

Challenging Orthodoxy in Strategic Competition: Introduction to Volume 2, Number 1

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Introduction

Challenging orthodoxy in scholarship involves temptation, satisfaction, and above all: Danger. Scholars are often tempted to connect their narrow areas of expertise to adjacent issues, because doing so can produce new and valuable insights. However, if they push that integration too far, the analysis can become so broad and interconnected that it loses focus and rigor; a phenomenon we call the “everything is nothing” problem at the Irregular Warfare Initiative. In other words, when everything connects to everything else, meaningful and disciplined analysis becomes difficult. The key is finding the right balance between innovation and analytical discipline. That tension is what this issue (volume 2, number 1) intends to explore.

Our newest issue comes at a time of change for the Irregular Warfare Initiative’s *Journal of Strategic Competition*, with a new editorial team executing on the vision of the journal’s founders and a continued focus on depth and quality of analysis with regard to strategic competition, international relations, and irregular warfare. Our relaunch reinforces the journal’s focus on the growing complexity in global stability and national security, and it now brings an attempt to balance the temptations of unorthodoxy with our roots in the Irregular Warfare Initiative² and a respect for the hard-fought lessons that have shaped the historical scholarship. We offer our sincere gratitude to the former editor-in-chief, Janna Mantua, for the significant effort she expended in launching the journal in 2025.

As the incoming editor-in-chief, I recognize the unique space that the journal holds at the intersection of scholarship and practice. What makes the *Journal of Strategic Competition* different is our focus on the combined efforts of scholars and practitioners. We recognize the value that each constituency brings to the study of strategic competition, and we know that they are better together than they are separately. For this reason, we strive for a mix of contributions from scholars and practitioners—not to mention those who fit both categories.

As always, the journal is intended to “provide a forum where academics, military practitioners, and policymakers can converge to discuss and explore the pressing issues of our time,”³ there are many such issues at present. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) finds itself not just under strain, but also at times competing with itself, as evidenced by recent U.S. positions on the annexation of Greenland⁴ and the return of the Monroe Doctrine.⁵ U.S. global leadership, even among existing allies, has eroded, with historical partners seeking new ways to support each other without the United States in the middle.⁶ Meanwhile, the role of the cyber domain for both statecraft and conflict

2 “IWI Mission,” *Irregular Warfare Initiative*, <https://irregularwarfare.org/iwi-mission/>.

3 Janna Mantua and Guido Torres, 2025, “Introducing the Journal of Strategic Competition,” *Journal of Strategic Competition*, 2025, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 1, <https://strategiccompetition.org/index.php/josc/article/view/3/2>

4 Spenser A. Warren, 2026, “Greenland Is Strategic. Annexation Is Not,” *War on the Rocks*, 20 January, <https://warontherocks.com/2026/01/greenland-is-strategic-annexation-is-not/>.

5 Richard J. Kilroy, Jr., 2026, “The Trump Corollary: An Expansive Vision of US Influence,” *Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy*, 17 February, <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/trump-corollary-expansive-vision-us-influence>.

6 Graham Lanktree, Zi-Ann Lum, and Jon Stone, 2026, “Carney constructs a mega anti-Trump trade

remains in its infancy. Fears of cataclysmic threats loom,⁷ despite the lack of precedent or justification,⁸ and the ways in which states seek to address the problem could benefit from further maturation. This issue of the journal features a wide range of practitioner and scholar perspectives and insights on these concerns.

In this issue

This new issue, the first issue of 2026, shows the breadth the *Journal of Strategic Competition* is willing to pursue, while still acknowledging that progress builds rather than replaces. This issue’s authors have interpreted “strategic competition” across a spectrum of orthodoxy. Together, they show how the study of strategic competition can be rooted in tradition but grow and flourish into new areas. From examinations of alliances and changes to the international order to behavioral and economic activity on the cyber domain, this issue’s contributors provide insights relevant to the practice of statecraft. This is a journal by and for doers as much as for thinkers.

In “Do Alliances Still Matter in a Multipolar World?” Joseph Long and Robert Burrell address a classic concern of strategic competition but do so within the context of a changing world with new prospective powers and alignments.⁹ With the perceived unipolarity of the 1990s long gone—and the bipolar structure of the Cold War further still—the role of American partnerships and influence is being challenged by a rising China and a growing bloc around it, by virtue of increasing BRICS membership. What started as Brazil, Russia, India, and China later added South Africa and now sees the accession of Iran, Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates. If alliances and alignments are the building blocks of strategic competition, then we may be seeing the future reordered before our eyes.

Building on the emergence of a new international order and roles within it, Joseph Long explores how the United States may need to invest in its role as a world leader—in a manner similar to that of an organized crime syndicate operating a “protection racket.”¹⁰ The bluntness of this approach is crucial to its relatability. Dr. Long effectively discusses the cost of leadership in the global environment and the risks assumed by not paying it. As the United States sees increasing challenges (see “Do Alliances Still Matter in a Multipolar World?” above), it faces decisions with implications both for itself and geopolitical stability the world over.

alliance,” *Politico*, 12 February, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-and-indo-pacific-blocs-eye-major-new-trade-pact/>.

⁷ World Economic Forum, 2025, *Global Cybersecurity Outlook 2025*, January, p. 26, https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GlobalCybersecurityOutlook2025.pdf.

⁸ James A. Lewis, 2020, “Dismissing Cyber Catastrophe,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 17 August, <https://strategiccompetition.org/index.php/josc/article/view/8/5>.

⁹ Robert S. Burrell and Joseph E. Long, 2026, “Do Alliances Still Matter in a Multipolar World?” *Journal of Strategic Competition*, vol. 2, no. 1, <https://strategiccompetition.org/index.php/josc/article/view/8/5>.

¹⁰ Joseph E. Long, 2026, “Even Crime Bosses Give Back: The Crisis of the American Leadership in the Changing World Order,” *Journal of Strategic Competition*, vol. 2, no. 1, <https://strategiccompetition.org/index.php/josc/article/view/14/7>.

While Long takes a look at crime bosses metaphorically, Tim Pappa and Olga Kuprina do so literally, in “Encouraging Whistleblowing Among Generational Cybercriminals Facilitating Governmental Cyberespionage.”¹¹ As true practitioners—a “former agent and profiler with the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU)” and a “former cybercriminal felon who has conducted cyberespionage campaigns on behalf of governments while active with a cybercriminal gang”¹²—they explore the role of whistleblowing among the “[c]ybercriminal supporting governmental intelligence and military espionage.”¹³ With younger generations more open to vocalizing their concerns, efforts to increase whistleblower activity in adversary states could constrain their cyber capabilities. As a result, this article offers a truly unorthodox view of strategic cyber competition.

The focus remains on the cyber domain in “Rewriting History: Understanding Historical Catastrophic Cyber Economic Losses,”¹⁴ In this piece, I propose a novel approach to understanding the potential economic effects of major cyber catastrophe events. The historical scholarship has been split on the potential economic harm that could be caused through the cyber domain—both through offensive cyber operations and accidental outages. However, there had been no progress made toward the development of economic impact estimates for the largest and most significant past cyber catastrophe events, costing the study of cyber security the sort of reference point long enjoyed in the study of natural catastrophes and other large economic loss events.¹⁵

Tradition as foundation, not foil

The articles that comprise volume 2, number 1, of the *Journal of Strategic Competition* may seem to challenge orthodox views of strategic competition in some ways, but it would be better to characterize the issue’s articles as expansionist. The point is to build and advance scholarship in strategic competition rather than to challenge orthodoxy for its own sake. Today, to view competition among states as strictly a physical or martial concern is to overlook a wide range of legitimate threats to the viability of the state from a wide range of actors spanning the broader set of sectors advanced by the Copenhagen School, such as environmental, economic, and political security concerns.¹⁶

In fact, strategic competition is no longer simply the domain of states, nor is it strictly a

11 Tim Pappa and Olga Kuprina, 2026, “Encouraging Whistleblowing Among Generational Cybercriminals Facilitating Governmental Cyberespionage,” *Journal of Strategic Competition*, vol. 2, no. 1, <https://strategiccompetition.org/index.php/josc/article/view/15>.

12 Pappa and Kuprina, 2026, p. 2.

13 Pappa and Kuprina, 2026.

14 Tom Johansmeyer, 2026, “Rewriting History: Understanding Historical Catastrophic Cyber Economic Losses,” *Journal of Strategic Competition*, vol. 2, no. 1, <https://strategiccompetition.org/index.php/josc/article/view/22/3>. This article was submitted, reviewed, and accepted prior to this author’s having taken the role of editor-in-chief at the *Journal of Strategic Competition*.

15 Tom Johansmeyer, 2025, “Putting the Cyber Threat in Perspective,” *War on the Rocks*, 12 November, <https://warontherocks.com/2025/11/putting-the-cyber-threat-in-perspective/>.

16 Titilayo Aishat Otukoya, 2024, “The securitization theory,” *International Journal of Science and Research Archive*, vol. 11, no. 1, p. 1748, <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2024.11.1.0225>.

martial matter. Not only do insurgencies, terrorist groups, and cybercriminal enterprises¹⁷ threaten state security, but they are increasingly joined by commercial entities that wield considerable power over the governments and societies extracting resources,¹⁸ engaging in trade,¹⁹ and connecting in the digital environment.²⁰ The viability and value of traditional alliances is being challenged in new ways, and territorial concerns²¹ could take on new forms. The need for a more expansive approach to strategic competition is immediately evident, but the opportunity to broaden it should not be taken lightly.

The rush to expand strategic competition to encompass new actors, disciplines, and forms of engagement risks over-inclusion. Scholar Vincent Cable warned of this with regard to economic security and the broadening scope of securitization: “The slipperiness of the concept of economic security is compounded by attempts to extend it to global problems.”²² In the end, he adds, definition creep threatens making “the concept so wide as to be unmanageable.”²³ Again, when you include too much, everything becomes nothing.

The status quo exists for a reason. It represents a history of tough lessons, important experiences, and accumulated wisdom—both evolutionary and revolutionary. This is not to say that tradition is sacred and should impede progress. In fact, this journal offers a platform for those who seek to advance the scholarship in this space, whether this be through filling gaps in the literature or calling the literature itself into question. In doing so, though, we believe that progress should be earned rather than taken. When a “better way” appears to present itself—especially for the bold and ambitious—decades of tradition, experience, and wisdom should become the paving stones leading to a new body of thought or platform for execution. To make progress, we need to recognize how we got to our respective starting points.

What comes next

Future issues of the *Journal of Strategic Competition* will continue to push the boundaries of orthodoxy with regard to strategic competition—deliberately and responsibly. We are open to contributions that offer new perspectives on what strategic competition should entail, suggestions as to where conventional thinking may have fallen short, and novel ways to understand and navigate the increasingly complex landscape noted in this journal’s

17 Pappas and Kuprina, 2026, p. 6.

18 Dino Garner, 2026, “Choke Points: Critical Minerals and Irregular Warfare in the Gray Zone,” *Irregular Warfare Initiative*, 5 January, <https://irregularwarfare.org/articles/choke-points-critical-minerals-and-irregular-warfare-in-the-gray-zone/>.

19 Eric Lebson, 2026, “CFIUS: Thinking Creatively About National Security,” *Irregular Warfare Initiative*, 4 January, <https://irregularwarfare.org/articles/cfius-thinking-creatively-about-national-security/>.

20 Derek Ray, 2026, “The Cyber Wars That Weren’t,” *Irregular Warfare Initiative*, 30 December, <https://irregularwarfare.org/articles/the-cyber-wars-that-werent/>.

21 Tom Johansmeyer, Gareth Mott, and Jason R.C. Nurse, 2025, “Invisible Lines, Visible Impact: How Territorial Security Influences Russian Cyber Security Strategy,” *RUSI Journal*, vol. 170, iss. 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2025.2458143>.

22 Vincent Cable, 1995, “What is International Economic Security?” *International Affairs*, vol. 71, no. 2, p. 307, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2623436>.

23 Cable, 1995, p. 308.

inaugural issue.²⁴ Further, we understand that the ideas needed to improve the study of strategic competition (and the practice of statecraft) may not always reside in experienced scholars, authors, or thinkers. We encourage early career researchers, active practitioners, and others to contribute. The journal's team is prepared to invest the time and effort necessary to help new contributors find their footing.

Although the current issue has longer-form submissions, we encourage contributions in a variety of forms. Other formats include operator field notes, lessons learned from wargames (and other exercises), and policy gaps.²⁵ In some cases, a contribution may be more appropriate for the Irregular Warfare Initiative's flagship editorial outlet,²⁶ of which the journal is but one part, and we happily work with our IWI colleagues to ensure that scholars and practitioners not only find their voices, but do so in the most effective environment.

The journal thanks this issue's contributors, peer reviewers, and editorial board for their efforts to bring volume 2, number 1, to life. Behind the five authors featured in this issue is the IWI team, without which the *Journal of Strategic Competition* would not function. No amount of thanks is enough for this group of volunteers committed to the irregular warfare community, but that won't stop us from trying anyway.

And as always, keep warfare irregular.

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²⁴ Mantua and Torres, 2025, p. 1.

²⁵ A full overview of contribution formats and attendant requirements can be found at <https://strategiccompetition.org/index.php/josc/submit>.

²⁶ "Submit an Article," *Irregular Warfare Initiative*, <https://irregularwarfare.org/submit-an-article/>.