Special Notice
Information Innovation Office

Future Program: National Security Economic Theory (NASCENT)

DARPA-SN-26-26

January 09, 2026

PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENT

The purpose of this Special Notice is to provide public notification of additional research areas of interest to the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) Information Innovation Office (I2O), specifically for the forthcoming National Security Economic Theory (NASCENT) program by I2O Program Manager, David Rushing Dewhurst.

If released, the solicitation will be made available at https://sam.gov.

PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The NASCENT program seeks to create the theoretical foundation for geoeconomics[1] to eventually enable evidence-based economic statecraft in furtherance of U.S. national security objectives. If successful, NASCENT will form a principled foundation for national security economic strategy and define a new scholarly field of quantitative geoeconomics.

To promote U.S. national security objectives, the U.S. has applied tools of economic statecraft to engage in deterrence and combat its adversaries.[2] Yet the U.S. Government lacks tailored, effective, and predictable options, remaining equipped only with tools that are either too narrowly targeted for today's global competition (e.g., entity-level sanctions) or that can rapidly escalate tensions (e.g., nation-level embargoes).

NASCENT will test the technical hypothesis that economic mechanism design, computer science formal methods, and experimental economics can be combined to construct a robust scientific framework for geoeconomics. Such a framework would entail joint analysis of precisely defined national security objectives and economic incentives of diverse public and private entities.

NASCENT starts from the observation that all existing work in geoeconomics analyzes "forward" from existing economic structures, attempting to identify mappings from those structures to national security outcomes. Conversely, NASCENT would combine techniques from economic mechanism design, formal methods, and experimental economics to work backwards from precisely described desired national security states to understand what economic incentives and mechanisms enable those outcomes.

Ultimately, the NASCENT program seeks to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Enable theoretically rigorous and empirically grounded economic statecraft to be the norm across the U.S. Government.

2. Harness strategic surprise by building the methodologies and tools necessary to both anticipate and mitigate unintended consequences of economic statecraft.

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[1] Geoeconomics is the academic field of study of usage of economic levers to achieve national security objectives; economic statecraft is the actual usage of economic levers to achieve national security objectives.

[2] E.g., see a March 2025 speech by Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent: https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sb0045.

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NOTE: This Special Notice does not constitute a formal solicitation for proposals. This notice is issued solely for information and program planning purposes and is not a Request for Information (RFI). DARPA will not accept any submission against this notice. Interested parties to this notice are cautioned that nothing herein obligates DARPA to issue a solicitation.

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