Inter-alliance Security Dilemmas: Korean Counterforce Systems and Their Effect on the Sino-American Nuclear Competition (Sam Seitz)

Cold War strategic competition was dominated by the actions of the US and USSR. Their material preponderance, coupled with tightly integrated multilateral alliances systems in Europe, oriented competition around this central axis of competition. But the current environment is less centralized, characterized by cross-cutting alliances and interacting nuclear dyads. How has this changed the nature of nuclear competition? We assess this question by considering the inter-Korean competition and its effects outside the peninsula. In response to North Korea's acquisition of nuclear weapons, Seoul has procured stealth aircraft and precision, long-range missiles. It has also authorized the deployment of US missile defense systems to its territory, pursued greater nuclear coordination with Washington, and even threatened nuclear acquisition itself. These moves are aimed at Pyongyang, but they have spillover effects on China. Exploiting new Chinese language military documents, we show that South Korea's increasingly sophisticated arsenal of counterforce systems is contributing to Beijing's anxiety about the survivability of its nuclear arsenal, helping to spur China's nuclear arsenal expansion. This has important implications both for the academic literature on alliances and arms racing as well as for policy debates surrounding Sino-American nuclear competition. In particular, it suggests that alliances might not just entrap patrons in wars but also in arms races. This creates a type of inter-alliance security dilemma, where security spirals in one state dyad produce security spirals in separate state dyads. Further, it reveals that contemporary strategic competition in East Asia systematically differs from the Cold War due to the existence of multiple cross-cutting alliances. This complicates signalling efforts, and, by increasing the number of relevant actors, augurs deep challenges for any efforts at bilateral nuclear arms control between the US and China.

Developing digital peripheries for strategic advantage: Competitive cyber capacity building assistance initiatives in Africa (Julia Carver)

Amidst escalating geopolitical competition and fears of weaponized interdependence, cyber capacity building assistance has climbed the foreign policy agendas of both weak and powerful actors. Yet, conventional wisdom about cyber capacity building (CCB) assistance implies a strategic conundrum: on the one hand, CCB assistance is held to be crucial for improving the recipient's autonomy and security in cyberspace. On the other hand, three major providers of such assistance—the United States, the EU, and China—have been accused of benefiting from the same network vulnerabilities that these programmes aim to redress. Therefore, this paper asks, how do powerful donors perceive CCB assistance provisions to developing states as shaping their strategic advantage? Further, what factors have shaped variation in donors' provision of CCB assistance to developing states? I argue that CCB assistance is a new and increasingly popular form of strategic alignment which has been used to reconfigure or maintain networked asymmetries in the donor's favour. To probe the plausibility of this argument, I undertake a qualitative analysis of primary source documents and elite interviews to assess American, EU, and Chinese provision of CCB assistance to African states. My analysis supports this argument, and further shows these donors have adopted different strategies of assistance to encourage favourable structural alignments with the recipient. Three mediating factors help to explain their different strategies of assistance: the donor's relative access to and control over the intermediary provider, their normative approach to development, and the locus of geopolitical competition. Ultimately, this paper reveals how CCB assistance can be instrumentalized to shape the hard and soft infrastructural conditions for strategic advantage.

Predicting East Asian Security Competition in the 21st Century: A Regional Approach (Chelsea Thorpe)

In the past 600 years, only one war has occurred between China, Japan, and Korea (Imjin War, 1592-1598). Yet contemporary foreign policy conversations emphasize China's threat to the West without proper consideration for the region's security architecture and balance of power. Analysts predict Sino-American and Sino-European relations based on 19th century neorealist theories that derive from Western conflicts, failing to contextualize China's role in its own regional security context and the power of competition between the three East Asian powers. Within the East Asian security complex, the political choice to engage – or not engage – will determine wars, as seen by the region's approach to security competition in the past. This paper argues that East Asia is not a sub-section of the global security architecture, but rather demonstrates unique security dynamics. Consequently, when analysing, we must consider regional security complex theory in predicting great power competition that would integrate non-kinetic statecraft, such as cyber and nuclear capabilities. I challenge explanations of conflict that privilege structural explanations and instead explore how several aspects of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean foreign and security policy–their security interests and motivations, force projection capabilities, and willingness to balance against China– will define broader dynamics of competition and conflict both amongst these regional actors and between the US and China. By teasing out the regional drivers of competition, I highlight the multiple avenues through which competition can manifest that are overlooked in more structuralist theories of great power war.

Small Islands, Big Potential: A Taiwan Contingency, Alliance Politics, and the Defence of Remote Islands with Large Stakes (Takuya Matsuda/ Elliot Ji)

Debates over great power competition in the western Pacific have largely been shaped by the question over a Taiwan contingency. Nevertheless, the scholarly work on the topic has rarely focused on the strategic and operational roles that some of the Japanese administered islands in the vicinity of Taiwan. We argue that the group of Japanese islands that are adjacent to Taiwan–namely the Sakishima Islands–are strategically important assets since they are both enablers of deterrence against a Chinese invasion of Taiwan and potential vulnerabilities that China could leverage for a wedge strategy. Taking the opposite side of the main island of Okinawa across the 155-mile-wide Miyako Strait, the Sakishima Islands are part of Japan's southwest island chain that stretches towards Taiwan. Drawing from a series of Chinese, Japanese, and military-technical sources, we demonstrate that patrolling and fortifying these islands as anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) outposts could strengthen deterrence against hostile Chinese action on two levels. First, fortifying this group of small and vulnerable islands is crucial in denying China the opportunity to engage in a salami tactic to test the strength of the U.S.-Japan alliance through a *fait accompli.* Second, arming the group of small islands as A2/AD outposts could complicate Chinese operational planning for a blockade against Taiwan by directly threatening Chinese naval assets operating east of Taiwan. By doing so, the small islands not only closes a potential vulnerability of Chinese coercion but also plays a key role in checking Chinese maritime aggression. Our findings generate broad scholarly and policy implications in addressing strategic challenges in an age of great power competition, some of which are also of direct relevance to European security regarding deterrence in contested spaces, alliance politics, and escalation control.