

CSF

Current Strategy Forum

The Navy, Maritime Strategy, and National Security

June 8–9, 2026





About Current Strategy Forum

This year marks the 75th Annual Current Strategy Forum (CSF) at the Naval War College in Newport. The first CSF took place on 9 May 1949 under the title “Round Table Talks.” This event offers an opportunity for the Nation’s public servants, scholars, and senior military officers to join the College faculty and students to discuss the future strategy of the United States. Over the years, the CSF has expanded to include a cross section of America’s civilian and military leadership to encourage a wide-ranging discussion on national and international security. This year’s theme:

The Navy, Maritime Strategy, and National Security

This year’s CSF will examine the ways and means by which the United States can meet the dangers of our era, marked by great-power competition, asymmetric threats, and rapid technological change. The National Security Strategy emphasizes that the United States is committed to preserving peace by maintaining the world’s most lethal military and robust nuclear deterrent to discourage aggression. The foundation for a robust national defense is a dynamic, innovative, and advanced economy, with strong industrial, agricultural, energy, science, and technology sectors.

The naval services have a vital role to play in providing for the country’s security and defending American interests around the globe. The Navy’s leadership has underscored the urgent need to rebuild the fleet with the most capable ships, revitalize the maritime industrial base, and change how the Department of the Navy operates. To achieve these objectives, the Navy will contract for the construction of the most tonnage undertaken by the country since World War II. Building the future force will require sustained investment in reviving the country’s defense industrial base by increasing shipyard construction capacity. To steer the Navy in the years ahead, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Daryl Caudle advocates a hedge strategy to create an adaptive force, mitigate uncertainty, manage risk, guide investments in future force structure, and conduct operations at sea.

This call to revitalize the country’s maritime industries harkens back to the teachings of Alfred Thayer Mahan who aimed to educate the officers studying in Newport as well as the American public about the importance of sea power in determining the rise and fall of great nations.

PROGRAM OF EVENTS

Business casual attire for all events

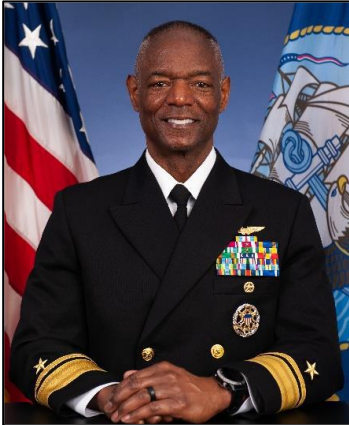
Day One, Monday, 8 June

- 0900 Welcome and Introduction**
[Rear Admiral Darryl Walker, U.S. Navy](#), President, U.S. Naval War College
- 0905 Keynote Address**
[Mr. William Toti](#), PTDO Under Secretary of the Navy
- 0945 Keynote Address**
[Dr. Francis J. Gavin](#), Giovanni Agnelli Distinguished Professor and Director of the Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies
- 1030 Break**
- 1050 Panel 1: International Strategic Environment and Challenges**
Moderator: [Dr. John H. Maurer](#), U.S. Naval War College
[Dr. Michael Doran](#), Hudson Institute
[Dr. Eyck Freymann](#), Hoover Institution
[Dr. Emily Goldman](#), National Security Agency
[Professor Stephen Peter Rosen](#), Harvard University
- 1215 Adjourn for Day One**

Day Two, Tuesday, 9 June

- 0830 Administrative announcements**
- 0840 Keynote Address**
[Dr. Toshi Yoshihara](#), Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments
- 0915 Break**
- 0930 Panel 2: Maritime Strategy and the Future Navy**
Moderator: [Professor Kathleen Walsh](#), U.S. Naval War College
[Mr. Bryan Clark](#), Hudson Institute (*virtual*)
[Dr. Andrew Erickson](#), U.S. Naval War College
[Dr. Sarah Kirchberger](#), Kiel University
[Dr. Eric Labs](#), Congressional Budget Office
- 1100 Break**
- 1115 Keynote Address**
[General Eric M. Smith, U.S. Marine Corps](#), Commandant of the United States Marine Corps (*virtual*)
- 1200 Current Strategy Forum Adjourns**
Students Transition to PMW Seminars
- 1330 PMW seminars**
Students will discuss CSF content as well as provide feedback on the PMW course.
- 1530 PMW Seminars Complete**

U.S. NAVAL WAR COLLEGE LEADERSHIP



Rear Admiral Darryl “D-Day” Walker is the 59th President of the U.S. Naval War College and a career naval aviator. He enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1985 as an Air Traffic Controller. He received his commission in the United States Navy through the Naval Aviation Officer Candidate School and was designated a Naval Flight Officer in 1992. He is a graduate of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and the U.S. Naval War College.

D-Day fulfilled various operational tours in the Pacific and Arabian Gulf, including service as the Commander and Executive Officer of the “Cougars” VAQ-139, deployed onboard USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76), as well as the Commodore and Deputy Commodore of the Electronic Attack Wing United States Pacific Fleet, flying the EA-18G Growler. He has amassed an impressive 3900 flight hours and 696 carrier-arrested landings throughout his career.

Walker’s shore assignments include Deputy Director, PERS-43; program director for the Naval Aviation Enterprise; Chief of Naval Operations Strategic Studies Group; Chief of Staff to the Chief Information Officer, Secretary of Defense; Executive Assistant to the 11th Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Executive Assistant to the 32nd Chief of Naval Operations.

As a flag officer, Walker served as the Deputy Director of Operations (J-3), U.S. Cyber Command, and most recently as the Deputy Commander of Joint Force Headquarters-Cyber (Navy), United States TENTH Fleet.

His awards include the Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal, Air Medal, Joint Service Commendation, Navy Commendation Medal, USAF Commendation Medal, and various unit and campaign awards.



Dr. Stephen J. Mariano most recently served as the deputy commandant and dean of the NATO Defense College in Rome, Italy. He also served on the faculties of the School of International Service at American University, National Defense University, the Royal Military College of Canada, and the U.S. Military Academy. He holds a B.A. in mathematics and economics from the University of California, Santa Barbara, an M.A. in national security affairs from the Naval Postgraduate School, and a Ph.D. in war studies from the Royal Military College of Canada.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

In Order of Appearance



Mr. William “Bill” Toti began performing the duties of the Under Secretary of the Navy on May 1, 2026.

Previously, Toti served as senior advisor to the Deputy Secretary of War. With more than 40 years of experience in defense, he spent 26 years on active duty in the United States Navy, followed by 17 years in the defense industry.

He originally enlisted in the Navy as an electronic technician in 1974 and later commissioned through the U.S. Naval Academy. Following commissioning, Toti completed a series of key submarine assignments at sea, including junior officer aboard USS Omaha (SSN-692), weapons officer and later navigator aboard USS Indianapolis (SSN-697), engineer officer aboard USS Buffalo (SSN-715), executive officer aboard USS Florida (SSBN-728) (Gold Crew), and commanding officer of USS Indianapolis

(SSN-697). He later served as commodore of Submarine Squadron 3 in Pearl Harbor and as commanding officer of Fleet Antisubmarine Warfare Command Norfolk.

Ashore, he served as special assistant to the Vice Chief of Naval Operations, as head of requirements for Commander, Submarine Forces, and as deputy director of the Navy War Plans Cell, Deep Blue. He also served on the Joint Staff, receiving the 1992 Action Officer of the Year award from Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell. He retired from active duty as a Captain after completing seven operational deployments.

Across his career, his crews earned the Battle Efficiency “E” award five times, the 7th Fleet Surface Warfare Award, and multiple Navy Unit Commendations.

Following his active-duty service, Toti held executive positions including vice president of Raytheon’s Mission Support Operations, vice president of the defense segment at Hewlett Packard, president at Cubic Global Defense, and president of the Navy sector at L3 Technologies. He concluded his industry career as CEO of Sparton Corporation.

Following this, he founded No Greater Love, a Christian ministry for veterans, and co-hosted a leading World War II Pacific theater podcast. He was also instrumental in the 2001 exoneration of USS Indianapolis Captain Charles B. McVay III and was later named an “honorary survivor” and honorary captain by the ship’s survivors.

Mr. Toti is a seven-time recipient of the Legion of Merit and was recognized on the “Wash 100” list of influential government contractor leaders. He holds a bachelor’s degree in physics from the U.S. Naval Academy, a master’s degree in spacecraft systems engineering, and the electrical engineer degree from the Naval Postgraduate School. He is an author of more than 30 published articles and the book *From CO to CEO*.



Dr. Francis J. Gavin is the Giovanni Agnelli Distinguished Professor and inaugural director of the Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs at Johns Hopkins SAIS in Washington, D.C., and chair of the Texas National Security Review’s Board of Editors. Previously, he was a professor of political science at MIT, where he held the inaugural Frank Stanton Chair in Nuclear Security Policy Studies, and earlier taught at the University of Texas, serving as Tom Slick Professor and director of the Strauss Center for International Security and Law. He remains affiliated with the Clements Center, the Strauss Center, and MIT’s Security Studies Program, and co-leads IPSCON while directing the Nuclear Studies Research Initiative. He serves on the CIA Historical Panel and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. Gavin is the author of *Gold, Dollars, and Power*, *Nuclear Statecraft*, and *Nuclear Weapons and American Grand Strategy*, as well as recent books including *The Taming of Scarcity* (2024) and *Thinking Historically and Wonder and Worry* (2025). He earned degrees from the University of Chicago, Oxford, and the University of Pennsylvania.



Dr. Toshi Yoshihara is a Senior Fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA). He was previously the inaugural John A. van Beuren Chair of Asia-Pacific Studies at the U.S. Naval War College. Dr. Yoshihara's latest book is *Mao's Army Goes to Sea: Island Campaigns and the Founding of China's Navy* (Georgetown University Press, 2022). He co-authored, with James R. Holmes, the second edition of *Red Star over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy* (Naval Institute Press, 2018). His CSBA publications include "Focused Force: China's Military Challenge and Australia's Response" (2025); "Chinese Lessons from the Pacific War: Implications for PLA Warfighting" (2023); "Rings of Fire: A Conventional Missile Strategy for a Post-INF Treaty World" (2022); "Seizing on Weakness: Allied Strategy for Competing with China's Globalizing Military" (2021); and "Dragon Against the Sun: Chinese Views of Japanese Seapower" (2020).



General Eric M. Smith is currently serving as the 39th Commandant of the Marine Corps.

Born in Kansas City, Missouri, and raised in Plano, Texas, General Smith graduated from Texas A&M University and was commissioned in 1987. He has commanded at every level, including Weapons Company, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment during Operation Assured Response in Monrovia, Liberia; 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment during Operation Iraqi Freedom; and 8th Marine Regiment/ Regimental Combat Team 8 during Operation Enduring Freedom. He also served in Caracas, Venezuela as part of the U.S. Military Group.

As a General Officer, he commanded U.S. Marine Corps Forces Southern Command, 1st Marine Division, III Marine Expeditionary Force, and Marine Corps Combat Development Command.

General Smith's staff assignments as a General Officer include serving as the Director of Capability Development Directorate, Combat Development and Integration; Senior

Military Assistant to both the Deputy Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Defense; Deputy Commandant for Combat Development and Integration; and the 36th Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKERS



Dr. John H. Maurer serves as the Alfred Thayer Mahan Distinguished University Professor of Sea Power and Grand Strategy at the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. As Chair of the Strategy and Policy Department, he led a major reform of the College's curriculum on strategy.

He is a graduate of Yale University and holds an M.A.L.D. and Ph.D. from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University.

He is the author or editor of books examining the outbreak of the First World War, military interventions in the developing world, naval rivalries and arms control between the two world wars, and a study about Winston Churchill's views on British foreign policy and grand strategy.

He is as a Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in the Program on National Security and served as executive editor of *Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs*. He serves on the Academic Board of Advisers, The International Churchill Society, and served on the Secretary of the Navy's advisory committee on naval history.

At the Naval War College, he teaches in the advanced strategy program and an elective course on Winston Churchill as statesman, strategist, politician, soldier, and war leader.

In recognition for his contribution to professional military education, he has received both the U.S. Navy's Meritorious Civilian Service Award and Superior Civilian Service Award.



Dr. Michael Doran is a senior fellow and director of the Center for Peace and Security in the Middle East at Hudson Institute. He specializes in Middle East security issues and co-hosts the Counterbalance podcast. In the administration of President George W. Bush, Doran served in the White House as a senior director in the National Security Council, where he was responsible for helping to devise and coordinate United States strategies on a variety of Middle East issues, including Arab-Israeli relations and U.S. efforts to contain Iran and Syria. He also served in the Bush administration as a senior advisor in the State Department and a deputy assistant secretary of defense in the Pentagon. His latest book, *Ike's Gamble*, was published by Free Press in 2016. He has published extensively in *Foreign Affairs*, *Commentary*, *Mosaic*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and *The New York Times*.



Dr. Eyck Freymann is a Hoover Fellow at Stanford University, where he directs the Allied Coordination Working Group. He also serves as a Non-Resident Research Fellow at Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy, the Institute of Geoeconomics in Tokyo, and the China Maritime Studies Institute at the U.S. Naval War College. His research focuses on strategies to preserve peace and protect U.S. interests amid systemic competition with China. Freymann is the author of several books, including *Defending Taiwan: A Strategy to Prevent War with China* (Oxford, 2026), *The Arsenal of Democracy* (Hoover, 2025), and *One Belt One Road* (Harvard, 2021). His work appears in leading journals and major outlets such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *Foreign Affairs*. He previously held postdoctoral fellowships at Harvard and Columbia and holds degrees from Oxford, Cambridge, and Harvard in History and China Studies.



Dr. Emily Goldman serves as a strategist at U.S. Cyber Command and a thought leader on cyber policy. She was cyber advisor to the Director of Policy Planning at the Department of State, 2018–19. From 2014 to 2018 she directed the U.S. Cyber Command / National Security Agency Combined Action Group, reporting to a four-star commander and leading a team that wrote the 2018 U.S. Cyber Command vision, *Achieve and Maintain Cyberspace Superiority*. She holds a doctorate in Political Science from Stanford University and was a Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Davis, for two decades. Dr. Goldman has published and lectured widely on strategy and cybersecurity. *Cyber Persistence Theory: Redefining National Security in Cyberspace* with Michael Fischerkeller and Richard Harknett was published by Oxford University Press in 2022.



Professor Stephen Peter Rosen is the Kaneb Professor Emeritus of National Security and Military Affairs at Harvard University, and a member of the Board of Directors of the American Academy for Strategic Education. He was Master of Winthrop House at Harvard University. He has received three prizes for excellence in undergraduate teaching. He was a professor in the Strategy Department and a Secretary of the Navy Fellow at the U.S. Naval War College, the civilian assistant to the Director of Net Assessment in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, where he wrote the first East Asian Net Assessment, and the Director of Political-Military Affairs on the staff of the National Security Council, where he was author of NSDD 166, the United States government strategy document for the Afghan covert war. He is the author of *Winning the Next War, Societies and Military Power*, and *War and Human Nature*.



Professor Kathleen (Kate) Walsh is Associate Professor of National Security Affairs at the U.S. Naval War College (NWC), where she has taught policy analysis since 2006. She directs NWC's Asia Pacific Studies Group (APSG) and founded the Oceanography & Maritime Security Group (OMSG) expert listserv. A founding member of NWC's Faculty Advisory Council (2021-2024), she also leads the NSA Department's annual student trip to Washington, DC. Prior to NWC, she was a senior consultant to D.C.-area think tanks, including the Stimson Center and a defense consulting firm. Her research focuses on China, the Asia-Pacific, security, technology, innovation, and the ocean or "blue" economy. She is the author of *China's Blue Economy: Evolution and Geostrategic Implications* (2024), among other works. Walsh holds an M.A. from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs and a B.A. from George Washington University's Elliott School. She is a recipient of the Navy Meritorious Civilian Service Award.



Mr. Bryan Clark is a senior fellow and director of the Center for Defense Concepts and Technology at the Hudson Institute, specializing in naval operations, electronic warfare, autonomous systems, and wargaming. From 2013 to 2019, he was a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, leading studies for the Office of Net Assessment, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and DARPA on emerging technologies and future warfare. Previously, he served as special assistant to the Chief of Naval Operations and director of the Commander's Action Group, where he helped develop Navy strategy and initiatives across key warfare domains and personnel readiness. Clark also worked on the Navy headquarters staff (2004–2011), contributing to major defense reviews and focusing on modeling, planning, and institutional reform. A retired submariner, he served in operational and training roles, earning the Navy Superior Service Medal and Legion of Merit. He holds an MS in philosophy from the University of Idaho.



Dr. Andrew S. Erickson (艾立信) is Professor of Strategy in NWC's China Maritime Studies Institute (CMSI). A core founding member, he helped establish CMSI in 2006 and has played an integral role in its development; from 2021–23 he served as Research Director. CMSI inspired the creation of other Department of Defense research centers, which he has advised and supported; he is a China Aerospace Studies Institute Associate. Erickson has taught courses at NWC and Yonsei University, advises NWC student research and curricula, and supports NWC's scholarly research relations with Japanese counterparts. He provides flag officer tailored education for NWC, both on and off campus, including in Honolulu, Taipei, Kaohsiung, and Naples.



Dr. Sarah Kirchberger is Academic Director at the Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University (ISPK) and Vice President of the German Maritime Institute (DMI). She was previously an Assistant Professor of Sinology at Hamburg University and a naval analyst with shipbuilder TKMS. She is the author of *Assessing China's Naval Power: Technological Innovation, Economic Constraints, and Strategic Implications*, co-author of *The China Plan: A Transatlantic Blueprint for Strategic Competition* and co-editor of *Russia-China Relations: Emerging Alliance or Eternal Rivals?*. In April 2023, she testified before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC) on China's undersea warfare. Her research focuses on China's undersea warfare; PLAN modernization; Chinese defense-industrial development; and mil-tech co-operation between China, Russia and Ukraine. She holds a MA and a Ph.D. in Sinology from the University of Hamburg after studies in Hamburg, Taipei and Trier.



Dr. Eric J. Labs is Senior Analyst for Naval Forces and Weapons at the Congressional Budget Office in Washington, D.C. He specializes in issues related to the procurement, budgeting, and sizing of the forces for the Department of the Navy. Dr. Labs has testified before Congress several times and published numerous studies under the auspices of the Congressional Budget Office as well as a number of articles and papers in academic journals and conferences, including the U.S. Naval Institute's *Proceedings*, *Sea Power* magazine, and the *Naval War College Review*. His most recent Navy-related CBO study is *An Analysis of the Navy's Fiscal Year 2011 Shipbuilding Plan* (May 2010). He has given presentations to a variety of industry, government, and academic audiences. He was awarded CBO's highest honor, the Director's Award for Exceptional Achievement, in 2001, 2003, and 2007. He received his doctorate in political science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and graduated from Tufts University, *summa cum laude*. He has worked for the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis in Cambridge, Massachusetts and, from 1994 to 1995, as a Visiting Scholar at the Center for International Security Studies at the University of Maryland. Dr. Labs has been with the Congressional Budget Office since 1995.



U.S. NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
— *Est. 1884* —
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

686 Cushing Road
Newport, Rhode Island 02841

www.usnwc.edu

Also search for us on Facebook and Twitter