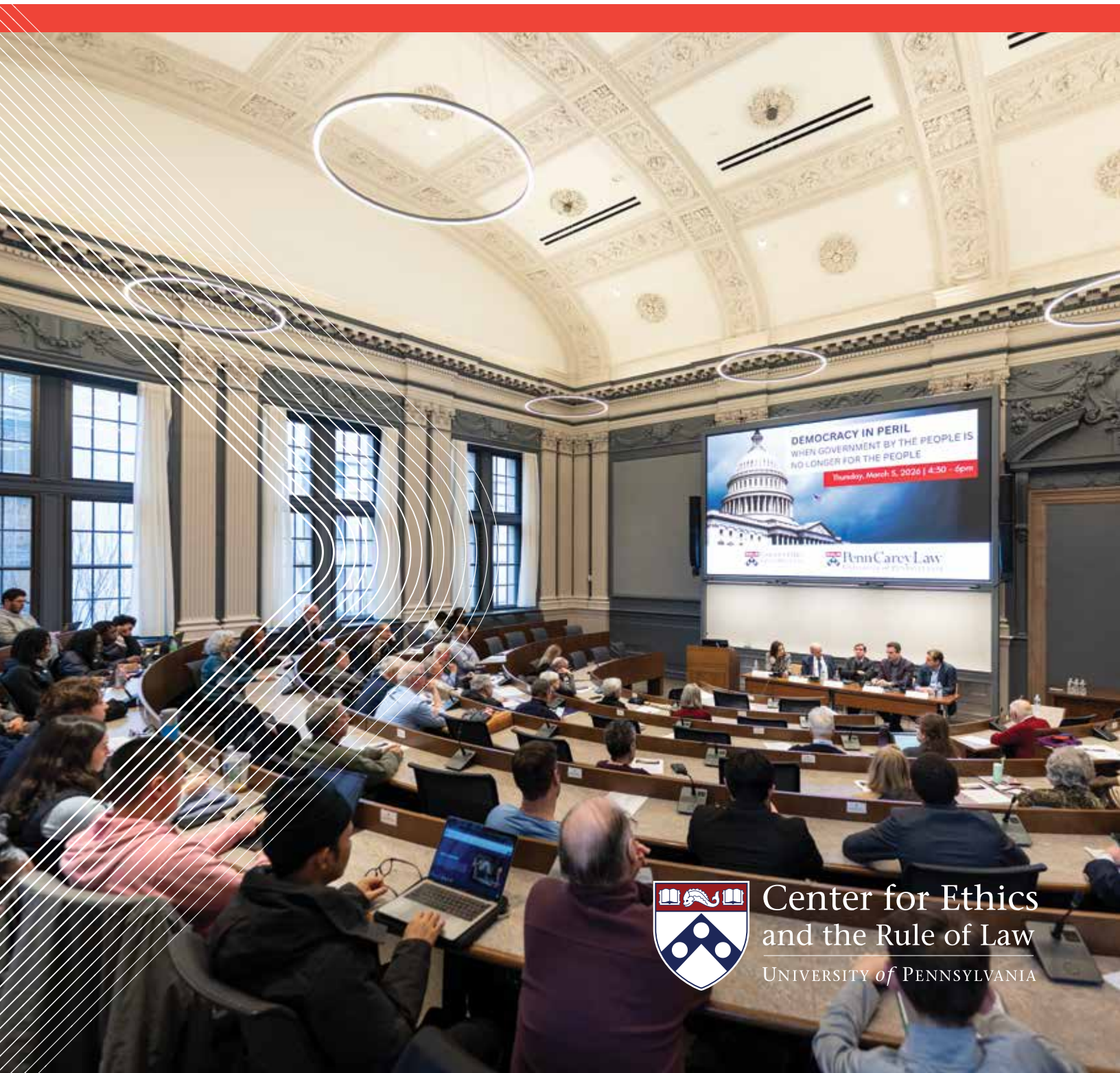


CERL ANNUAL REPORT

2025 // 2026



Center for Ethics
and the Rule of Law
UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA



OURMISSION

The Center for Ethics and the Rule of Law (CERL) is a non-partisan, interdisciplinary institute at the University of Pennsylvania dedicated to preserving and promoting ethics and the rule of law in national security, warfare, and democratic governance. CERL draws from the study of law, philosophy, and ethics to answer the difficult questions that arise in times of war and contemporary transnational conflicts.

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COVER IMAGE

"Democracy in Peril: When Government by the People Is No Longer for the People," March 5, 2026, at Penn Carey Law

THANK YOU

With special thanks to Fotobuddy Photography for photographing our programs and events this year, and to Imogen Design for designing this report.

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Letter from the Faculty Director

Dear Friends,

I do not need to tell you that U.S. democracy is in a state of upheaval. The fundamentals of political representation, checks and balances, federalism, the role of the military, and guarantees of the Bill of Rights are tested nearly daily in federal courts, Congress, and public discourse.



It will not surprise you, then, that the Center for Ethics and the Rule of Law has been incredibly busy this past year defending the rule of law, educating the public on the basics of democratic governance, and training the next generation of national security professionals to serve their country with a solid foundation in rule of law values. I am proud to continue to lead CERL's efforts in advancing these aims.

The 2025-26 academic year was a momentous one for CERL. The Center launched a new Litigation and Policy Initiative to address rule of law issues in federal court and through consultation with public officials, and for the first time welcomed a litigation and policy fellow to the Center's team. CERL was also able to add the position of "Director of Litigation and Policy" to its staff lineup, and a search for that position is underway. CERL was proud to enter a new arrangement with Penn Carey Law and with Penn Global and settled into its new offices in the Franklin Annex. And CERL welcomed the most competitive class yet for its summer internship program, with students from diverse backgrounds, locations, disciplines, and experience.

However, the 2026 academic year also brought tragedy. In February, Captain Robert G. Fuller Jr., one of the fiercest champions of CERL's work and its mission, suffered an untimely death in his assisted living facility in Potomac, Maryland. Bob was a dear friend to me personally and a longtime benefactor to the Center as well as a member of its Advisory Council. CERL is deeply indebted to Bob for his support of CERL and will continue to honor his legacy by carrying out his vision of protecting and preserving the rule of law in national security law and practice.

To that end, we undertook a number of litigation projects as we worked to build up the litigation initiative Bob so warmly supported. In November 2025, CERL represented more than 150 members of the Senate and House in an amicus brief in *Trump v. Illinois* challenging the federalization and deployment of the National Guard to Chicago.

CERL also submitted an amicus brief in a case called *United States v. Askins*, concerning a statute of limitations tolling provision. It also filed a brief in the case of *Kelly v. Hegseth*, arguing Senator Mark Kelly wrongly faces discipline for his statement

**WE LOOK
FORWARD TO
ADVANCING
CERL'S
MISSION IN
THE MONTHS
AND YEAR
AHEAD.**

in the “Don’t Give Up the Ship” video. I also filed a brief in my personal capacity before the U.S. Supreme Court in the case *Khalid Shaikh Mohammad et al. v. United States*, urging the Supreme Court to grant Khalid Shaikh Mohammad and other petitioners’ application for certiorari in light of the rule of law issues raised by the reinstatement by the D.C. Circuit Court of the Secretary of Defense’s cancellation of the petitioners’ plea deals.

In January 2026, CERL filed a FOIA request asking the Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) to release the secret OLC memo laying out the legal justification for President Trump’s ground operation in Venezuela that led to the capture of the Venezuelan president and his wife. That same day, the report was released to lawmakers.

In addition to its litigation efforts, CERL brought together dozens of experts to participate in multi-day conferences on two distinct issues: advanced strategies to mitigate civilian harm in armed conflict and the evolving use of the U.S. military to support civilian law enforcement operations. The Center also offered public programming on the operational and legal dimensions of the Iran war and democratic backsliding in the United States and elsewhere in the world.

CERL was pleased to continue its critical work of educating students on ethical and rule of law values. In June, CERL welcomed 16 talented students from diverse disciplines and institutions, including Penn’s undergraduate schools and Penn Carey Law, to work on legal and policy projects at the forefront of national security and democratic governance.

The Center continues to produce volumes as part its Oxford Series in Ethics, National Security, and the Rule of Law. To date, CERL has published 14 volumes with several more in production.

As always, we remain grateful to our institutional partners, donors, members of our Executive Board, and CERL’s friends and affiliates for their ongoing support and contributions to our programming and publications. We express our deepest thanks to Penn Global for its generous operational, administrative, and financial support and to Penn Carey Law for its partnership. We look forward to advancing CERL’s mission in the months and year ahead.

Sincerely,



Claire Finkelstein
Faculty Director



From left: Acting Board Chair Gary Deutsch
and Professor Claire Finkelstein

Letter from the Acting Board Chair

Dear Friends,

This past year has been one of impact, growth, and transition for the Center for Ethics and the Rule of Law. Following the departure of our former Chair of the Executive Board, Dr. Morton Halperin—to whom we are most grateful for his leadership and contributions—I stepped into the role of Acting Board Chair. I am proud to serve in this role for an organization that is deeply committed to defending the rule of law and the principles that form the bedrock of our democracy.

This year, CERL organized programming around critical issues, including the increasing militarization of domestic law enforcement authority in the United States, the relationship and tensions between precision lethality and civilian harm mitigation, instances of democratic decay in the United States and other countries, and the nature of the military operations in Iran. CERL also broadened its litigation efforts, filing four amicus briefs and one FOIA request.

The center is actively engaged in seeking a dynamic and forward-looking permanent board chair who can assist in expanding CERL's reach and influence across a variety of sectors. CERL's Executive Search Committee, led by General James Cartwright, Professor Claire Finkelstein, and me, began outreach efforts in the spring of 2026.

In the coming year, we are committed to identifying the right individual for this important leadership role and advancing CERL's mission at a time when the rule of law is under increasing threat. CERL is set to host a workshop-style conference in the fall to re-examine the strategies and tools by which autonomous weapons systems and other advanced AI-based technologies, such as large language models, are selected for development and deployment. CERL will also be focused in the 2026-27 academic year on the issue of presidential authority in the United States and will continue to prioritize the expansion of our litigation efforts.

On behalf of CERL's Executive Board, I wish to thank CERL's sponsors, supporters, intellectual partners, and affiliates for their meaningful contributions and commitment to CERL's mission. We look forward to broadening our reach and deepening our impact in the year ahead.

Sincerely,



Gary Deutsch

Acting Chair of the Board



About Us

Center for Ethics and the Rule of Law (CERL)

The Center for Ethics and the Rule of Law (CERL) is a non-partisan, interdisciplinary institute at the University of Pennsylvania dedicated to preserving and promoting ethics and the rule of law in national security, warfare, and democratic governance. CERL draws from the study of law, philosophy, and ethics to answer the difficult questions that arise in times of war and contemporary transnational conflicts.

CERL's conferences and symposia focus on some of the most daunting issues facing our country and the world. Academics, legal experts, intelligence officials, journalists, public servants, and private sector professionals convene to engage in discussion and analysis, produce papers, identify needed policies and actions, and issue recommendations. CERL enjoys a particularly constructive partnership with the armed services, collaborates with the private sector's defense industry, and partners with renowned public interest organizations and academic centers.

CERL also conducts ethics and policy briefings; drafts and disseminates policy papers; publishes volumes as part of an ethics, national security, and rule of law book series; presents book talks with high-profile authors; participates in podcasts; and engages with national and international media. CERL's summer internship program focuses on fostering the next generation of national security professionals through research, writing, and conference planning to help ensure their future perspectives and decisions are ethical and grounded in the rule of law.

Since 2012, CERL has raised public consciousness and influenced policy through varied activities that tackle serious and often complex threats to or violations of the rule of law. CERL does this to help academia, government, and the public cultivate a clearer understanding of the rule of law and play a role in the preservation of our country's democratic principles and institutions.

Members of CERL's Executive Board in Washinton, D.C.

Top row from left to right: Professor Christopher Morris, Associate Dean Kevin Govern, Mr. Jules Zacher, Mr. Mark Zaid, Mr. Stuart Gerson, and Mr. Alberto Mora; Bottom row from left to right: Mr. Harvey Rishikof, Mr. Robert Kelner, General (Ret.) James Cartwright, Professor Claire Finkelstein, Mr. Gary Deutsch, and Ms. Arlene Fickler



2025-2026

Year at a Glance

1

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request asking the Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) to release the secret OLC memo asserting that President Trump's ground operation in Venezuela that led to the capture of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, was lawful

4

Amicus briefs filed, including to the Supreme Court in *Trump v. Illinois* for 150+ members of Congress, in *United States v. Askins* on a tolling provision, in *Kelly v. Hegseth*, and in *Khalid Shaikh Mohammad et al. v. United States*

50+

Op-eds authored by CERL affiliates for over 15 outlets, including *The Hill*, *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post*, and *Time Magazine*

50+

Law, graduate, and undergraduate students involved in CERL training programs designed to equip the next generation of national security leaders with a strong foundation in ethics and the rule of law

63

Affiliates involved in CERL's Executive Board, Affiliated Faculty, and Advisory Council

70+

Experts convened for closed-door discussions, including a former congressman, five senior retired military officials, and representatives from over 40 institutions — spanning universities, think tanks, policy groups, and public/private organizations

160+

Media mentions and appearances by CERL affiliates in over 60 outlets, including PBS, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*

250+

Individuals registered to attend CERL's public symposia and panels on Penn's campus and online, with over 200 views of the event recordings online

8,000+

Web views of blog posts for CERL's *The Rule of Law Post*, a blog covering ethics and rule of law issues in national security, warfare, and democratic governance



News and Updates

Welcoming CERL's New Affiliates, Fellows & Staff

CERL is delighted to welcome Mary McInnis Boies, who brings decades of leadership in law and national security, to its Executive Board, and is equally thrilled to welcome one new fellow and one staff member.

EXECUTIVE BOARD



Mary McInnis Boies is Counsel to Boies Schiller Flexner LLP, where she focuses on antitrust and corporate commercial litigation. She has significant experience advising companies on complex commercial litigation and is also a respected authority on matters relating to international affairs, governance, and national security.

For over 30 years, Ms. Boies was founder and managing partner at Boies & McInnis LLP. Previously, she served as Vice President at CBS Inc., General Counsel of the U.S. Civil Aeronautics Board, Assistant Director of the Domestic Policy Staff at the White House, and Counsel to the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce.

She has also held numerous board and advisory roles with organizations such as the Council on Foreign Relations, MIT's Center for International Studies Advisory Committee, Harvard Kennedy School, the International Rescue Committee, and U.S. Air Force institutions.



"It is a tremendous honor to join CERL's Executive Board. In a highly skilled and nonpartisan manner, CERL experts address national security issues that are central to our time, such as legal dimensions of Middle East conflicts, infrastructure targeting, human control of lethality, and the use of artificial intelligence."

Mary McInnis Boies, Member of CERL's Executive Board



FELLOW

Ashley Fuchs, originally from Stony Brook, New York, graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 2022 with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Classical Studies. While at Penn, she worked for the Center for Ethics and the Rule of Law as student editor of *The Rule of Law Post* and contributed to major investigative reports, national security briefings, conferences, and academic volumes as a legal researcher and summer intern. A Benjamin Franklin Scholar and Phi Beta Kappa member, Ashley received the College Alumni Society Prize in Classical Studies; Dick Wolf Award for Best Screenplay; and Philo S. Bennett Prize for her honors thesis on prison museums. In 2023, she was named a Fulbright Scholar and subsequently worked as an English Teaching Assistant in Narva, Estonia. A 2024 Marshall Scholar, Ashley received a Master of Science in Global Crime, Justice and Security from the University of Edinburgh and a Master of Philosophy in Heritage Studies from the University of Cambridge. Her graduate research focused on criminal legal policy, prison conditions, and the heritagization of former sites of punishment.



STAFF

Gabrielle Seamon is a coordinator at CERL. Prior to working at CERL, she was the senior communications assistant at the United States Institute of Peace where her work involved organizing high-level conferences and events, managing analytics, and editing and posting content on the website. Gabrielle also worked at the International Monetary Fund and is a graduate of West Chester University of Pennsylvania.





In Memoriam

In Memoriam

Captain Robert G. Fuller Jr.

CERL HONORS THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF CAPTAIN ROBERT G. FULLER JR., A LONGTIME FRIEND AND BENEFACTOR TO THE CENTER

Captain Robert G. Fuller Jr., Esq., passed away on February 14, 2026, at the Cogir Senior Living Facility in Potomac, Maryland.

Captain Fuller was a member of CERL's Advisory Council, a retired U.S. Navy Judge Advocate General and Navy Reserve officer, and an attorney from Augusta, Maine who was widely known for his altruism and philanthropic work. He was a friend to CERL's faculty, board, and staff, as well as a key supporter of CERL's mission. Captain Fuller was a leader, visionary, lawyer, author, philanthropist, and Navy officer of the highest caliber. His unwavering love of country and the U.S. military, and

his determination to safeguard the rule of law principles that served as the bellwether of his own professional training and experience in public service, motivated his work with CERL and the many initiatives he undertook to support democratic values.

Mr. Fuller was a proud alumnus of the class of 1964 at the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School. In 1971, he endowed the Robert G. Fuller, Jr. Professor of Law, which honors "professors who demonstrate scholarship and the ability to communicate to students a knowledge of the essential principles of law and a humanistic understanding of the

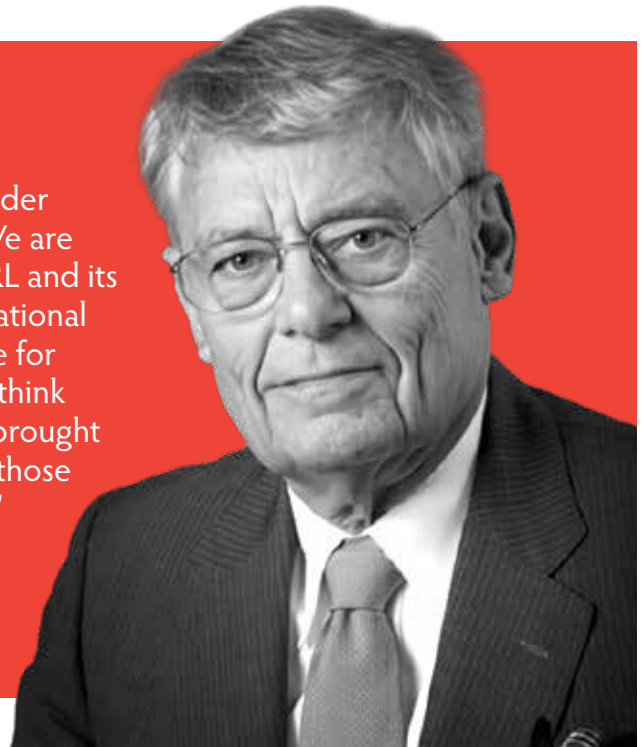
application of these principles." That professorship is currently held by Penn Carey Law Professor Gideon Parchomovsky. In recent years, Captain Fuller was a generous benefactor to CERL who was also an engaged participant in CERL's conferences, board meetings, and countless other activities.

CERL continues to honor Captain Fuller's legacy by carrying out his vision of preserving and promoting the rule of law in twenty-first-century national security, warfare, and democratic governance. His leadership, his dedication, and his optimism will continue to have an enduring impact on the center's work.

“

“The center has lost a dear friend and a great defender of its work and the values that animate its history. We are indebted to Bob for his unwavering support of CERL and its mission to protect and preserve the rule of law in national security law and practice. He was a tireless advocate for integrity in public life who was idealistic enough to think individuals could make a difference. Personally, he brought warmth, enthusiasm, and an infectious humor to all those who knew him. His presence will be deeply missed.”

Claire Finkelstein, Faculty Director of CERL,
Algernon Biddle Professor of Law and Professor of Philosophy



“

“We have gathered together to bid farewell to Captain Bob Fuller, a soul who loved CERL but belonged to the sea. For a sailor, the ocean is not just a place, but a home—a vast, unpredictable, and beautiful home. Bob knew this beauty better than most, and lived his life with the same courage and freedom as a vessel riding the crest of a wave.

Proverbially, or literally, whether navigating calm waters or weathering the fiercest storms, Bob lived with purpose. He taught us to appreciate the horizon, to respect the power of nature, and to understand that a smooth sea never made a skilled sailor. He found simple but profound joy in the beauty of a sunset over the water and freedom in the open air.

As the old naval saying goes, 'Eight Bells toll, 'tis the end of the watch.' The journey has brought them to the quietest, deepest harbor. We do not just mourn his loss, but celebrate a journey that was rich, full, and now, finally at peace.

Just as Alfred Lord Tennyson hoped to see his Pilot face to face when he crossed the bar, we trust that Bob is embarking on peaceful new voyage. Though he is no longer within our sight, he is not gone. He is simply sailing on, exploring horizons we cannot yet see.

May the seas lie smooth before you, Bob. May a gentle breeze forever fill your sails. We love you, and we wish you fair winds and following seas. Home is the sailor, home from the sea.”

Kevin Govern, Member of CERL's Executive Board; Associate Dean for Faculty Development and Professor of Law, Ave Maria School of Law

“

“We, of CERL, give thanks for getting to share in a small part of a well-lived life of service to the country and to the law.”

Stuart Gerson, Member of CERL's Executive Board; Former Acting Attorney General of the United States; Founding Member, Checks & Balances

“

“He will always be remembered for his dedication and commitment to public service.”

Harvey Rishikof, Member of CERL's Executive Board; Former Director of Military Commissions and Convening Authority at DoD; Former Dean of National War College



A series of approximately 20 thin, light red wavy lines originate from the top left and bottom left corners, curving towards the right side of the page, creating a sense of movement and depth.

People

People

Executive Board

The Executive Board, Affiliated Faculty, Advisory Council, and CERL Staff and Fellows pages are current and do not necessarily represent the membership and staffing of the 2025-2026 academic year.



Gary Deutsch

*Acting Chair of the Board;
Managing Chief Counsel,
PNC Bank, N.A.*



M. Tay Aspinwall

*Former Assistant U.S. Attorney,
Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney's Office
for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania*



John Baker

*Brigadier General (Ret.),
U.S. Marine Corps;
Federal Public Defender,
Western North Carolina*



Vivian Berger

*Professor Emerita, Columbia Law School;
Mediator and Arbitrator*



Mary McInnis Boies

Counsel, Boies Schiller Flexner LLP



Sean Carter

Member, Cozen O'Connor



James Cartwright

*General (Ret.), U.S. Marine Corps;
Former Vice Chair, Joint Chiefs of Staff,
USMC*



William Craven

*CERL Founding Executive Board Chair;
Chair of Federal Systems, LLC (retired)*



Arlene Fickler

Counsel, Dilworth Paxson LLP



Stuart Gerson

*Former Acting Attorney General of
the United States; Founding Member,
Checks & Balances*



Kevin Govern

*Associate Dean for Faculty
Development and Professor of Law,
Ave Maria School of Law*



Morton Halperin

*Renowned expert in U.S. foreign
policy and civil liberties*



Robert Kelner

Partner, Covington & Burling LLP



Duncan Macintosh

*Professor of Philosophy,
Dalhousie University*



Alberto Mora

*Former General Counsel,
U.S. Department of the Navy*



Christopher Morris

*Professor Emeritus of Philosophy,
University of Maryland*



Jens David Ohlin

*Allan R. Tessler Dean and Professor of
Law, Cornell Law School*



Harvey Rishikof

*Former Director of Military Commissions
and Convening Authority at DoD;
Former Dean of National War College*



Connie Rosati

*Roy Allison Vaughan Centennial
Professor in Philosophy and Professor of
Law, The University of Texas at Austin*



Shawn Turner

*Professor of National
Security Communication,
Michigan State University;
CNN National Security Analyst*



Joseph Votel

General (Ret.), U.S. Army



Paul Welsh

Principal, PA Welsh Advisors LLC



Jennifer Arbittier Williams

Partner, Freeh Sporkin & Sullivan LLP



Stephen Xenakis, M.D.

*Brigadier General (Ret.), U.S. Army;
Advisor for Physicians for Human Rights
and Center for Victims of Torture;
Adjunct Professor, Uniformed Services
University of Health Sciences*



Jules Zacher

*Attorney, Jules Zacher, P.C.; Board Chair,
Council for a Livable World*



Mark Zaid

Managing Partner, Mark S. Zaid, PC



Dell Dailey

EXECUTIVE BOARD EMERITUS
*President, Dell Dailey and Family;
Former Ambassador-at-Large,
Department of State*



Elizabeth Rindskopf Parker

EXECUTIVE BOARD EMERITA
*Dean Emerita, McGeorge School of
Law; Former General Counsel, CIA and
NSA; Senior Adviser, Center for Strategic
and International Studies; Defending
Democratic Institutions Project*

People

Affiliated Faculty



Claire Finkelstein

*CERL Faculty Director; Algernon Biddle
Professor of Law and Professor of
Philosophy, University of Pennsylvania*



Mitchell Berman

*Leon Meltzer Professor of Law and
Professor of Philosophy, University of
Pennsylvania*



William Burke-White

*Professor of Law, University of
Pennsylvania Carey Law School*



Rangita de Silva de Alwis

*Distinguished Adjunct Professor of Law
and Global Leadership, University of
Pennsylvania Carey Law School*



William Ewald

*Professor of Law and Professor of
Philosophy, University of Pennsylvania*



Eric Feldman

*Professor of Law and Professor of
Medical Ethics & Health Policy,
University of Pennsylvania*



Michael Horowitz

*Director of Perry World House and
Richard Perry Professor, University of
Pennsylvania*



Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet

*Walter H. Annenberg Professor of
History, University of Pennsylvania*



Kimberly Kessler Ferzan

*Earle Hepburn Professor of Law and
Professor of Philosophy, University of
Pennsylvania*



Lynn Meskell

*Penn Integrates Knowledge (PIK)
Professor; Department of Anthropology,
School of Arts & Sciences, Penn Museum,
and Weitzman School of Design,
University of Pennsylvania*



Eric Orts

*Guardsmark Professor of Legal Studies
and Business Ethics, The Wharton School,
University of Pennsylvania*



Sharon Ravitch

*Professor of Practice, Policy,
Organizations, Leadership, and Systems
Division, University of Pennsylvania
Graduate School of Education*



Kermit Roosevelt

*David Berger Professor for the
Administration of Justice, University of
Pennsylvania Carey Law School*



Beth Simmons

*Andrea Mitchell University Professor in
Law, Political Science and Business Ethics,
University of Pennsylvania*



Abraham Wyner

*Professor of Statistics and Data Science,
The Wharton School, University of
Pennsylvania*



Anita Allen

EMERITA

*Henry R. Silverman Professor of Law
and Professor of Philosophy, Emeritus,
University of Pennsylvania*



Stuart Diamond

EMERITUS

*Emeritus Practice Professor of Legal
Studies and Business Ethics, The Wharton
School, University of Pennsylvania*



Daniel Koditschek

EMERITUS

*Alfred Fitler Moore Professor Emeritus,
University of Pennsylvania School of
Engineering and Applied Science*



Jonathan Moreno

EMERITUS

*David and Lyn Silfen University Professor,
Emeritus, University of Pennsylvania*



Rogers Smith

EMERITUS

*Professor Emeritus,
University of Pennsylvania*

People

Advisory Council



John Altenburg Jr.

Major General (Ret.), U.S. Army; Of Counsel, Greenberg Traurig



Mark Aronchick

Shareholder, Hangley Aronchick Segal Pudlin & Schiller



Geoffrey Corn

George R. Killam Jr. Chair of Criminal Law; Director of the Center for Military Law and Policy, Texas Tech University School of Law



George Croner

Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy Research Institute; Member, National Security Leaders for America



Mark Fallon

Co-Founder, Project Aletheia, John Jay College of Criminal Justice



Benjamin Farley

Special Counsel, National Immigration Law Center



Derek Gillman

Distinguished Teaching Professor, Art History and Museum Leadership, Drexel University



David Jonas

Partner, Fluet PLLC



Orde Kittrie

Law Professor, Arizona State University; Senior Fellow, Foundation for Defense of Democracies



Vijay Kumar

Nemirovsky Family Dean of Penn Engineering, University of Pennsylvania



Martin Lederman

Professor from Practice, Georgetown University Law Center



Sharon Lloyd

Professor of Philosophy, Law, and Political Science, University of Southern California



Jeff McMahan

Emeritus Sekyra and White's Professor of Moral Philosophy, University of Oxford



Mary Ellen O'Connell

Robert and Marion Short Professor of Law and Professor of International Peace Studies, Kroc Institute, University of Notre Dame



Mitt Regan

McDevitt Professor of Jurisprudence, Georgetown Law Center



Franklin Rosenblatt

Associate Professor, Mississippi College School of Law; President, National Institute of Military Justice



Stephen Sheller

Founding Partner, Sheller, P.C.

People

Staff



Claire Finkelstein
Faculty Director



Marcos Soler
Executive Director



Jennifer Cohen
Director of Engagement



Alexandra Herrera
Staff Writer



Gabrielle Seamon
Coordinator

Fellows



Brenner Fissell
*Distinguished Senior Fellow;
Professor of Law,
Villanova University*



Ashley Fuchs
Fellow



Joshua Greenberg
Nonresident Fellow



Łukasz Kamiński
*2025-26 Fulbright Visiting
Scholar*



Ilya Rudyak
Nonresident Senior Fellow



Update from CERL's Litigation and Policy Initiative

Update from CERL's Litigation and Policy Initiative

About CERL's Litigation and Policy Initiative



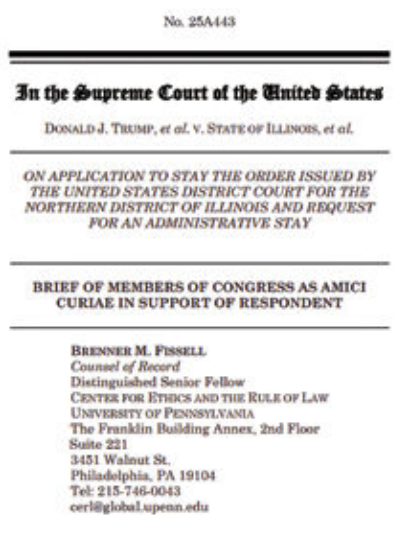
Housed at the University of Pennsylvania, CERL's Litigation and Policy Initiative is a partnership with the National Institute of Military Justice (NIMJ), the country's only non-governmental organization dedicated solely to the study and improvement of the military's justice system. The initiative aims to advance democratic governance and U.S. national security interests with a focus on defending the rule of law with regard to military practice and use of the U.S. military. Through collaboration with other academic and public interest organizations, the initiative seeks to engage in a full range of litigation activities and policy-based consultations.

The Litigation and Policy Initiative has three issue areas as its core focus:

-  **1**
The deployment of the U.S. military for civilian law enforcement purposes
-  **2**
The use of the U.S. military to commit crime
-  **3**
Executive authority and declarations of national emergencies, including regulation of cutting-edge technology, national security-related tariffs, and other actions

CERL and NIMJ launched the initiative with a one-year postdoctoral fellowship held by Rachel Baron.

In the 2025-26 academic year, CERL filed four amicus briefs and one FOIA request as part of the initiative.



Amicus Brief in *Trump v. Illinois* on Behalf of More Than 150 Members of Congress in the Senate and House

➤ November 2025

CERL submitted an amicus brief to the U.S. Supreme Court in the case *Trump v. Illinois* on behalf of more than 150 members of Congress in the Senate and House of Representatives. The brief responded to a request by the Court for submissions regarding the meaning of 10 U.S.C. § 12406, the provision the president has relied on to federalize the National Guard across the country, or on any other matter of relevance to the case.

Amici urge the Court to deny the Trump administration's application for a stay of the order issued by the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. The friend-of-the-court brief argues the president is not entitled to absolute deference with respect to the conditions required by 10 U.S.C. § 12406.

“

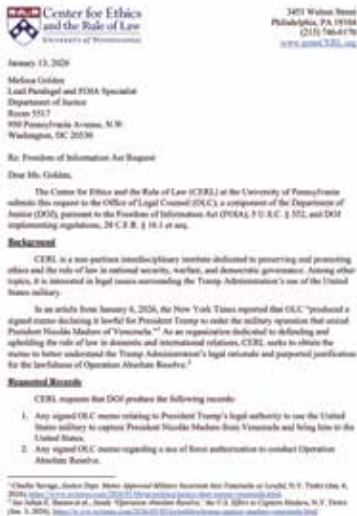
“The members of Congress today reaffirmed to the Court that the law at issue does not write a blank check to the president.”

Brenner Fissell

Counsel of Record,
Distinguished Senior Fellow
at CERL, and Professor
of Law at Villanova

“It is an honor for CERL to represent members of the Senate and House in this bicameral amicus brief supporting the interests of Congress and the American people before the U.S. Supreme Court,” said Professor Claire Finkelstein, faculty director of CERL and law professor at Penn. “The provision of federal law at issue, 10 U.S.C. 12406, is an obscure and poorly understood statute rarely used before the present moment. Since the deployment of the National Guard to Los Angeles, the Trump administration has been distorting the meaning of that provision and creating profound confusion in federal law. Our brief seeks to explain why the president cannot use this provision to federalize the Illinois and Texas National Guard and deploy them to the City of Chicago, and why federal courts must act to protect the constitutional rights of the American people that are threatened by this illegal deployment.”

Update from CERL's Litigation and Policy Initiative



FOIA Request Seeking Release of Secret OLC Memo Concerning Military Action in Venezuela

➤ January 2026

CERL filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request on January 13, 2026, asking the Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) to release the secret OLC memo asserting that President Trump's ground operation in Venezuela that led to the capture of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, was lawful.

The memo, arguing the president "has inherent constitutional power to authorize law enforcement activities," was released to lawmakers that same day.



"The Trump administration has offered no clear legal authority for its use of force against Venezuela, an action that unless legally justified would constitute a violation of Article 2(4) of the U.N. Charter. If the Office of Legal Counsel memo can shed light on why the administration believes its actions were permissible under international law, the American people deserve to know their reasoning."



Professor Claire Finkelstein

Faculty Director of CERL

IN THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE ARMED FORCES	
UNITED STATES Appellee	THE CENTER FOR ETHICS AND THE RULE OF LAW NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MILITARY JUSTICE AMICUS CURIAE BRIEF
x	
Staff Sergeant (E-4) ZACHARY J. ASKINS United States Army Appellant	Crim App. Dkt. No. 20250903 USCA Dkt. No. 25-0002-AR
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Amicus Brief in *United States v. Askins* Urging Court to Apply International Law Lens to “at war” Tolling Provision

➤ March 2026

CERL and the National Institute of Military Justice filed an amicus brief in March 2026 with the United States Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces in *United States v. Askins*, concerning a statute of limitations tolling provision.

The relevant tolling provision in the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) operates when the United States is “at war.” The brief argues that the lower court did not apply the appropriate test to determine what “at war” means within the statute, and urges the Court to “assess whether the United States was ‘at war’ according to the definition of ‘time of war’ found in the Manual for Courts-Martial interpreted through the lens of international law.”

Amici assert that the Army Court of Criminal Appeals gave inappropriate weight to factors derived from *United States v. Bancroft* in determining whether the United States was “at war” within the meaning of the UCMJ. International law, specifically the *Tadić* test, can help resolve ambiguities around the meaning of the phrase “time of war.”

“

“In the absence of a clear statement from Congress defining the meaning of the phrase ‘at war,’ reliance on the international consensus of what constitutes an armed conflict is a methodological approach consistent with United States case law.”

Amicus Brief

Update from CERL's Litigation and Policy Initiative



Amicus Brief Emphasizing Senator Mark Kelly's Statement in "Don't Give Up the Ship" Video Is an Accurate Reflection of the Law of Superior Orders

➤ April 2026

CERL filed an amicus brief on April 24, 2026, with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit in the case *Kelly v. Hegseth*, urging the Court to uphold a lower court's decision blocking Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth from punishing Senator Mark Kelly (D-AZ), a retired Navy captain, for his statements in a video he and five other Democratic lawmakers released in which they said service members can disobey unlawful orders.



"This case is the most egregious use of military jurisdiction in the history of the United States. We urge the D.C. Circuit to affirm that military law may not be used pretextually to undermine the separation of powers."

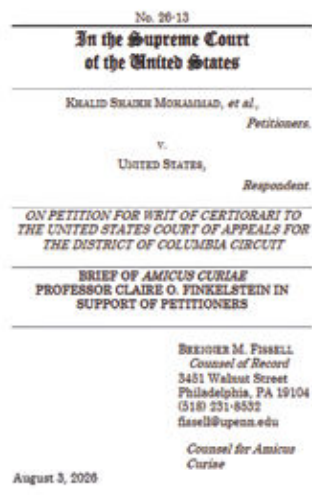
Brenner Fissell

Counsel of Record,
Distinguished Senior Fellow
at CERL, and Professor
of Law at Villanova

"The attempt to discipline Senator Kelly on the part of the Trump administration reflects not only a concerning lack of understanding of the law concerning superior orders, but a lack of respect for the boundaries of open discourse in a democratic society and the role of the executive branch relative to members of a co-equal branch of the federal government," said Professor Claire Finkelstein, faculty director of CERL and law professor at Penn.

The brief asserts that Senator Kelly wrongly faces discipline for speech that "accurately reflects the law of superior orders." Secretary Hegseth alleged in a January 2026 Secretarial Letter of Censure that the retired Navy captain had "counseled disobedience" to lawful orders when, in fact, he had clearly and correctly stated that members of the military "can refuse illegal orders," in keeping with the body of law that addresses when service members are obligated to obey military orders. Even if his speech had encouraged members of the military to resist lawful orders, Senator Kelly is owed protections under the First Amendment as a retired member of the U.S. military. Subjecting the U.S. senator to charges for his speech would gravely violate the separation of powers and impede members of Congress from carrying out their legislative functions.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit heard oral arguments on May 7, 2026. **Two of the three judges on the panel appeared inclined to support the position of Senator Kelly and that of CERL that what the U.S. senator said was accurate and that penalizing him would violate his free speech protections.**



Amicus Brief Before U.S. Supreme Court in Case Concerning the Plea Agreements of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Other Guantánamo Detainees Accused of Planning 9/11 Attacks

➤ August 2026

Faculty Director Claire Finkelstein filed an amicus brief in her personal capacity before the U.S. Supreme Court in the case *Khalid Shaikh Mohammad et al. v. United States*. The brief urges the Supreme Court to grant Khalid Shaikh Mohammad and other petitioners' application for certiorari in light of the profound rule of law issues raised.

She argues that then-Secretary of Defense Lloyd James Austin III's withdrawal of the Department of Defense from the pretrial agreements with Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Mustafa Ahmed Adam al-Hawsawi, and other detainees in the Guantánamo detention facility "was unlawful and ill-advised." His intervention and the decision of the D.C. Circuit call into question the separation of powers between the executive branch and the congressionally established non-Article III courts. The brief also asserts that the revocation of the plea agreements compromised both the rights of the accused and those of the victims. A pathway to conviction is unlikely absent these agreements.

Testimony

Professor Claire Finkelstein testified at a spotlight forum in Washington, D.C., on July 22, 2026, addressing the nomination of Todd Blanche for attorney general. The forum was convened by Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) with members of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

In her testimony, Professor Finkelstein urged the Committee to reject the nomination of Mr. Blanche, citing "grave concerns about the future of the Department of Justice," should he be installed as attorney general. Mr. Blanche's unwavering loyalty to President Donald Trump and his lack of transparency about the conflicts of interest arising from his relationship to the president as his former personal attorney suggest he is unfit to uphold the impartiality required of the position and would pose a threat to the rule of law, she asserted.

Professor Finkelstein was one of four witnesses providing testimony at the forum. The other witnesses were former DOJ officials and a survivor of Jeffrey Epstein. Participating members of the Committee were Senator Booker, Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Senator Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Senator Peter Welch (D-VT), and Senator Adam Schiff (D-CA).

CERL published a report with Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) in October 2020 examining the practices and policies of the Department of Justice under the tenure of U.S. Attorney General William Barr, concluding there was sufficient basis for Congress to conduct a detailed impeachment inquiry. "For the United States to remain a 'government of laws, and not of men,' it is essential that our nation's highest law enforcement office maintains independence from partisan politics and the executive branch," said Professor Finkelstein at the time of the report's release.

“

"His undivided loyalty to a self-serving president, whose interests he defends above all else, have created professional conflicts that can only be addressed through a debilitating commitment to extensive recusal. As attorney general, Mr. Blanche would have to choose between abandoning his professional integrity and rendering himself ineffectual by his own extensive need to recuse. Dishonest or ineffectual—either way Mr. Blanche is not an appropriate choice for attorney general."

**Professor
Claire Finkelstein**
Faculty Director of CERL



Events and Symposia

Precision Lethality and Civilian Harm Mitigation

Challenges and Opportunities in the Future of Warfighting

➤ November 13-14, 2025 • Perry World House, Philadelphia, PA

CO-SPONSORS: Perry World House, Georgetown's Center on Ethics and the Legal Profession



Together with Perry World House and Georgetown's Center on Ethics and the Legal Profession, CERL convened a high-level, interdisciplinary conference addressing precision lethality and advanced strategies to mitigate civilian harm in armed conflict, with a focus on large-scale combat operations and the civilian environment in urban warfare.

The purpose of the two-day conference was to bring together academics in multiple domains with practitioners from civil society, government service, industry, and the military to make recommendations for combatant commanders in considering the relationship and tensions between precision lethality and civilian harm mitigation in asymmetrical warfare.

Agenda

SESSION I

How does implementing a civilian harm mitigation strategy in war fighting enhance precision lethality and strengthen national defense?

SESSION II

How does human shielding and other forms of lawfare challenge efforts to mitigate civilian harm in war?

SESSION III

Furthering civilian harm mitigation in war through accurate data collection

SESSION IV

Humanitarian aid to civilians in conflict zones, evacuation obligations, and the targeting of humanitarian safe zones



Conference participants convene in the World Forum of Perry World House for workshop-style sessions on November 13-14, 2025.

SESSION V

Press, perfidy, and propaganda: The complexities of the information space and civilian and military intelligence operations in war

SESSION VI

What role might artificial intelligence (AI) and other advanced technologies play in mitigating harm to civilians in war?

SESSION VII

War, grey zone conflict, and peace: The role of civilian harm mitigation in militarized civilian law enforcement and counter terrorism operations

KEYNOTE PANEL

The future of urban warfare: Lessons learned from the Israel-Hamas war and beyond

Key Takeaways

Experts stressed numerous takeaways from the Israel-Hamas war that could better inform the extent to which the U.S. military's precautions through a civilian harm mitigation policy are adequate and may be improved. Distinguishing between legal and policy requirements related to civilian harm mitigation emerged as a key point of discussion. Efforts by state and non-state actors in participating in warfighting and delivering humanitarian aid require updated legal definitions and strong leadership from military commanders. The asymmetrical battleground in Gaza presented new forms of perfidy that require further consideration about how to address these issues as an opposing force.

Events and Symposia

Precision Lethality and Civilian Harm Mitigation



Clockwise: Keynote panelists from left: Mr. Scott Anderson, Fellow at The Brookings Institution, Senior Editor at *Lawfare*, and former State Department attorney; Professor Claire Finkelstein, Algernon Biddle Professor of Law and Professor of Philosophy and CERL Faculty Director; Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Geoffrey Com, Professor of Law at Texas Tech University and member of CERL's Advisory Council; Dr. Larry Lewis, Principal Research Scientist at the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) and founder of CNA's Center for Autonomy and Artificial Intelligence (AI); and Mr. Christopher Maier, former United States Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict | Left top to bottom: Keynote event, "The Future of Urban Warfare: Lessons Learned from the Israel-Hamas War and Beyond," at The Union League of Philadelphia | General (Ret.) James Cartwright, U.S. Marine Corps, former Vice Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, USMC, and member of CERL's Executive Board, provides introductory remarks at keynote event



Left top to bottom: Dr. Larry Lewis, Principal Research Scientist and Founder of Center for Autonomy and Artificial Intelligence at the Center for Naval Analyses, kicks off discussion; CERL's Professor Claire Finkelstein guides the conversation; Ms. Loren Voss, then Public Service Fellow at *Lawfare*, participates in the two-day conference; Professor Amichai Cohen, Professor of International law at Ono Academic College in Israel and Senior Fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute, offers his perspective; Professor Dr. Andres B. Munoz-Mosquera, adjunct professor at Boston College Law School, participates in a session

Right top to bottom: Ms. Jennifer Arbittier Williams, former U.S. Attorney, partner at Freeh Sporkin & Sullivan LLP, and member of CERL's Executive Board participates in discussion; Professor Laurie Blank, Clinical Professor of Law and Director of the International Humanitarian Law Clinic at Emory Law School, moderates a session; Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Geoffrey Corn, Professor of Law at Texas Tech University and member of CERL's Advisory Council, engages in discussion; Mr. Joshua Greenberg, Nonresident Fellow at CERL; Ms. Pnina Sharvit Baruch, Director of the Israel and the Global Powers Research Program at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) and expert on the laws of armed conflict, offers remarks

Military and Legal Dimensions of Operation Epic Fury Against Iran

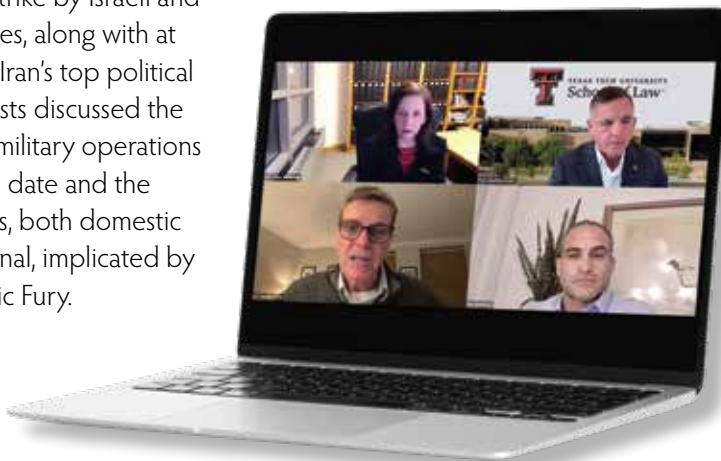
➤ March 3, 2026 • Online

CO-SPONSOR: Penn Global



CERL and Penn Global hosted an open-to-the-public expert panel to discuss the operational and legal contours of military action in the Middle East.

In the early hours of February 28, 2026, the United States, in conjunction with Israel, launched Operation Epic Fury. President Trump announced this as a full-scale military attack to bring about regime change in Iran and to protect the United States, Israel, and their allies against the dangers of a nuclearized Iran. One day later, the world learned that the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, had been killed in a coordinated strike by Israeli and American forces, along with at least seven of Iran's top political leaders. Panelists discussed the nature of the military operations undertaken to date and the legal questions, both domestic and international, implicated by Operation Epic Fury.



Panel Discussion

General (Ret.) Joseph L. Votel, U.S. Army, former Commander of the United States Central Command

Professor Geoffrey S. Corn, George R. Killam Jr. Chair of Criminal Law, Texas Tech University School of Law

Ben Walhaus, Herzog Law Offices, Partner; former Israel Defense Forces Legal Advisor

Professor Claire Finkelstein, Algernon Biddle Professor of Law and Professor of Philosophy, University of Pennsylvania; CERL Faculty Director, as moderator

Democracy in Peril

When Government by the People Is No Longer for the People

➤ March 5, 2026 • Penn Carey Law, Philadelphia, PA

CO-SPONSOR: Penn Carey Law



The core concept of any democracy, namely the rule of law, appears increasingly precarious in the United States, and signs of democratic backsliding are now unmistakable.

Threats to the independence of the judiciary; failure to adhere to the constitutional rights of individuals; lack of independence of the legislature from the executive; and political targeting of critics of the government are among the many symptoms of a democracy under strain. Recent actions of the U.S. government are reminiscent of patterns seen in other supposed democracies hovering on the brink of authoritarianism elsewhere in the world and throughout history. CERL and Penn Carey Law co-hosted a public panel to compare the current state of democratic backsliding in the United States with instances of such democratic decay in other countries.

Welcome Remarks

Dean Sophia Z. Lee, Dean and Bernard G. Segal Professor of Law at Penn Carey Law

PANEL DISCUSSION

Professor Wojciech Sadurski, Challis Professor of Jurisprudence at the University of Sydney and Professor at the University of Warsaw Center for Europe; then Bok Visiting International Professor at Penn Carey Law

This program was approved for a total of 1.5 Ethics CLE credits for Pennsylvania lawyers.

Events and Symposia

Democracy in Peril

Professor William W. Burke-White,
Professor of Law, Penn Carey Law;
Member of CERL's Affiliated Faculty

Professor Mitchell A. Orenstein,
Professor of Russian and East European
Studies, University of Pennsylvania

Professor Rogers M. Smith,
Christopher H. Browne Distinguished
Emeritus Professor of Political Science,
University of Pennsylvania; Member of
CERL's Affiliated Faculty

Professor Claire Finkelstein,
Algernon Biddle Professor of Law and
Professor of Philosophy, University of
Pennsylvania; CERL Faculty Director, as
moderator



Above: Dean Lee gives welcome remarks; Right top to bottom: Professors Orenstein, Smith, Sadurski, Finkelstein, and Burke-White; Professor Sadurski offers perspective; Panelists engage in discussion at Penn Carey Law; Professor Orenstein

Evolving Norms of Military Aid to Civilian Law Enforcement

Is Militarized Law Enforcement Consistent with the Rule of Law?

➤ April 15-16, 2026 • Penn Washington, Washington, D.C.

CO-SPONSOR: Penn Washington



CERL held a high-level roundtable conference with Penn Washington, in which over 30 high-ranking retired military leaders, national security professionals, academics, and civil society leaders participated.

Experts addressed the evolving use of the U.S. military to support civilian law enforcement operations both domestically and abroad, as well as the increasing militarization of domestic law enforcement authority in the United States. Conducted under the Chatham House Rule, the conference focused on the proper role of the military with respect to law enforcement authority and the National Guard's role in federalized status when pressed into service to assist with domestic operations.

Right: Dr. Amy Gadsden, Associate Vice Provost for Global Initiatives, University of Pennsylvania



Events and Symposia

Evolving Norms of Military Aid to Civilian Law Enforcement

Agenda

SESSION I

Presidential Authority for Domestic National Guard Deployments: The Implications of *Trump v. Illinois*

SESSION I

Militarized Law Enforcement in the Homeland

SESSION II

Presidential Emergency Powers and Martial Law

SESSION IV

Preservation of Constitutional Rights in the Face of Exertions of Federal Law Enforcement Authority

SESSION V

Operation Absolute Resolve in Venezuela and the Capture of Nicolás Maduro

SESSION VI

U.S. Boat Strikes in the Caribbean and the Eastern Pacific

Key Takeaways

Many participants agreed there are several reforms that would better protect the rights of civilians and safeguard American democracy where domestic national guard deployments are concerned. The inability of an individual to sue an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officer in an Article III court for constitutional rights violations is an area requiring attention. Participants noted concerns around the erosion of military norms, including potentially compromising the nonpartisan nature of judge advocates general's roles as legal counsel to combatant commanders, and with respect to the U.S. military's boat strikes in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean and concerns around defining enemy combatants and targetability.



Top to bottom: Mr. Benjamin Farley, Special Counsel, National Immigration Law Center and member of CERL's Advisory Council; Ms. Loren Voss, Legal Fellow, Transatlantic Security, German Marshall Fund; Mr. Michel Paradis, Partner, Steptoe LLP



Clockwise from top: (from left) Major General (Ret.) Randy Manner, former Acting Vice Chief of the National Guard; Major General (Ret.) William Enyart, former Adjutant General of Illinois and former Congressman from Illinois; and Rear Admiral (Ret.) Michael Smith, National Security Leaders for America; Ms. Hina Shamsi, Director, National Security Project, ACLU; Professor Chris Mirasola, Assistant Professor of Law, University of Houston Law Center; CERL's Professor Claire Finkelstein opens the roundtable discussion; Professor Stephen Vladeck, Agnes Williams Sesquicentennial Professor of Federal Courts, Georgetown University Law Center; Mr. Alberto Mora, former General Counsel of the Navy and member of CERL's Executive Board



Events and Symposia

Co-Sponsored Programming

CERL was pleased to collaborate with other institutions and university centers on programming at the intersection of democratic governance and the rule of law.



Public Safety & Education Policy

featuring Philadelphia Mayor Cherelle Parker

➤ **April 7, 2026 • Perelman Center for Political Science and Economics, Philadelphia, PA**

CERL co-sponsored a public event with the Penn Political Union, the Andrea Mitchell Center for the Study of Democracy, the College of Arts & Sciences, and the Penn Institute for Urban Research featuring a discussion with Philadelphia Mayor Cherelle Parker. Among the topics discussed were legislation addressing the presence of ICE in Philadelphia, immigration policy, and the impact of federal budget cuts on education in Philadelphia public schools.



Student Engagement

Student Engagement

Pentagon Briefing

On April 10-11, 2026, Professor Finkelstein and students from her National Security Law class at Penn Carey Law, together with CERL and Penn Washington, held a high-level meeting with Pentagon officials. Participants included lawyers from the Department of Defense Office of General Counsel, members of the Legal Counsel of the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, members of the National Guard Bureau's General Counsel Office, staff from Penn Washington, and a high-ranking retired military leader. The event took place at Penn Washington's offices in Washington, D.C.

The students considered the legal, policy, ethical, and operational challenges U.S. service members face when deployed for law enforcement purposes. Their presentations focused on the implications of the federalization of the National Guard, Posse Comitatus Act restrictions on domestic deployments, 287 (g) Agreements, and the relationship between federal law enforcement and the National Guard, among other topics.

CERL thanks the participants for their time and expertise.

2026 Summer Internship Program

The Summer Internship Program provides professional, graduate, and undergraduate level students who are interested in the national security field with an ethics and rule of law foundation to help ground their future perspectives, leadership, and decision-making in the rule of law. Our interns help further CERL's mission through research, writing, and conference planning, and gain valuable insights through conversations with national security experts on the critical issues facing our nation today.

This year, 16 students—14 from graduate programs, including Penn Carey Law, and two from undergraduate programs, including Penn Undergraduate—participated in the nine-week program. Led by CERL's executive director, Marcos Soler, and with the generous support of Penn Carey Law, Penn Global, the Cozen O'Connor Foundation, the Windover Foundation, Morgan Lewis, Hangley Aronchick Segal Pudlin & Schiller, Mr. Jules Zacher, Mr. Gary Deutsch, and Mrs. Lizanne Kelly and Family in memory of Mr. Patrick W. Kelley, the program comprised a mix of lectures, seminars, and research.

THE PROJECTS

Interns worked in teams under CERL's leadership on various projects relating to AI and command responsibility in warfare, executive authority and war powers, illegal orders and the U.S. boats in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean, tabletop exercises in the face of federal law enforcement authority, and other areas of research.

Students from Professor Finkelstein's Penn Carey Law National Security Law class at Penn Washington's offices in Washington, D.C.



Student Engagement

2026 INTERN CLASS



Josey Aron

University of Alabama; Academic Program: Master of Arts in Philosophy (Graduated)



Mia-Lucia Barashenkov

University of Pennsylvania; Academic Program: Doctor of Philosophy, Department of Spanish and Portuguese



Julia Bochkarev

University of Pennsylvania; Academic Program: Bachelor of Arts



Natalie Davidson

University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School; Academic Program: Juris Doctor



Noah Gerlach

University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School; Academic Program: Juris Doctor



Mariam Kakhabrishvili

University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School; Academic Program: Juris Doctor



Isabella Lok

University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School; Academic Program: Juris Doctor



Erica Maltsev

University of Pennsylvania; Academic Program: Bachelor of Arts



Julia Bochkarev



Josey Aron



Brendan Turowski

University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School; Academic Program: Juris Doctor



Megan Vidovich

Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs; Academic Program: Master of International Affairs



Sarah Well

University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School; Academic Program: Juris Doctor



Lillian Weng

University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School; Academic Program: Juris Doctor



Cate McGowan

Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs; Academic Program: Master of International Affairs



Esin Nizamoglu

Yale University; Academic Program: Master of Arts



Quinton O'Connor

University of Denver Sturm College of Law; Academic Program: Juris Doctor



David Pritchard

University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School; Academic Program: Juris Doctor



Brendan Turowski



Isabella Lok

Student Engagement

WHAT CERL INTERNS HAD TO SAY ABOUT THE PROGRAM



"CERL's internship program gave me the opportunity to research a number of emerging legal and ethical questions related to everything from artificial intelligence to transgender soldiers. Working alongside a cohort with such diverse academic backgrounds made the experience interdisciplinary in a way I have not seen elsewhere."

JOSEY ARON

University of Alabama, Master of Arts in Philosophy Program (graduated)



"During my internship with CERL, I researched the expansion of presidential war powers, examining how successive administrations have circumvented the War Powers Resolution and eroded Congress' constitutional authority over war-making. Beyond the research itself, I valued hearing directly from academics, practitioners, and generals, and I left with sharpened research and writing skills alongside great colleagues."

NOAH GERLACH

University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School, Juris Doctor Program



"As an undergraduate, the opportunity to work alongside J.D. and master's students on one of the most important and pressing topics of our generation, artificial intelligence, made this an incredible way to begin my career. The research, analytical, public speaking, and teamwork skills I developed at CERL, along with the chance to learn from accomplished guest speakers and spend an entire summer exploring a complex topic in depth, are experiences and skills that I will carry with me throughout my career."

JULIA BOCHKAREV

University of Pennsylvania, Bachelor of Arts Program



"I loved the opportunity to strengthen my legal research and writing skills while working on real-world cases as part of a litigation team, which made the experience both engaging and rewarding. The guest speakers were a highlight because we had the chance to learn from and connect with professionals in the national security field. The staff was also incredibly supportive, and getting to work with fellow CERL interns from different schools and backgrounds made the experience even more enjoyable."

MARIAM

KAKHABRISHVILI

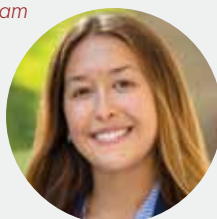
University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School, Juris Doctor Program



"During my internship with CERL, I worked on some of the litigation that the center is currently involved with. It was great to get hands-on experience with legal writing outside of a classroom environment and meet people with the same interests as me!"

NATALIE DAVIDSON

University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School, Juris Doctor Program



"I'm grateful to CERL for bringing together interns with a shared interest in national security. It was great getting to work with people from different backgrounds, learn[ing] from each other, and becom[ing] friends along the way."

ISABELLA LOK

University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School, Juris Doctor Program





"I had an unforgettable summer with CERL. During my internship, I had the opportunity to work with law students and master's students on current issues revolving around international law, national security, and the law of armed conflict. I was able to make lasting connections with my cohort while expanding my knowledge and understanding of the intersection between international relations and the field of law."

ERICA MALTSEV

*University of Pennsylvania,
Bachelor of Arts Program*



"My internship at CERL gave me the opportunity to engage with complex questions at the intersection of law, technology, and national security while working alongside an exceptional group of scholars and fellow interns. It's an experience that will continue to shape my legal education and future career."

BRENDAN TUROWSKI

*University of Pennsylvania Carey Law
School, Juris Doctor Program*



"At CERL, I had the opportunity to explore a broad set of intellectually enriching and pressing questions at the intersection of law and national security. Most importantly, my experience at CERL helped me realize how much I enjoy approaching these questions through a legal lens and solidified my interest in pursuing a career in law. I am especially grateful for the mentorship, intellectual freedom, and community I found at CERL."

ESIN NIZAMOGLU

*Yale University,
Master of Arts Program*



"At CERL, I conducted legal research and tracked executive actions to analyze their impact on U.S. elections. Given the timeliness of this topic ahead of the 2026 midterms, the work offered valuable insight into how to navigate a fast-moving news cycle."

MEGAN VIDOVICH

*Columbia University School of
International and Public Affairs,
Master of International Affairs
Program*



"CERL provided me with the opportunity to explore important and often under-addressed topics in the national security law space. Throughout the course of the internship, I was able to strengthen my legal research and writing skills with the support of my fellow interns and the CERL staff."

QUINTON O'CONNOR

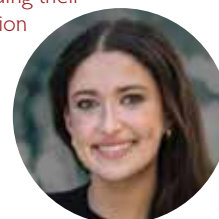
*University of Denver Sturm
College of Law, Juris Doctor Program*



"Through CERL, I had the privilege of conducting legal research alongside students from various disciplines, guided by leading academics, military professionals, and legal practitioners who place ethics and the rule of law at the center of national security. The program's expert lectures deepened my understanding of the forces reshaping warfare and democratic institutions, the public service careers dedicated to defending their integrity, and my professional direction within that landscape."

SARAH WELL

*University of Pennsylvania Carey
Law School, Juris Doctor Program*



Student Engagement

Guest Speaker Series

CERL thanks its guest speakers for their valuable contributions to CERL's 2026 Summer Internship Program.

Zeeshan Ali, Research Associate, Princeton University's Bridging Divides Initiative

Lieutenant General (Ret.) James R. Clapper Jr., U.S. Air Force; former Director of National Intelligence

Claire Finkelstein, Algernon Biddle Professor of Law and Professor of Philosophy; Faculty Director, CERL, University of Pennsylvania

Łukasz Kamieński, 2025-2026 Fulbright Visiting Scholar

Anne Kim, Senior Editor, *The Washington Monthly*; Senior Fellow, FutureEd at Georgetown

Scott Moore, Managing Director, Practice Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania

Michel Paradis, Partner, Steptoe LLP; Lecturer, Columbia Law School; Fellow, Center on National Security; General Counsel, National Institute of Military Justice

Franklin Rosenblatt, Associate Professor, Mississippi College School of Law; President, National Institute of Military Justice

Gianni Quattrocchi, Summer Associate, Greenberg Traurig, LLP

Susana Sanz Caballero, Jean Monnet Professor in European Studies; Professor of International Public Law and International Relations at the Universidad CEU Cardenal Herrera (Valencia); ad hoc judge of the European Court of Human Rights



Dr. Susana Sanz Caballero and Professor Łukasz Kamieński participated in the summer guest speaker series.



General James Cartwright joined CERL's interns as part of the "Breakfast with the Board" series.

BREAKFAST WITH THE BOARD

Mary McInnis Boies, Counsel, Boies Schiller Flexner LLP

Sean Carter, Member, Cozen O'Connor

General (Ret.) James Cartwright, U.S. Marine Corps; former Vice Chair, Joint Chiefs of Staff, USMC

Duncan MacIntosh, Professor of Philosophy, Dalhousie University

Stuart Gerson, former Acting Attorney General of the United States

Kevin Govern, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs & Professor of Law, Ave Maria School of Law

General (Ret.) Joseph L. Votel, U.S. Army, former Commander of the United States Central Command

Jennifer Arbittier Williams, Partner, Freeh Sporkin & Sullivan LLP

Jules Zacher, Attorney, Jules Zacher, P.C.; Board Chair, Council for a Livable World

Mark S. Zaid, Managing Partner, Mark S. Zaid, PC

Mentors

Rachel Baron, Postdoctoral Litigation and Policy Fellow, CERL

Claire Finkelstein, Algernon Biddle Professor of Law and Professor of Philosophy; Faculty Director, CERL, University of Pennsylvania

Brenner Fissell, Professor of Law, Villanova University; Distinguished Senior Fellow, CERL

Alexandra Herrera, Staff Writer, CERL

Marcos Soler, Executive Director, CERL

Top to bottom: Professor Claire Finkelstein; CERL Acting Board Chair Gary Deutsch offers welcome remarks at the soiree; CERL Executive Director Marcos Soler; CERL's friends and affiliates gather for the end-of-summer soiree at Professor Finkelstein's residence



Student Engagement



Clockwise from top: CERL's 2026 summer internship class (not pictured: David Pritchard); From left: Mariam Kakhabrishvili, Quinton O'Connor, Natalie Davidson; From left: Brendan Turowski, Lillian Weng, Megan Vidovich, Esin Nizamoglu; From left: Cate McGowan, Noah Gerlach, Sarah Well; Josey Aron, Julia Bochkarev, Isabella Lok, and Erica Maltsev present findings from their final paper



The Rule of Law Post

Blog Posts

CERL's blog, *The Rule of Law Post*, showcases articles written by policy experts, members of the military, lawyers, academics, and CERL fellows and interns who put forth thoughtful analysis, conclusions, and recommendations on current and often urgent ethics and rule of law issues in national security, warfare, and democratic governance. This year, the Center published seven posts.



“Acknowledged” covert activity and regime change plans for Venezuela?

➤ Kevin H. Govern
October 24, 2025



The Trump administration's bias is polluting the integrity of the intelligence community and damaging the nation's security

➤ George W. Croner
December 2, 2025



Teetering on the edge:

The Trump administration's congressional allies push forward the attack on the federal judiciary

➤ George W. Croner
January 30, 2026



The Pentagon's distortions of law to justify Venezuela operations have a name — “Lawfare”

➤ Rachel E. VanLandingham and Steven J. Lepper
March 17, 2026



The clock is ticking on America's most important intelligence program: It is time to renew FISA Section 702

➤ George Croner
March 30, 2026



The need for FISA Section 702 reform is greater than ever

➤ Elizabeth Goitein and Hannah James
April 14, 2026



United States military actions against Venezuela:

Will international criminal law be enforced? An explainer

➤ Franklin D. Rosenblatt
April 20, 2026

The views expressed in these posts are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of any organization or university.





In the News

CERL in the News

Expert commentary from CERL's affiliates appeared in over 60 outlets, including PBS, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. Members of CERL's staff, Affiliated Faculty, Executive Board, and Advisory Council authored over 50 op-eds in more than 15 outlets, including *The Hill*, *The Washington Post*, and *Time Magazine*.



TELEVISION

PBS News Hour

➤ January 27, 2026

Professor Claire Finkelstein, faculty director of CERL, spoke with Geoff Bennett of PBS News Hour about the motivation behind a CERL-run tabletop exercise held in the leadup to the 2024 presidential election that explored what would happen if a president deployed federal troops in a domestic context, at the objection of a governor, to suppress civil unrest. She discussed similarities between the center's simulation and events in Minnesota, and the importance of accountability.

MeidasTouch Network

➤ January 30, 2026

Executive Board Member Mark Zaid conversed with attorney and former MSNBC anchor Katie Phang about the state of democracy and his takeaways as a participant of the 2024 tabletop exercise. More than three dozen high-ranking military and national security experts, current and past officials in state and local government, and civil society leaders participated in the simulation.

NBC News, Fox News, CBS News, and NewsNation

➤ February & March 2026

General Joseph Votel, member of CERL's Executive Board, appeared on NBC News, Fox News, CBS News, and NewsNation to discuss the U.S. military operations against Iran that began on February 28, 2026. Among the topics he discussed were implications of the U.S. strikes, the primary targets of the operations, and consequences of Iran's response.



RADIO

NPR

➤ **October 13, 2025**

Benjamin Farley, member of CERL's Advisory Council, spoke with NPR about President Donald Trump's deployments of the National Guard to aid in immigration enforcement. He explained that the reaction to the Trump administration's immigration enforcement tactics is being used as a "pretext" for sending the National Guard to U.S. cities.

NPR | On Point

➤ **October 17, 2025**

Addressing over 800 military leaders at Quantico in September 2025, President Donald Trump and Secretary Pete Hegseth presented a new vision for the future of U.S. warfighting. Professor Geoffrey Corn, member of CERL's Advisory Council, spoke with NPR's Meghna Chakrabarti on the program *On Point* about how the administration is chipping away at the guardrails around presidential power that uphold the system of checks and balances in democratic governance.

Irregular Warfare Initiative

➤ **March 7, 2026**

In a podcast episode released by the Irregular Warfare Initiative discussing recent research on the logic behind why militant groups create alliances, CERL Executive Board Member and former CENTCOM commander General Joseph Votel leveraged his many years of experience in the Middle East to analyze the strategic alliances that groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State create in order to boost their global reach or ideological credibility.



OPINIONS

Could Trump Use the Uniform Code of Military Justice to Stifle the Protected Speech of Military Retirees?

➤ **By George Croner, *Just Security***
September 19, 2025

George Croner, member of CERL's Advisory Council, argues the concern around President Trump applying Article 88 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice to seek retribution and mute criticism is legitimate, and if pursued, would come at a high cost to military retirees and our country.

Argentina's \$16 Billion Payment Would Disrupt Global Legal Order

➤ **By Anne-Marie Slaughter and William Burke-White, *Bloomberg Law***
November 20, 2025

CERL Affiliated Faculty Member William Burke-White argues that a reversal by the Second Circuit of the lower court's decision in *Argentine Republic v. Petersen Energia Inversora, S.A.U.* would be the best outcome for protecting the equality of sovereign states.

We Ran High-Level U.S. Civil War Simulations. Minnesota Is Exactly How They Start

➤ **By Claire Finkelstein, *The Guardian***
January 21, 2026

CERL's Professor Claire Finkelstein explains how findings from CERL's 2024 tabletop exercise, particularly those relating to green-on-green violence, are relevant to Minnesota.

All Too Quiet on the Western Neuroenhancement Front

➤ **By Łukasz Kamieński, *War on the Rocks***
February 27, 2026

CERL Fellow and Fulbright Visiting Scholar Łukasz Kamieński argues that democratic states must begin to practically apply some of the research being done on neurostimulation, or the altering of brain and body systems through the introduction of energy to the nervous system in order to alter emotions, cognition, or behavior.

Operation Epic Fury Puts Congress and the Constitution to the Test

➤ **By Geoffrey Corn and Claire Finkelstein, *Lawfare***
March 11, 2026

CERL Faculty Director Claire Finkelstein and CERL Advisory Council Member Geoffrey Corn argue that Operation Epic Fury is fundamentally distinct from Operations Midnight Hammer and Absolute Resolve, as well as from the previous attack on Iran and the operation in Venezuela. The current campaign clearly and definitively rises to the level of armed conflict that triggers the War Powers Resolution (WPR). Even when the WPR conditions are met, presidents have historically been able to use congressional inaction to infer congressional support for military action.



Upcoming Programming

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2026-2027 Event Calendar



Ethical and Legal Aspects of Battlefield AI and Robotics

➤ October 8-9, 2026

Presidential Authority in the United States

➤ April 8-9, 2027



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