

Memorandum to: Competition Judges and Teams

Memorandum from: Dave Oakley

Subject: 1st Annual Strategy Undergraduate Strategy Competition, Prompt and Judging Considerations

Date: 20 January 2026

1. This memorandum presents the prompt for the 1st Annual Strategy Competition.
2. The memorandum also presents a set of proposed considerations for judges to weigh as they assess the quality of the teams' presentations. These considerations do not constitute an obligatory rubric, and they should not prevent judges from applying their own strategic style or emphases to their judgments.

3. Prompts:

"Craft a comprehensive (whole-of-government) strategy for the United States and its allies to deter the People's Republic of China from initiating large-scale military conflict. What are the implications of your strategy for U.S. and allied military employment and capabilities if deterrence fails?"

4. Judging considerations:

	Considerations:	Yes? Partially? No?
1	Does the team account for the differences between shared and member states' interests?	
2	Does the team provide evidence of having weighed alternative strategies?	
3	Does the team offer a coherent set of policy aims and strategy?	
4	Does the team offer a causal theory or explanation about how the recommended interventions will lead to the desired outcomes?	
5	Is the recommended strategy feasible, especially regarding the scarcity of means and resources?	
6	Does the team engage in perspective-taking, to include accounting for the interest calculus of adversaries, allies, and other relevant actors?	
7	Does the team's strategy account for the need to conduct alliance management?	
8	Does the team adequately consider and integrate military factors and contributions?	

9	Does the team evince an adequate understanding of the substantive issues, to include an attention to local sociopolitical, ethical, and geographic dynamics?	
10	Is the team's presentation compelling, both stylistically and substantively?	

NOTE: This is a practice prompt. The prompt/scenario will be different than the practice one above, but the judging considerations will remain largely the same.

Memorandum to: Competition Judges and Teams

Memorandum from: Dave Oakley

Subject: 1st Annual Strategy Undergraduate Strategy Competition, Prompt and Judging Considerations

Date: 20 January 2026

1. This memorandum presents the prompt for the 1st Annual Strategy Competition.
2. The memorandum also presents a set of proposed considerations for judges to weigh as they assess the quality of the teams' presentations. These considerations do not constitute an obligatory rubric, and they should not prevent judges from applying their own strategic style or emphases to their judgments.

3. Prompts:

Recommend a set of NATO policy aims and a comprehensive strategy for the Ukraine-Russia war. You are not constrained by current policy choices, whether belonging to NATO or any member state; however, your recommendations should be realistic and capable of winning the necessary consensus. Your strategy should account for the current-day and long-term considerations pertinent to the war and NATO. Describe in detail the military contribution to the comprehensive strategy and any recommended changes NATO militaries must undergo to remain relevant (posture, doctrine, equipment, training, etc.).

4. Judging considerations:

	Considerations:	Yes? Partially? No?
1	Does the team account for the differences between shared and member states' interests?	
2	Does the team provide evidence of having weighed alternative strategies?	
3	Does the team offer a coherent set of policy aims and strategy?	
4	Does the team offer a causal theory or explanation about how the recommended interventions will lead to the desired outcomes?	
5	Is the recommended strategy feasible, especially regarding the scarcity of means and resources?	
6	Does the team engage in perspective-taking, to include accounting for the interest calculus of adversaries, allies, and other relevant actors?	
7	Does the team's strategy account for the need to conduct alliance management?	

8	Does the team adequately consider and integrate military factors and contributions?	
9	Does the team evince an adequate understanding of the substantive issues, to include an attention to local sociopolitical, ethical, and geographic dynamics?	
10	Is the team's presentation compelling, both stylistically and substantively?	

NOTE: This is a practice prompt. The prompt/scenario will be different than the practice one above, but the judging considerations will remain largely the same.

Memorandum to: Competition Judges and Teams

Memorandum from: Dave Oakley

Subject: Undergraduate Strategy Competition Scenario and Judging Considerations

Date: 15 April 2026

1. Purpose: This memorandum presents the competition prompt for the Undergraduate Strategy Competition and provides a set of considerations to guide judges in assessing team performance. These considerations are not prescriptive but are intended to support consistent and rigorous evaluation.

2. Strategic Scenario Context: By 2026, the Arctic has emerged as a critical arena of strategic competition due to climate change, shifting access to natural resources, and the opening of new maritime routes. Russia has significantly expanded its military presence in the Arctic over the past decade, including:

- Modernization and expansion of Arctic bases and airfields
- Increased naval and submarine operations in the High North
- Deployment of advanced air defense and anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) systems
- Efforts to assert control over the Northern Sea Route (NSR)
- In 2022, Russia operated 10-20% of its personnel and equipment across much of the Kola Peninsula.

At the same time, NATO's posture in the Arctic has evolved:

- Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO has expanded the alliance's geographic footprint in the High North
- NATO allies (e.g., Norway, Canada, the United States) have increased Arctic exercises and presence
- However, NATO lacks a coherent, unified Arctic strategy, and member states differ in priorities and threat perceptions. Tension also exists in NATO over the status of Greenland and the Trump Administration's recent push to acquire the territory from Denmark.

China has also increased its involvement as a self-declared "near-Arctic state," investing in infrastructure, research, and potential shipping routes—raising concerns about long-term strategic positioning. Recent developments have increased tensions:

- A series of close military encounters between Russian and NATO forces in the Arctic
- Disputes over freedom of navigation and control of Arctic sea lanes
- Growing competition over energy resources and undersea infrastructure

The Arctic remains a region of cooperation in some domains, but the risk of miscalculation, escalation, and strategic competition is increasing.

NATO now faces a central strategic question: how to balance deterrence, defense, and stability in the Arctic while managing escalation with Russia, accounting for emerging competition with China, and managing relationships among NATO members?

3. Develop a comprehensive NATO strategy for the Arctic in an era of renewed strategic competition with Russia, increasing involvement by China, and tension within the NATO alliance.

Your strategy should:

- Define NATO's policy aims in the Arctic
- Address how NATO should respond to Russian and Chinese posture and strategy in the Arctic

- Integrate military and non-military tools, including diplomatic, economic, and informational measures
- Consider the challenges of alliance cohesion, including differing priorities among Arctic and non-Arctic NATO members and tension that exists within the alliance
- Balance the need for deterrence with the risks of escalation and militarization

4. Judging considerations:

	Considerations:	Yes? Partially? No?
1	Does the team account for the differences between shared and member states' interests?	
2	Does the team provide evidence of having weighed alternative strategies?	
3	Does the team offer a coherent set of policy aims and strategy?	
4	Does the team offer a causal theory or explanation about how the recommended interventions will lead to the desired outcomes?	
5	Is the recommended strategy feasible, especially regarding the scarcity of means and resources?	
6	Does the team engage in perspective-taking, to include accounting for the interest calculus of adversaries, allies, and other relevant actors?	
7	Does the team's strategy account for the need to conduct alliance management?	
8	Does the team adequately consider and integrate military factors and contributions?	
9	Does the team evince an adequate understanding of the substantive issues, to include an attention to local sociopolitical, ethical, and geographic dynamics?	
10	Is the team's presentation compelling, both stylistically and substantively?	

5. Notes for Teams

- You are not constrained by current U.S. policy, but your strategy must be politically plausible and implementable.
- You should assume **resource constraints and competing global priorities** (e.g., Indo-Pacific, Europe).