

# To secure our future, this ASU initiative is examining the past

## ASU working group to explore whether an update to the National Security Act of 1947 is needed to address 21st-century challenges

By Katelyn Reinhart, ASU News  
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The year was 1947, and the United States was adjusting to new realities after World War II.

Jackie Robinson became the first African American player to join Major League Baseball, and President Harry S. Truman announced the Truman Doctrine. The microwave oven, far too bulky and expensive for home use, made its way into American restaurants for the first time.

The year also marked the signing of the National Security Act of 1947, a landmark law that restructured the United States' military and intelligence agencies. Almost 80 years later, a new initiative out of Arizona State University will explore whether the act needs a modern update.

When it was first implemented, the National Security Act was revolutionary. It established the Department of Defense, as well as a National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency.

Ambassador Michael C. Polt, co-founder of the [Leadership, Diplomacy and National Security Lab](#) at ASU, said the newly streamlined structure was the culmination of all the lessons Americans learned from World War I and II.

“After World War II, we learned that the world had profoundly changed, and that America’s role in that world had profoundly changed as well,” said Polt, who is also the [ASU ambassador-in-residence](#). “So we created these institutions to address that change.”

Now, those same institutions are facing a very different geopolitical climate. Perhaps, Polt said, it is time to reassess whether the priorities U.S. leaders set in 1947 suit the needs of the 21st century and beyond.

“Today, we are again a nation in flux,” he said. “This is the time to ask, ‘Does change provide opportunity?’”

Polt, along with other members of the Leadership, Diplomacy and National Security Lab at ASU, will investigate that very question. Throughout 2026, a working group led by diplomatic and national security professionals, in addition to ASU student fellows, will assess how today's complex global challenges align with the national security structures established nearly 80 years ago.

Part of that feasibility study will be exploring what values define the nation. Polt refers to an iconic line from Benjamin Franklin — Franklin had been asked if the country was to be a republic or a monarchy. His response: "A republic, if you can keep it."

Polt said Franklin's words are a reminder that our nation is a project that requires both maintenance and vigilance by the American people.

"One of the key challenges for us is whether we go the way of other great nations or empires, or will we be different? And I insist that we are different," he said.

"I insist on what Madeleine Albright called the 'indispensable nation.' I insist on what Ronald Reagan called the 'shining city on the hill' — not because we have reached perfection, but because we aspire to form that 'more perfect union' of our founding documents. And to do that, you have to actually work at it."

This feasibility study is part of that work, and Polt said ASU is uniquely positioned to take on the task.

ASU has a strong history of [defense technology innovation](#), [policy leadership](#) and [national security education](#). In addition to its proven track record in supporting the defense industry, Polt said ASU brings a unique trait to the conversation: its accessibility.

"I think at the heart of this feasibility study is the American people," Polt said. "This shouldn't be an exercise for the 'elites' to gather in a room. We need to have an organized effort that is understandable to the people whose lives are affected by the decisions we make. I think ASU has a greater standing in that regard than other entities do."

Should the feasibility study determine that an update to the National Security Act is needed, Polt said the final product would be a proposal that any American could understand and be invested in.

"If we decide to move forward at the conclusion of this study," Polt said, "we would be building an instruction manual for the American people on how to assess whether their leaders are delivering the national security that lives up to the high standards and character of the people it protects."

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*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

## Main image



Photo by Chris Goulet/Arizona State University