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Introduction to Issue No. 27 of the *Journal of the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies*

We are pleased to present a new issue of the *Journal of the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies*, at a time when the international geopolitical landscape is becoming increasingly turbulent, complex, fragmented and unpredictable. The succession and, above all, the overlapping of crises and conflicts are shaping a strategic landscape characterised by competition between major powers, leading us towards growing uncertainty, in which it is becoming increasingly difficult to isolate regional events from the structural transformations the international system is undergoing.

The ongoing war in Ukraine, which has now become a protracted conflict with far-reaching consequences for European security and for relations between Russia and the West, is compounded by the emergence or intensification of other hotspots of instability. Particularly noteworthy among these is the war in Iran, which has once again placed the Middle East at the centre of the international strategic agenda and has highlighted, yet again, the extent to which regional conflicts can rapidly take on global implications. Added to this are the persistent tensions in the Indo-Pacific, growing competition in Africa and instability in other strategic regions.

We are therefore not merely facing an accumulation of crises. We are witnessing the symptoms of a more profound transformation of the international system. Power politics is once again gaining prominence and the scope for cooperation appears to be shrinking precisely at a time when global challenges would demand greater levels of coordination. The result is an increasingly fragmented world, in which alliances are becoming more flexible and multi-alignment more common, whilst alliances are less permanent, and numerous actors and middle powers seek to expand their scope for strategic autonomy.

This transformation is also taking place in parallel with a growing erosion of the rules-based international order. The multilateral norms, institutions and mechanisms built up over decades are finding it increasingly difficult to manage contemporary security crises. The United Nations, particularly its Security Council, is probably the most visible example of this situation. Vetoes, the conflicting interests of the major powers and the instrumentalisation of international institutions are reducing their capacity to provide effective responses to some of the major conflicts of our time.

We can thus speak of a gradual "demultilateralisation" of the international system. This does not necessarily mean the disappearance of multilateralism, but rather its weakening as the organising principle of international relations and the growing tendency of states to resort to limited coalitions, bilateral agreements, flexible partnerships or unilateral decisions to defend their interests. Multilateralism continues to exist, but it increasingly shares the stage with transactional and competitive dynamics that reflect a redistribution of global power.

It is precisely against this backdrop that the contributions featured in this issue of the journal are set. Six articles which, drawing on different approaches and methodologies, enable us to examine some of the most significant manifestations of this transformation of the international strategic landscape.

The first article, "Turkey Facing Strategic Uncertainty: Between Hedging and Decisive Projection in Syria, Libya and Somalia", by Carlos Ortega Sánchez, analyses the reconfiguration of Turkish foreign policy in an international environment marked by uncertainty and competition amongst major powers. The author examines the combination of two distinct strategic behaviours. On the one hand, Türkiye resorts to strategic hedging in scenarios such as Ukraine-Russia and Gaza-Israel relations, avoiding rigid alignments with more powerful actors. On the other hand, it pursues what the author terms "decisive projection" in priority areas such as Syria, Libya and Somalia, combining limited military instruments, political agreements, control over institutions and infrastructure, and soft power tools. This dual strategy provides a better understanding of Turkey's quest for strategic autonomy and its implications for Europe and the Mediterranean.

The second paper, "Strategic Coherence and Democratic Stability in Europe: Lessons from the Spanish Case for Political Risk Assessment (2012-2020)", by Marcos Lara Sánchez, extends the analysis to the sphere of European democracies and examines the consequences of the emergence of challenger parties within political systems. Drawing on a comparative study of Podemos, UPyD, Ciudadanos and Vox, the author analyses the relationship between political innovation, antiestablishment rhetoric and strategic coherence. The paper argues that the ability to maintain coherence between discourse, proposals and political action is a key factor in channelling discontent, and proposes observable indicators that can contribute to the ongoing assessment of political risk in European democracies.

The third article, "Technology and Armed Conflict: The Transformation of War in the 21st Century", by Tania Vidal López, addresses one of the most profound transformations in contemporary security: the impact of new technologies on the

nature and conduct of conflicts. In an increasingly multipolar and competitive international system, state and non-state actors have new tools at their disposal capable of exploiting the vulnerabilities of modern societies. Cyberspace has emerged as a new arena of confrontation that overlaps with traditional domains and enables the destabilisation of critical infrastructure and information systems. The article situates this development within the paradigm of hybrid warfare and demonstrates how the incorporation of digital tools is altering states' strategies, organisations and defence capabilities themselves.

The informational and cognitive dimension of this transformation is precisely the subject of the fourth paper, "Russian cognitive warfare in Africa: from the Sahel to the European Union", by Manuel José Gazapo Lapayese. The author examines the expansion of Russian influence operations in Africa, initially carried out through the Wagner Group and subsequently via Africa Corps. The analysis shows how Russia has exploited existing vulnerabilities in the information ecosystems of countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger to disseminate anti-Western narratives and shape social perceptions. These actions extend beyond the African context, as they contribute to creating environments less favourable to the European presence and affect the European Union's capacity for dialogue and strategic projection on its southern flank. The study therefore emphasises the need for comprehensive and coordinated responses in collaboration with African partners themselves.

The fifth article takes us to one of the key arenas of competition between major powers. In "An Uncomfortable Triangle: China, Taiwan and the United States. An Analysis Using Game Theory", Enrique Martín Quilis examines the complex strategic interaction between the three actors regarding Taiwan's status and the risk of a potential armed conflict. Using game theory and its dynamic extension, movement theory, the author constructs a sequential model that allows for the examination of different behaviours and issues of asymmetric information. The study highlights Taiwan's central role in this interaction, China's growing assertiveness, and the long-term difficulties that the traditional US policy of strategic ambiguity may present.

Finally, Daniel Flores Flores, in "The (un)just war of the United States against Venezuela: hegemony, oil and geopolitics in the 21st century", offers a critical analysis of US military actions in Venezuela based on the just war theory developed by Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in *Demócrates II*. The paper analyses the evolution of US policy from the "maximum pressure" strategy towards the direct use of force and examines the legitimising narratives linked to democracy, drug trafficking and security, as well as their relationship with strategic resources and US hegemony. Within the analytical framework adopted, the author argues that these actions do not meet the classical criteria that would allow them to be classified as a just war, and analyses their consequences for international law and regional stability.

This issue is rounded off with three reviews that broaden the discussion to other relevant areas of strategic studies.

The first, written by IEEE analyst Javier Fernández Aparicio, examines the book *National Armies and NATO, 1949-1991*, edited by Jan Hoffenaar and Brian

McAllister Linn. The book focuses on the relationship between the Atlantic Alliance and national armies during the period from its creation to the end of the Cold War, offering a historical perspective of particular interest at a time when NATO and its member states are once again facing significant debates on collective defence, capabilities and strategic adaptation.

The second review, by Diego Cánovas-Cánovas, presents *Ocean Governance and Conflict in the East and South China Sea* by Christian Schultheiss, a work devoted to maritime governance and the dynamics of conflict in the East and South China Seas. Its subject matter ties in directly with the growing strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific and with the tensions arising from sovereignty, maritime security and competition between regional actors and major powers.

Finally, Luis de la Corte Ibáñez reviews *A Deceptive World: The New Global Order in the Age of Algorithms and Manipulation* by Ángel Gómez de Ágreda. The book examines one of the major challenges of our time: the impact of algorithms, the manipulation of information and the transformation of the digital environment on our societies and on the international system itself. This subject is directly linked to several of the topics addressed in this issue, particularly the growing importance of the informational and cognitive domains in contemporary strategic competition.

The six articles and three reviews that make up this issue ultimately offer different perspectives on a single reality: the rapid transformation of the international system. From Türkiye to the Sahel, from Ukraine to the Indo-Pacific, from the evolution of our democracies to cyberspace and cognitive warfare, we are witnessing a growing interrelationship between power, technology, information, legitimacy and geopolitical competition.

In a world that is more turbulent, more complex, more fragmented and less multilateral, strategic analysis takes on renewed importance. Precisely when certainties diminish and the pace of events accelerates, it becomes all the more necessary to have spaces for rigorous, pluralistic and multidisciplinary reflection. This remains the fundamental purpose of the *Journal of the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies*: to contribute to a better understanding of an increasingly complex strategic landscape through rigorous academic analysis, thereby helping to anticipate its transformations and the challenges they may bring.