

MELANIE W. SISSON

POSITIONS

Senior Fellow, Brookings Foreign Policy, Talbott Center for Security, Strategy, and Technology	2021-Present
Vice President of Analysis, Govini	2020-2021
Fellow and Director, Stimson Center Defense Strategy and Planning Program	2018-2020
Manager of Information Strategy, Mental Health Center of Denver	2015-2018
Senior National Security Project Associate, RAND Corporation	2005-2014
Presidential Management Fellow, Federal Bureau of Investigation	2003-2005

EDUCATION

PhD, Political Science, University of Colorado at Boulder (International Relations, Political Theory)	2013
MA, Political Science, University of Colorado at Boulder	2009
MIA, Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs (Security Studies)	2003
BA, Tufts University (International Relations)	1999

BOOKS AND CHAPTERS

Sisson, Melanie W., [*The United States, China, and the Competition for Control*](#), (Oxon, UK: Routledge), 2025.

Sisson, Melanie W., “Gray Zone Conflict and Military Affairs: Questioning the Premise”, in Regan, Mitt and Aurel Sari, [*Hybrid Threats and Grey Zone Conflict*](#), (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press), 2024 pp. 45-60

Sisson, Melanie W. and James A. Siebens, “China’s Multi-domain Deterrence of the United States”, in Siebens, James A. Ed., [*China’s Use of Armed Coercion: To Win Without Fighting*](#), (Oxon, UK: Routledge), 2023, pp. 202-216

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Sisson, Melanie W., James A. Siebens and Barry M. Blechman, Eds., [*Military Coercion and U.S. Foreign Policy: The Use of Force Short of War*](#), (Oxon, UK: Routledge), 2020

PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

Sisson, Melanie W., “Basis and Elements of a Strategy for Multiparty, Intra-War Nuclear Deterrence”, (Washington, D.C.: CSIS [Project Atom 2024](#)), November 2024.

Sisson, Melanie W., “Victory is not an Option”, in [Defining Success: Does the United States Need an 'End State' for its China Policy?](#), (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, Freeman Chair in China Studies), with: Ryan Hass, Rush Doshi, Elizabeth Economy, Richard Fontaine, Hal Brands, Susan Shirk and others, 10/7/2024

Sisson, Melanie W., “[Review: Dying by the Sword](#)”, *H-Diplo*, RJISSF Roundtable on Toft and Kushi, *Dying by the Sword*, 09/06/2024

Sisson, Melanie W., “[Russia, Ukraine, the United States, and the End of Imagination](#)”, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings), 08/08/2024

Sisson, Melanie W., “[What is Deterrence, and What is its Role in U.S. National Defense?](#): Election 2024 Explainer”, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings), May 1, 2024

Sisson, Melanie W., “[Does the West’s Ukraine policy need a reality check? A Brookings debate](#)”, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings), 02/15/2024, with Asli Aydintaşbaş, Michael E. O’Hanlon, Steven Pifer, Angela Stent, and Tara Varma

Sisson, Melanie W., “[Deterring a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan: What does successful deterrence look like for the United States, and what cost are we willing to pay for it?](#)”, *Inkstick*, February 12, 2024

Sisson, Melanie W., “[Around the Halls: The Impact of Taiwan’s Election in 2024 and Beyond](#)”, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings), January 17, 2024, with Richard C. Bush, Ryan Hass, Patricia M. Kim, Adam P. Liff, Syaru Shirley Lin, and Susan A. Thornton

Sisson, Melanie W., “[The Biden Administration’s Dangerous Grand Strategy](#)”, *Lawfare*, May 21, 2023

Sisson, Melanie W. and Dan Patt, “[A Deterrence Response Monitoring Capability for the DoD](#): Policy Brief”, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings), June 29, 2023

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Sisson, Melanie W., “[Deterring a Cross-Strait Conflict: Beijing’s Assessment of Evolving U.S. Strategy](#)”, (Washington, D.C.: CSIS), March 29, 2023, with Taylor Fravel and Elbridge Colby

Sisson, Melanie W., “Artificial Intelligence, Geopolitics, and the U.S.-China Relationship”, (Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung), November 14, 2022

Sisson, Melanie W., “[There’s a lot to like in the 2022 National Defense Strategy](#)”, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings), November 18, 2022

Sisson, Melanie W., “[Succeeding in the AI Competition with China: A Strategy for Action: Policy Brief](#)”, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Global China), September 30, 2022

Sisson, Melanie W., with Michael E. O’Hanlon and Caitlin Talmadge, “[Managing the Risks of U.S.-China War: Implementing a Strategy of Integrated Deterrence: Policy Brief](#)”, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings), September 30, 2022

Sisson, Melanie W., “[On Taiwan and China, is the U.S. Ignoring the Real Lesson of Ukraine?](#)”, *Responsible Statecraft*, July 25, 2022

Sisson, Melanie W., “[America’s Real Deterrence Problem](#)”, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings), June 15, 2022

Sisson, Melanie W., “[Taiwan and the Dangerous Illogic of Deterrence by Denial: Policy Brief](#)”, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings), May 1, 2022

Sisson, Melanie W., “[Why Can’t the Pentagon Buy the Cutting-Edge Technology it Needs?](#)”, *TechStream*, February 23, 2022

Sisson, Melanie W., “[Around the Halls: Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and the European Security Order](#)”, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings), January 11, 2022, with Marvin Kalb, Constanze Stenzenmuller, and others

Sisson, Melanie W., “[Anticipating the Effects of Emerging Technologies on Nuclear Deterrence](#)”, (Washington, D.C.: Strategic Multilayer Assessment, U.S. Department of Defense), November 30, 2021

Sisson, Melanie W., “[War is Interested in You: Balancing the Promise and Peril of High-Tech Deterrence](#)”, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings), September 10, 2021

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Sisson, Melanie W., "[A Strategy for Competition](#)", *The Next Defense Strategy Series*, Center for a New American Security, 2020

"[The Militarization of Artificial Intelligence](#)", with Jennifer Spindle, Paul Scharre, and Vadim Kozyulin, The Stanley Center for Peace and Security, 2020

Sisson, Melanie W., "[Review: 'A Recent History of al-Qa'ida'](#)", H-Diplo, ISSF Article Review 35, 2015

Sisson, Melanie W. and Martin DeNicolò, "[Minimal Mutual Advantage: How the Social Contract Can Do Justice to the Disabled](#)", *European Journal of Political Theory*, Vol. 14, No 2., pp. 161-179, 2015

Sisson, Melanie W., "[U.S. Overseas Military Presence: What are the Strategic Choices?](#)", MG-1211-AF, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND), 2012, with Lynn E. Davis, Stacie L. Pettyjohn, Stephen M. Worman, and Michael J. McNerney

Sisson, Melanie W. and Steve Vanderheiden, "[Ethically Responsible Leisure? Promoting Social and Environmental Justice through Ecotourism](#)", *Environmental Philosophy*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 1-15, 2010

Sisson, Melanie W. and Lynn E. Davis, "[A Strategic Planning Approach: Defining Alternative Counterterrorism Strategies as an Illustration](#)", Occasional Paper 242, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND), 2009

Sisson, Melanie W., with Martin C. Libicki and Peter Chalk, [Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences](#), (Santa Monica, CA: RAND), 2007

Sisson, Melanie W., with Brian A. Jackson et. al, [Breaching the Fortress Wall: Understanding Terrorist Efforts to Overcome Defensive Technologies](#), MG-481, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND), 2007

OP-EDS

Sisson, Melanie W. and Michael E. O'Hanlon, "[Weaken but don't Ruin Russia](#)", *The Hill*, May 18, 2022

"[Amazon in Crystal City: Threat and Opportunity for the Defense Department](#)", *War on the Rocks*, 2018

Sisson, Melanie W., "[Mattis is Poisoning the Well on Women in Combat](#)", *The Hill*, 2018

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Sisson, Melanie W., “[NATO Isn’t Cheap – and It’s Still Worth the Price](#)”, *The National Interest*, 2018

Sisson, Melanie W. “The FBI’s Second-Class Citizens”, *Washington Post*, Saturday December 31, 2005, p. A19, 2005

TESTIMONY, OFFICIAL BRIEFINGS, KEYNOTE SPEECHES

Sisson, Melanie W., [Testimony](#) before the House Armed Services Committee at the hearing titled, “The Pressing Threat of the Chinese Communist Party to U.S. National Defense”, February 7, 2023

Sisson, Melanie W., “The AI Arms Race”, (at the invitation of the State Secretary of North Rhine Westphalia, Berlin: Academy of International Affairs), November 9, 2022

Sisson, Melanie W., “[Avoiding Traps and Preventing War: History, Technology, and Fear](#)”, Washington D.C., U.S. Air Force Skunk Works memorial event, December 7, 2022

Sisson, Melanie W., “Challenges to 21st Century Deterrence – Anticipating the Effects of Emerging and Disruptive Technologies”, (Briefing to Lt. Gen., U.S. Strategic Command: Washington, D.C.), February 14, 2022, *Briefer*

PUBLIC EVENTS, PRIVATE PANELS, GUEST LECTURES

Sisson, Melanie W., “The 2024 Knight Forum on Geopolitics”, (Public panel discussion, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), October 2, 2024, *Moderator*

Sisson, Melanie W. and David Sacks, “Should the United States Defend Taiwan: Roundtable Debate”, (Private roundtable debate, New York: Council on Foreign Relations), August 13, 2024, *Speaker*

Sisson, Melanie W. “Deterrence and Taiwan”, (Public panel discussion, Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College), August 8, 2024, *Panelist*

Sisson, Melanie W., “Taiwan and technology cooperation”, (Private panel discussion, Taiwan Experts Conference, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), June 7, 2024, *Moderator*

Sisson, Melanie W., “What Deters and What are We Deterring?”, (Private panel discussion, The One China Policy at 45: What’s Working, What Isn’t, and What’s Next, Washington, D.C.: CSIS), May 10, 2024, *Panelist*

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- Sisson, Melanie W., “Nuclear Challenges for the Next U.S. Administration”, (Public panel discussion, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), April 2, 2024, *Moderator*
- Sisson, Melanie W., “Optimizing Air Power: A conversation with U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David Allvin”, (Public event, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), February 28, 2024, *Moderator*
- Sisson, Melanie W., “Assessing Integrated Deterrence”, (Public panel discussion, The William C. Battle Symposium on American Diplomacy: Reimagining Nuclear Deterrence, Charlottesville VA: University of Virginia Miller Center), February 16, 2024, *Panelist*
- Sisson, Melanie W., “Maritime Blockades and Coercion: Implications for the Region, the U.S., and Industry”, (Private panel discussion, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), *Discussant*
- Sisson, Melanie W., “Gray Zone Competition Maritime Security & Governance Staff Course”, (Graduate seminar, Newport, R.I.: U.S. Naval War College), December 8-12, 2023, *Guest Lecturer*
- Sisson, Melanie W., “The U.S. as a Strategic Competitor”, (Private panel, Livermore, CA: Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Center for Global Security Research), December 5, 2024, *Panelist*
- Sisson, Melanie W., “Implementing the 2022 National Defense Strategy: A Conversation with Mara Karlin”, (Public event, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), October 24, 2023, *Moderator*
- Sisson, Melanie W., “The U.S.-South Korea Alliance: Towards Another 70 Years”, (Public panel, Seoul, ROK: The Chey Institute for Advanced Studies), October 20, 2023, *Panelist*
- Sisson, Melanie W., “Strengthening U.S. Semiconductor supply Chain Resilience”, (Public panel, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), September 22, 2023, *Panelist*
- Sisson, Melanie W., “The Knight Forum on Geopolitics”, (Public panel, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), September 26, 2023, *Moderator*
- Sisson, Melanie W., “Deterrence and Taiwan”, (Public panel, Newport, R.I.: U.S. Naval War College), August 9, 2023, *Panelist*
- Sisson, Melanie W., “The War in Ukraine”, (Public panel, The Sphere Summit, Washington, D.C.: CATO), July 11, 2023, *Panelist*

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Sisson, Melanie W., “Deterrence and Taiwan”, (Private panel, Taiwan Experts Conference, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), May 25, 2023, *Panelist*

Sisson, Melanie W., “21st Century Soldiers of the Sea: A Conversation with General David Berger, 38th Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps”, (Public event, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), May 23, 2023, *Co-moderator*

Sisson, Melanie W., “The U.S. Coast Guard in an Increasingly Complex World: A Conversation with Admiral Linda Fagan, 27th Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard”, (Public event, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), May 17, 2023, *Moderator*

Sisson, Melanie W., “Brookings/Bosch Workshop: Challenges from China and the Middle Powers”, (Private panel, Berlin, GER: Brookings/Bosch), May 10, 2023, *Moderator*

Sisson, Melanie W. “Unpacking AUKUS”, (Private panel, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), April 25, 2023, *Co-moderator*

Sisson, Melanie W., “The U.S. Congress and National Security: A Conversation with Rep. Abigail Spanberger”, (Public event, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), April 17, 2023, *Co-moderator*

Sisson, Melanie W., “A Conversation with General McConville”, (Public event, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), March 21, 2023, *Co-moderator*

Sisson, Melanie W., “Iraq 20 years later”, (Public panel, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), March 17, 2023, *Moderator*

Sisson, Melanie W., “Integrated Deterrence of Aggression Against Taiwan”, (Public panel, Washington, D.C.: The Atlantic Council), March 2, 2023, *Panelist*

Sisson, Melanie W., “Interpret China: Deterrence Workshop”, (Private panel, Washington, D.C.: CSIS), February 23, 2023, *Panelist*

Sisson, Melanie W., “Spy Balloons and National Intelligence”, (Public panel, Canada: The Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy), February 17, 2023, *Panelist*

Sisson, Melanie W., “The U.S. Air Force and American Defense Strategy: A Conversation with Air Force Chief of Staff General Charles Q. Brown”, (Public event, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), February 13, 2023, *Co-moderator*

Sisson, Melanie W., “Military History for the Modern Strategist”, (Public panel, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), January 27, 2023, *Moderator*

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Sisson, Melanie W., “Reflections on U.S. Defense Policy with Representative Adam Smith”, (Public event, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), January 11, 2023, *Co-moderator*

Sisson, Melanie W. “The National Defense Strategy”, (Public event, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), November 3, 2022, *Moderator*

Sisson, Melanie W. “U.S.-China Relations through the Lens of Technology Competition”, (Public event, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), September 30, 2022, *Panelist*

Sisson, Melanie W., “Advanced Technology for Strategists”, (Australian War College), September 25, 2022, *Guest Lecture*

Sisson, Melanie W., “First Annual Knight Forum on Geopolitics”, (Public panel, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), September 19, 2022, *Panelist*

Sisson, Melanie W. “The United States Marine Corps, the National Defense Strategy, and the Future of Expeditionary Warfare”, (Public panel, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), August 26, 2022, *Moderator*

Sisson, Melanie W. “Legacies and Lessons from America’s Post-9/11 Wars”, (Public panel, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), June 24, 2022, *Moderator*

Sisson, Melanie W., “Deterrence”, (Private workshop, Washington, D.C.: Hudson Institute), August 4, 2022, *Panelist*

Sisson, Melanie W. “Integrated Deterrence”, (Public panel, Omaha: NE), July 27, 2022, *Panelist*

Sisson, Melanie W., “Advanced Technology for Strategists”, (Australian War College), April 18, 2022, *Guest Lecture*

Sisson, Melanie W., “U.S. Grand Strategy Under President Biden and Beyond”, (Public panel, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), May 5, 2022, *Panelist*

Sisson, Melanie W., “The Struggle to Govern the World’s Oceans”, (Public panel, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), March 31, 2022, *Moderator*

Sisson, Melanie W., “U.S. Pursuit of Advanced Military Technologies: Science, Money, Machines, and Wicked Problems”, (Australian War College), March 20, 2022, *Guest Lecture*

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Sisson, Melanie W., “Responsible AI from Principles to Practice”, (Public panel, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), January 31, 2022, *Moderator*

Sisson, Melanie W., “Military Coercion and U.S. Foreign Policy”, (U.S. Marine Corps College), January 7, 2022, *Guest Lecture*

Sisson, Melanie W., “Military Coercion and U.S. Foreign Policy”, (U.S. Army War College), December 12, 2022, *Guest Lecture*

Sisson, Melanie W. “Anticipating the Effects of Emerging Technologies on Nuclear Deterrence”, (Public panel, Washington, D.C.: SMA/U.S. DoD Joint Staff), November 30, 2022, *Panelist*

Sisson, Melanie W., “Strategic Stability”, (Public panel, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), November 17, 2021, *Panelist*

Sisson, Melanie W., “Strategy of Denial”, (Public panel, Washington, D.C.: Brookings), November 5, 2021, *Panelist*

MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

Quoted, “Why Harris’ Debate Remarks About U.S. Military in Combat Zones is Misleading”, *Politifact*, September 11, 2024

Interviewed, “Deterrence”, *The Federal Drive with Tom Temin*, June 17, 2024

Interviewed, “Is Economic Decoupling Possible for the United States?”, *Brookings TechTank Podcast*, January 30, 2023

Interviewed, “The Taiwan Question”, *The Whole Truth with David Eisenhower*, October 2, 2022

Interviewed, “Taiwan, Pelosi, and Ukraine”, *CBS Podcast: America Changed Forever*, August 5, 2022

Quoted, “StratCom Commander: U.S. Adjusting to Great Power Competition with Russia, China”, *Nebraska Examiner*, July 28, 2022

Quoted, “DoD Responsible AI Framework”, *FedScoop*, June 29, 2022

Interviewed, “China and Ukraine”, *Raeson*, June 6, 2022

Quoted, “U.S. Army in Europe”, *Expressen*, March 7, 2022

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Interviewed, “U.S. Troops in Denmark”, *Berlingske*, February 2022

Quoted, “U.S. Navy’s Unmanned Work”, *FedScoop*, February 9, 2022

Quoted, “U.S. Military Presence in Europe”, *NPR*, February 4, 2022