# Fairmont Prep KT --- Berkeley --- Aff vs. Palo Alto

## 1AC

### Contention 1 is Restraint

#### Trump is expanding US intervention in a laundry list of areas, big and small --- force is on the table.

**Kumar yesterday** [R Arun Kumar, 2-14-2025, 'Emperor' Trump and Imperial US Expansionism, People’s Democracy, https://peoplesdemocracy.in/2025/0216\_pd/emperor-trump-and-imperial-us-expansionism, Willie T.]

TRUMP is back. His foreign policy announcements, or rather, interventions, **clearly show his intentions**. What were imagined as statements made by a maniac are now turning out to be pronouncements made with all due seriousness. The real meaning of making ‘America Great Again’ is now becoming crystal clear.

Trump started his first day as president by signing **many executive orders**, one among them is renaming the **Gulf of Mexico as Gulf of America**. Innocuous it might seem, but it signals the **imperial ambitions** of the US. Historically, the US has occupied many territories belonging to Mexico. Now, by renaming the Gulf, he wants to erase history and rewrite it on his terms.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum displayed a historical map from 1607 and cheekily stated that going by the map and history, the entire North America should be called as ‘Mexican America’. She also took on the Google for bowing down before Trump and changing the name of Gulf of Mexico. She pointed out to Google that ‘any name change on maps could only apply to the 12 nautical miles surrounding a country’s coastline’. This means that Trump’s renaming of the Gulf does not apply to the entire waters of the Gulf and is only applicable to the US and not to Mexico or for that matter to the world. By standing up to Trump, she showed the world how to deal with him and his policies.

PANAMA CANAL

Trump’ imperial ambitions came out more openly through the statement he made about Panama and the Panama canal. He wrongly claimed that Panama canal is run by the Chinese and the US naval vessels and ships are being discriminated by levying higher tolls. All these allegations were denied by the president of Panama, but of course, Trump is not bothered about the truth. He threatened **Panama** that the US will ‘take back the canal’, even if that **means using force**. The reality is that the canal is managed by Panama and there is no discrimination on levying tolls.

Trump has recently declared that Panama bowed before his threats and has agreed to allow free pass to the US vessels. Panamanian President José Raúl Mulino denied the US State Department’s claims. The Panama Canal Authority said it had ‘not made any adjustments to the fees’. The people of Panama are against the statements and claims made by the US administration and want the sovereignty of their country protected at any cost. They still remember the US invasion of Panama on December 20, 1989 and are stating: “we rise, you know, we defend and we unite, after all, to defend our country and our people. Because it’s not about the canal, it’s about our integrity”. The determination of the people of Panama is reflected in their social media posts: ‘No way – this is not gonna happen again’.

THE CURIOUS CASE OF CANADA

Another statement of Trump that shook people and forced them to take notice is on Canada. Trump stated that he **would like Canada** to become the 51st state of the US. This took **everybody by surprise** because, unlike Panama, Canada is **not a small country**. Not only in size and economy, Canada is also a **part of the NATO alliance**, one of the **members of the ‘Five Eyes** Alliance’ and a partner in crime in many US projects across the world. In spite of all these factors, Trump was unfazed and continued with his insistence, which slowly made the Canadian government to accept that he is really serious and means what he is saying. If there were still any doubters in the Canadian administration, the imposition of 25 per cent tariffs on all Canadian goods (which were later revoked in order to give Canada a month’s time to reconsider its trading relations with the US) opened their eyes to the hard realities. On February 10, Trump announced that he planned to add a ‘25 per cent tax on all global steel and aluminium imports to the US beginning 12th March’. This is going to be another big blow on Canada’s economy.

Frightened by Trump’s threats, all the 13 premiers of Canada went on a visit to Washington to meet with the officials in the new administration. What transpired was contrary to their expectations. They hoped that together they would be able to convince the US not to punish them with such punitive measures as tariffs. But as clearly stated by the Premier of British Columbia, David Eby, “White House advisers urged us to take the President at his word”.

More than 75 per cent of Canada's exports go to the US and the two economies are thoroughly integrated. The US imports six million tonnes of Canadian steel and more than three million tonnes of aluminium products per year. Since 1988, after the signing of the US-Canada Free Trade Agreement, Canada has moved very close to the US. This has foreclosed many options that were open before it, and made Canada dependent on the US. Canadians were comforted with statements like both the countries share ‘shared values’ and should be together. Now the reality is striking them on their faces.

Canada needs to think of other options if it decides to stand up for its independence and integrity. People on the streets are opining that it is better to pay the costs, but retain their independence and integrity. But the elected leaders, representing the interests of the ruling classes are extremely worried about the costs and are trying to beg and persuade the US to be sympathetic to their interests. Though talk of retaliation through tariffs exists, there appears to be no sincerity and courage behind these statements. It is for this reason that a delegation of the premiers of all the states in Canada went to the US capital.

GREENLAND, MEXICO AND GAZA

Trump reiterated his proposal to buy ‘**Greenland’ from Denmark**, first made in 2019. He said buying Greenland is essential for American economic security, and ‘national security and freedom throughout the world’. “I don't really know what claim Denmark has to it, but it would be a very unfriendly act if they didn't allow that to happen because it's for the protection of the free world”, he stated. He expressed his confidence that the US would ‘get it’ and bizarrely claimed that “the people want to be with us”.

This proved to be another one of Trump’s false claims as a survey done by a media agency found that 85 per cent of Greenlanders stated that they do not want to be with the US. Both Denmark and Greenland, have condemned Trump’s preposterous claims.

On the question of tariffs, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum spoke to the US and also the people of Mexico by reiterating the principles of sovereignty and integrity. She agreed to address the concerns of the US about illegal migration and also drug smuggling, but not at the cost of compromising the sovereignty of Mexico. When the US accused Mexican government of according ‘safe havens for the cartels’, Sheinbaum rejected the slander and in a strongly worded statement said “if there’s such an alliance, it exists between US gun shops and the criminal groups”. Her firm dealing with the US won her many admirers not only in Mexico, but also around the world.

Trump has stunned the world by stating that **Gaza** is ‘hell of a place to live’ due to all the destruction and it needs to be ‘cleaned up’. He wants all the Palestinians residing in Gaza to be relocated to Jordan and Egypt, while the US will take over Gaza and develop into a ‘Middle-East Riviera’. According to him, this is the only lasting solution for the ‘middle-eastern problem’, which is inflaming the region for the past more than 70 years. Prime Minister of Israel, Netanyahu, who was standing beside Trump, could not hide his glee on hearing these words. Trump, in the name of bringing peace, is proposing all the Palestinians to forego their homes and land and leave it for the US and Israel to re-settle and develop it into a **tourist hub.** Such is his **outrageous contempt** for Palestine and the demand for Statehood.

The thread linking all the claims made by Trump – whether it is on **Panama**, **Mexico**, **Canada**, **Greenland**, **Gaza** or on **Ukraine** – is very clear. He wants the US to **control these regions** for their rich rare earth **minerals** and control the **routes** of navigation. Canada, Greenland, Ukraine all have rich rare earth reserves, which the US desperately needs. It needs to control the navigation routes for dominating the global trade and also ensure that it retains a hold and gets to decide who trades what and with whom. This is what really is behind Trump’s calculated, but seemingly crazy utterances.

The US realised that China is a major threat to its hegemony. The newly elected Defence Secretary unequivocally stated that it is not Russia or any other country that is a threat to the US. It is China and the Communist Party of China that is a major countervailing force to the US hegemony and thus a threat to the US. By identifying the Communist Party, Trump administration acknowledges that socialism and the Left are the only forces that are capable of standing up against capitalism’s ruthless exploitation and expansionism.

It is also for this reason, Trump placed Cuba in the list of State sponsors of terrorism, revoking the orders passed few days before the end of Biden’s presidency. Cuba condemned this move and defiantly stated that it would not kowtow before the US, and would continue to resist. It takes huge courage to take such a position, more so for a small country located within 90 miles of the US coast and already suffering severely from US imposed economic embargo. Cuba’s courage comes from the belief on its people and socialist conviction.

A major initiative of Trump was the deportation of immigrants. Thousands of immigrants are rounded off and deported. In this process, they are being inhumanly treated. We ourselves have witnessed how Indian immigrants are shackled, handcuffed and sent in a military airplane. Our government reacted very meekly on such a treatment. Now, Prime Minister Modi is on a trip to the US and all indications once again point to a meek submission before the US, unlike how countries like Mexico, Cuba and China are reacting.

Trump believes that America’s greatness depends on hegemony and **expansionism**. Nothing could be further from the truth. True greatness comes from standing with the people, serving their interests, and having the courage to assert independence, sovereignty, and the freedom to choose the system in which we want to live.

#### Guardrails are off for the second term.

**Brands 24** [Hal Brands, 5/27/2024, Henry A. Kissinger Distinguished Professor of Global Affairs at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, An “America First” World, Foreign Affairs Magazine, DOA: 1/30/2025, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/america-first-world-trump)// JZ

To be sure, **under Trump, the United States was hardly a passive superpower.** As **his trade war with China, ratcheting up of tensions with Iran and North Korea, and economic dustups with U.S. allies** between demonstrated, **Trump does believe Washington should throw its weight around when its interests are at stake.** He just doesn’t believe those interests include the liberal order U.S. power has long sustained.

AMERICA UNBOUND

**“America first” never got a full test during Trump’s presidency, thanks to the obstruction of more mainstream advisers, the opposition of Republican internationalists in Congress**, and the indiscipline of Trump himself. Yet **the** first two **factors could be less salient if Trump retakes the White House, given his growing ideological sway in the GOP and the care he will take to surround himself with acolytes this time around.** And regardless of whether Trump wins in November, **his ideas are increasingly central to the U.S. debate. So it’s worth imagining the contours and consequences of an “America first” agenda, consistently applied.**

#### Executive overreach allows Trump’s aggression --- affirming allows oversight and empirically spurs domestic checks.

**Saul 22** [Neil A. Saul 22, 1/14/2022, Recent graduate of the School of International Service at American University and Program Manager of the Prevention Practitioners Network at Washington, The ICC’s Potential to Check US Warmongering, Inkstick media, DOA: 1/29/2025 https://inkstickmedia.com/the-iccs-potential-to-check-us-warmongering/)// JZ

Advocates of a **restrained foreign policy** often **lament executive overreach, the unchecked authority to commit US forces to military actions abroad, and the curtailment of civil liberties as consequences of war.** The US **executive** has **gained** entirely **too much power in its ability to wage war**, originally delegated to Congress. This can be seen in the authorization of limited warfare in the 1973 War Powers Resolution or, since 9/11, Congress has delegated executive authority for waging war through the Authorization for Use of Military Force. While the tug-of-war between the White House and Congress is generally a domestic issue, there are other institutions that could rein in the abuse of US executive power to wage war, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC).

In his “Second Treatise of Government,” an inspiration to the American Declaration of Independence, John Locke affirmed that, “Where there is no law, there is no freedom.” Law, therefore, is the alternative to arbitrary power. The rule of law in foreign policy is just as essential to human freedom as the rule of law in domestic governance. **Foreign policy realists**, however, **recognize that powerful state actors — chief among them the United States — don’t often abide by the rules of international law, the laws of war, and state sovereignty.**

**To restrain the executive** and uphold **human rights, the US** has two choices: **Join the ICC** or create laws **that will hold its officials and armed services accountable to war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and aggression overseas.** The best option, however, is to do both.

For law to fill its role, there have to be incentives for all to abide by it, including the powerful and the weak, the large and the small, the just and the unjust. **International institutions like the ICC** certainly have their own set of problems, but **ultimately** can **serve as tools to hold states responsible for their questionable behavior, especially powerful states like the US.** For the US, joining the ICC is actually a sound strategy. **By cooperating with the ICC, the US would put in place an incentive structure to rein in lawless behavior, including overreach on the part of the US executive.**

**Committing the US to international law** and human rights **in our decisions about foreign policy and war**, therefore, **creates a safeguard against executive overreach, which is essential if we want to end endless wars.** As a president who has spoken about refocusing US foreign policy several times, President Joe Biden is well-positioned to pivot US foreign policy away from war and more toward restraint. Seeing the ICC as a way to improve US foreign policy and standing in the world, however, requires thinking outside the box and political will, both of which may be lacking in today’s White House.

WHY THE ICC?

**Many have railed against the ICC as an infringement on sovereignty because it restricts power, but that is the point** of a constitution: **To subject power to law.** Not only is **accountability for gross atrocity crimes well precedented in international law**, but **sovereignty is no excuse to shield policymakers from perpetrating these crimes.** Popular **criticisms** of the ICC cover three elements: **Jurisdiction**, the **potential for political power play, and weak enforcement** mechanisms. These criticisms, however, **are** not only **overblown** but **also unreasonable.**

ICC jurisdiction is narrowly defined and reserved only for the most heinous offenses, such as genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and aggression. The complementarity principle ensures that the Hague could only investigate and prosecute American officials where, according to Article 17 of the Rome Statute, the US is either “unable or unwilling.” More importantly, a US investigation into its own conduct essentially prohibits any ICC jurisdiction over US officials. Unfortunately, these investigations either get swept under the rug, like we’ve seen with recent US drone strikes, or war criminals like Eddie Gallagher are all together commuted.

In theory, updating the US legal code to include these atrocity laws is enough to address this concern, but there are significant gaps. The US has already signed and ratified the 1949 Geneva Conventions as well as the 1948 Genocide Convention. Additionally, in 2007, the Genocide Accountability Act was signed into law, further codifying genocide in the US penal code. While there is no international treaty with regards to crimes against humanity, the ICC refers to the “widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population,” including murder, extermination, torture, and sexual violence, among other heinous crimes. Yet, those **systematic crimes, individually illegal in US law, are not codified in such a way to curtail executive and military abuse overseas.**

Some may fear that a rogue prosecutor might indict US officials for political purposes. A remote logical possibility should not be an obstacle to embracing lawfulness. After all, **rogue prosecutors can go off the rails domestically too, but** that is a weak argument against having a criminal justice system. More significantly, **it has never happened.** While the **ICC prosecutor remains independent and can initiate an investigation on their own with the approval of the Pre-Trial Chamber**, the ICC’s previous prosecutors have never done so. Indeed, prosecutors only investigated situations referred to by member states themselves or by the UN Security Council or within states already signed on to the treaty that were “unable or unwilling” to conduct their own investigations.

Some may fear that a rogue prosecutor might indict US officials for political purposes. Yet, that has never happened.

The Trump administration raised populist fears about the ICC and even imposed sanctions on ICC officials, but the complementarity principle was clearly applied in Afghanistan: The prosecutor initiated an investigation but in March 2020, deferred by request of the Afghan government to investigate any alleged crimes — by all parties — on its own. In other words, the prosecutor has cooperated. Since the US withdrawal, the ICC’s new prosecutor, Karim A. A. Khan QC, has received incredulous pushback for his decision to focus on crimes committed by the Taliban and the Islamic State-Khorasan (ISK), rather than US forces. While this scrutiny bears merit, his justification is due to the reality that the ICC has limited resources and the crimes committed by the ISK “constitute a global threat to international peace and security.” The Taliban and ISK continue to commit gross atrocity crimes and it is therefore more prudent to shift resources to bring these criminals to justice.

The final, and probably most common criticism against the ICC is that it does not have the ability to enforce its decisions. Like all international bodies, the ICC is constrained by resources and relies on member-state cooperation. However, a lengthy list of arrests and convictions isn’t necessarily a measure of success either. Human rights scholars Geoff Dancy and Kathryn Sikkink have found evidence that **state parties who sign on to the Rome Statute are much more likely to adopt atrocity laws into their own domestic penal codes with the technical assistance of the ICC, resulting in more domestic prosecutions.** Therefore, **individual states that are able and willing to conduct their own trials and hold their own officials accountable is a better indicator of an effective institution than trials and convictions by the ICC.**

What’s more, **the ICC only prosecutes those top-level officials most responsible for gross atrocity crimes, not low-level offenders who carry out orders.** Therefore, **it isn’t US soldiers who would be at risk of prosecution, but US administration officials and policymakers. And those who make decisions and wield power**, in fact, are the very persons who most need to be constrained by law. Furthermore**, it would raise the stakes and change the calculations made by the executive when initiating military conflicts.**

COMMITTING TO ACCOUNTABILITY

Those who advocate **cooperation with the ICC** share the same goals proclaimed by those seeking to **constrain US military actions.** For instance, **the unfettered use of drone strikes through unilateral executive action, the repeal of both AUMFs, unilateral military intervention and state building, and the use of torture in Guantánamo.**

Lee Feinstein and Tod Lindberg, scholars on each side of the political spectrum, point out in their book “Means to an End” that **cooperation doesn’t** entail or **require the use of military action. It encompasses intelligence sharing, logistical and security assistance for investigators, judicial assistance and capacity-building for foreign domestic court systems, and more robust domestic laws against gross atrocity crimes**, all of **which** are tools that serve to **reinforce US commitment toward accountability** and to **deter the perpetration of such crimes in the future. That**, at least, **should be lauded by advocates for military restraint.**

It is a central tenet of the rule of law that if state officials engage in atrocious crimes and gross human rights abuses, they should be prosecuted and held accountable. Impunity to commit these crimes is incompatible with basic principles of constitutional government and is offensive to every principle of the American founding. **To take seriously commitments to restrain the executive and to uphold human rights**, the US has two choices: **Join the ICC** or create laws that will hold its officials and armed services accountable to war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and aggression overseas. The best option, however, is to do both.

#### Accession ensures Trump cooperates.

**CICC ND** [Coalition for the International Criminal Court, xx-xx-xxxx The Coalition for the ICC is a global civil society network of member organizations in 150 countries. "Joining the ICC," No Publication, https://www.coalitionfortheicc.org/joining-icc, DOA: 1-28-2025] shaan

When we say “**joining the International Criminal Court” we are referring to states ratifying, or acceding to, the Rome Statute, the Court’s founding treaty.** ICC member states also take on a whole range of legal, and moral, obligations.

**All ICC member states are obliged to cooperate with the Court and its decisions, and can be referred to the Assembly of States Parties for non-cooperation.** However, the enforcement of cooperation remains weak spot in the Rome Statute system.

ICC member states should also actively participate in the ASP and its annual sessions, and provide the ICC with high-level political support, along with technical assistance when necessary.

#### Otherwise, Trump’s imperial ambitions set up imperial competition between great powers, risking world war.

**Cave 25** [Damien Cave, covers global affairs after two decades reporting from dozens of countries @ the NYT, 1-8-2025, ‘Here We Go Again’: Trump’s Territorial Ambitions Rattle a Weary World, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/08/world/asia/trump-greenland-panama.html, Willie T.]

Diplomats in world capitals said they would zero in on what his administration does, rather than what Mr. Trump says. Bigger nations developed plans to soften or counter his threat of punitive tariffs. Smaller countries hoped they could simply hide from four more years of gale-force America First.

But it’s getting **harder for the world** to keep calm and carry on.

At Tuesday’s news conference at Mar-a-Lago, Mr. Trump declined to rule out the use of force in a potential land grab for Greenland and the Panama Canal. He vowed to rename the Gulf of Mexico the “Gulf of America.” He also said he could use “economic force” to turn Canada into the 51st state as a matter of American national security.

For those eager to parse substance from bluster, it looked like another performance of scattershot bravado: Trump II, the sequel, more unrestrained. Even before taking office, Mr. Trump, with his surprising wish list, has stirred up “here we go again” commentary from across the globe.

Beyond the chatter, however, are **serious stakes**. As the world prepares for Trump’s return, the **parallels** between his preoccupations and the distant age of American imperialism in the late 19th century are becoming **more relevant.**

Mr. Trump has already championed the era for its protectionism, claiming that the United States in the 1890s “was probably the wealthiest it ever was because it was a system of tariffs.” Now, he seems to be adding the focus from the 19th and early 20th centuries on territorial control.

What both epochs share is a fear of shaky geopolitics, and the threat of being locked out of territory with great economic and military importance. As Daniel Immerwahr, an American historian at Northwestern University, put it: “We are seeing a reversion to a **more grabby world.”**

For Mr. Trump, China looms — ready, in his view, to take territory far from its own borders. He has falsely accused Beijing of controlling the American-built Panama Canal. There is also the specter, more grounded in reality, of China and its ally Russia moving to secure control over Arctic Sea routes and precious minerals.

At the same time, **competition** is increasing all around, as some nations (**India**, **Saudi** **Arabia**) rise and others (**Venezuela**, **Syria**) spiral and struggle, creating **openings for outside influence.**

In the 1880s and ’90s, there was also a scramble for control and no single dominant nation. As countries became more powerful, they were expected to physically grow, and rivalries were redrawing maps and causing conflicts from Asia to the Caribbean.

The United States mirrored Europe’s colonial designs when it annexed Guam and Puerto Rico in 1898. But in larger countries, like the Philippines, the U.S. eventually chose indirect control by negotiating deals to advance preferential treatment for American businesses and its military interests.

Some believe that Mr. Trump’s fixation on Greenland, the Panama Canal and even Canada is a one-man revival of the debate over expansionist pursuits.

“This is part of a pattern of the U.S. **exerting control**, or trying to, over areas of the globe perceived to be American interests, without having to summon up the dreaded words ‘empire,’ ‘colonies’ or ‘imperialism,’ while still extracting material benefits,” said Ian Tyrrell, a historian of American empire at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia.

Mr. Trump’s threats of territorial takeover may be simply a transactional starting point or some kind of personal wish. The United States already has a deal with Denmark that allows for base operations in Greenland.

His suggestion of Americanization there and elsewhere amounts to what many foreign diplomats and scholars see as an escalation more than a break with the past. For years, the United States has been trying to curtail **Chinese ambitions** with a **familiar playbook.**

The Philippines is again a focus, with new deals for bases the American military can use in any potential war with Beijing. So are the sea routes that matter most for trade both in Asia and around the Arctic as climate change melts the ice and makes navigation easier.

“What the U.S. always wanted was access to markets, lines of communication and capacity for forward projections of material power,” Professor Tyrrell said.

But for some regions in particular, past as prologue inspires dread.

Panama and its neighbors tend to see Mr. Trump’s comments as a blend of both the 1890s and the 1980s, when the Cold War led Washington to meddle in many Latin American countries under the guise of fighting Communism. The Monroe Doctrine, another 19th-century creation that saw the United States treat the Western Hemisphere as its exclusive sphere of influence, has re-emerged into relevance alongside tariffs and territorial deals.

Carlos Puig, a popular columnist in Mexico City, said Latin America was more worried about Mr. Trump’s return than any other part of the world.

“This is Trump, with majorities in both houses, after four years complaining, a guy that only cares about himself and winning at all cost,” Mr. Puig said. “Not easy for a guy like that not to show that he is trying to fulfill his promises, no matter how crazy they are. I am not so sure everything is just bullying and almost comic provocations.”

But how much can Mr. Trump actually achieve or damage?

His news conference in Florida mixed vague threats (“It might be that you’ll have to do something”) with messianic promises (“I’m talking about protecting the free world”).

It was more than enough to awaken other nations, drawing rapt attention and resistance even before he has taken office.

The French foreign minister, Jean-Noël Barrot, on Wednesday warned against threatening the “sovereign borders” of the European Union — referring to Denmark’s territory of Greenland. He added that “we have entered an era that is seeing the return of the law of the strongest.”

What may be harder to see from Mar-a-Lago but is much discussed in foreign capitals: Many countries are simply **tired of the America Mr. Trump wants to make great again.**

While the United States is still a dominant force, it has less leverage than in the 1980s or the 1890s, not just because of China’s rise, but because of what many nations see as America’s own drift into dysfunction and debt, coupled with the surge in development by other countries.

The international system the United States helped set up after World War II prioritized trade in hopes of deterring conquest — and it worked well enough to build paths to prosperity that made American unilateralism less potent.

As Sarang Shidore, the director of the global south program at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft in Washington, explained, many developing nations “are savvier, more assertive and capable even as the U.S. has become less predictable and stable.”

In other words, today the world is **unsettled**. The postwar equilibrium is being shaken by wars in Europe and the Middle East; by the autocratic partnership of **China, Russia and North Korea**; by a weakened Iran that is seeking nuclear weapons; and by climate change and artificial intelligence.

The end of the 19th century was turbulent, too. The **mistake** Mr. Trump may be making now, according to historians, is thinking that the world can be calmed and simplified with additional U.S. real estate.

The **protectionist, imperialist age** Mr. Trump seemingly romanticizes blew up when **Germany and Italy sought a greater share** of the world. The result was **two world wars.**

“We saw how that went with 20th-century weaponry,” said Mr. Immerwahr, the author of “How to Hide an Empire: A Short History of the Greater United States.” “It’s potentially **far more dangerous** in the 21st.”

#### Extinction!

**Clare '23** [Stephen Clare; Effective Altruism Writer; June 2023; "Great power war"; 80000 Hours; https://80000hours.org/problem-profiles/great-power-conflict/; accessed 12-05-2024]

A modern **g**reat **p**ower **w**ar could see **nuclear weapons**, **bioweapons**, **autonomous weapons**, and other **destructive** new **technologies** deployed on an **unprecedented scale**.

It would **probably** be the **most destructive** event in **history**, **shattering** our **world**. It could **even threaten** us with **extinction**.

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We’ve come perilously close to just this kind of catastrophe before. On October 27, 1962 — near the peak of the Cuban Missile Crisis — an American U-2 reconnaissance plane set out on a routine mission to the Arctic to collect data on Soviet nuclear tests. But, while flying near the North Pole, with the stars obscured by the northern lights, the pilot made a navigation error and strayed into Soviet airspace.1 Soviet commanders sent fighter jets to intercept the American plane. The jets were picked up by American radar operators and nuclear-armed F-102 fighters took off to protect the U-2. Fortunately, the reconnaissance pilot realised his error with enough time to correct course before the Soviet and American fighters met. But the intrusion enraged Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, who was already on high alert amidst the crisis in Cuba. “What is this, a provocation?” Khrushchev wrote to US President John F. Kennedy. “One of your planes violates our frontier during this anxious time when everything has been put into combat readiness.” If the U-2’s path had strayed further west, or the Soviet fighters had been fast enough to intercept it, this incident could have played out quite differently. Both the United States and the USSR had thousands of nuclear missiles ready to fire. Instead of a nearly-forgotten anecdote, the U-2 incident could have been a trigger for war, like the assassination of Franz Ferdinand.

<<LINE BREAKS CONTINUE>>

**Competition** among the world’s **most powerful** countries **shapes** our **world** today. And whether it’s through future incidents like the lost U-2, or something else entirely, it’s plausible that it could escalate and lead to a major, devastating war.

Is there anything you can do to help avoid such a terrible outcome? It is, of course, difficult to imagine how any one individual can hope to influence such world-historical events. Even the **most powerful** world **leaders** often **fail** to predict the **global consequences** of **their decisions**.

But I think the **likelihood** and **severity** of **g**reat **p**ower **w**ar makes this **among** the **most pressing** problems of **our time** — and that **some solutions** could be **impactful** enough that **working** on them may be one of the **highest-impact** things to do with **your career**.

By taking action, I think we **can create** a **future** where the **threat** of **g**reat **po**wer **w**ar is a **distant memory** rather than an **ever-present** danger.

Summary

**Economic growth** and **technological progress** have **bolstered** the **arsenals** of the world’s **most powerful** countries. That means the **next war** between **them** could be **far worse** than **W**orld **W**ar **II**, the **deadliest conflict** humanity has **yet experienced**.

Could **such** a war **actually occur**? We can’t rule out the possibility. **Technical accidents** or **diplomatic misunderstandings** could **spark** a **conflict** that **quickly escalates**. Or **international tension** could **cause leaders** to decide they’re **better off** fighting than **negotiating**.

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It seems hard to make progress on this problem. It’s also less neglected than some of the problems that we think are most pressing. There are certain issues, like making nuclear weapons or military artificial intelligence systems safer, which seem promising — although it may be more impactful to work on reducing risks from AI, bioweapons or nuclear weapons directly. You might also be able to reduce the chances of misunderstandings and miscalculations by developing expertise in one of the most important bilateral relationships (such as that between the United States and China). Finally, by making conflict less likely, reducing competitive pressures on the development of dangerous technology, and improving international cooperation, you might be helping to reduce other risks, like the chance of future pandemics. Our overall view Recommended Working on this issue seems to be among the best ways of improving the long-term future we know of, but all else equal, we think it’s less pressing than our highest priority areas (primarily because it seems less neglected and harder to solve). Scale There’s a significant chance that a new great power war occurs this century. Although the world’s most powerful countries haven’t fought directly since World War II, war has been a constant throughout human history. There have been numerous close calls, and several issues could cause diplomatic disputes in the years to come. These considerations, along with forecasts and statistical models, lead me to think there’s about a one-in-three chance that a new great power war breaks out in roughly the next 30 years. Few wars cause more than a million casualties and the next great power war would probably be smaller than that. However, there’s some chance it could escalate massively. Today the great powers have much larger economies, more powerful weapons, and bigger military budgets than they did in the past. An all-out war could kill far more people than even World War II, the worst war we’ve yet experienced. Could it become an existentially threatening war — one that could cause human extinction or significantly damage the prospects of the long-term future? It’s very difficult to say. But my best current guess is that the chance of an existential catastrophe due to war in the next century is somewhere between 0.05% and 2%. Neglectedness War is a lot less neglected than some of our other top problems. There are thousands of people in governments, think tanks, and universities already working on this problem. But some solutions or approaches remain neglected. One particularly promising approach is to develop expertise at the intersection of international conflict and another of our top problems. Experts who understand both geopolitical dynamics and risks from advanced artificial intelligence, for example, are sorely needed. Solvability Reducing the risk of great power war seems very difficult. But there are specific technical problems that can be solved to make weapons systems safer or less likely to trigger catastrophic outcomes. And in the best case, working on this problem can have a leverage effect, making the development of several dangerous technologies safer by improving international cooperation and making them less likely to be deployed in war. At the end of this profile, I suggest five issues which I’d be particularly excited to see people work on. These are: Developing expertise in the riskiest bilateral relationships Learning how to manage international crises quickly and effectively and ensuring the systems to do so are properly maintained Doing research to improve particularly important foreign policies, like strategies for sanctions and deterrence Improving how nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction are governed at the international level Improving how such weapons are controlled at the national level Profile depth In-depth This is one of many profiles we've written to help people find the most pressing problems they can solve with their careers. Learn more about how we compare different problems, see how we try to score them numerically, and see how this problem compares to the others we've considered so far. Why might preventing great power war be an especially pressing problem? A modern great power war — an all-out conflict between the world’s most powerful countries — could be the worst thing to ever happen to humanity. Historically, such wars have been exceptionally destructive. Sixty-six million people died in World War II, likely the deadliest catastrophe humanity has experienced so far. Since World War II, the global population and world economy have continued to grow, nuclear weapons have proliferated, and military technology has continued to advance. This means the next world war could be even worse, just as World War II was much deadlier than World War I. It’s not guaranteed that such a war will break out. And if it does, it may not escalate to such a terrible extent. But the chance can’t be ignored. In fact, there are reasons to think that the odds of World War III breaking out this century are worryingly high. A modern great power war would be devastating for people alive today. But its effects could also persist long into the future. That’s because there is a substantial chance that this century proves to be particularly important. Technologies with the potential to cause a global catastrophe or radically reshape society are likely to be invented. How we choose to develop and deploy them could impact huge numbers of our descendants. And these choices would be affected by the outcomes of a major war. To be more specific, there are three main ways great power conflict could affect the long-term future: High international tension could increase other risks. Great power tensions could make the world more dangerous even if they don’t lead to war. During the Cold War, for example, the United States and the USSR never came into direct conflict but invested in bioweapons research and built up nuclear arsenals. This dynamic could return, with tension between great powers fueling races to develop and build new weapons, raising the risk of a disaster even before shots are fired. War could cause an existential catastrophe. If war does break out, it could escalate dramatically, with modern weapons (nuclear weapons, bioweapons, autonomous weapons, or other future technologies) deployed at unprecedented scale. The resulting destruction could irreparably damage humanity’s prospects. War could reshape international institutions and power balances. While such a catastrophic war is possible, it seems extremely unlikely. But even a less deadly war, such as another conflict on the scale of World War II, could have very long-lasting effects. For example, it could reshape international institutions and the global balance of power. In a pivotal century, different institutional arrangements and geopolitical balances could cause humanity to follow different long-term trajectories. The rest of this profile explores exactly how pressing a problem great power conflict is. In summary: Great power relations have become more tense. (More.) Partly as a result, a war is more likely than you might think. It’s reasonable to put the probability of such a conflict in the coming decades somewhere between 10% and 50%. (More.) If war breaks out, it would probably be hard to control escalation. The chance that it would become large enough to be an existential risk cannot be dismissed. (More.) This makes great power war one of the biggest threats our species currently faces. (More.) It seems hard to make progress on solving such a difficult problem (more) — but there are many things you can try if you want to help (more). International tension has risen and makes other problems worse Imagine we had a thermometer-like device which, instead of measuring temperature, measured the level of international tension.2 This ‘tension metre’ would max out during periods of all-out global war, like World War II. And it would be relatively low when the great powers3 were peaceful and cooperative. For much of the post-Napoleonic 1800s, for example, the powerful European nations instituted the Concert of Europe and mostly upheld a continental peace. The years following the fall of the USSR also seem like a time of relative calm, when the tension metre would have been quite low.4 How much more worried would you be about the coming decades if you knew the tension metre would be very high than if you knew it would be low? Probably quite a lot. In the worst case, of course, the great powers could come into direct conflict. But even if it doesn’t lead to war, a high level of tension between great powers could accelerate the development of new strategic technologies, make it harder to solve global problems like climate change, and undermine international institutions. During the Cold War, for instance, the United States and USSR avoided coming into direct conflict. But the tension metre would still have been pretty high. This led to some dangerous events: A nuclear arms race. The number of nuclear warheads in the world grew from just 300 in 1950 to over 64,000 in 1986. The development of new bioweapons. Despite signing the Biological Weapons Convention in 1972, the search for military advantages motivated Soviet decision makers to continue investing in bioweapon development for decades. Although never used in combat, biological agents were accidentally released from research facilities, resulting in dozens of deaths and threatening to cause a pandemic.5 Nuclear close calls. Military accidents and false alarms happened regularly, and top decision makers were more likely to interpret these events hostilely when tensions were high. On several occasions it seems the decision about whether or not to start a nuclear war came down to individuals acting under stress and with limited time. This makes international tension an existential risk factor. It’s connected to a number of other problems, which means reducing the level of international tension would lower the total amount of existential risk we face. The level of tension today Recently, international tension seems to have once again been rising. To highlight some of the most salient examples: China-United States relations have deteriorated, leading to harsh diplomatic rhetoric and protectionist trade policies that aim to reduce the countries’ economic interdependence. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has killed about a hundred thousand people so far, raised the risk of nuclear war, and sent United States-Russia relations to their lowest point since the Cold War. Chinese and Indian soldiers fought deadly skirmishes along their countries’ disputed border in 2020–21. These dynamics raise an important question: how much more dangerous is the world given this higher tension than it would be in a world of low tension? I think the answer is quite a bit more dangerous — for several reasons. First, international tension seems likely to make technological progress more dangerous. There’s a good chance that, in the coming decades, humanity will make some major technological breakthroughs. We’ve discussed, for example, why one might worry about the effects of advanced artificial intelligence systems or biotechnology. The level of tension could strongly affect how these technologies are developed and governed. Tense relations could, for example, cause countries to neglect safety concerns in order to develop technology faster.6 Second, great power relations will strongly influence how nations do, or do not, cooperate to solve other global collective action problems. For example, in 2022, China withdrew from bilateral negotiations with the United States over climate action in protest of what it perceived as American diplomatic aggression in Taiwan. That same year, efforts to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention were reportedly hampered by the Russian delegation after their country’s invasion of Ukraine raised tensions with the United States and other western countries. And third, if relations deteriorate severely, the great powers could fight a war. How likely is a war? Wars are destructive and risky for all countries involved. Modern weapons, especially nuclear warheads, make starting a great power war today seem like a suicidal undertaking. But factors like the prevalence of war throughout history, the chance that leaders make mistakes, conflicting ideologies, and commitment problems, make me think that conflict could break out anyway. On balance, I think such an event is somewhat unlikely but hardly unthinkable. To quantify this: I put the chance we experience some kind of war between great powers before 2050 at about one-in-three.7 War has occurred regularly in the past One reason to think a war is quite likely is that such conflicts have been so common in the past. Over the past 500 years, about two great power wars have occurred per century.8 Naively, this would mean that every year there’s a 2% chance such a war occurs, implying the chance of experiencing at least one great power war over the next 80 years — roughly until the end of the century — is about 80%.9 This is a very simple model. In reality, the risk is not constant over time and independent across years. But it shows that if past trends simply continue, the outcome is likely to be very bad. Has great power war become less likely? One of the most important criticisms of this model is that it assumes the risk is constant over time. Some researchers have argued instead that, especially since the end of World War II, major conflicts have become much less likely due to: Nuclear deterrence: Nuclear weapons are so powerful and destructive that it’s just too costly for nuclear-armed countries to start wars against each other.10 Democratisation: Democracies have almost never gone to war against each other, perhaps because democracies are more interconnected and their leaders are under more public pressure to peacefully resolve disputes with each other.11 The proportion of countries that are democratic has increased from under 10% in 1945 to about 50% today. Strong economic growth and global trade: Global economic growth accelerated following World War II and the value of global exports grew by a factor of almost 30 between 1950 and 2014. Since war disrupts economies and international trade, strong growth raises the costs of fighting.12 The spread of international institutions: Multilateral bodies like the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council promote diplomatic dialogue and facilitate coordination to punish transgressors.13 It is true that we are living through an unusually long period of great power peace. It’s been about 80 years since World War II. We just saw that a simple model using the historical frequency of great power wars suggests there was only a 20% chance of going that long without at least one more war breaking out. This is some evidence in favour of the idea that wars have become significantly less common. At the same time, we shouldn’t feel too optimistic. The numerous close calls during the Cold War suggest we were somewhat lucky to avoid a major war in that time. And a 20% chance of observing 80 years of peace is not that low.14 Structural changes might have dramatically reduced the likelihood of war. Or perhaps we’ve just been lucky. It could even be that technological advances have made war less likely to break out, but more deadly when it occurs, leaving the overall effect on the level of risk ambiguous. It just hasn’t been long enough to support a decisive view.15 So while the recent historical trend is somewhat encouraging, we don’t have nearly enough data to be confident that great power war is a thing of the past. To better predict the likelihood of future conflict, we should also consider distinctive features of our modern world.16 One might think that a modern great power war would simply be so destructive that no state leader would ever choose to start one. And some researchers do think that the destruction such a war would wreak globally makes it less likely to occur. But it would be hard to find anyone who claims this dynamic has driven the risk to zero. First, a war could be started by accident. Second, sometimes even prudent leaders may struggle to avoid a slide towards war. We could blunder into war An accidental war can occur if one side mistakes some event as an aggressive action by an adversary. This happened several times during the Cold War. The earlier example of the wayward American reconnaissance plane shows how routine military exercises carry some escalation risk. Similarly, throughout history, nervous pilots and captains have caused serious incidents by attacking civilian planes and ships.17 Nuclear weapons allow for massive retaliatory strikes to be launched quickly — potentially too quickly to allow for such situations to be explained and de-escalated. It is perhaps more likely, though, that an accidental war could be triggered by a technological malfunction. Faulty computers and satellites have previously triggered nuclear close calls. As monitoring systems have become more reliable, the rate at which such accidents have occurred has been going down. But it would be overconfident to think that technological malfunctions have become impossible. Future technological changes will likely raise new challenges for nuclear weapon control. There may be pressure to integrate artificial intelligence systems into nuclear command and control to allow for faster data processing and decision making. And AI systems are known to behave unexpectedly when deployed in new environments.18 New technologies will also create new accident risks of their own, even if they’re not connected to nuclear weapon systems. Although these risks are hard to predict, they seem significant. I’ll say more about how such technologies — including AI, nuclear, biological, and autonomous weapons — are likely to increase war risks later. Leaders could choose war All that said, most wars have not started by accident. If another great power war does break out in the coming decades, it is more likely to be an intentional decision made by a national leader. Explaining why someone might make such a costly, destructive, unpredictable, and risky decision has been called “the central puzzle about war.” It has motivated researchers to search for “rationalist” explanations for war. In his 2022 book Why We Fight, for example, economist Chris Blattman proposes five basic explanations: unchecked interests, intangible incentives, uncertainty, commitment problems, and misperceptions.19 Blattman's Five (Rationalist) Explanations for War This section discusses how great power tensions may escalate to war in the next few decades. It focuses on three potential conflicts in particular: war between the US and China, between the US and Russia, and between China and India. These are discussed because each of these countries are among the world’s largest economies and military spenders, and seem particularly likely to fight. At the end, I briefly touch on other potential large conflicts. Projected real GDP of the US, China, India and Russia according to a 2022 Goldman Sachs analysis Source: Author’s figure using data from: Kevin Daly and Tadas Gedminas, “Global Economics Paper The Path to 2075 — Slower Global Growth, But Convergence Remains Intact,” Global Economics Paper (Goldman Sachs, December 6, 2022), https://www.goldmansachs.com/intelligence/pages/gs-research/the-path-to-2075-slower-global-growth-but-convergence-remains-intact/report.pdf. United States-China The most worrying possibility is war between the United States and China. They are easily the world’s largest economies. They spend by far the most on their militaries. Their diplomatic relations are tense and have recently worsened. And their relationship has several of the characteristics that Blattman identifies as causes of war. At the core of the United States-China relationship is a commitment problem. China’s economy is growing faster than the United States’. By some metrics, it is already larger.20 If its differential growth continues, the gap will continue to widen between it and the United States. While economic power is not the sole determinant of military power, it is a key factor.21 The United States and China may be able to strike a fair deal today. But as China continues to grow faster, that deal may come to seem unbalanced. Historically, such commitment problems seem to have made these kinds of transition periods particularly dangerous.22 In practice, the United States and China may find it hard to agree on rules to guide their interactions, such as how to run international institutions or govern areas of the world where their interests overlap. The most obvious issue which could tip the United States-China relationship from tension into war is a conflict over Taiwan. Taiwan’s location and technology industries are valuable for both great powers. This issue is further complicated by intangible incentives. For the United States, it is also a conflict over democratic ideals and the United States’ reputation for defending its allies. For China, it is also a conflict about territorial integrity and addressing what are seen as past injustices. Still, forecasts suggest that while a conflict is certainly possible, it is far from inevitable. As of 8 June 2023, one aggregated forecast23 gives a 17% chance of a United States-China war breaking out before 2035.24 A related aggregated forecast of the chance that at least 100 deaths occur in conflict between China and Taiwan by 2050 gives it, as of 8 June 2023, a much higher 68% chance of occurring.25 United States-Russia Russia is the United States’ other major geopolitical rival. Unlike China, Russia is not a rival in economic terms: even after adjusting for purchasing power, its economy is only about one-fifth the size of the United States’. However, Russia devotes a substantial fraction of its economy to its military. Crucially, it has the world’s largest nuclear arsenal. And Russian leadership has shown a willingness to project power beyond their country’s borders. Country Military spending in 2021 (2020 USD, PPP adjusted) United States 801 billion China 293 billion India 76.6 billion United Kingdom 68.4 billion Russia 65.9 billion Top five countries by estimated military spending, 2021. Source: SIPRI Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine demonstrated the dangers of renewed rivalry between Russia and the United States-led West. The war has already been hugely destructive: the largest war in Europe since World War II, with hundreds of thousands of casualties already and no end to the conflict in sight. And it could get much worse. Most notably, Russian officials have repeatedly refused to rule out the use of nuclear weapons. Unchecked interests and intangible incentives are again at play here. Vladimir Putin leads a highly-centralised government. He has spoken about how his desire to rebuild Russia’s reputation played in his decision to invade Ukraine. Given their ideological differences and history of rivalry, it is reasonable to expect that the United States and Russia will continue to experience dangerous disagreements in the future. As of 8 June 2023, an aggregated forecast gives a 20% chance that the United States and Russia will fight a war involving at least 1,000 battle deaths before 2050. China-India India is already the world’s third-largest economy. If national growth rates remain roughly constant, the size of the Indian economy will surpass that of the United States’ sometime this century. India also has nuclear weapons and is already the world’s third-largest military spender (albeit at a much lower level than China or the United States). One reason to worry that China and India could fight a war is that they already dispute territory along their border. Countries that share a border, especially when it is disputed, are more likely to go to war than countries that do not. By one count, 88% of the wars that occurred between 1816 and 1980 began as wars between neighbours.26 In fact, China and India already fought a brief but violent border war in 1962. Deadly skirmishes have continued since, resulting in deaths as recently as 2020. Forecasters agree that a China-India conflict seems relatively (though not absolutely) likely. An aggregated forecast gives a 19% chance of war before 2035. Other dangerous conflicts These three conflicts — United States-China, United States-Russia, and China-India — are not the only possible great power wars that could occur. Other potential conflicts could also pose existential risk, either because they drive dangerous arms races or see widespread deployment of dangerous weapons. We should keep in mind India-Pakistan as a particularly likely conflict between nuclear-armed states and China-Russia as a potential, though unlikely, conflict between great powers with a disputed border and history of war. Plus, new great powers may emerge or current great powers may fade in the years to come. While I think we should prioritise the three potential conflicts I’ve highlighted above, the future is highly uncertain. We should monitor geopolitical changes and be open to changing our priorities in the future. Overall predictions Below is a table listing relevant predictions from the forecasting platform Metaculus, including the number of predictions made, as of 10 March 2023. Note the different timescales and resolution criteria for each question; they may not be intuitively comparable. Prediction Resolution criteria Number of predictions Metaculus prediction World war by 2151 Either: A war killing >0.5% of global population, involving >50% of countries totalling >50% of global population from at least 4 continents. Or: A war killing at least >1% of global population, involving >10% of countries totalling >25% of global population 561 52% World War III before 2050 Involving countries >30% of world GDP OR >50% of world population AND >10M deaths 1640 20% Global thermonuclear war by 2070 EITHER: 3 countries each detonate at least 10 nuclear warheads of at least 10 kt yield outside of their territory OR 2 countries each detonate at least 50 nuclear warheads of at least 10 kt outside of their territory 337 11% When will be the next great power war? Any two of the top 10 nations by military spending are at war “At war” definition: EITHER Formal declaration OR Territory occupied AND at least 250 casualties OR Media sources describe them as “at war” 25th percentile: 2031 Median: 2048 75th percentile: 2088 Never (not before 2200): 8% No non-test nuclear detonations before 2035 No nuclear detonation other than controlled test [Note the negation in the question. It resolves negatively if a warhead is detonated] 321 69% At least 1 nuclear detonation in war by 2050 Resolves according to credible media reports 476 31% I have previously independently estimated the likelihood of seeing a World War III-like conflict this century. My calculation first adjusts historical base rates to allow for the possibility that major wars have become somewhat less likely, and uses the adjusted base rate to calculate the probability of seeing a war between now and 2100. This method gives a 45% chance of seeing a major great power war in the next 77 years. If the probability is constant over time then the cumulative probability between now and 2050 would be 22%. This is aligned with the Metaculus predictions above. We can also ask experts what they think. Unfortunately, there are surprisingly few expert predictions about the likelihood of major conflict. One survey was conducted by the Project for the Study of the 21st Century. The numbers were relatively aligned with the Metaculus forecasts, though slightly more pessimistic. However, it seems a mistake to put too much stock in this survey (see footnote).27 We now have at least a rough sense of a great power war’s probability. But how bad could it get if it occurred? A new great power war could be devastating At the time, the mechanised slaughter of World War I was a shocking step-change in the potential severity of warfare. But its severity was surpassed just 20 years later by the outbreak of World War II, which killed more than twice as many people. A modern great power war could be even worse. How bad have wars been in the past? The graph below shows how common wars of various sizes are, according to the Correlates of War’s Interstate War dataset.28 The x-axis here represents war size in terms of the logarithm of the number of battle deaths. The y-axis represents the logarithm of the proportion of wars in the dataset that are at least that large. Using logarithms means that each step to the right in the graph represents a war not one unit larger, but 10 times larger. And each step up represents a war that is not one unit more likely, but 10 times more likely. Cumulative frequency distribution of severity of interstate wars, 1816-2007 Source: Author’s figure. See the data here. Data source: Correlates of War Interwar dataset, v4.029 What the graph shows is that wars have a heavy tail. Most wars remain relatively small. But a few escalate greatly and become much worse than average. Of the 95 wars in the latest version of the database, the median battle death count is 8,000. But the heavy tail means the average is 334,000 battle deaths. And the worst war, World War II, had almost 17 million battle deaths.30 The number of battle deaths is only one way to measure the badness of wars. We could also consider the proportion of the population of the countries involved who were killed in battle. By this measure, the worst war since 1816 was not World War II. Instead, it’s the Paraguayan War of 1864–70. In that war, 30 soldiers died for every 1,000 citizens of the countries involved. It’s even worse if we also consider civilian deaths; while estimates are very uncertain, it’s plausible that about half of the men in Paraguay, or around a quarter of the entire population, was killed.31 What if instead we compared wars by the proportion of the global population killed? World War II is again the worst conflict since 1816 on this measure, having killed about 3% of the global population. Going further back in time, though, we can find worse wars. Ghengis Khan’s conquests likely killed about 9.5% of people in the world at the time. The heavy tail means that some wars will be shockingly large.32 The scale of World War I and World War II took people by surprise, including the leaders who initiated it. It’s also hard to know exactly how big wars could get. We haven’t seen many really large wars. So while we know there’s a heavy tail of potential outcomes, we don’t know what that tail looks like. That said, there are a few reasons to think that wars much worse than World War II are possible: We’re statistically unlikely to have brushed up against the end of the tail, even if the tail has an upper bound. Other wars have been deadlier on a per-capita basis. So unless wars involving countries with larger populations are systematically less intense, we should expect to see more intense wars involving as many people as World War II. Economic growth and technological progress are continually increasing humanity’s war-making capacity. This means that, once a war has started, we’re at greater risk of extremely bad outcomes than we were in the past. So how bad could it get? How bad could a modern great power war be? Over time, two related factors have greatly increased humanity’s capacity to make war. 33 First, scientific progress has led to the invention of more powerful weapons and improved military efficiency. Second, economic growth has allowed states to build larger armies and arsenals. Since World War II, the world economy has grown by a factor of more than 10 in real terms; the number of nuclear weapons in the world has grown from basically none to more than 9,000, and we’ve invented drones, missiles, satellites, and advanced planes, ships, and submarines. Ghengis Khan’s conquests killed about 10% of the world, but this took place over the course of two decades. Today that proportion may be killed in a matter of hours. First, nuclear weapons could be used. Today there are around 10,000 nuclear warheads globally.34 At the peak of nuclear competition between the United States and the USSR, though, there were 64,000. If arms control agreements break down and competition resurges among two or even three great powers, nuclear arsenals could expand. In fact, China’s arsenal is very likely to grow — though by how much remains uncertain. Many of the nuclear weapons in the arsenals of the great powers today are at least 10 times more powerful than the atomic bombs used in World War II.35 Should these weapons be used, the consequences would be catastrophic. Graph showing that early nuclear weapons are 1,000s of times more explosive than previous conventional explosives Source: AI Impacts, Effect of nuclear weapons on historic trends in explosives

<<LINE BREAKS CONTINUE>>

By any measure, **such** a **war** would be **by far** the **most destructive**, **dangerous event** in **human history**, with the potential to cause billions of deaths.

The probability that it would, on its own, lead to **humanity’s extinction** or unrecoverable **collapse**, is contested. But there seems to be some possibility — whether through a **famine** caused by **nuclear winter**, or by reducing **humanity’s resilience** enough that **something else**, like a **catastrophic pandemic**, would be far **more likely** to reach **extinction**-levels (read more in our problem profile on nuclear war).

**Nuclear weapons** are **complemented** and **amplified** by a **variety** of other **modern military** technologies, including **improved missiles**, **planes**, **submarines**, and **satellites**. They are **also not** the only **military technology** with the **potential** to cause a **global catastrophe** — **bioweapons**, too, have the potential to cause massive harm through accidents or unexpected effects.

### Contention 2 is Lethal Autonomous Weapons

#### The US is integrating AI and warfighting --- Trump is downing restrictions.

**Khlaaf 25** [Dr. Heidy Khlaaf, Chief AI Scientist @ AI Now Institute & PhD in Computer Science @ University College London, 1-27-2025, The Rush to A.I. Threatens National Security, The New York Times, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/27/opinion/ai-trump-military-national-security.html, Willie T.]

Militaries are using artificial intelligence systems, which are often flawed and error-prone, to make decisions about who or what to target and how to do it. The Pentagon is already considering **incorporating A.I. into many military tasks**, potentially amplifying risks and introducing new and serious cybersecurity vulnerabilities. And now that Donald **Trump has taken office**, the tech industry is moving **full steam ahead** in its push to integrate A.I. products across the defense establishment, which could make a dangerous situation even more perilous for national security.¶ In recent months, technology industries have announced a **slew of new partnerships** and initiatives to integrate A.I. technologies into deadly weaponry. OpenAI, a company that has touted safety as a core principle, announced a new partnership with the defense tech startup Anduril, marking its entry into the military market. Anduril and Palantir, a data analytics firm, are in talks to form a consortium with a group of competitors to bid jointly for defense contracts. In November, **Meta announced agreements** to make its A.I. models available to the defense contractors Lockheed Martin and Booz Allen. Earlier in the year, the Pentagon selected the A.I. startup Scale AI to help with the testing and evaluation of large language models across a range of uses, including military planning and **decision-making**. Michael Kratsios, who served as chief technology officer during Mr. Trump’s first term and later worked as a managing director at Scale AI, is back to handling tech policy for the president.¶ Proponents argue that the integration of A.I. foundation models — systems trained on very large pools of data and capable of a range of general tasks — can help the United States retain its technological advantage. Among other things, the hope is that using foundation models will make it easier for soldiers to interact with military systems by offering a more conversational, humanlike interface.¶ Yet some of our country’s defense leaders have expressed concerns. Gen. Mark Milley recently said in a speech at Vanderbilt University that these systems are a “double-edged sword,” posing real dangers in addition to potential benefits. In 2023, the Navy’s chief information officer Jane Rathbun said that commercial language models, such as OpenAI’s GPT-4 and Google’s Gemini, won’t be ready for operational military use until security control requirements had been “fully investigated, identified and approved for use within controlled environments.”¶ U.S. military agencies have previously used A.I. systems developed under the Pentagon’s Project Maven to identify targets for subsequent weapons strikes in Iraq, Syria and Yemen. These systems and their analogues can speed up the process of selecting and attacking targets using image recognition. But they have had problems with accuracy and can introduce greater potential for error. A 2021 test of one experimental target recognition program revealed an accuracy rate as **low as 25 percent**, a stark contrast from its professed rate of 90 percent.¶ But A.I. foundation models are **even more worrisome** from a cybersecurity perspective. As most people who have played with a large language model know, foundation models frequently “hallucinate,” asserting **patterns** **that do not exist** or producing **nonsense**. This means that they may **recommend the wrong targets**. Worse still, because we **can’t reliably predict** or explain their behavior, the military officers supervising these systems may **be unable to distinguish correct** recommendations from erroneous ones.¶ Foundation models are also often trained and informed by troves of personal data, which can include our faces, our names, even our behavioral patterns. Adversaries could trick these A.I. interfaces into giving up the sensitive data they are trained on.¶ Building on top of widely available foundation models, like Meta’s Llama or OpenAI’s GPT-4, also introduces cybersecurity vulnerabilities, creating vectors through which hostile nation-states and rogue actors can hack into and harm the systems our national security apparatus relies on. Adversaries could “poison” the data on which A.I. systems are trained, much like a poison pill that, when activated, allows the adversary to manipulate the A.I. system, making it behave in dangerous ways. You can’t fully remove the threat of these vulnerabilities without fundamentally changing how large language models are developed, especially in the context of military use.¶ Rather than grapple with these potential threats, the White House is **encouraging full speed ahead**. Mr. Trump has already repealed an executive action issued by the Biden administration that tried to address these concerns — an indication that the White House will be **ratcheting down its regulation** of the sector, not scaling it up.

#### Affirming solves --- it’ll hold developers liable for unjustified aggression.

**Hassan 23** [F.M. Hassan, PhD in International Criminal Law @ the University of Aberdeen & Law Professor @ University Sains Islam Malaysia, 2023, AI-Based Autonomous Weapons and Individual Criminal Responsibility Under the Rome Statute, Journal of Digital Technologies and Law, https://www.lawjournal.digital/jour/article/view/188, GZR + Willie T.] \*\*brackets in original\*\*

War has become a tool for states to expand its territories where they have resorted to armed conflicts (Kalmanovitz, 2022; Kohama, 2019). During the armed conflict, various methods and means of warfare have been used which resulted into casualties for both or all sides, depending on how many parties or states have involved in the armed conflict (Bantekas, 2022). The warfare or types of weapons have evolved and changed tremendously, especially during and after the outbreak of both World Wars I and II (Fennell, 2019). Conventional weapons such as swords, knives, bows, gunpowder have been replaced with nuclear arms since then. Nonetheless, many states have now resorted to autonomous weapons via artificial intelligence (AI) as the latest technology to be used as its warfare (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Autonomous weapon is based on the AI which is the latest technology developed many countries and to be used as a weapon system that once activated, can select and engage targets without further intervention by a human operator (Horowitz, 2019). This type of weapon replaces ordinary human fighters (Hareth & Evans, 2023).¶ Autonomous Weapon in Artificial Intelligence¶ Autonomous weapon in artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics, autonomy simply refers to the ability to function for an **extended period without the assistance of a human operator**. Since war is divisive, many military applications of AI and robotics are also **contentious** (Amoroso & Tamburrini, 2021). The development and use of lethal autonomous weapons systems capable of **autonomously making life and death decisions** regarding human targets is perhaps the most contentious aspect of this topic. Cruise missiles, some argue, are a type of lethal autonomous weapons system. The Patriot missile system, the AEGIS naval weapons system, the Phalanx weapons system, and the Israeli Harpy weapons system are all examples of lethal autonomous weapons systems in use today (Payne, 2021). Defensive weapons include the Patriot, AEGIS, and Phalanx systems (Bartneck et al., 2021). In short, not all military robots are lethal.¶ The term “military robot” encompasses a wide range of non-lethal applications (Bartneck et al., 2021; Krishnan, 2009). Autonomous robots might be employed in mine clearance, explosive ordnance disposal, command and control, reconnaissance, intelligence, mobile network nodes, rescue missions, supply and resupply missions, and support operations, among other things (Burgess, 2017). Debates about military robots may differ depending on the robot’s role (Malle et al., 2019). It is important to define some commonly used terms to illustrate the robot’s and human’s role in relation to war. In AI and robotics, autonomy simply refers to the ability to function for an extended period without the assistance of a human operator (Totaro, 2023). Robots may have autonomy over their immediate decisions, but they generally do not have autonomy over their goal selection (Javdani et al., 2018). A weapon is said to be “autonomous” in the “critical functions of targeting” if it can perform one or more of the following without the assistance of a human operator. If the weapon can choose which types of objects to engage, it will be autonomous in terms of defining its targets (Ekelhof, 2017). This capability is not currently available on AWS. If a weapon can use sensors to select a target without the assistance of a human operator, it is said to have autonomy in the targeting selection function.¶ Many existing weapons can select targets without the assistance of a human operator. When a weapon can fire on a target without the intervention of a human operator, it is said to have autonomy in the engage function of targeting. Many existing weapons can engage previously selected targets. The Patriot anti-missile system, for example, can select targets autonomously but requires a human operator to press a confirm button before launching a missile. Once launched, the missile can hit its target without the assistance of a human operator. Human control of a Patriot missile is not possible due to the speeds involved (Bartneck et al., 2021).¶ Many other functions may be “autonomous” for an AWS. It may be able to take off and land autonomously, as well as navigate autonomously. However, this non-lethal “autonomy” is not generally regarded as morally dubious. Autonomous weapons are frequently referred to as “killer robots” in media reports. Some people object to the term’s use. The phrase is described as a “insidious rhetorical trick” (Lokhorst & Van Den Hoven 2012). The “Campaign to Stop Killer Robots” believes otherwise. This is an umbrella organisation of human rights organisations seeking a global ban on lethal autonomous weapons systems (Bartneck et al., 2021).¶ Autonomous Weapon at the International Level¶ When many countries around the world criticise autonomous weapons, it only raises one critical issue: the risks of their use for humankind as well as military and war purposes. According to those who promote the benefits of autonomous weapons, the AI technology poses risks and benefits. The norms in deciding to regulate this contentious area of technology are the analysis of risks and benefits for lethal and non-lethal purposes. This would raise ethical and legal concerns about the use of autonomous weapons under international law. Before delving deeper into the autonomous weapon based on artificial intelligence as a method of warfare, it is necessary to review the series of incidents that led to legal regulation in this area.¶ Autonomous weapons based on artificial intelligence were previously discussed in 2010, when Philip Alston, then Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Executions, raised the issue in his interim report to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly 65th Session. Alston affirmed that “automated technologies are becoming increasingly sophisticated, and artificial intelligence reasoning and decision-making abilities are actively being researched and receive significant funding. States’ militaries and defence industry developers are collaborating to develop ‘fully autonomous capability’, which will allow unmanned aerial vehicles to make and execute complex decisions, including the identification of human targets and the ability to kill them”1. Subsequently, in 2013, Christof Heyns, who was Special Rapporteur for Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions at the time, released a report that articulated further on the issues raised by what he called “lethal autonomous robotics”.¶ Just after a recommendation by the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters at the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly, the Convention on the Prohibition or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Considered Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects, as revised on 21 December 2001, began discussing autonomous weapons systems in 2014. To address this issue, the Group of Governmental Experts on Emerging Technologies in the Area of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (GGE on LAWS) was formed in 2016. While the group has continued to meet since then, no concrete steps towards a normative framework on autonomous weapons have been taken as of September 2022.¶ For the first time at the United Nations General Assembly, countries from around the world issued a joint statement on autonomous weapons systems. This was the largest cross-regional group statement ever made during UN discussions on the issue, with 70 states participating. While discussions at the UN CCW have yielded no results, the statement at the UNGA demonstrates states’ widespread commitment to moving forward with a new international framework for autonomous weapons systems. The statement, delivered on behalf of the group by Ambassador Alexander Kmentt, Director of the Disarmament, Arms Control, and Non-proliferation Department at the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, consolidates key elements of the urgently needed international response, inter alia, “[r]ecognising that autonomous weapons systems raise serious humanitarian, legal, security, technological, and ethical concerns; [r]ecognise the importance of maintaining human responsibility and accountability when using force; and [t]he importance of internationally agreed rules and limits, including a combination of prohibitions and regulations on autonomous weapons systems”2¶ are emphasised.¶ International Law on Autonomous Weapons¶ The Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects as amended on 21 December 2001, or the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW)3 is often widely recognised as the Inhumane Weapons Convention. The Convention’s goal is to prohibit or limit the use of specific types of weapons that are thought to cause unnecessary or unjustifiable suffering to combatants or to affect civilians indiscriminately. The CCW’s distinct structure aims to ensure adaptability in dealing with new developments in armed conflicts and weapon technologies.¶ The Framework Convention sets out the general operating provisions, such as rules for joining the regime and the ability to negotiate and adopt new protocols. The Protocols to the Convention contain substantive prohibitions and restrictions on specific types of weapons. The Convention, which included three annexed protocols, was adopted on 10 October 1980, and opened for signature on 10 April 1981 for a one-year period. The Convention was signed by 50 states and went into effect on December 2, 1983. There were initially three protocols namely Protocol I on ‘Non-Detectable Fragments’; Protocol II on the ‘Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby Traps and Other Devices’ and Protocol III on the ‘Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Incendiary Weapons’.¶ However, there were later additions of the Protocols namely Protocol IV on the ‘Blinding Laser Weapons’ which was adopted on 13 October 1995 during the First Review Conference of the States parties to the Convention pursuant to Article 8(3)(b) of the CCW and entered into force on 30 July 1998 as well as Protocol on the ‘Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-Traps and Other Devices’ as amended on 3 May 1996 (Amended Protocol II) adopted at the First Review Conference, pursuant to Article 8 (1)(b) of the CCW and entered into force on 3 December 1998. There was also an amendment to Article 1 which extends the scope of application of the CCW to also cover situations of non-international armed conflict, adopted at the Second Review Conference in December 2001 pursuant to Article 8 (1)(b) of the CCW and entered into force on 18 May 2004. Lastly, Protocol V on the ‘Explosive Remnants of War;’ the first multilaterally negotiated instrument to deal with the problem of unexploded and abandoned ordnance was adopted on 28 November 2003 by the Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention pursuant to Article 5 (3) of the CCW and entered into force on 12 November 2006.¶ The International Criminal Court (ICC) and Its Jurisdiction¶ The Rome Statute was adopted by the international community on July 19984 and came into force in 2002 which established the International Criminal Court (ICC) which mentions under Preamble 10 and Article 1 of the Rome Statute. The ICC became the first and the most awaited permanent international criminal court (Pella, 1950) to end impunity of international crimes (Schabas, 2009) of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression as provided under Articles 6, 7, 8, 8bis and 15ter respectively. The ICC was created after a series of ad hoc tribunals established by the international community since the outbreak of the World War II by the victors allies which were the International Military Tribunal (IMT) in Nuremberg through the London Agreement6 and the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) in Tokyo through a declaration made by General MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers of the World War II7 and two of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY)8 and Rwanda (ICTR)9 acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter in the 1990s.10¶ Unlike the International Court of Justice (ICJ) which only has jurisdiction over states,11 the ICC only has jurisdiction over natural persons as stipulated under Article 25(1) of the Rome Statute who must be over 18 years old at the time of the commission of the crimes, or else they will be considered as under age as stipulated under Article 26 of the Rome Statute. Similarly, other parts of the Rome Statute also specifically mention the word ‘person’, among others, Article 1 which states that ‘…shall have the power to exercise its jurisdiction over persons…’, Article 20 which mentions ‘…no person…’ and ‘…the person…’, Article 22 which elucidates ‘…a person’ and ‘…the person…’ as well as Article 23 which refers ‘…a person’.¶ Since these crimes are international crimes in nature, states have the obligation to investigate and prosecute them (Hassan & Osman, 2019). If states are either unable or unwilling to do so, the ICC will take over to exercise its jurisdiction over these crimes under the **complementary principle** as stipulated under **Article 17** of the Rome Statute. In other words, national authorities will be the forum conveniens; latin words mean the most appropriate court to solve a particular dispute or case, has first-hand jurisdiction and are either able and willing to investigate or prosecute the individual perpetrators of the alleged crimes.¶ Individual Criminal Responsibility Under the ICC Jurisdiction¶ As mentioned under Article 10 of the Rome Statute, ‘[n]othing in this Part shall be interpreted as limiting or prejudicing in any way existing or developing rules of international law for purposes other than this Statute12. As we have discussed in the previous parts of this paper, there are several treaties which have been adopted by the international community to regulate autonomous weapons based on AI. Moreover, Article 21 of the Rome Statute allows the ICC to apply, ‘where appropriate, applicable treaties and the principles and rules of international law, including the established principles of the international law of armed conflict’ to decide cases brought before it13. Although the Rome Statute does not restrict the development of international law and its applicability to the ICC when deciding any cases brought before it, still the one who will be investigated and stand trials before it is only natural persons in accordance with Article 25(1) of the Rome Statute, regardless of his or her official positions as the head of state, head of government or other officials as enumerated under Article 27(1) of the Rome Statute.¶ The notion of prosecuting persons or individuals **regardless of his or her official positions** for committing international crimes by the ICC is not new but has been practiced by **numerous international tribunals** such as the IMT under Articles 6 and 7 of the IMT Charter, the IMTFE under Articles 5 and 6 of the IMTFE Charter, the ICTY pursuant to Articles 6 and 7 of ICTY the Statute and the ICTR by virtue of Articles 5 and 6 of the ICTR Statute. As for the ICC, Article 25(3) of the Rome Statute further provides six (6) different modes or situations for a person to be criminally responsible and liable for punishment for a crime within the jurisdiction of the Court which contains both basic rules of individual criminal responsibility and rules expanding attribution (Ambos, 2016).¶ I. If that person commits the crime14¶ As for the first mode of criminal liability under the Article 25(3)(a) of the Rome Statute, it provides that a person shall be criminally responsible and liable for punishment for a crime within the jurisdiction of the Court if that person ‘[c]ommits such a crime, whether as an individual, jointly with another or through another person, regardless of whether that other person is criminally responsible’15. It is universally accepted criminal law principle16 as held by the International Military Tribunal (IMT) at Nuremberg on the principle of individual criminal responsibility that ‘[c]rimes against international law are committed by men, not by abstract entities, and only by punishing individuals who commit such crimes can the provisions of international law be enforced’17. Under this mode of individual criminal responsibility, it ‘refers to three forms of perpetration: on one’s own, as a co-perpetrator or through another person (perpetration by means)18.¶ II. If that person orders, solicits or induces the commission of the crime¶ As for the second mode of criminal liability under the Article 25(3)(b) of the Rome Statute, it provides that a person shall be criminally responsible and liable for punishment for a crime within the jurisdiction of the Court if that person ‘[o]rders, solicits or induces the commission of such a crime which in fact occurs or is attempted’19;¶ III. If that person facilitates the commission of the crime¶ As for the third mode of criminal liability under the Article 25(3)(c) of the Rome Statute, it provides that a person shall be criminally responsible and liable for punishment for a crime within the jurisdiction of the Court if that person facilitates the commission of the crimes by aiding, abetting or otherwise assisting in its commission or its attempted commission, including providing the means for its commission;¶ IV. If that person in any way contributes to the commission or attempted commission of such a crime by a group of persons acting with a common purpose¶ As for the fourth mode of criminal liability under the Article 25(3)(d) of the Rome Statute, it provides that a person shall be criminally responsible and liable for punishment for a crime within the jurisdiction of the Court if that person ”[i]n any other way contributes to the commission or attempted commission of such a crime by a group of persons acting with a common purpose”20. Such contribution shall be intentional and shall either ‘[b]e made with the aim of furthering the criminal activity or criminal purpose of the group, where such activity or purpose involves the commission of a crime within the jurisdiction of the Court’21 or ‘[b]e made in the knowledge of the intention of the group to commit the crime’22;¶ V. In respect of the crime of genocide, directly and publicly incites others to commit genocide; and¶ VI. Attempts to commit such a crime by taking action that commences its execution by means of a substantial step, but the crime does not occur because of circumstances independent of the person’s intentions. However, a person who abandons the effort to commit the crime or otherwise prevents the completion of the crime shall not be liable for punishment under this Statute for the attempt to commit that crime if that person completely and voluntarily gave up the criminal purpose.¶ Individual Criminal Responsibility and the Autonomous Weapons Based on AI¶ If linking those individuals or persons responsible to the crime can be very difficult, particularly when they are geographically and structurally remote from the scene of the crime, what more the ‘perpetrators’ of the ICC crimes are allegedly committed by autonomous weapons of AI which are not human beings. Article 36 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions 194923 states that reviewing the legality of the intended deployment of the new weapon is an obligation of a state. It is crucial to ensure that the armed forces of a State are capable of carrying out hostilities in line with their international responsibilities (Lawand, 2006). Article 36(2) of Additional Protocol I further mention that, when developing new weapon technology, lawyers and politicians need to maintain in respect of the law and accountability for those who seriously violate the law as stipulated under Article 49 of the Geneva Convention I24.¶ Under Article 49 of the Geneva Convention I, is states that ”[t]he High Contracting Parties undertake to enact any legislation necessary to provide effective penal sanctions for persons committing, or ordering to be committed, any of the grave breaches of the present Convention”25. Moreover, it mentions that ”[e]ach High Contracting Party shall be under the obligation to search for persons alleged to have committed, or to have ordered to be committed, such grave breaches, and shall bring such persons, regardless of their nationality, before its own courts. It may also, if it prefers, and in accordance with the provisions of its own legislation, hand such persons over for trial to another High Contracting Party concerned, provided such High Contracting Party has made out a ‘prima facie’ case”26.¶ As for autonomous weapons based on AI which are fully unmanned, orders from the operators have been pre-programmed and as such, the legal responsibility for any actions must be expected to transfer from the operators to the system conducted by the AI. However, a question of legal obligations will arise; whether any decisions made by the weapon will be borne by the weapon or its operators? In this sense, no one can be held accountable if he or she is willing to offend or behave passively. However, a weapon system’s **designer**, **programmer**, or **manufacturer** could also be held liable only to the extent if they willfully to contributed to the crime commission (McFarland & McCormack, 2014).¶ Since autonomous weapons, particularly those which are free of human intervention where AI entirely controls them, there are no choice for human actors to exercise empathy or judgment (Gunawan et al., 2022). Human influence over weapons systems and force use need to meet legal and ethical demands, as mentioned by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in its statement on the Meeting of Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) in Geneva on 11 April 2017 to the CCW.¶ Conclusion¶ The advancement of technology has reached a **high standard and demand** by the international community in order to protect its borders and citizens not only from being **invaded** and **attacked by outsiders**, but also to protect their troops from being targeted and killed. This led to the creation of the new technology in weaponry of autonomous weapons based on AI. However, such technology does **not free from any responsibility** under international law and has received many criticisms and concerns by the international community due to attacks by to be taken and done by autonomous weapons based on AI which could still incur casualties from the non-military objectives. Since the creation of the ICC in 2002 via the Rome Statute, the latter provides a **solution** even to the most advanced weapons such as **unmanned autonomous weapons** based on AI whereby individuals behind the creation and manning such weapons would be **criminally liable** if they went **beyond the borders** allowed under the law in order to win the war or involved in armed conflicts.

#### Perceptually, AI developers are risk averse to liability.

**Smith 22** [Maggie Smith, US Army cyber officer currently assigned to the Army Cyber Institute @ the United States Military Academy & assistant professor in the Department of Social Sciences @ West Point, 6-21-2022, With Artificial Intelligence, Short-Term Risk Aversion is Long-Term Risk Seeking, Modern War Institute, https://mwi.westpoint.edu/with-artificial-intelligence-short-term-risk-aversion-is-long-term-risk-seeking/, Willie T.]

Different Futures¶ But as the autonomous systems revolution unfolds, there is divergence in how ML-based AI is perceived and in predictions about the technology’s future. One perspective is rooted in optimism, offering a utopian future in which AI benefits humankind and has a net-positive impact. Jobs will be created; catastrophes such as climate change and nuclear holocaust will be averted; and humans will be better able to self-actualize. The alternative perspective envisions a dystopian future in which AI takes over but lacks the ability to understand humanity and therefore wreaks havoc on humankind and society. Predictions that account for Moore’s Law increase the complexity of how AI could shape the future: as processors reach the atomic level, experts speculate that exponential growth in processing power may end, thereby creating a physical limit that will prevent AI from reaching singularity—or the time when the abilities of a computer overtake the abilities of the human brain. And even though quantum computing holds potential for AI, and may bridge the current theoretical limits on processing, unknowns abound.¶ Specifically, there are two key **areas of concern**—especially for the implementation of AI-powered technologies on the battlefield: AI development and AI implementation. Namely, it is unclear if developers should wait for a notionally perfect, safe solution before implementing AI technology, or if they should introduce AI technology after it reaches an acceptable level of proficiency and allow it to organically develop in the wild. For example, the several companies pursuing autonomous driving technology are understandably cautious, and some remain unwilling to make their technology available for public or widespread use. The hesitancy is, in part, related to a desire to avoid fatal accidents and a **fear of being held liable** for mistakes made by an **immature technology**. ¶ However, a few companies, most notably Tesla, are more eager to take their autonomous driving technology public and seek rapid AI employment. Tesla is willing to accept risk and chooses to rely on iteration and data amalgamation with the expectation that the company’s cars will drive better over time, as they accrue experience in real environments with real hazards. Supporting Tesla’s approach of rapid implementation, some experts say that most of the difficult development work on AI has been done, so now it is up to businesses to incorporate AI into their products and strategies to push the technology forward. But adopting new technology is never easy—especially when the new technology is likely to change the character of warfare and be used to kill.

#### Otherwise, automation escalates conflict, kills time for mediation, and creates asymmetric advantages encouraging aggression in nuclear hotspots.

**Yu 24** [Jihoon Yu, MA in National Security Affairs from the US Naval Postgraduate School & PhD in Political Science from Syracuse University, 12-20-2024, The Strategic Implications of AI on Maritime Security, Real Clear Defense, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2024/12/20/the\_strategic\_implications\_of\_ai\_on\_maritime\_security\_1079942.html, Willie T.]

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is **transforming the global security landscape**, and its impact on the maritime domain is **profound**. From enhancing surveillance to introducing new vulnerabilities, AI’s role in maritime security offers significant opportunities and challenges. One of AI’s most transformative contributions lies in improving situational awareness and surveillance. Traditional methods of monitoring vast oceanic spaces are labor-intensive and limited in scope, but AI-powered systems can analyze data from satellites, drones, and automatic identification systems (AIS) to detect patterns and anomalies. This capability enables the identification of “dark ships” involved in illicit activities such as smuggling or illegal fishing, allowing authorities to act proactively and efficiently.¶ In naval operations, AI is revolutionizing capabilities through the deployment of autonomous systems. Unmanned surface vessels and underwater drones can perform high-risk tasks like reconnaissance, mine detection, and surveillance, reducing risks to human crews. However, the use of AI in naval warfare raises strategic concerns. Autonomous systems could escalate conflicts if they **act unpredictably** or **misinterpret data**. The lack of international regulations governing AI-driven weapons further complicates the potential for conflict resolution and risk management in contested regions. If rival states deploy AI-enabled naval systems without coordination or transparency, the risk of **accidental confrontations** or **rapid escalations** in regions such as the **S**outh **C**hina **S**ea or the **Arctic** grows significantly. These strategic flashpoints, where **competing claims** and **heightened tensions** already exist, could see AI **amplifying instability** rather than mitigating it.¶ Ports, as critical hubs of global trade, also stand to benefit from AI integration. Automated systems powered by AI can enhance cargo inspections, detect anomalies, and improve access control, bolstering security and reducing vulnerabilities to criminal or terrorist activities. Predictive analytics can identify patterns that signal threats, ensuring timely interventions. However, the increased reliance on digital systems introduces cybersecurity risks, a double-edged sword in the maritime domain. AI-driven cybersecurity tools can help detect and neutralize threats, but adversaries can also use AI to launch sophisticated attacks. Cyberattacks on ports or shipping systems could disrupt global trade, creating cascading economic and geopolitical effects.¶ AI’s role in maritime warfare brings additional **strategic risks**. Autonomous systems and decision-making platforms could alter the nature of naval conflicts, making engagements **faster and less predictable**. This heightens the risk of escalation in **already tense regions**, such as the South China Sea. Misidentifications or unintended actions by AI systems could spark conflicts, and the absence of international agreements on the use of AI in military applications increases the potential for miscalculations. For example, an AI-powered naval drone could perceive a civilian or non-threatening vessel as hostile, prompting unnecessary or disproportionate responses. Such incidents could trigger a chain reaction in high-tension regions, potentially drawing major powers into conflict.¶ On a broader strategic level, AI is altering the balance of power in maritime security. Nations with advanced AI capabilities have a **distinct advantage**, as they can integrate sophisticated technologies into their maritime operations, creating a **technological gap** between themselves and less-developed states. This **disparity** could lead to a **concentration of power** among a few dominant nations, undermining collective maritime security efforts. Additionally, adversaries with access to AI capabilities, such as autonomous naval vessels or intelligent cyberattack platforms, could challenge the dominance of traditionally superior navies, leveling the playing field in asymmetric conflicts.

#### Humans won’t detect failures --- stress creates automation bias.

**Klare 20** [Michael Klare, secretary for the Arms Control Association board of directors and a senior visiting fellow working on emerging technologies, April 2020, ‘Skynet’ Revisited: The Dangerous Allure of Nuclear Command Automation, Arms Control, https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2020-04/features/skynet-revisited-dangerous-allure-nuclear-command-automation, Willie T.]

An equal danger is what analysts call “**automation bias**,” or the tendency for stressed-out decision-makers to trust the information and advice supplied by advanced computers rather than their own considered judgment. For example, a U.S. president, when informed of sensor data indicating an enemy nuclear attack and under pressure to make an immediate decision, might choose to accept the computer’s advice to initiate a retaliatory strike rather than consider possible alternatives, such as with Petrov’s courageous Cold War action. Given that AI data systems can be expected to gain ever more analytical capacity over the coming decades, “it is likely that humans making command decisions will treat the AI system’s suggestions as on a par with or **better** than those of human advisers,” a 2018 RAND study noted. “This potentially unjustified trust presents new risks that must be considered.”19 Compounding all these risks is the likelihood that China, Russia, and the United States will all install automated NC3 systems but without informing each other of the nature and status of these systems. Under these circumstances, it is possible to imagine a “flash war,” roughly akin to a “flash crash” on Wall Street, that is triggered by the interaction of competing corporate investment algorithms. In such a scenario, the data assessment systems of each country could **misinterpret** signs of adversary moves and conclude an attack is imminent, leading other computers to order preparatory moves for a retaliatory strike, in turn prompting the similar moves on the other side, until both commence a rapid **escalatory cycle ending in nuclear catastrophe**.20

#### AND it pressures second strike capabilities creating use or lose pressures --- guarantees pre-emption.

**Horowitz 19** [Michael C. Horowitz, Professor of Political Science @ the University of Pennsylvania, 8-22-2019, When speed kills: Lethal autonomous weapon systems, deterrence and stability, Journal of Strategic Studies, https://sci-hub.se/10.1080/01402390.2019.1621174, Willie T.]

How might the deployment of LAWS **influence deterrence** and the prospect for wartime escalation, including with **nuclear-armed countries**? The relationship between **speed and crisis stability** in a world of deployed LAWS represents one of the **clearest risk factors** associated with autonomous weapons. The United States and the Soviet Union avoided nuclear war during the Cold War in part due to the development of mutually assured destruction, a situation where each side believed that, even if it struck first, the target would still have enough nuclear forces remaining to destroy the aggressor. The countries developed complicated and overlapping systems for command and control, as well as different types of nuclear strike systems.62 Ballistic missiles, for example, represented the ‘autonomous’ weapons of their day, because they could not be recalled, which was unique at the time. There was also a trade-off between perceived attack capabilities and perceived strategic stability. Ballistic missiles with multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicles could allow countries to maximise damage in a first strike, but those very capabilities also made them disruptive to strategic stability.63 The Soviet Union also allegedly deployed an automated system called ‘Perimeter’, known as the Dead Hand system, in response to fears of decapitation. Evidence from former Soviet military and nuclear officials suggest that the Soviets designed the system to enable retaliation against a US nuclear first strike even if Soviet command and control was decapitated. Soviet leadership could active Perimeter in a crisis if they feared they might lose active control of their nuclear arsenal due to a US strike.64 The speed associated with LAWS could potentially threaten first strike stability in a crisis. The ability to fight at machine speed means a state could win faster – but it also means that **state could lose faster.** Countries could fear that an aggressor, using LAWS or related systems operating at **machine speed**, could quickly knock out their command and control capabilities, **eliminating** their **ability to retaliate** (regardless of whether one or both sides has nuclear weapons). This fear would create incentives for many of the **least stable military postures** developed during the Cold War, including strategic weapons on **high alert**, **launch on warning** postures, and others. A country fearing it might not have the ability to respond in time if its command and control capabilities are **devastated by machine-speed attack** could also have incentives for **pre-delegation**. Autonomous weapon systems could therefore place pressure on escalation control mechanisms. LAWS, if they prove effective battlefield weapons, could also **threaten deterrence** by undermining a **nuclear deterrent itself**.65 Imagine, for example, undersea or above-ground **swarms** of autonomous systems with the ability to target ballistic missile submarines or ICBM silos. Some also fear a situation where undersea LAWS track adversary submarines. Fear that those tracking systems could undermine the sea-based deterrent of a country, especially a nuclear-armed country, could in theory create **first strike incentives** as well.

#### Nuclear use is an existential risk

**Sarg 15** [Dr. Stoyan Sarg, 10-9-2015, Director of the Physics Research Department at the World Institute for Scientific Exploration, PhD in Physics, "The Unknown Danger of Nuclear Apocalypse," Foreign Policy Journal, https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2015/10/09/the-unknown-danger-of-nuclear-apocalypse/, accessed: 11-5-2023] // sid

With the new NATO plan for installation of nuclear tactical weapons in Europe, nuclear missiles may reach Moscow in only 6 minutes, and the opposite case is also possible in the same time. The question is: how can we be sure that this will not be triggered by a human error or computer malfunction. An adequate reaction dictated by the dilemma “to be or not to be” and the concept of preventive nuclear strike may **lead to a nuclear consequence** that is difficult to stop. At the present level of distributed controlled systems and military global navigations, this will lead to **unstoppable global nuclear war.** However, there is **something not predicted**, of which the military strategists, politicians and powerful forces are not aware. Probably, it will not be a nuclear winter that they hope to survive in their underground facilities. The most probable consequence will be a partial **loss of the Earth’s atmosphere** as a result of one or many powerful simultaneous tornadoes caused by the nuclear explosions. In a tornado, a powerful **antigravitational effect** takes place. The official science does not have an adequate explanation for this feature due to an incorrect concept about space. The antigravitational effect is **not a result of the circling air**. It is a specific physical effect in the aether space that is **dismissed in physics** as it is currently taught. Therefore, the effective height of this effect is **not limited to the height of the atmosphere**. Then in the case of many simultaneous powerful tornadoes, an effect of **suction of the earth atmosphere** into space might take place. Such events are **observed on the Sun** and the present physical science does not have an explanation for them. The antigravitational effect is accompanied by **specific electric and magnetic fields** with a twisted shape. This is observed in tornado events on the Sun. Some effects in the upper Earth atmosphere known as sprites have a similar **combination of electrical and magnetic fields** but in a weaker form. They are also a mystery for contemporary physical science.

At the time of atmospheric nuclear tests, made in the last century, a **number of induced tornadoes are observed** near the nuclear mushroom as shown in Figure 1.

The strongest **antigravitational effect**, however, occurs in the central column of the formed nuclear mushroom. The analysis of underwater nuclear tests also indicates a **strong antigravitational effect**. It causes a rise of a vertical column of water. In the test shown in Figure 2, the vertical column contains millions tons of water. Thermonuclear bombs are **multiple times more powerful**. The largest thermonuclear bomb of the former Soviet Union tested in 1961 is 50 megatons. It is 3,300 times more powerful than the bomb dropped by USA on Hiroshima at the second world war and may kill millions.

It is known that Mars once had liquid water and consequently an atmosphere that has mysteriously disappeared. If the scenario described above takes place, the **Earth will become a dead planet** like Mars. The powerful politicians, military adventurers and their financial supporters must be aware that even the most secured underground facility wi**ll not save them** if a global nuclear conflict is triggered. Their disgraced end will be more miserable than the deaths of the **billions of innocent human beings**, including the animal world.

## 2AC

**A2: Diverting Attention**

**1. T - Joining the ICC increases funding and resources.**

**Brahm 23** [Eric; Professor @ University of Arkansas; January 31; Taylor & Francis; “The evolution of funding for the International Criminal Court: Budgets, donors and gender justice,” https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14754835.2022.2156276, GZR]

Once the overall budget is set, state parties’ individual contributions are calculated. During treaty negotiations, there was a proposal to fund the Court through the United Nations. The primary opponents were the United Nations’s biggest contributors—namely the United States, Germany, and Japan—and the idea was abandoned (Schabas, Citation2020). However, assessed contributions for the Court are calculated in the same way as for the United Nations. **Per Article 117 of the Rome Statute**, “**contributions** **of** States **Parties** shall be **assessed in accordance with an agreed scale of assessment**, based on the scale adopted by the United Nations **for its regular budget and adjusted in accordance with the principles on which that scale is based**.” In other words, **states are assigned a proportion of the overall** **budget that is** essentially **based on the size of their economies**. As such, our data available on the Harvard Dataverse site show that **the ICC’s largest funders are large** European **economies**, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and Brazil.

**AND capabilities that only the US has.**

**Bosco 13** [David; Professor @ University of Indiana, J.D. from Harvard Law School, M.Phil. from Cambridge University, BA from Harvard College; November 8; ResearchGate; “Rough Justice: The International Criminal Court in a World of Power Politics,” https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282893443\_Rough\_Justice\_The\_International\_Criminal\_Court\_in\_a\_World\_of\_Power\_Politics\_David\_Bosco\_New\_York\_Oxford\_University\_Press\_2014\_312\_pp\_2995\_cloth, accessible at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tLbJ2xZhv1N5FlyIU\_-e1Pk9IPENLb7M/view?usp=sharing] tristan

Throughout the book, I place particular emphasis on the relationship between the court and the United States. There are several reasons for this focus. **US opposition** to the court has been the most pronounced and articulated, and its early effort to **limit the court’s reach** was the most developed. The US stance toward the court has also changed considerably in the past decade and describing that transformation requires sustained attention. **The U**nited **S**tates also **stands alone in** terms of **its** global **interests and capabilities.** **Whether its military and intelligence resources and its diplomatic weight are deployed to assist the court is a critical factor in the institution’s trajectory.**

**The US obv cares about confronting the Taliban.**

**3. NL - No warrant that any Taliban leaders actually get prosecuted --- no arrests happen if they just hide out in Afghanistan – Putin proves. If the ICC is already locking in on the Taliban, then how come you still see them control a ton of territory and harm women now. This means it's try or die for our US support turns.**

**4. Even if you remove some Taliban leaders, someone will fill in and continue what the Taliban has done.**

**A2: Ukraine**

**1. Tons of countries in Europe give aid to Ukraine (UK and France) BUT they are in the ICC, so this argument is just untrue.**

**2. The ICC bans war crimes and acts of aggression, selling guns is neither. Dallas and Casey are all about military intervention.**

**3. Bernstein is reliant on Russia winning. That’s not happening.**

**Lurie 1/14** [David R. Lurie, Attorney, 1-14-2025, Putin needs Trump's help more than ever, Public Notice, https://www.publicnotice.co/p/putin-trump-ukraine-inauguration-2025?utm\_medium=email&utm\_content=post, GZR + Willie T.] \*\*un-underlined portions of this card mention forms of sexual assault\*\*

It’s been nearly three years since Vladimir Putin’s despotic regime began its reign of terror against Ukraine by attempting to conquer the country and, in Putin’s words, put an end to the “fictional” Ukrainian nation.

Putin’s **gambit has failed**, leaving Russia in **economic and demographic crisis**. The Russian dictator’s **only hope** is to receive help from his longstanding ally: **Donald Trump**. And he just might get it.

Last week, in the midst of the latest wave of Russian bombings of apartments and markets, a leading rightwing American influencer repeated Putin’s lie that the West forced Russia to invade its neighbor. According to this influencer, by leaving open the possibility of Ukraine joining NATO at some undefined date in the future, President Biden and other Western leaders forced Putin’s hand, compelling him to embark on a campaign mass murder and destruction.

“I could understand their feeling,” said the influencer, of the purportedly beleaguered Putinists.

That rightwing influencer was Donald Trump. (Watch below.)

Soon thereafter, Trump’s designated “Envoy for Ukraine and Russia,” Keith Kellogg, echoed the Trump/Kremlin line, stating that the US will pursue a resolution of Russia’s war of conquest that is “equitable and fair.” The implication was plain: Putin’s violent imperialist project is justified, and it’s only “fair” that he be appeased.

It’s clear that the incoming Trump administration is **ready to reward Putin** for invading his neighbor. Mike Waltz, Trump’s incoming National Security Advisor and self-described “warrior diplomat,” declared Sunday on ABC that there’s been a "huge step forward" because the "rest of the world" is coming around to the Putin/Trump view that a "ceasefire" should be imposed leaving Putin with a large swath of Ukrainian territory.

"I just don't think it's realistic to say we're gonna expel every Russian from every inch of Ukrainian soil,” Waltz said. “Even Crimea." (Watch below.)

Russia currently occupies **only about 20 percent** of Ukraine’s territory after three years of combat that has cost approximately **800,000 Russian casualties**. The **battle lines** are **moving very slowly**, despite Putin sacrificing large numbers of soldiers every day. And in the meantime, Russia’s war economy is **collapsing** in a mire of **stagnation and inflation**.

Yet, based on the statements of Trump and his courtiers, it seems that the incoming president is determined to throw Putin a **lifeline**. The consequences of this traitorous prospect for the United States and Europe, let alone Ukraine, would be catastrophic.

Putin’s debacle

In February 2022, at the outset of his full scale onslaught on Ukraine, Putin predicted that his invading army would be welcomed and would prevail in a matter of days, much as did the Soviet Union’s invading army in Eastern Poland in 1939, following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Nazi Germany and Stalin’s USSR. Instead, Putin’s invading forces met fierce resistance from a nation that had already endured and fought back against years of Russian-sponsored attacks.

As the outset of the full-scale invasion, in a **humiliating display**, miles-long convoys of Russian invading armies were **stopped on roads** and **destroyed in place**, most **far from their targets** in Kyiv and elsewhere in Western Ukraine. Furthermore, after Russian invaders were **expelled from towns** such as Bucha, evidence of rapes and mass killings demonstrated the utter debasement and brutality of the Putin regime’s military. Their atrocities resembled the behavior of the German troops on the Eastern Front of World War II — a dark irony given Putin’s claim that Russia invaded to free Ukraine from “Nazis.”

In addition to being unprepared for the steely opposition of the Ukrainians, Putin was caught off guard by the effective support that the West, under the leadership of President Joe Biden, marshaled on behalf of Ukraine. Biden and his team demonstrated that they had learned important lessons from less effective responses to Putin’s prior incursions into Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.

Before the invasion began, the Biden administration took the unprecedented step of publicly disclosing that Putin was amassing troops on Ukraine’s border. Biden began pressuring European nations to stand behind Ukraine, despite the reticence of some politicians in “leading” nations like Germany and France. Soon, European countries were providing military support for Ukraine. Nearly as importantly, Europe started weaning itself from reliance on Russian natural gas, which Putin had long used as a political and economic drug to hook countries like Germany.

Biden took a well-deserved victory lap on Monday for his strategy of supporting Ukraine and stymying Putin, noting during his foreign policy farewell speech that “when Putin invaded Ukraine, he thought he'd conquer Kyiv in a matter of days. But the truth is, since that war began, I'm the only one that stood in the center of Kyiv, not him. Putin never has." (Watch below.)

Putin’s war of conquest has been disastrous for the people of Ukraine, who have had to defer their efforts to build a democracy and functioning economy in order to fend off an onslaught from one of the largest militaries in the world — one that honed its brutal tactics through years of bombarding Syrian and Chechen civilians. But the Ukrainian military, with US and European support in the form of weapons, not only fended off Russia’s attacks on Western Ukraine, but had initial success pushing invaders out of key parts of the East of the country. While a Ukrainian offensive in 2023 largely failed, the country has managed to **limit Russian gains.**

Some Ukrainian resources, however, may be near their breaking point. The government has been reticent to conscript young people, for good reason, given the nation’s history of devastation, and Ukraine is quite literally running out of troops. On large portions of the massive front, the country has only a small infantry presence. And this state of affairs has allowed Russia to make ongoing gains of territory during recent months, even as Putin’s forces destroy apartment blocks, hospitals, and schools in Ukraine’s cities and towns.

But the cost to Russia of Putin’s continued pursuit of his nihilistic war may be nearly as **grievous**.

Despite its far smaller fighting force, Ukraine has demonstrated the ability to **marshal often far superior Western weapons systems** as well its own weapons, most notably “kamikaze” drones, allowing the country to slow Russia’s encroachment and impose a massive cost on the invaders. Russia has already suffered approximately 800,000 casualties and the current estimated average rate of Russian troop losses is about 1,400 a day. In addition to holding onto territory in Russia’s Kursk region, Ukraine has also recently had success in striking strategic targets in Russia.

Apparently out of fear of the potential political costs, Putin has been unwilling to impose a new mandatory mobilization. The Russian dictator also refuses to admit to his subjects that Russia is involved in a war at all. It’s illegal in Russia to describe Putin’s war of conquest for what it is; instead, it must be called a “Special Military Operation.”

But Russia is nonetheless continuing to send huge portions of its population into a maw of death in Ukraine, including by emptying prisons and enticing men from the poorest (often non-Russian speaking) areas of the country to join the military. And North Korean troops have recently started fighting alongside Russians.

The decaying pariah state

The costs in maimed and dead Russians are far from the only price Russia is paying for Putin’s war. In just a few years, the already grievously weakened country’s economy and **key cohorts of its population** have been depleted by the **huge direct and indirect costs** of the war on Ukraine (as well as the now entirely failed war on Syria). The country’s remaining democratic institutions have been systematically dismantled, while many of Russia’s most skilled (and valuable) professionals have fled.

After years of attempting to make Russia a “normal” country that is integrated with its neighbors and the world, Putin has now been fully transformed his country into an international pariah state whose primary allies are fellow kleptocracies and autocracies, including Iran and North Korea, as well as Xi’s China and various terrorist groups.

These allies are far from charitably minded. Xi’s price for tacitly supporting Russia’s war of terror has been to make Russia into what amounts to a vassal client of China, which is increasingly treating Russia as its captive source of cheap oil. And Ukraine’s recent decision to cease permitting Russia to transit gas through a Ukrainian pipeline to its remaining few customers in Europe means the country is now going to have to sell even more of its hydrocarbons at low prices to China.

Russia’s economic travails are, inevitably, contributing to the military ones. The Russian military-industrial sector remains hobbled by corrosive and rampant corruption and labor shortages. This has been made evident, most embarrassingly, by the underperformance of many of Russia’s weapons systems on the Ukrainian battlefields, in some cases because the systems were not maintained for decades as military funding was siphoned off by criminals.

As a result, Russia is **running out** of some critical items, such as tanks, and has shown an impaired ability to replenish stocks of armored vehicles. And longstanding customers of Russian weapons, including India, are less interested in buying weapons systems from Putin given how badly many of them have performed on the battlefield in Ukraine. This bodes ill for one of Russia’s other key sources of hard currency.

While Stalin’s Russia, with help from massive aid and materiel from the United States, was able to supercharge its military with ever increasing numbers of weapons during World War II, today’s Russia — which was already becoming a husk of a nation well before 2022 — has no such ability.

The **lynchpin moment** is approaching

By the estimates of many analysts, the Russian economy, which is mired in stagflation, is on the **verge of collapse**. As a result, if the war on Ukraine proceeds on anything close to the current pace, Russia’s battered military and economic infrastructure could begin **collapsing within a year** — maybe faster if Trump actually makes good on his promise to flood the markets with oil and gas, thereby further lowering market prices.