuclear Scholars Research Initiative Workshop; Georgetown University; Naval Postgraduate School; Center for Global Security Research, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory; NC3 Systems and Strategic Stability, Nautilus Institute
- 2018 Bridging the Straits Conference, Naval War College; Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University; Emerging Scholars in Grand Strategy Conference, Notre Dame International Security Center
- 2017 Institute for Security and Conflict Studies, The George Washington University; Project on Nuclear Issues, Center for Strategic and International Studies
- 2016 PIIC Beijing Seminar on International Security
- 2015 China-U.S. Young Scholars Dialogue, China Institute of International Studies; Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University; Nuclear Scholars' Research Initiative Workshop
- 2014 Institute for Security and Conflict Studies, The George Washington University

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

APSA Annual Conference	2015, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026
ISA Annual Convention	2017, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

University of Pennsylvania

University

- 2025-6 Security Pillar Co-Lead, Perry World House
- 2022 Fellowship Committee, Perry World House

School of Arts and Sciences

- 2026-8 International Education Committee (subcommittee of the Committee on Undergraduate Education)
- 2021-3 Executive Committee, Center for East Asian Studies

Political Science Department

- 2026-7 Committee on Associated Faculty
- 2024 Chinese Domestic Politics Search Committee
- 2023-4 Diversity Committee
- 2023-4 Undergraduate Executive Committee

MIT

- 2018 International Relations Search Committee, Political Science Department
- 2014-5 Coordinator, Working Group on the Strategic Use of Force
- 2014-5 Coordinator, Nuclear Weapons Working Group

SERVICE TO THE PROFESSION

Reviewer: *American Journal of Political Science*, *American Political Science Review*, *Asian Survey*, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *China Quarterly*, *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, *Contemporary Security Policy*, *International Interactions*, *International Organization*, *International Security*, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, *Journal of Cybersecurity*, *Journal of Global Security Studies*, *Journal of Politics*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *Nonproliferation Review*, *Political Analysis*, *RUSI Journal*, *Security Studies*, *Texas National Security Review*, U.S. State Department, *World Politics*

Book manuscript workshops:

- 2024 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
 - 2023 Georgia Institute of Technology
 - 2022 Johns Hopkins University
-
- 2023- Organizing Committee, New Faces in Chinese Politics Conference
 - 2015, 2016-7 Co-chair, Women in International Politics and Security, Boston area

OTHER EXPERIENCE

2010-11 Research Assistant to Prof. David Kinley, Faculty of Law, University of Sydney
2009-12 Research Associate, Nuclear Policy, Lowy Institute for International Policy
2009-10 Summer Clerk, Mallesons Stephen Jaques (now King & Wood Mallesons)
2008 Executive Editor, *UNSW Law Journal*

LANGUAGES

Mandarin Chinese, French

Updated September 8, 2026