



Columbia
Law School

PI/PS

*Office of Public Interest/
Public Service Law and Careers*

Federal Government Careers in National Security Law and Policy

**A Job Search Tool from the Office of Public Interest/
Public Service Law and Careers**

2024-2025 Edition

How to Use This Guide

This guide, produced by the [Office of Public Interest/Public Service Law and Careers](#) (the PI/PS Office), offers a brief introduction to federal government jobs in national security law and policy. You should study this guide prior to counseling appointments with [PI/PS Office staff](#), faculty, and alumni so that you have a basic understanding of the types of national security careers available to you. Remember that this guide is only a starting point and should be used in conjunction with advising appointments, informational interviews, and independent research, as well as other [PI/PS Office resources](#), as part of your job search. For more information, including the number of anticipated hires per agency, required qualifications, and application deadlines, please consult official agency websites and the [Arizona Government Honors and Internship Handbook](#).

Introduction to Federal Government Careers in National Security Law and Policy

A federal government career in national security law and policy offers opportunities in policymaking, the provision of legal advice, and criminal prosecution. The events of September 11, 2001 and the U.S.'s involvement in recent military conflicts have put national security at the forefront of the American consciousness. Fortunately for students interested in this field, employment opportunities may be found in agencies and offices across the federal government, several of which hire graduating law students. Though most lawyers working in national security will find jobs within general counsels' offices, others will be engaged in policymaking and analysis within a diverse array of other offices. The national security field is extremely competitive, so summer and permanent job applicants should cast a wide net when searching for employment.

Where Will I Work?

While there are many government agencies engaged in work relating to national security, the most common places for lawyers to work immediately following or shortly after law school, or for law students to intern over the summer, are listed below. **Please note: hiring varies by year, and some agencies hire less frequently than others do.**

Executive Branch

- [U.S. Department of Justice, National Security Division](#) litigates counterterrorism, counterespionage, and foreign intelligence surveillance matters, represents the federal government before the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court and other federal courts, and conducts oversight over Federal Bureau of Investigation national security investigations and foreign intelligence collection.
- [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) works, through intelligence gathering and law enforcement, to defend the United States against terrorist and foreign intelligence

threats, enforce criminal law, and provide leadership and criminal justice services to federal, state, municipal, and international agencies and partners. Sections include the Office of General Counsel, the National Security Branch (NSB), the Weapons of Mass Destruction Directorate (WMDD), the High-Value Detainee Interrogation Group, and the Terrorist Screening Center.

- [U.S. State Department](#) furnishes advice on domestic and international legal issues and assists in the formulation and implementation of U.S. foreign policy. While most lawyers work in the Office of the Legal Adviser, positions are available elsewhere in the department. Lawyers are also employed in the Office of Policy Planning. Other postings and descriptions of jobs outside the Office of the Legal Adviser can be found on the State Department website.
- [U.S. Department of Homeland Security](#) works to create complementary national security plans. Its clients include the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services, and the Transportation Security Administration. There are opportunities for lawyers to work in the Office of the General Counsel, the Office of Policy, and the Office of Legislative Affairs.
- [U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the General Counsel](#) provides advice to the secretary of defense regarding all legal matters, both domestic and international, involving the Department of Defense. Additionally, each branch of the military has an individual Office of General Counsel to deal with branch-specific legal issues.
- [Defense Intelligence Agency](#) provides military intelligence to combat troops and policymakers at the Department of Defense in support of military operations.
- [National Security Council](#) acts as the president's principal forum for the consideration of national security and foreign policy issues.
- [U.S. Treasury Department, Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence](#) safeguards the financial system against illicit use and combats rogue nations, terrorist facilitators, weapons of mass destruction proliferators, money launderers, and other national security threats.
- [U.S. Central Intelligence Agency](#) focuses on foreign intelligence and counterintelligence activities, international terrorism, international narcotics trafficking, and related issues.
- [Office of the Director of National Intelligence](#) was created after the 9/11 attacks in order to better integrate all U.S. intelligence capabilities. The director of national intelligence is the head of a coalition of 17 executive branch intelligence agencies. Sections within the ODNI include the Office of General Counsel (OGC), the Office of National Counterintelligence Executive (ONCIX), the National Counterterrorism Center, the Civil Liberties and Privacy Office, and the Office of Legislative Affairs.
- [Transportation Security Administration](#) protects the nation's transportation systems to ensure freedom of movement for people and commerce and provide the most effective transportation security in the most efficient way as a high-performing counterterrorism organization. Sections include the Office of Chief Counsel, Enforcement and Incident Management, the Offices of Intelligence and Investigation, Litigation, General Law

(employment and labor, ethics, fiscal, and privacy law), Procurement, Regulations, Legislation and Authorities, and Field Operations.

- [U.S. Department of Justice, Office of U.S. Attorneys](#) deploys 93 U.S. attorneys across the country as the principal litigators for the nation. Many offices have sections that focus on national security and counterterrorism.
- [Judge Advocate's General Corps](#): Students can also pursue a career through military service. Each branch has commissioned officers that serve in Judge Advocate General Corps (JAGs). These officers provide legal service to all levels of military operation— from local prosecution under the Code of Military Justice to high-level strategic advice.
- [National Security Agency](#) monitors global information and data and processes information for both counterintelligence and foreign intelligence objectives.

Legislative Branch

Students interested in legislative and oversight activities relating to national security may wish to consider a job on Capitol Hill. Note that such posts generally require significant subject matter expertise, and few positions are likely to be available at junior levels or during the summer.

Congressional committees that deal most directly with national security issues include:

- House and Senate Armed Services Committees
- House and Senate Judiciary Committees
- House Committee on Intelligence
- House and Senate Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Defense
- House and Senate Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Homeland Security
- House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation
- Senate Select Committee on Intelligence
- Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on International Operations and Terrorism
- Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs

State and Local Government

This guide provides information on federal opportunities in national security law. Please note, however, that state and local governments are also involved in certain aspects of national security. Students interested in state and local government opportunities should consult the [director of government programs](#) at the PI/PS Office, as well as the appropriate [PI/PS Office job search publications](#) (select Specialized Job Search Tools for government-specific publications).

Nonprofit Organizations

- [The American Civil Liberties Union](#) is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to defending and preserving the individual rights and liberties guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of the United States.

- [Amnesty International](#) envisions a world in which every person, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity, enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other internationally recognized human rights standards. The organization unites people across the globe in service to this vision using research, action, and advocacy.
- [Center for Constitutional Rights](#) is dedicated to protecting the rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to using the law creatively to effect social change. This is done through litigation, advocacy, and strategic communications.
- [Human Rights Watch](#), a nonprofit, nongovernmental human rights organization, provides accurate fact-finding, impartial reporting, effective use of media, and targeted advocacy, often in partnership with local human rights groups.
- [Open Society Foundations](#) seek to investigate and combat human rights violations linked to global national security and counterterrorism operations.
- [Rand National Security Research Division](#) (NSRD) conducts research and analysis for all national security sponsors other than the U.S. Air Force and Army. The division includes the National Defense Research Institute. NSRD also conducts research for the U.S. intelligence population.

What Will I Do?

Lawyers working in national security law and policy are usually engaged in offering legal advice to a policymaker or other principal or in formulating diplomatic, military, or other policy recommendations on behalf of an agency or principal. Often they are engaged in some combination of the two. Such work can involve legal research and writing and often incorporates analysis focused on policy or political implications.

For those working on Capitol Hill, the work consists of formulating policy recommendations or legislation on behalf of Congressional committees or members of Congress or of participating and preparing for oversight activities relating to national security. Such work draws on substantive knowledge of the issue area but also includes tasks like building coalitions, interacting with the executive branch or outside groups, preparing members of Congress for hearings and votes, and advising members of Congress on policy matters.

How Can I Become a Competitive Candidate for Employment?

The following chart lists factors national security employers consider when evaluating entry-level applicants. The importance they place on each varies from office to office. This chart is intended to supplement information you receive from PI/PS Office advisers, agency websites, the [Arizona Government Honors and Internship Handbook](#), and other sources. If you lack one of the “Extremely Important” or “Very Important” qualifications, you are not disqualified from employment, but you should consult the PI/PS Office to discuss search strategies.

	Extremely Important	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Demonstrated Commitment	✓			
Clerkship			✓	
Summer with Agency		✓		
High Grades			✓	
Clinic			✓	
Law Review/Journal			✓	
National Security Experience			✓	
Government Experience			✓	
Relevant Coursework		✓		
Recommendation from a Practitioner in the Field		✓		

Relevant Professors and Courses

Professors

- Matthew C. Waxman: Liviu Librescu Professor of Law and the faculty chair of the Roger Hertog Program on Law and National Security
- Daniel C. Richman: Paul J. Kellner Professor of Law
- Sarah Cleveland: Louis Henkin Professor of Human and Constitutional Rights; Faculty Co-Director, Human Rights Institute
- Philip Bobbitt: Herbert Weschler Professor of Federal Jurisprudence

Courses

The aforementioned professors teach a variety of classes touching on different issues within the field of national security. The courses offered by these professors and others at Columbia Law School are updated each semester and can be referenced [here](#).

Alumni

Notable Columbia Law School alumni who work or have worked in national security law and policy include the following. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.

Preet Bharara
Anthony Blinken

Glenn Gerstell
Eric Holder

Jeh Johnson
Richard Scott

John J. Sullivan
Mary Jo White

Additional Resources

The [PI/PS Office director of government programs](#) is available for individual counseling sessions. Please schedule an appointment via Symplicity.

Columbia Law School Organizations

- [National Security Law Society](#) is an organization of law students who share an interest in the role of law in national security. The group organizes panels and events to expose the rest of the law school to current issues.
- [Columbia Law School Military Association](#) is an organization of veteran law students that organizes events about veteran and national security issues.

Web Resources

- [American Bar Association Standing Committee on Law and National Security](#) provides information on different national security career paths, advice from former and current practitioners, and tips on finding your interest area.
- Students may find classmates who have interned at the above offices and agencies through [LawNet](#).
- The PI/PS Office [job search tools](#) contain additional information relating to careers in national security.
- [Arizona Government Honors and Internship Handbook](#), the most comprehensive resource for entry-level federal government legal jobs.
- [PSJD.org](#), a useful source for identifying state and local government opportunities.

Think Tanks

[American Enterprise Institute \(AEI\)](#)
[American Foreign Policy Council \(AFPC\)](#)
[Aspen Institute](#)
[Atlantic Council of the United States](#)
[Brookings Institute](#)
[Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#)
[Cato Institute](#)
[Council on Foreign Relations](#)
[Center for International Policy \(CIP\)](#)

[Center for National Security Studies](#)
[Center for Security Policy](#)
[Center for Strategic and International Studies](#)
[Foreign Policy Research Institute](#)
[Heritage Foundation](#)
[Homeland Security and Analysis Institute \(HSAI\)](#)
[Hoover Institution at Stanford University](#)
[Hudson Institute](#)
[Wilson Center](#)

Blogs

[Just Security](#)
[LawFare](#)