

Empathy and perspective-taking are critical yet underexplored skills in national security, human security, and conflict settings. While extensive research demonstrates the interpersonal benefits of empathy and seeing others' viewpoints (e.g. Zaki, 2019), unique challenges arise when applying these concepts amid conflicting interests and security threats. In such contexts, it can be hard to align the idea of understanding how other actors and particularly adversaries might perceive and experience the world with one country's own strategic and security imperatives, especially at times of heightened tensions. However, understanding the motivations and intentions of adversaries, competitors, allies and other parties through an empathetic lens can enhance decision-making and advance national and shared interests (McMaster, 2020; Shore, 2014; Berenji, 2023; Yorke, 2023). This makes it important not only for advancing academic understanding, but also for informing more effective policy and practitioner approaches.

Political Psychology advanced early work on empathy in security, strategy, and policymaking in which published a series of articles by Ralph K. White on "realistic empathy" (White, 1983; 1990; 1991). He defined realistic empathy as understanding how the world looks through another actor's eyes. Rather than feeling sympathy for another's plight, realistic empathy entails cognitively understanding another's perspective without judgment (White, 1967). From his initial conception, the notion of realistic empathy was interdisciplinary, putting psychological processes in strategic and international context. This special section aims to expand upon this past research in *Political Psychology* and continue the tradition of integrating academic disciplines to inform a richer and more nuanced understanding of our contemporary context.

In security settings, empathy and perspective taking are multi-level phenomena, by which observers and decision makers seek to understand the motives and intentions of actors at different levels of analysis, including individuals, groups, and nation-states (McMaster, 2020; Holmes and Yarhi-Milo, 2017; Kertzer et al, 2024; Ku et al, 2015). Understanding the perspectives and sensemaking of other actors is fundamental to strategic communication (Yorke, 2017), conflict resolution, and deterrence. Although research has focused primarily on the benefits of empathy and perspective taking, some research notes the darker side of empathy, such as taking advantage of counterparts in negotiations and engaging in moral/ethical violations (e.g. Bloom, 2017; Breithaupt, 2019). Thus, harnessing the benefits of empathy and perspective taking while avoiding ethical pitfalls is among the key challenges for educating security practitioners to use these skills in accordance with cultural and organizational values.

Moreover, empathy in security contexts raises questions around conceptual definitions, theoretical implications, and ethical considerations. We are therefore looking for contributions that advance our understanding of the concept, and its limitations in these contexts. Furthermore, as a lot of work on empathy in strategy has focused on an American perspective, this special section aims to highlight what the concept means in an international context and seeks contributions that will examine the diverse applications of empathy and perspective taking in security and strategy. To this end, it seeks theoretical, conceptual, and empirical contributions from political science,

psychology, international relations, and related fields that offer original case studies from around the world.

Potential research questions that this special section might address include:

- What are the limits and tensions of empathy in strategy and security settings?
- How can strategic empathy be inculcated across and within security organizations and strategic thinking?
- Where and how has strategic empathy contributed to reducing insecurity or enhancing engagement with adversaries?
- On the other side, how is strategic empathy experienced by adversaries?
- How might historical empathy inform contemporary strategy and security thinking?

These are just indicative questions, rather than an exhaustive list. We are especially keen to see a range of regional and national case studies and perspectives from diverse disciplines.

The timeline for this special section will be: Submission of proposals (a short abstract/ summary): **May 2025**; Decisions made in consultation with the journal's editorial team, and confirmation to selected authors: **June 2025**; First draft submission: **November 2025**; Reviews and decisions by editors: **Jan 2026**; Second review and final decisions: **April 2026**.

If you would like to submit a proposal for the special section, please send a title and abstract or short summary to the guest editors by May 2025: Prof. Allison Abbe (allison.abbe@armywarcollege.edu) and Dr Claire Yorke (claire.yorke@deakin.edu.au).

For those authors invited to participate, their papers should be submitted via the [Political Psychology manuscript submission system](#) and will be a part of the regular peer review procedure.