



RETHINKING AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY

MAY 29-30, 2026

THE BLACKWELL INN AND PFAHL CONFERENCE CENTER



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

MERSON CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL
SECURITY STUDIES

STANTON
FOUNDATION

Rethinking American Grand Strategy

The Blackwell Inn & Pfahl Conference Center

May 29 - 30, 2026

Overview

Co-organized by Christopher McKnight Nichols, the Wayne Woodrow Hayes Chair in National Security Studies and Professor of History, The Ohio State University and Andrew Preston, W.L. Lyons Brown Jr. Jefferson Scholars Foundation Distinguished Professor of Diplomacy and Statecraft, University of Virginia.

The Rethinking American Grand Strategy conference brings together exceptional scholars and thinkers, eminent figures, and rising stars to rethink the past and present of American grand strategy. In a series of innovative talks and original presentations the panelists seek to construct a rich account of how grand strategy has expanded and continues to operate in the U.S. role in the world in the twenty-first century. The conference and resulting book will broaden the field of Grand Strategy beyond traditional assessments of the ends and means of (military) power, by including cutting-edge work on, non-state actors, raw materials, economics, race, gender, and other innovative ways of examining the history of American grand strategy. In emphasizing new subjects and new approaches, the larger objective is to provide a better understanding of the most pressing international issues not just of the past and present, but for the future as well. War, peace, and diplomatic strategy will be central, but conference participants also will engage with topics and on topics and areas not often historicized and understood in grand strategic terms, such as artificial intelligence, materials (e.g. rare earths), and climate change, as well as strategically critical regions (from Canada to Central Europe, from Southeast Asia to the Arctic) and geographies (e.g., space, the seas).

Together we will be developing new approaches to American Grand Strategy across an array of present concerns. Recommendations from each issue area will be informed by a rich account of past approaches to Grand Strategy, how they were realized in practice (or not), and how they played out. Participants will consider how the lessons of history can foster a more productive, holistic approach to domestic and international security.

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Keen observers of U.S. foreign policy are divided in many ways, yet they are united in their longing for a clearer view of U.S. strategic priorities, plans, and a process by which to at least seek to attain them. From across the political spectrum thinkers, politicians, journalists, and citizens alike want the United States to have a grand plan to meet the major challenges of the 21st century – nuclear proliferation, AI and cybersecurity, climate change, human rights, inequality, and more.

As the study of Grand Strategy expands beyond traditional assessments of the ends and means of (military) power, lead co-organizer Christopher McKnight Nichols proposes to consolidate the state of the field and propel it in new directions; in close collaboration with Andrew Preston, the two aim to build on their recent work through this conference and in a resulting new book.

This event is co-sponsored by The Ohio State University's America at 250 Initiative.



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Co-Organizers

- Christopher McKnight Nichols, Wayne Woodrow Hayes Chair in National Security Studies and Professor of History, The Ohio State University
- Andrew Preston, W.L. Lyons Brown Jr. Jefferson Scholars Foundation Distinguished Professor of Diplomacy and Statecraft, University of Virginia.

May 29, 2026 | Program Schedule and Topics

8:45-9:30 AM Registration, Coffee & Light Breakfast

9:30-10:00 AM Welcome & Day One Remarks

- Christopher McKnight Nichols, The Ohio State University
- Andrew Preston, University of Virginia

10:00-11:45 AM Panel 1: Reflections on Grand Strategy

- Francis J. Gavin, Johns Hopkins University
“The Art of Grand Strategy: Assessing Critical Choices in Real Time”
- Neta Crawford, St Andrews University
“Down with Kool-Aid, Up with New Wine in New Bottles: Towards an Entirely New Grand Strategy”
- Michael Brenes, Yale University
“Hubris and Failure: Grand Strategy at the End of the American Century”

12:00-1:00 PM Lunch | Daley Pavilion

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- 1:00-3:00 PM** **Panel 2: Politics and Threats**
- Keisha N. Blain, Brown University
“Black American Women, Anti-Colonial Politics, and Grand Strategies from Below”
 - Sam Lebovic, George Mason University
“Grand Strategy’s Democracy Gap, or, what do we talk about when we talk about ‘the National Interest?’”
 - Nicole Hemmer, Vanderbilt University
“The End of Liberal Media: The Collapse of a Democratic Press in an Illiberal Age”
 - Eleanor Runde, Former Policy Advisor on Artificial Intelligence, Office of the Secretary, U.S. Department of Commerce
“Diplomatic Sequencing in AI Safety”

3:00-3:30 PM **Break**

- 3:30-5:30 PM** **Panel 3: Military Strategies**
- Risa Brooks, Marquette University
“Civil-Military Relations and Strategic Assessment”
 - Jonathan R. Hunt, Associate Scholar, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School
“A Killing Peace: American Grand Strategy, the Nuclear Revolution, and the Wars that Remained”
 - Joseph Stieb, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
“Through the Prism of Morality: Explaining Terrorism’s Grip on American Grand Strategy”
 - Josephine Wolff, Tufts University, and Anatol Klass, U.S. Naval War College
“Cyber power and grand strategy in China and the United States”

5:30 PM **Day One Concludes**

8:45-9:20 AM **Registration, Coffee & Light Breakfast**

9:20-9:30 AM **Welcome & Day Two Remarks**

- Christopher McKnight Nichols, The Ohio State University
- Andrew Preston, University of Virginia

New Perspectives on the Northwest Ordinance

May 30, 2026 | Program Schedule and Topics

9:30-11:30 AM

Panel 4: Resources and the Role of Business

- Megan A. Black, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
“Undermining Strategy: US Mineral Policies against Sovereignty and Earth Systems”
- Christopher Dietrich, Fordham University
“Oil, Industrial Foreign Relations, and the Origins of National Insecurity”
- Michael De Groot, Indiana University
“Economic Statecraft and the Contradictions of US Grand Strategy during the Cold War”
- Rebecca Herman, University of California, Berkeley
“The Strategy of the Commons: Antarctica, the US, and the World”

11:45-12:45 PM

Lunch | Daley Pavilion

1:00-3:00 PM

Panel 5: Geographies of Space and Time

- Rana Mitter, Harvard University
“The Two-Body Problem: China in US Grand Strategy”
- Simon Miles, Duke University
“West of Somewhere: Eastern Europe in US Grand Strategy”
- Asa McKercher, St. Francis Xavier University
“From 14th Colony to 51st State: Canada in American Grand Strategy”
- Kara Cunzeman, Founder, Unconstrained Futures
“Space, the Final Frontier: Grand Strategy or Grand Chaos?”

3:00-3:30 PM

Break

3:30-5:30 PM

Panel 6: Opportunities and Challenges

- Elisabeth Leake, Tufts University
“Decolonization and the Limits of US Grand Strategy”
- Daniel J. Sargent, University of California, Berkeley
“The Hardware of Grand Strategy: Institutions and American Power”
- Susan Colbourn, Duke University
“The Entangling Alliance Revisited: NATO and the Patterns of American Grand Strategy”
- Lydia Walker, The Ohio State University
“The United Nations: A Wartime Alliance during the Global Postwar”

5:30 PM

Concluding Remarks and Next Steps

- Christopher McKnight Nichols, The Ohio State University
- Andrew Preston, University of Virginia



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