# Cyber War versus Cyber Realities: Cyber Conflict in the International System

*By Brandon Valeriano, Ryan C. Maness*



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In 2011, the United States government declared a cyber attack as equal to an act of war, punishable with conventional military means. Cyber operations, cyber crime, and other forms of cyber activities directed by one state against another are now considered part of the normal relations range of combat and conflict, and the rising fear of cyber conflict has brought about a reorientation of military affairs. What is the reality of this threat? Is it actual or inflated, fear or fact-based?

Taking a bold stand against the mainstream wisdom, Valeriano and Maness argue that there is very little evidence that cyber war is, or is likely to become, a serious threat. Their claim is empirically grounded, involving a careful analysis of cyber incidents and disputes experienced by international states since 2001, and an examination of the processes leading to cyber conflict.

As the authors convincingly show, cyber incidents are a little-used tactic, with low-level intensity and few to no long-term effects. As well, cyber incidents are motivated by the same dynamics that prompt regional conflicts. Based on this evidence, Valeriano and Maness lay out a set of policy recommendations for proper defense against cyber threats that is built on restraint and regionalism.

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## Editorial Review

Review

"Valeriano and Maness have done real service to the field by taking cyber hyperbole down a notch and highlighting the need for better theory about and empirical evaluation of cyber conflict, even if they will not have the last word on the topic." --Jon R. Lindsay, Assistant Professor of Digital Media and Global Affairs, University of Toronto Munk School of Global Affairs

"Path-breaking...the first [book] to provide both theory and empirical evidence to bear on the subject. In doing so it is likely to direct all serious research on the subject in the immediate and medium term." --Paul F. Diehl, Associate Provost and Ashbel Smith Professor of Political Science, University of Texas-Dallas

"Why haven't more cyber wars occurred? Valeriano and Maness present theory and evidence to show why states exercise cyber restraint. Their book is a healthy corrective to the usual hype." --Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Harvard University and author of *The Future of Power*

"An important contribution to international relations theory and analysis. A path-breaking empirical work." --Nazli Choucri, Professor of Political Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

"Most books that touch on theories of cyber power are stuck in either the mire of technical realities or zoom in the other direction, into the stratosphere of 'battles' over cognition and perception. Neither is very relevant for understanding actual conflict between nations. With *Cyber War versus Cyber Realities*, Valeriano and Maness have a rare gem, a book rooted in a deep analysis of the true realities of cyber conflict from which they draw both lessons and theories with real relevance in national capitals." --Jay Healey, Director of the Cyber Statecraft Initiative, The Atlantic Council

"Valeriano and Maness have provided scholars with an impressive starting point that contributes towards greater understanding of the cyber security threat landscape as well as the prospect of a less threatening cyber future." --Francis C. Domingo, De La Salle University and the University of Nottingham, *Journal of Information and Technology*

"Cyber War Versus Cyber Realities is a groundbreaking empirical work and a necessary read for scholars focusing on cyber conflict and people generally interested in international relations." -- *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*

"Overall...the book is an essential contribution to the cyber security literature, and one that substantially advances the debate about the impact of cyber war as a term of reference and an empirical reality." --Joe Burton, *H-Net Reviews*

"Overall, this book provides a new perspective on cyber conflict, countering the media hype of impending Cyber Pearl Harbors or Cyber 9/11s. Further, it offers one of the first viable attempts to quantify the impact of cyber actions, and presents facts and evidence to support their theories. As such, [the authors] build a strong case for cyber policy based on moderation versus worst-case scenarios." -- *Small Wars & Insurgencies*

"Valeriano and Maness view cyber conflict through the lens of international relations and primarily focus on cyber interactions among states and directed towards states in the realm of foreign policy." --*Small Wars & Insurgencies*

About the Author

**Brandon Valeriano** is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Politics and Global Security at the University of Glasgow.

**Ryan C. Maness** is Visiting Fellow of Security and Resilience Studies at Northeastern University.

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