**1NC**

**1NC---NRC**

**Contention 1 is the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.**

#### NRC increases inspections now.

**Goldfin ‘23** [Robert P. Goldfin and Jane Accomando, 12-22-2023, "NRC to Increase Focus on Appendix B Compliance in View of FY2023 Enforcement Findings," No Publication, https://www.morganlewis.com/blogs/upandatom/2023/12/nrc-to-increase-focus-on-appendix-b-compliance-in-view-of-fy2023-enforcement-findings, DOA: 3/30/2025] YL

**The US Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) recently published its annual vendor newsletter,** The Vendor Times, documenting findings of NRC vendor inspection staff and lessons learned related to the vendor inspection program. The newsletter follows the NRC’s November 20 vendor inspection program self-assessment for fiscal year 2023. Through these two issuances, the NRC **noted an increase in enforcement findings and indicated that it will focus on 10 CFR Part 21 and supplier oversight compliance during future inspections.**

The NRC identified that this increase in NOCs and NOVs is mainly in the areas of corrective actions, 10 CFR Part 21, and supplier oversight. Therefore, the **NRC stated it will focus on these areas during future inspections and stress the importance of adequately implementing correction action** and 10 CFR Part 21 programs to vendors. With respect to supplier oversight, the NRC will focus on the areas of commercial-grade dedication and supplier audits.

NRC vendor inspection staff also supported 47 allegation actions during fiscal year 2023, one of which resulted in a reactive inspection.

Lessons Learned

**The NRC continues to support the implementation of Inspection Procedure** (IP) No. 71111.21N.03, Commercial Grade Dedication, last revised in March 2023. To that end, NRC staff **supported technical process and inspection implementation training for regional inspectors,** including tabletop scenario discussions, and engaged in discussions with stakeholders to provide clarity on the IP.

The **NRC will carry out inspections through 2026, and each nuclear plant site will have an inspection.** As of October 2023, the NRC has completed 20 inspections, identifying seven noncited violations. The NRC identified the following common themes associated with the noncited violations:

**The AFF strains resources.**

**Gilbert 21** [Alex Gilbert, 5-15-2021, A complex systems researcher with expertise in nuclear innovation, space mining, energy markets, and climate policy. "Unlocking Advanced Nuclear Innovation: The Role of Fee Reform and Public Investment," No Publication, https://www.nuclearinnovationalliance.org/unlocking-advanced-nuclear-innovation-role-fee-reform-and-public-investment, DOA: 3/30/2025] JZ + shaan

**Due to the limited resources and flexibility, NRC was unable to proactively develop rules and perform technical activities for advanced reactors.** Many of these are now **being done on an adhoc basis for individual applications.** The current fee model **creates uncertainty for developers, customers, and investors as NRC reviews of advanced reactors can be lengthy and thus involve unexpected and open-ended licensing review costs.** While the NRC regulations require fees to recover “full cost” of NRC’s review, there is **no way to predict what that “full cost” will be and therefore what the fees will be.** In some cases, at the time that NRC accepts an application for review, it has provided an estimate of how much the fees will be. But that estimate is only an estimate. **The applicant is still responsible for the full cost, regardless of the estimate.**

Congress addressed some of these concerns when it passed NEIMA (See Section 2.c.). Off-fee funding in NEIMA and subsequent legislation are providing initial resources for NRC activities to build advanced reactor regulatory infrastructure. While NIA applauds these activities, **expanded and more durable public resources are needed to ensure NRC remains a global leader in nuclear regulation.** In addition, a more holistic review and revision to NRC’s fee structure can address the underlying issues that NEIMA attempted to address.

Fees are an **important consideration for commercializing advanced reactors**, and near-term licensing activities make reconsideration of licensing fees an urgent imperative. In the case of fees collected for NuScale’s recent design certification, estimated upfront licensing fees were equivalent to at least 10-15 years of annual fees for operating facilities. 12 These costs could be even more significant for combined or operating license applicants who must recoup fees through revenues from a specific and limited customer base. As licensing fees occur at the beginning of the project, they require equity or debt servicing until operation commences, and can **have large impacts on a project’s net present value.** Therefore, even though fees are only a small part of a project’s lifecycle cost, they can have **disproportionate impacts on early-stage projects and even discourage consideration of nuclear energy in the first place.**

Today, NRC’s regulatory framework for licensing reviews is largely predicated on review of large light-water reactors. **To apply this framework to advanced reactors requires extensive company and staff work to identify non-applicability of regulations**, exemptions, and other adaptations. This can **cause initial advanced reactor reviews to take longer and cost more** than historical reviews. This conflicts with the general principle of risk-informed, performance-based regulation. Advanced reactors are expected to be significantly safer than past designs, and the fees incurred should be reflective of the enhanced safety, rather than a result of inefficient requirements. Until regulations are modernized, fees **pose additional undue burdens on innovators and may be costlier compared to licensing with performance-based regulatory frameworks in other countries.**

**That causes decreased oversight.**

**CBS ‘19** [CBS News, 7-17-2019, CBS News is the news division of the American television and radio broadcaster CBS. It is headquartered in New York City. "Nuclear Regulatory Commission mulls cutting back on inspections at nuclear reactors," No Publication, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/nuclear-regulatory-commission-mulls-cutting-back-on-inspections-at-nuclear-reactors/, DOA: 3/30/2025] JZ

Washington – The staff of the **Nuclear Regulatory Commission is recommending that the agency cut back on inspections at the country's nuclear reactors, a cost-cutting move promoted by the nuclear power industry** but denounced by opponents as a threat to public safety.

The recommendations, made public Tuesday, **include reducing the time and scope of some annual inspections at the nation's 90-plus nuclear power plants.** Some other inspections would be cut from every two years to every three years.

Some of the staff's recommendations would require a vote by the commission, which has a majority of members appointed or reappointed by President Trump, who has urged agencies to reduce regulatory requirements for industries.

The nuclear power industry has prodded regulators to cut inspections, saying the nuclear facilities are operating well and that the inspections are a financial burden for power providers. Nuclear power, like coal-fired power, has been struggling in market completion against cheaper natural gas and rising renewable energy.

While Tuesday's report made clear that there was **considerable disagreement among the nuclear agency's staff on the cuts, it contended the inspection reduction "improves efficiency** while still helping to ensure reasonable assurance of adequate protection to the public."

Commission member Jeff Baran criticized the proposed changes Tuesday, saying **reducing oversight of the nuclear power industry "would take us in the wrong direction."**

"NRC shouldn't perform fewer inspections or **weaken its safety oversight to save money,"** Baran said.

The release comes a day after Democratic lawmakers faulted the NRC's deliberations, saying they had failed to adequately inform the public of the changes under consideration.

"Cutting corners on such critical safety measures may eventually **lead to a disaster that could be detrimental to the future of the domestic nuclear industry,**" Rep. Frank Pallone, D-N.J., chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, and other House Democrats said in a letter Monday to NRC Chairwoman Kristine Svinicki.

**Extinction!**

**Wasserman '08** [Harvey Wasserman; Author of The Last Energy War; 2008; "Nuclear Power and Terrorism"; Earth Island Journal; https://www.earthisland.org/journal/index.php/magazine/entry/nuclear\_power\_and\_terrorism; accessed 03-07-2025] leon

**A terrorist assault at Indian Point could yield three infernal fireballs of molten radioactive lava burning through the earth and into the aquifer and the river**. Striking water, **they would blast gigantic billows of horribly radioactive steam into the atmosphere**. Thousands of square miles would be saturated with **the most lethal clouds ever created, depositing relentless genetic poisons that would kill forever**.

**Infants and small children would quickly die en masse**. Pregnant women would spontaneously abort or give birth to horribly deformed offspring. Ghastly sores, rashes, ulcerations and burns would afflict the skin of millions. **Heart attacks, stroke and multiple organ failure would kill thousands on the spot**. Emphysema, hair loss, nausea, inability to eat or drink or swallow, diarrhea and incontinence, sterility and impotence, asthma and blindness would afflict hundreds of thousands, if not millions.

**Then comes the wave of cancers, leukemias, lymphomas, tumors and hellish diseases for which new names will have to be invented**.

Evacuation would be impossible, but thousands would die trying. **Attempts to quench the fires would be futile**. **More than 800,000 Soviet draftees forced through Chernobyl’s seething remains in a futile attempt to clean it up are still dying from their exposure**. At Indian Point, the **molten cores would burn uncontrolled for days, weeks and years**. Who would volunteer for such an American task force?

The immediate damage from an Indian Point attack (or a domestic accident) would render all five boroughs of New York City an apocalyptic wasteland.

As at Three Mile Island, where thousands of farm and wild animals died in heaps, **natural ecosystems would be permanently and irrevocably destroyed**. Spiritually, psychologically, financially and ecologically, our nation would never recover.

This is what we missed by a mere 40 miles on September 11. Now that we are at war, this is what could be happening as you read this.

**There are 103 of these potential Bombs of the Apocalypse operating in the US**. They generate a mere 8 percent of our total energy. Since its deregulation crisis, California cut its electric consumption by some 15 percent. Within a year, the US could cheaply replace virtually all the reactors with increased efficiency.

Yet, as the terror escalates, Congress is fast-tracking the extension of the Price-Anderson Act, a form of legal immunity that protects reactor operators from liability in case of a meltdown or terrorist attack.

Do we take this war seriously? Are we committed to the survival of our nation?

If so, **the ticking reactor bombs that could obliterate the very core of our life and of all future generations must be shut down**.

**1NC---Russia**

**Contention 2 is Russia.**

**Russia’s economy is on the brink---oil is Putin’s lifeline.**

**Matthews ’25** [Owen Matthews, Degree in Modern History at Oxford University, 3-13-2025, The Russian economy is on the **brink of collapse** and Putin knows it, The Independent, https://www.the-independent.com/news/world/europe/russia-economy-putin-ukraine-war-deal-talks-trump-b2714371.html, accessed 03-28-2025] leon

How close is Russia’s economy to collapse? As Donald Trump’s negotiators open direct talks with the Kremlin, Kyiv’s European allies hope that a final push on sanctions against Russia could be Ukraine’s last – and best – hope of victory. Mr Trump has warned that the US could impose a “devastating” financial blow on Russia if Putin refuses to accept the ceasefire agreement. “There are things you can do that wouldn’t be pleasant in a financial sense. I can do things financially,” he said in the Oval Office.

Putin intended his full-scale invasion of Ukraine to be a three-day operation that would force regime change in Kyiv. Neither Putin nor his military or economic planners anticipated a grinding war that now soaks up over **40 per cent of Kremlin spending**.

Nor did they expect Europe to impose serious sanctions, and even less did they anticipate the destruction of three of the four Gazprom gas pipelines under the Baltic Sea that before the war supplied over 30 per cent of Europe’s gas.

The result in Russia has been **rampant inflation**, currently running at over 9 per cent, crippling **interest rates** of 21 per cent and runaway price hikes on staple goods that far **outpace the headline inflation rate** and have hit ordinary Russians hard.

Last summer the price of **eggs jumped by 42 per cent**, **bananas by 48 per cent, tomatoes by 39.5 per cent and potatoes by 25 per cent**. The Russian ruble has lost over **half of its value** since Putin first invaded Crimea in 2014, and over $600bn of the Kremlin’s foreign currency reserves have been frozen in Western banks.

More than **1,000 Western businesses** – including Ikea and McDonald’s – pulled out, as did Western car manufacturers. Imports of Western goods – especially technology – are now **expensively routed through sanctions-busting neighbours** like Kazakhstan and Georgia. And last month Russian utility companies hiked prices for electricity by up to **250 per cent.**

“Everyone drives Chinese cars these days, but there are no spare parts,” says Alexandra, 39, a former journalist who lives in Moscow and whose ex-husband is fighting in Ukraine. “The only foreign cars you buy are right-hand-drive [from Japan]. Anyone with a mortgage is paying crazy interest. People complain how expensive everything has become.”

Russia spent more on its military in 2024 than the rest of Europe combined, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies’ latest Military Balance report – a staggering $462bn, if adjusted for purchasing power. The Kremlin’s spending splurge on its war effort has produced some winners, notably the 1.5 million troops currently serving in Putin’s army who are paid up to $2,500 a month to fight – four times the average salary in Russia’s most impoverished provinces.

Massive losses on the battlefield have **worsened labour shortages**, with a record-low unemployment rate of 2.4 per cent. Factories are **running at capacity and beyond**. Russia’s economy has “reached the **limits of its productive capacity** while demand continues to be stimulated,” Central Bank chief Elvira Nabiullina warned the Russian parliament in November, predicting a fatal combination of economic stagnation and inflation known as “stagflation”.

For the first three years of the war, the Kremlin’s war spending fuelled GDP growth which peaked at a staggering 5.4 per cent in early 2024. But 2025 will be the year that growth flatlines, experts predict.

The Kremlin has been able to afford its spending spree thanks, mostly, to India and China, which have continued to import Russian oil in record quantities. The EU has in theory capped the price that customers can pay for Russian Urals crude at $60 a barrel – somewhat below the current market price of $67. But so-called “attestation fraud” – such as making up the difference in fake transportation and other costs – makes the rules easy to bend.

Natural gas has **never been sanctioned** by the EU at all – and until 1 January of this year, 13 per cent of Europe’s piped gas was still being shipped from Russia through Ukrainian pipelines to Slovakia and Hungary.

Ukrainian fire and fury are currently doing damage to Russia’s war economy that near-**nonexistent European sanctions have failed to achieve**

Southern Europe **continues to import** millions of cubic meters of Russian gas via Turkey. And despite its posturing, Europe still sources more than 15 per cent of its liquefied natural gas or LNG from Russia – with some 17.8m tonnes of LNG docking in European ports in 2024, **up by more than 2 million tonnes from the year before**, according to analysts Rystad Energy.

In fact the only really effective “sanctions” on the Russian energy sector – which accounts for over **two-thirds of government revenues** – have been in the form of Ukrainian drone attacks on Russian oil refineries, pumping stations and storage facilities. Ukrainian fire and fury are currently doing damage to Russia’s war economy that European “sanctions” have failed to achieve.

International pressure has made it harder, but not impossible, for the Russian war machine to obtain important components such as semiconductors. And sanctions have certainly “achieved the crucial goal of leaving Russia’s economy highly unstable in the medium to long term”, according to Oliver Ruth of London’s Royal United Services Institute.

The current crazy levels of expenditure are unsustainable, so Putin has a strong economic incentive to bring his war to an end. Ukraine’s economy is also under attack.

But on the flip side, even as Russia’s economy slips into stagflation Ukraine’s economy is doing far worse. Concerted Russian assaults, damage to vital energy infrastructure and mass emigration have inflicted catastrophic damage of up to 40 per cent of the country’s pre-war GDP. Kyiv’s budget payments to millions of soldiers and state employees are currently being paid by the EU. Without those subsidies – the lion’s share of the €60bn in direct financial support so far sent by Brussels – Ukraine’s government finances would instantly collapse.

Ukraine’s European allies hoped that sanctions would force Putin into taking an early off ramp and bring his **economy crashing down**. That hasn’t yet happened yet – largely because Europe has been unable to kick its addiction to Russian gas, and the US did not want to risk a global **oil price spike by cutting off Russian exports.**

**Affirming collapses state stability.**

**Proedrou ’23** [Filippos; Senior Lecturer in Global Political Economy @ the University of South Wales, PhD in IR from the University of Thrace; November 10; Elgar; “Chapter 27: The global energy transition and Russian structural power: scenarios and strategic options,” https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollchap/book/9781800370432/book-part-9781800370432-35.xml; accessed 03-21-2025] tristan

Lower fossil-induced profits will test the current rent-based social contract (Scholten et al., 2019, p. 190). **Shrinking** budget **revenues** will **decelerate** the country’s **fiscal** **capacity** to **maintain** the **wealth** and the **welfare** level of the Russian population (Henderson & Mitrova, 2020, p. 110). The ensuing likely **removal** of gas **subsidies** and **cuts** to **healthcare**, **education** and **social** **services** have the potential to **destabilize** the **regime**. This will be so especially in the resource-producing regions, which are going to be hit the hardest by the progressive divestment from the fossil industry. One could counterargue that Russia retains strong fiscal capacity and has managed to successfully support its budget in cases of low oil prices. Hence, one should not anticipate such drastic deterioration of the social contract in Russia. Nevertheless, and while Russia will manage to offset some of these repercussions at least for some time, the pace and **scale** of the **revenue** **decrease** caused by the global energy transition is **expected** to be very **severe**. More importantly, **unlike** the **case** of **low** oil **prices** that at some point **rebound** in **normal** boom-and-bust **cycles**, the trend of the **global** **energy** **transition** will be exactly towards **lower** oil and gas quantities exported and lower prices (Coffin et al., 2021), thus bringing the **Russian** **economy** to its **knees**. Such **developments** are likely to **increase** the **infighting** between the **Russian** **elites** as the **consolidated** **power** of incumbents **weakens**, thus opening up a **window** of **opportunity** for **contenders** (Øverland, 2021). This, at the same time, can **intensify** (a sense of) non-governability and **instability**, and precipitate/invite **insurrections** and **separatist** **movements**, as separatist factions may **perceive** **Russian** **impoverishment** and **economic** **hardship** as the **opening** of a **grand** **opportunity** for achieving longstanding **political** **goals**. The precedent of Chechnya in an impoverished and largely unproductive Russia in the 1990s (Aliyev, 2013) may offer insight into the likely internal political problems Russia may face once the global energy transition dilutes a substantial chunk of Russia’s budget and spending capacity. **Regional** **nationalism** in, among others, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, the Urals and the Far East (exposing the populations to Chinese influence and encroachment) renders **secessionist** **tendencies** a **real** **danger** to Russian integrity. The shifting of budgetary priorities to meet the war economy goals, in conjunction with anticipated progressively **lower** energy-borne **revenues**, resistance to mobilization of the part of the population for war needs and frustration with the war constitute a context more conducive to **political** **turmoil**, resistance and **pressures** to the **regime** (Lieven, 2022).

#### Perception triggers financial shocks.

**Baltvilks ’22** [Witajewski; Expert @ the Centre for Climate and Energy Analyses @ the Polish National Centre for Emission Management; April 26; euractiv; “How the green paradox and climatepolicy can become Putin’s nightmare,” https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/opinion/how-the-green-paradox-and-climate-policy-can-become-putins-nightmare/; accessed 03-21-2025] YL

The ability of climate policy to influence the oil market and oil prices is illustrated in the so-called green paradox. The green paradox is a hypothetical scenario in which the **announcement** of a rigid **climate** **policy** becomes a **signal** for **oil** **producers** that the **demand** for oil will **end** soon, motivating them to **sell** as **much** as they **can** as soon as they can.

**Flooding** the **market** with oil **depresses** its **price** and **incentivises** **consumers** to **use** **more**. If this were to happen, emissions would increase, **rendering the climate policy** **ineffective**. The green paradox is particularly relevant in the context of oil markets, but the mechanisms of the paradox can also apply to natural gas and coal.

A **clear** and credible **commitment** by the largest economies in the world to halve the consumption of oil over the next two decades would be a **clear** **signal** to all oil producers that their **resources** will soon **lose** **value**. **No** **producer** with low extraction costs will **keep** its **reserves** for the **future** — they will **attempt** to **pump** their **oil** into the market as long as it **exists**.

**Low**-**cost** oil from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates will, at least partly, **crowd** **out** the more **expensive** **product** from **Russia**, Venezuela and Iran. Even if that crowding out is not complete, the low oil price will **render** these countries’ **oil** **revenues** **negligible**. In Russia, where **oil** **rents** constitute more than **9% of** the nation’s **GDP** (**36%** of public-sector **revenue**), this will unavoidably **complicate** the **financial** **landscape** of the regime.

**Nuclear is unique.**

**Adams ’13** [Rod Adams; Reporter for the American Nuclear Society; 12-10-2013; "Do oil and gas suppliers worry about nuclear energy development?"; Nuclear Newswire; https://www.ans.org/news/article-1481/do-oil-and-gas-suppliers-worry-about-nuclear/; accessed 03-04-2025] leon

That is the most important take away for attendees at the OPEC Embargo +40 summit held in Washington DC on October 16. Unfortunately, the meeting sponsors avoided acknowledging that **nuclear energy is the alternative energy source that most worries established hydrocarbon suppliers**. Nuclear has held that position since the early 1960s, when General Electric first won a head-to-head competition against coal to sell the Oyster Creek nuclear power plant.

**Nuclear energy is reliable, virtually emission-free, and uses a widely distributed, abundant fuel source that is no longer subject to influence by the same producers that manipulate other fuel prices**. Its cheap, clean heat can help turn coal, natural gas, and plants (vegetation) into liquid fuels that can be drop-in replacements for petroleum-based fuels.

**Decline causes great power war.**

**Kaplan '16** [Robert D. Kaplan; American author, Senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security; March/April 2016; "Eurasia’s Coming Anarchy"; Foreign Affairs; https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2016-02-15/eurasias-coming-anarchy; access at https://archive.ph/YfaTO; accessed 03-29-2025] doobz

Not coincidentally, **these military adventures have accompanied the sharp reversal of Russian economic power**. In 2014, the price of oil collapsed, the countries of central and eastern Europe continued to wean themselves off Russian gas, slow global growth further reduced the appetite for Russian hydrocarbons and other natural resources, and the West levied damaging sanctions on Moscow. The result has been a full-blown economic crisis, with the ruble losing roughly half of its value against the U.S. dollar since 2014. That year, Russian GDP growth fell to nearly zero, and by the third quarter of 2015, the economy was shrinking by more than four percent. In the first eight months of 2015, capital investment declined by six percent and the volume of construction fell by eight percent.

Russia’s economic problems run deep, leaving its leaders with few easy options for fixing them. For decades, **Russia has relied on natural resource production and a manufacturing sector that makes consumer goods for the domestic market** (since few foreigners want to buy Russia’s nonmilitary products). Despite some pockets of ostentatious wealth, **the service sector has remained underdeveloped**. Because Putin and his camarilla never built civil institutions or a truly free market, the corrupt, gangster-led economy of Russia today exhibits eerie similarities to the old Soviet one.

Back in the 1980s, when that economy was hit by a crisis, Mikhail Gorbachev responded by opening up the political system—only to be rewarded with anarchy and the collapse of Russia’s empire. Putin learned this lesson well and is determined to do the opposite: keep the political system closed while distracting the masses with displays of Russian power in the near abroad. Putin is a former intelligence agent, not a former apparatchik. Thus, although he nurses historical grudges concerning Russia’s place in the world, he is not deceiving himself about Russia’s internal problems. As **the Russian economy decays further, Putin surely knows that for the sake of domestic approval, his foreign policy must become more creative and calculating**, even deceptively conciliatory at moments. Over time, expect him to find new ways to undermine NATO and the EU, even as he claims to be helping the West fight the Islamic State, or ISIS. **For the more chaos he can generate abroad, the more valuable the autocratic stability he provides at home will appear**. Russians may know in the abstract that a freer society is preferable, but they fear the risks of such a transition.

Try as he might, however, Putin will not be able to shelter his regime from the fallout of economic collapse. Desperation will spawn infighting among a ruling elite that has grown used to sharing generous spoils. Given the absence of strong institutions, as well as the brittle and highly centralized nature of the regime, **a coup like the one that toppled Nikita Khrushchev in 1964 cannot be ruled out**; **Russia remains Soviet in its style of governance**. The country has experienced the crumbling of autocracy followed by chaos before (as during and after the 1917 revolutions), and it’s possible that enough turmoil could cause Russia to fragment yet again. The heavily Muslim North Caucasus, along with areas of Russia’s Siberian and Far Eastern districts, distant from the center and burdened by bloody politics, may begin loosening their ties to Moscow in the event of instability inside the Kremlin itself. **The result could be Yugoslavia lite: violence and separatism that begin in one place and spread elsewhere**. **As Moscow loses control, the global jihadist movement could take advantage of the vacuum and come to Russia’s outlying regions and to Central Asia**.

Bad as this sounds, things could still get worse. Back in 1991, the Polish intellectual Adam Michnik predicted that future leaders in Russia and eastern Europe would fill the gap left by the collapse of communism with “a coarse and primitive nationalism.” **Putin has adopted just such a nationalism in recent years**. **He has slyly backed separatist movements in Abkhazia, the Donbas, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Transnistria**, creating deniable conflicts that result in warlord-run statelets. In the years ahead, **he may well choose to provoke more of these so-called frozen conflicts, but this time in NATO Baltic member states** (which have sizable Russian populations and which Moscow still considers lost provinces). Meanwhile, Putin will try to play on Europe’s need for Russian support in Syria to force Europe to acknowledge his annexation of Crimea and his de facto rule over eastern Ukraine.

**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] leon

**A modern great power war 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**.

<<TEXT CONDENSED NONE OMITTED>>

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 great power war 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 great power war 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 World War 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**.

<<TEXT CONDENSED NONE OMITTED>>

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).

**1NC---Proliferation**

**Contention 3 is Proliferation.**

**Alliances are strong now.**

**Suh '24** [Liviu Horovitz; Senior Associate Researcher at the Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy; Elisabeth Suh; research fellow in DGAP's Center for Security and Defense; 08-21-2024; "Trump II and US Nuclear Assurances in the Indo-Pacific"; SWP; https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2024C36/; accessed 11-04-2024] leon

While heated debates in Europe have focused on how to respond **if Donald J. Trump is re-elected to the White House, discussions in Australia, Japan, and South Korea reveal a greater sense of confidence in Washington’s commitments**. The fear that the United States would withdraw its nuclear assurances is much less pronounced in the Indo-Pacific than in Europe. **This serenity appears primarily grounded in a shared understanding that a bipartisan consensus is driving the US commitment to contain China’s rise** – **a goal that requires reliable allies across the Pacific**. At the same time, US allies want to maintain the regional status quo and are willing to support Washing­ton’s efforts. **Trump’s potential return does little to change these structural incen­tives**. Instead, Pacific allies fear challenges to the East Asian regional order, challenges that are also relevant for Europe’s security and prosperity.

**Trump pursues arms talks.**

**PSR ‘25** [U.S. Affiliate of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, 2-25-2025, "The New Trump Administration on Nuclear Weapons", Physicians for Social Responsibility |, https://psr.org/the-new-trump-administration-on-nuclear-weapons/; accessed 03-29-2025] //dg

Since January 20th, when President Trump entered the White House it’s been unclear how exactly this administration would approach nuclear weapons and how this second term could impact our nation’s nuclear weapons, and prospects for disarmament. **Over the past month, Trump has indicated a range of possible policies on American nuclear weapons. Most notably Trump said he would “restart nuclear arms control talks with Russia and China** and that eventually he hopes all three countries could agree to cut their massive defense budgets in half.” **In Davos, Switzerland he expressed concern over the amount of money spent on nuclear weapons**. This comes just as the Department on Government Efficiency (DOGE) cut, then repealed said cuts, to the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) which could be said to have destabilizing effects on our current nuclear weapons’ security, and the management of nuclear waste at sites like Savannah River or Oak Ridge. **These statements giving vague, yet potentially positive, support for cuts to nuclear weapons spending and industries could be a step forward for nuclear disarmament or better arms control**, however, much is still unknown as we see how words translate into action to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons in this administration.

**Nuclear exports are low.**

**Park ’23** [Jackie; BA from Duke University, Writer @ Power Technology; December 11; Power Technology; “Global nuclear power faces unprecedented challenges,” https://www.power-technology.com/news/global-nuclear-power-faces-unprecedented-challenges/; DOA: 3-26-2025] tristan

In a stark revelation, **the World Nuclear Industry Status Report** (WNISR) **has outlined the severe challenges faced by the global nuclear power sector in recent years**. The report, covering developments up to mid-2023, highlights a significant decline in nuclear production, with **its share dropping to the lowest point in four decades**. This **decline is attributed to a combination of factors including national policy shifts, economic pressures and the rapid growth of renewable energy alternatives**.

Global nuclear production and generation reaches new low

The WNISR points out that global nuclear power generation experienced a notable 4% decline, reaching a level not seen since the mid-1990s. Outside of China, the decrease was even more pronounced, at 5%, taking the global nuclear energy share of commercial gross electricity generation in 2022 down to 9.2%. This marks the most substantial drop since the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster in 2012 and a record low in the past four decades. It is noteworthy that this share is now little more than half of its peak of 17.5% in 1996.

Several major nuclear-producing nations faced significant challenges in 2022 and mid-2023, contributing to the overall hit on the global nuclear landscape.

The US saw its nuclear share of commercial electricity generation drop to 18.2%, the lowest level in 25 years. France experienced a drop in nuclear generation below its 1990 level, turning into a net importer of electricity for the first time since 1980. However, the country seems motivated to rectify the situation, recently leading a group of 20 countries in declaring to “triple nuclear energy capacity from 2020 by 2050” at COP28 in Dubai.

Belgium witnessed the closure of two reactors, in September 2022 and January 2023, with three more slated for closure by 2025. Germany saw the closure of its last three operating reactors on 15 April 2023, completing the phase-out policy initiated in 2011.

**The report notes that the number of closed power reactors reached 212 units as of mid-2023, with 22 fully decommissioned and 11 released from regulatory control**. With this, the report indicates that 407 reactors with a total capacity of 365GW were operational worldwide – a decrease of four reactors compared with the previous year and 31 units below the peak observed in 2002.

Economic challenges and renewable competition

**Nuclear power faces increasing economic challenges**, with Lazard modelling indicating that, at discount rates over 5.4%, it becomes **the most expensive generator in terms of the levelized cost of energy** (LCOE).

National developments of major nuclear-producing countries reflect this reality. The report highlights massive subsidies in the US, with state-level taxpayer-funded subsidies estimated to exceed $15bn by 2030. The UK, now operating only nine nuclear units, has seen cost estimates for the two Hinkley Point C reactors soar to $44bn (£34.98bn) and grid connection delayed until June 2027. South Korea’s state-owned utility, KEPCO, recently faced a record loss of $25bn (33.01trn won), with a 32% rise in net debt to an unprecedented $149bn.

The report also underscores the underestimated hidden costs associated with nuclear power, including decommissioning expenses and liabilities for accidents. Decommissioning costs in Germany, Italy and Lithuania, all nuclear phase-out countries, were estimated to be orders of magnitude higher than international estimates. Meanwhile, the Japanese Government estimated the cost of the 2011 Fukushima accidents at an astonishing $223bn (Y32.62trn) – the largest in the world.

Nuclear finances are even more alarming when compared with renewable alternatives. **Renewable energy continues to outpace nuclear power**, with total investment in non-hydro renewable electricity capacity reaching a record $495bn in 2022, **14-times the investment in nuclear power plant construction**. Wind and solar facilities alone generated 28% more electricity than their nuclear counterparts, accounting for 11.7% of global electricity generation, compared with nuclear’s 9.2%.

In terms of LCOE, the report highlights that nuclear power can be nearly four-times the LCOE of onshore wind at a discount rate of 10%. In the US, unsubsidised solar and wind, with rapidly declining firming costs, have a combined cost of $45–140 per megawatt-hour (MWh) in comparison with new nuclear at a mean $180/MWh.

Uncertain future for global nuclear industry

The global nuclear industry confronts an uncertain future, paired with concerning new developments in the sector.

In the report, one country stood out for going against the current as it continues to dominate the global nuclear market – Russia.

While **China leads in the domestic number of reactors** under construction with 23 ongoing, Russia dominates the international market with 24 units under construction, including 19 in seven other countries. Russia has also brought on new technology, notably developing the first and only floating nuclear power plant in the world.

However, according to the report, **construction delays plague many Russian projects, with 93% of ongoing constructions taking place in Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) or by NWS-controlled companies abroad**.

**Investment perceptually fuels conflict.**

**Gilinsky '14** [Victor Gilinsky; Former commissioner of the Nuclear Regulation Commission; Henry Sokolski; Executive Director of NPEC; 02-25-2014; "Victor Gilinsky and Henry Sokolski: Serious Rules for Nuclear Power without Proliferation (Working Paper 1302)"; Nonproliferation Policy Education Center; https://npolicy.org/victor-gilinsky-and-henry-sokolski-serious-rules-for-nuclear-power-without-proliferation-working-paper-1302/; accessed 03-22-2025] //dg

The usual reference is to President Kennedy's 1962 statement that 15 to 25 countries could obtain nuclear weapons. But this was a warning, not a prediction, and a useful one that led to nonproliferation efforts that slowed the process. In **view of our experiences with countries falsely claiming to be conducting** ―**peaceful‖ nuclear programs and later using their facilities for illicit activities or conducting clandestine bomb activities**—**in India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan, South Africa, and Syria**—it is time to heed these warnings again.

There is also a school of thought that even if some more countries obtained nuclear weapons it wouldn‘t make much difference because they would just serve as deterrents.1 1.

There is a troubling disconnect between this cheerful theorizing—which is not without an element of self-interest—and any awareness of the devastating possibility of nuclear war. Just because the weapons are supposed to be for deterrence doesn't mean they won't be used. Such use is after all implied in the threat that underlies deterrence. And if they are used they are likely to profoundly change the way the world is organized, with unpredictable but likely unhappy consequences. 2 A few years ago Henry Kissinger wrote:

**If one imagines a world of tens of nations with nuclear weapons and major powers trying to balance their own deterrent equations**, plus the deterrent equations of the subsystems, **deterrence calculation would become impossibly complicated**. **To assume that**, in such a world, **nuclear catastrophe could be avoided would be unrealistic**.3

Happily, we have not reached this state. No such weapons have exploded in anger since World War II, and it is a long time since people have seen the results of atmospheric tests. But this has also meant there is not the gut level consciousness about proliferation dangers that there is about the dangers of nuclear accidents. Whereas everyone agrees that expanded use of nuclear power has to be predicated on tough safety rules, there is no corresponding agreement when it comes to rules to protect against nuclear weapons spread, especially when it comes to restrictions on nuclear power programs.

**One often hears from nuclear industry sources that** ―civilian‖ nuclear programs are not a **proliferation worry because they are an unlikely source of nuclear explosive materials for would-be bomb makers**. They argue that just as current nuclear weapons states relied on dedicated military programs, so would any future would-be weapons country.4 Our view is different. **Leaving aside the correctness of the assumptions about past weapons programs, the past is not here a good guide to the future because conditions have changed fundamentally**. **Today all non-weapon states are members of the NPT**. **If one of these countries should decide to obtain weapons, it would have to withdraw or cheat, both courses risking a military response until the would-be bomb maker had weapons comfortably in hand**. **This would put a very high premium on traversing the period of vulnerability as quickly as possible**. Henry Kissinger made this point in the previously cited 2006 Trilateral Commission report: ―A policy of using preventive force against aspiring nuclear powers, however, creates incentives for them to acquire nuclear weapons as rapidly as possible . . .‖5

**That means drawing on bomb material and knowhow where it is most quickly obtainable, which would mean tapping a nuclear power program if there is one**, unless of course there are strict measures in place to prevent that. If there is any doubt about this conclusion, consider the following counter-historical: **Suppose each of the major WWII belligerents already had civilian nuclear power programs before the war started**. **Would they not have tapped them rather than started anew to develop independent nuclear weapons programs**? The answer suggests why strict nonproliferation measures are important.

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The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty’s Deficiencies ¶ In this regard, no one believes that we have adequate preventive anti-proliferation measures in place today. Otherwise we wouldn‘t be endlessly discussing various international fuel supply schemes to mitigate the risks that national uranium enrichment and fuel reprocessing might be used to produce nuclear explosives. Everyone understands that the NPT as it has been interpreted up to now has basic deficiencies: ¶ The treaty allows withdrawal on three months‘ notice. ¶ It does not delineate the limits on permissible ―peaceful‖ technology, with respect to fuels that are immediately usable to make nuclear explosives. ¶ It sharply restricts IAEA inspections. ¶ 5. See, Nuclear Proliferation: Risk and Responsibility. 6 ¶ The treaty lacks an established enforcement system, so that each violation requires an improvised response. ¶ The treaty‘s universality is undermined by India, Israel, North Korea, and Pakistan, which remain as examples of what a country can get away with. ¶ The advance of technology since the treaty went into force has exacerbated these problems by lowering the technological barriers between civilian nuclear activities and nuclear weapons. The prime example is the spread of centrifuge enrichment technology, which can be used to produce low enriched uranium to fuel power reactors but also can bring states within weeks of acquiring weapons-grade uranium to make a bomb. More generally, worldwide advances in materials and manufacturing and computing skills put weapons design and manufacture within reach of a larger group of countries. ¶ Nuclear Power Expansion Remains Goal of Major Nuclear Suppliers and of the IAEA ¶ Despite these acknowledged basic inadequacies of current anti-proliferation protections, the U.S. government has supported worldwide use of nuclear power since President Eisenhower‘s Atoms for Peace Program and continues to do so today. The rationale, however, has evolved. ¶ In proposing the program, Eisenhower said that starting with small projects had ―the great virtue that it can be undertaken without irritations and mutual suspicions incident to any attempt to set up a completely acceptable system of world-wide inspection and 7 control.‖6 In time, however, the projects got bigger and much more significant from the point of view of international security. Meanwhile, the effectiveness of the IAEA inspection system did not keep up. This arguably mattered less when the two Cold War camps expected to keep their client states in line mainly through their own intelligence and intervention. But now we really do need the ―completely acceptable system of worldwide inspection and control‖ that President Eisenhower spoke about, especially if there is to be a major expansion in use of nuclear power plants. ¶ At the moment, a major, global nuclear expansion is not in play, mainly because of unfavorable economics and, since the March 11, 2011 Fukushima accident, also because of increased safety concerns. 7 Nevertheless, such expansion remains the goal, or at least the expectation, of key nuclear exporters—the United States included—and of the IAEA in Vienna. ¶ President Obama has consistently supported an expanded role for nuclear power both abroad and at home. In a March 2012 speech at Hankuk University in South Korea, almost exactly a year after Fukushima, the president said the world needed nuclear power.8 He predicted that ―nuclear energy will only become more important,‖ and that remains the operational assumption in the U.S. government. ¶ 9 The IAEA also announced optimism about nuclear power expansion post-Fukushima. At the 2012 IAEA General Conference, Director General Amano said he expected a steady rise in the number of nuclear power plants in the world in the next 20 years.‖ His low case for 2030 projected a nuclear power capacity increase of about a quarter, and his high case projected a doubling of current capacity. 10 The projections are significant as expressions of the Agency‘s sentiments and those of the national nuclear bureaucracies it represents. However unrealistic, these projections find their way into official and semiofficial nuclear establishment reports and bolster support for nuclear power. ¶ Security Implications of the Climate Argument for Nuclear Power

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In his January 28, 2013 Inaugural address, **President Obama reiterated his support for building** ―a new generation of safe, clean nuclear power plants in this country.‖ In this he is following in his predecessors‘ footsteps.11 But his rationale—**that nuclear power is necessary to deal with climate change**—is significantly different, and it has far-reaching security implications.

Since we are talking about a global rather than a local effect, **the climate benefit of nuclear power installations only accrues if there are very many of them**. In resting the case for nuclear power on the need for them to deal with global warming, the proponents are therefore saying that we must build a very large number of nuclear plants. **The experts say it would take well over 1,000 plants just to make a dent on the climate problem**.12 **But an increase of that size would likely involve nuclear power programs in dozens more countries, including many in the rougher parts of the world**—most of the Middle Eastern countries have already expressed interest in building nuclear plants—a worrisome prospect from a security point of view.

**It spreads material, knowledge, and 3rd party markets.**

**Fuhrmann ’9** [Matthew; Professor of Political Science @ Texas A&M University, Former Associate Professor @ Stanford University’s Center for International Security & Cooperation, Stanton Nuclear Security Fellow @ the Council on Foreign Relations, Pre-Doctoral Research Fellow @ Harvard University’s Belfer Center for Science & International Affairs, Andrew Carnegie Fellow; Summer; JSTOR; “Spreading Temptation: Proliferation and Peaceful Nuclear Cooperation Agreements,” https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40389184.pdf; DOA: 3-22-2025; brackets and ellipses in original] tristan

This article argues that the conventional wisdom is wrong and dangerous. **All types of civilian nuclear assistance raise the risks of proliferation**. **Peaceful nuclear cooperation and proliferation are causally connected because of the dual-use nature of nuclear technology and know-how**.7 Civilian cooperation provides technology and materials necessary for a nuclear weapons program and helps to establish expertise in matters relevant to building the bomb. I develop four hypotheses based on this general insight. **First, receiving civilian nuclear assistance over time increases the likelihood that states will begin nuclear weapons programs because it reduces the expected costs of such a campaign and inspires greater confidence among leaders that the bomb could be successfully developed**. Second, militarized disputes with other countries condition the effect of civilian nuclear assistance on program initiation. The likelihood that nuclear assistance causes countries to begin weapons programs increases as their security environments worsen. Third, peaceful aid increases the probability that countries will successfully build nuclear weapons. Fourth, this is especially true when a country's security environment deteriorates.

To test these hypotheses, I produced a data set on civilian nuclear assistance based on the coding of all NCAs signed from 1945 to 2000.8 A combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis yields support for my arguments, even when controlling for the other variables thought to influence proliferation. The results from my statistical analysis indicate that other factors, such as industrial capacity and membership in the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), also have significant effects on proliferation. But peaceful cooperation is among the few variables that is consistently salient in explaining both nuclear weapons program onset and weapons acquisition.

The conclusions reached in this article should raise concern among policymakers in the United States and abroad. For more than fifty years, the international community has behaved as though peaceful atomic assistance could serve as an effective arms control policy. The United Nations established the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1957 to help bring nuclear energy to countries around the world and establish a system of safeguards to ensure that countries did not use peaceful assistance for military purposes.9 A decade later, Eisenhower's notion of "atoms for peace" was codified in the NPT, which obligates signatories to forgo nuclear weapons in exchange for access to nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. The findings in this article reveal that efforts to promote the spread of nuclear technology for peaceful use have largely backfired. Given that a nuclear energy renaissance looms on the horizon, the United States and other supplier countries should reevaluate their export practices

**Previous research has noted that illicit proliferation networks operated by "rogue" states can contribute to nuclear proliferation**.10 Most infamously, the Pakistan-based Abdul Qadeer (A.Q.) **Khan network served as a** "**Wal-Mart for proliferators**," **selling weapons-relevant technology to Iran, North Korea, and Pakistan, and possibly other countries**.11 **This article does not dispute that illicit commercial activities conducted by second-tier suppliers can facilitate the spread of nuclear weapons**. Rather, it demonstrates that legal nuclear commerce conducted under the auspices of the NPT can also have damaging effects for national and international security.

The next section offers an overview of the existing research on the causes of nuclear proliferation. In subsequent sections, I lay out my hypotheses linking peaceful nuclear cooperation and proliferation. I then draw from several cases to illustrate the plausibility of my argument and describe how civilian nuclear cooperation can contribute to the spread of nuclear weapons. Next I describe the statistical tests used to evaluate the hypotheses and discuss the results. I conclude by summarizing the article's findings, underscoring the contributions of this study, and offering directions for future research.

Why Do States Pursue Nuclear Weapons?

There is a rich literature on why states pursue nuclear weapons. In recent years this scholarship has turned its attention toward factors influencing a country's demand for nuclear weapons and has treated technological considerations as a secondary concern. For example, Scott Sagan argues that scholars and practitioners should focus on "addressing the sources of the political demand for nuclear weapons, rather than focusing primarily on efforts to safeguard existing stockpiles of nuclear materials and to restrict the supply of specific weapons technology from the 'haves' to the 'have-nots.'"12 The extant literature identifies a number of demand-side considerations that are salient in explaining nuclear proliferation, including: a state's security environment, international norms, domestic politics, and intangible or symbolic motivations.13 These studies are often dismissive of supply-side approaches because several countries most notably Germany and Japan have the technical capacity to build nuclear bombs but have chosen not to do so. This critique fails to consider, however, that technology-based arguments are probabilistic, not deterministic.14

Recent research focuses on the supply side of nuclear proliferation. This author has examined why states transfer dual-use technology that could be employed to build weapons of mass destruction and why countries export nuclear technology, materials, and know-how for peaceful purposes.15 Matthew Kroenig has analyzed reasons why states provide " sensitive" nuclear assistance to help other countries to build nuclear weapons.16 Other quantitative studies examine the links between technical capacity and the spread of nuclear weapons.17 These studies have found that indicators of economic capacity, such as a state's gross domestic product (GDP) and the nuclear-related resources it possesses, are correlated with weapons proliferation. Despite its many contributions, this work has not adequately addressed the links between civilian nuclear cooperation and weapons proliferation. In particular, it fails to sufficiently test the argument that the diffusion of knowledge and technology makes proliferation more likely. Dong-Joon Jo and Erik Gartzke include a variable in their model measuring the natural log of the number of years between 1938 and time t, which allows the authors to test the systemic effects of diffusion, but diffusion does not occur equally across all states.18 Kroenig examines the relationship between nuclear assistance and proliferation more directly, although he does not explore how peaceful aid can encourage countries to pursue nuclear weapons.19 He also does not examine how strategic factors such as militarized interstate disputes could interact with nuclear assistance. Kroenig argues that only certain sensitive nuclear assistance helps countries acquire the bomb.20 This type of aid makes up a mere fraction of all nuclear assistance, however. Of the more than 2,000 bilateral civilian nuclear cooperation agreements signed from 1945 to 2000, only 14 (less than 0.7 percent) meet Kroenig's definition of sensitive assistance. I argue that the relationship between nuclear aid and atomic weapons is much broader. All forms of atomic assistance whether it involves training scientists, supplying reactors, or building fuel fabrication facilities raise the likelihood that nuclear weapons will spread.

Civilian Nuclear Cooperation and the Bomb

Decades ago scholars offered a "technological momentum" hypothesis, suggesting that countries are more likely to pursue nuclear weapons once they obtain civilian nuclear technology and expertise.21 The logic driving this hypothesis is that the accumulation of nuclear technology and knowledge leads to incremental advances in the field of nuclear engineering that ultimately makes progress toward developing a nuclear weapons capability before a formal decision to build the bomb is made.22 John Holdren illustrates this argument well when he states that the proliferation of nuclear power represents the spread of an "attractive nuisance."23 This logic highlights the relationship between the peaceful and military uses of the atom, but it underplays the political dimensions of proliferation.24

Peaceful nuclear cooperation and nuclear weapons are related in two key respects. First, all technology and materials linked to a nuclear weapons program have legitimate civilian applications. For example, uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing facilities have dual uses because they can produce fuel for power reactors or fissile material for nuclear weapons. **Second, civilian nuclear cooperation increases knowledge in nuclear-related matters**. **This knowledge can then be applied to weapons-related endeavors**. **Civilian nuclear programs necessitate familiarity with the handling of radioactive materials, processes for fuel fabrication and materials** having chemical or nuclear properties, and the operation and function of reactors and electronic control systems. They also provide experience in other crucial fields, such as metallurgy and neutronics.25 These experiences offer "a technology base upon which a nuclear weapon program could draw."26

**These linkages suggest that peaceful nuclear assistance reduces the expected costs of a weapons program, making it more likely that a decision to begin such a program will be made**. Considerable political and economic costs such as international sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and strained relationships with allies can accompany nuclear weapons programs.27 **Leaders may be reluctant to take on these burdens unless they believe that a weapons campaign could succeed relatively quickly**.28 As Stephen Meyer argues, "**When the financial and resource demands of** [**beginning a weapons program**] **become less burdensome, states might opt to proceed** . . . under a balance of incentives and disincentives that traditionally might have been perceived as insufficient for a proliferation decision."29

Sometimes, nuclear assistance can cause leaders to initiate nuclear weapons programs in the absence of a compelling security threat. This usually happens when scientists and other members of atomic energy commissions convince the political leadership that producing a nuclear weapon is technologically possible and can be done with relatively limited costs.30 Scientists do not always push leaders down the nuclear path, but in many cases they do.31 **Leaders are persuaded by this lobbying because they are keenly aware that the quicker the bomb can be developed, the less likely other national priorities will suffer**.

Although nuclear assistance occasionally produces bomb programs in the absence of a security threat, the relationship between such assistance and proliferation is usually more nuanced. Countries that have received considerable assistance are especially likely to initiate bomb programs when threats arise because they have greater demand for the strategic advantages that nuclear weapons offer.32 In other words, peaceful nuclear assistance typically conditions the effect that a security environment has on a state's political decision to begin a weapons program. A state that suffers a defeat in war or feels threatened for another reason is unlikely to initiate a program if it lacks a developed civilian nuclear program. **Without the technical base in place, it is too costly to venture down the weapons path**. **This explains, in part, why Saudi Arabia has yet to begin a nuclear weapons program even though it faces considerable security threats**.33 Likewise, countries are unlikely to nuclearize even if they have accumulated significant amounts of assistance if they do not face security threats. On the other hand, initiation of a weapons program is more likely in states that operate in dangerous security environments and possess peaceful nuclear facilities and a cadre of trained scientists and technicians.

**Safeguards are off.**

**Gilinsky ’20** [Victor Gilinsky; Former commissioner of the Nuclear Regulation Commission; Henry Sokolski; Executive Director of NPEC; 02-25-2014; "“Bad Business: Pushing US Nuclear Exports,” The American Interest – NPEC"; Nonproliferation Policy Education Center; https://npolicy.org/bad-business-pushing-us-nuclear-exports-the-american-interest/; accessed 03-23-2025] //dg

But the **nuclear enthusiasts say that’s too strict, that others have more accommodating terms, and that if we sell with looser terms, we’ll have more influence**. **They have their eye especially on Saudi Arabia**, a country that at one point said, implausibly, it was going to build 16 nuclear power plants. **They don’t seem to pay attention to the other thing the Saudis said**—**the crown prince’s statement that if Iran was going to get a bomb, he was going to get one, too, and fast**.

**It’s not just the Trump crowd that opposes tightening security rules over nuclear exports** (in the name, they say, of security). President Obama’s Energy Secretary, Ernest Moniz, has been arguing that subsidizing domestic nuclear power and encouraging nuclear sales without especially tight security restrictions—restrictions that go by the rubric of “gold standard”—are in the interests of U.S. nuclear security, and even support the deterrence value of our nuclear weapons.

**All this is a bit much**. **Do we really think that Russia, with a GNP below that of Italy, is capable of freezing us out of the world**? **Does it have the financial capacity** to offer generous terms on many projects? Will they ever be completed?

**Nuclear power is just one U.S. export technology**, and not exactly the most promising. For example, the U.S. exported $136 billion in aircraft last year; U.S. nuclear exports for the same period could only be measured in millions of dollars. **China is building a comparatively large number of nuclear plants but nuclear power supplies less than five percent of its electrical demand** and is only projected to account for seven percent by 2040. **Any large accident will turn this program off**.

**Detection is impossible.**

**Lyman ’11** [Dr. Edwin; Senior Scientist @ Global Security Program, Member of the Union of Concerned Scientists; July 14; UCSUSA; “An examination of the safety and economics of light water small modular reactors,” https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951d035862139; DOA: 3-23-2025] tristan

**The distributed deployment of small reactors would also put great strains on existing licensing and inspection resources**. Nuclear reactors are qualitatively different from other types of generating facilities, not least because they require a much more extensive safety and security inspection regime. Similarly, deployment of individual small reactors at widely distributed and remote sites around the world would strain the resources of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and its ability to adequately safeguard reactors to guard against proliferation, **since IAEA inspectors would need to visit many more locations per installed megawatt around the world**. **Maintaining robust oversight over vast networks of SMRs around the world would be difficult, if feasible at all**.

**Spread enables WMDs.**

**Squassoni ’24** [Sharon; Research Professor of International Affairs @ the George Washington University; April; George Washington University; “New Nuclear Energy: Assessing the National Security Risks,” https://bpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/blogs.gwu.edu/dist/7/1053/files/2024/04/NewNuclearRisk\_Report\_2024\_v4-1-0b59385f1c7d4153.pdf; DOA: 3-23-2025] tristan

At the time of the 2008 ISAB report, small modular reactors were not being widely considered as potentially influencing the spread of nuclear power.64 Yet a successful “**SMR** **revolution**” could **lower** the **political**, **technical**, and **financial** **barriers** to entry into the **nuclear** field **significantly**. In some regions, political instability or **terrorist** **activity** could **increase** risks for nuclear energy. For those countries that do not already have nuclear research reactors, developing the scientific and engineering skills associated with nuclear power would enhance their proliferation potential, triggering concern in neighboring states about the possibility that these countries could develop weapons programs.

In addition to more states deploying nuclear energy, more **reactors** will **require** more **fuel** **services**. An “SMR revolution” limited to light water reactor designs may not increase proliferation risks if countries forego reprocessing. But it would still require **expanded** **enrichment** capacity. In particular, small modular reactors that require infrequent refueling operate less efficiently with that fuel, requiring **more** **uranium** to be **mined**, processed and enriched.65 An **increase** in the number of **enrichment** **plants** around the world, particularly if they are located in new countries, would **raise** proliferation **risks**.

Widespread use of reactors fueled by HEU or plutonium would certainly increase the risks of **proliferation** and **terrorism** since those **materials** are **weapons**-**usable**. But even the greater use of high-assay low-enriched (HALEU) fuel could heighten proliferation and terrorism risks compared to the status quo. HALEU would be impractical to use directly in a nuclear weapon, but it is not impossible. One calculation is that 300kg of 19.75% enriched HALEU would be needed in a nuclear weapon; a **single** Oklo **microreactor** would contain **enough** **material** for **10** **bombs**.66

Similarly, reactor designs that feature **lifetime** **cores** begin with a higher load of fissile material and continue to produce plutonium in the fuel. One estimate is that a 200 MWe lifetime core reactor could contain 1000kg of plutonium after seven years and 3000 kg of plutonium after 30 years.67 This is **hundreds** of **weapons’** worth of plutonium in a single core.

Lastly, SMR designs that incorporate continuous recycle of fuel may pose the highest proliferation risk. These can include designs that integrate pyroprocessing, a version of reprocessing

As in 2008, **nuclear** **energy** is still highly **concentrated** in a comparatively **small** number of **countries**. The top generators of nuclear electricity constitute about seventy percent of global capacity. Two-thirds of countries with commercial nuclear power have 5 or fewer reactors while fewer than ten countries have ten or more. The **promotion** of **SMRs** could **change** those **numbers** drastically, with two to three times as many countries operating nuclear power plants. Even if the risk of proliferation remains constant, a **growing number** of reactors provides **additional** **targets** for **sabotage**, coercion, blackmail or military operations. Reactors that are housed underground could mitigate some of the risks that might accrue from increased numbers of reactors, likely at an increased cost.

For many countries, the attacks on, coercion of and misinformation propagated about Ukraine’s nuclear energy program since last year may be perceived as local, aberrant risks brought about by war. Indeed, before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the shelling of nuclear power plants was unthinkable in the context of central Europe. However, national security risks can materialize in situations short of war if nuclear energy expands to countries with fragile governance structures and experience.

The 2008 ISAB study identified 30 countries that did not have nuclear power but were interested in moving ahead. The table below lists those countries according to how far their plans have developed and their supplier relationships as well as other countries that have a developed an interest in nuclear power since 2008.68 Most importantly, Table 2 includes all countries’ ranking in the 2022 Fragile States Index. (The Fragile States Index ranks countries in terms of their sustainability, using three measures in four areas: cohesion, economics, political legitimacy and social/cross-cutting indicators.) Finally, the table highlights where countries have specifically noted an interest in SMRs and those that might have potential interest based on the existence of an electrical grid smaller than 20 GWe. Those countries highlighted in bold text already have nuclear power plants under construction, all by Russian vendors.

Many of the **countries** that have **expressed** an **interest** in nuclear power may never move forward. More than **half**, however, **appeared** in the **Fragile** **States** **Index** with a rating of “Warning” or higher and three– Syria, Sudan, and Myanmar – appeared in the “High Alert” category.

**Countries immediately react.**

**Schaer ‘24** [Cathrin Schaer; freelance journalist and editor with primarily DW News; 05-28-2024; "Could a US-Saudi nuclear deal spark Middle East arms race? – DW – 05/28/2024"; DW News; https://www.dw.com/en/how-us-saudi-mega-deal-could-spark-nuclear-arms-race-in-middle-east/a-69206058; accessed 03-23-2025] //dg

**Besides fears that the Saudis might end up with nuclear bombs, there are also concerns that simply permitting them to enrich uranium would set off a regional race**.

"Allowing Saudi Arabia to acquire **such capabilities could set a problematic precedent at the international level**. It could possibly encourage other countries in the region, such as **Egypt or Turkey, to pursue similar nuclear capabilities, leading to a proliferation cascade in an already volatile Middle East**," Manuel Herrera, a researcher focused on nuclear non-proliferation at Istituto Affari Internazionali, an Italian thinktank, wrote late last year.

**Preemptive strikes ensue.**

**Cimbala ’23** [Stephen J. Cimbala; Distinguished Professor of Political Science, Penn State Brandywine, an American Studies faculty member; Adam B. Lowther; Research Professor at the Air Force Research Institute, 06-28-2023; “Nuclear Danger in Asia: Arms Races or Stability?”; Politics Between Nations; pp 263–280; Springer; access at https://drive.google.com/file/d/14S6vNFrtea17NeUY9GUFDVUA-qmfm499/view?usp=sharing; accessed 11-03-2024] leon

**The spread of nuclear weapons in Asia poses two kinds of threats to international peace and security**. **The first is that of a deliberate decision taken for nuclear first strike**, either **in mistaken fear of imminent attack, or as a preventive war** to disable a rising and presumably threatening opponent. **The second nuclear danger in Asia is that of inadvertent escalation growing out of a conventional war**, and related to this, **the possibility of accidental or inadvertent use of nuclear forces due to military usurpation of civil authority or technical malfunction**.20 However, there is no reliable metric for relating the numbers of nuclear weapons states to the probability of nuclear first use. States’ internal decision-making processes will drive these decisions, for better or worse. Although the international system imposes certain constraints on the behaviors of current and aspiring nuclear weapons states, **the system is also the derivative of their respective national priorities and threat perceptions**.

**Perception of nuclear terror causes extinction.**

**Hayes ’18** [Peter; PhD from Yale University, Director of the Nautilus Institute, Honorary Professor @ the Centre for International Security Studies @ the University of Sydney, Former Professor @ Northwestern University; January 18; Nautilus Institute; “NON-STATE TERRORISM AND INADVERTENT NUCLEAR WAR,” https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/non-state-terrorism-and-inadvertent-nuclear-war/; DOA: 3-19-2025] tristan \*\*brackets & ellipses r og\*\*

* Early **warning** **systems** fail or are “**tripped**” in ways that lead to **launch**-on-**warning**
* Accidental nuclear detonation, including sub-critical explosions.
* **Strategic** **miscalculation** in crisis, **show** of **force**
* **Decision**-**making** **failure** (such as irrational, **misperception**, bias, degraded, group, and **time**-**compressed** decision-making)
* Allied or enemy **choices** (to **seek** **revenge**, to exploit nuclear risk, to act out of **desperation**)
* Organizational cybernetics whereby a nuclear command-control-and communications (NC3) system generates error, including the interplay of national NC3 systems in what may be termed the meta-NC3 system.

Exactly how, where, and when nuclear terrorism may “ambush” nuclear armed states already heading for or on such a path to inadvertent nuclear war depends on who is targeting whom at a given time, either immediately due to high tension, or generally due to a structural conflict between states. Nuclear armed states today form a complex set of global threat relationships that are not distributed uniformly across the face of Earth. Rather, based on sheer firepower and reach, the nine nuclear weapons states form a global hierarchy with at least four tiers, viz:

* Tier 1: United States, clear technological supremacy and qualitative edge.
* Tier 2: Russia, China, global nuclear powers and peers with the United States due to the unique destructive power of even relatively small nuclear arsenals, combined with global reach of missile and bomber delivery systems, thereby constituting a two-tiered global “nuclear triangle” with the United States.
* Tier 3: France, UK, NATO nuclear sharing and delivery NATO members (Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey) and the NATO and Pacific nuclear umbrella states (Japan, South Korea, Australia) that depend on American nuclear extended deterrence and directly and indirectly support US and US-allied nuclear operations even though they do not host nor deliver nuclear weapons themselves.
* Tier 4: India, Pakistan, Israel, DPRK.

The first two tiers constitute the global nuclear threat triangle that exists between the United States, Russia, and China, forming a global nuclear “truel.” Each of these states targets the other s; each represents an existential threat to the other; and each has a long history of mutual nuclear threat that is now a core element of their strategic identity.

Tier three consists of states with their own nuclear force but integrated with that of the United States (even France!) that expand the zone of mutual nuclear threat over much of the northern and even parts of the southern hemisphere; and states that host American nuclear command, control, communications, and intelligence systems that support US nuclear operations and to whom nuclear deterrence is “extended” (if, for example, Australia’s claim to having an American nuclear umbrella is believed). The fourth tier is composed of smaller nuclear forces with a primarily regional reach and focus.

Between most of these nuclear armed states and across the tiers, there are few shared “rules of the road.” The more of these states that are engaged in a specific conflict and location, the more unpredictable and unstable this global nuclear threat system becomes, with the potential for cascading and concatenating effects. Indeed, as the number of nuclear states projecting nuclear threat against each other increases, the notion of strategic stability may lose all meaning.

The emergence of a fifth tier—of non-state actors with the capacity to project nuclear threat against nuclear-armed and nuclear umbrella states (although not only these states)—is a critically important possible catalytic actor in the new conditions of nuclear threat complexity that already exist today. Such a layer represents an “edge of chaos” where the attempts by nuclear armed states to exert absolute “vertical” control over the use of nuclear weapons confront the potential of non-state entities and even individuals (insiders) to engage in “horizontal” nuclear terrorism, presenting radically different control imperatives to the standard paradigm of organizational procedures, technical measures, and safeguards of various kinds. This tier is like the waves and tides on a beach that quickly surrounds and then causes sand castles to collapse.

In 2010, Robert Ayson reviewed the potential linkages between inter-state nuclear war and non-state terrorism. He concluded: “…[T]hese two nuclear worlds—a non-state actor nuclear attack and a catastrophic interstate nuclear exchange—are not necessarily separable. It is just possible that some sort of terrorist attack, and especially an act of **nuclear** **terrorism**, could **precipitate** a **chain** of **events** leading to a **massive** **exchange** of nuclear **weapons** between two or more of the states that possess them.”[5] How this linkage might unfold is the subject of the next sections of this essay.

Are non-state actors motivated and able to attempt nuclear terrorism?

A **diverse** set of **non**-**state** **actors** have **engaged** in **terrorist** **activities**—for which there is no simple or consensual definition. In 2011, there were more than 6,900 known extremist, terrorist and other organizations associated with guerrilla warfare, political violence, protest, organized crime and cyber-crime. Of these, about 120 terrorist and extremist groups had been blacklisted by the United Nations, the European Union and six major countries.[6]

Some have argued that the **technical**, **organizational**, and **funding** **demanded** for a successful nuclear attack, especially involving nuclear weapons, **exceeds** the **capacity** of most of the **non**-**state** **actors** with terrorist proclivities. Unfortunately, this **assertion** is **not** **true**, especially at lower levels of impact as shown in Figure 1; but even at the **highest** **levels** of obtaining authentic nuclear weapons **capabilities**, a small **number** of non-state **actors** already **exhibit** the **motivation** and possible **capacity** to become **nuclear**-**armed**.

Ellingsen suggests a useful distinction that nuclear terrorists may be impelled by two divergent motivations, as shown in Figure 2, creating “opportunistic” and “patient” profiles.[7] The requirements for an opportunist non-state nuclear terrorist tend towards immediate use and the search for short-term payoffs with only tactical levels of commitment; whereas the patient non-state nuclear terrorist is able and willing to sustain a long-term acquisition effort to deal a strategic blow to an adversary in a manner that could be achieved only with nuclear weapons.

In turn, many factors will drive how a potential nuclear terrorist non-state organization that obtains nuclear weapons or materials may seek to employ them, especially in its nuclear command-and-control orientations.

Blair and Ackerman suggest that the goals, conditions, and capacity limitations that shape a possible nuclear terrorist’s posture lead logically to three types of nuclear terrorist nuclear command-and-control postures, viz: pre-determined (in which the leadership sends a fire order to a nuclear-armed subordinate and no change is entertained and no capacity to effect change is established in the field, that is, the order is fire-and-forget); assertive (in which only the central command can issue a nuclear fire order, central control is maintained at all times, with resulting demanding communications systems to support such control); and delegative (in which lower level commanders control nuclear weapons and have pre-delegated authority to use them in defined circumstances, for example, evidence of nuclear explosions combined with loss-of-connectivity with their central command).[8] An example of such delegative control system was the November 26, 2008 attack on Mumbai that used social media reporting to enable the attacking terrorists to respond to distant controller direction and to adapt to counter-terrorist attacks—a connectivity tactic that the authorities were too slow to shut down before mayhem was achieved.[9]

Logically, one might expect nuclear **terrorists** oriented toward **short**-**term**, **tactical** **goals** to **employ** pre-determined **nuclear** command-and-control **strategies** in the hope that the **speed** of **attack** and **minimum** field **communications** **avoids** **discovery** and **interdiction** before the attack is complete; whereas nuclear terrorists oriented toward long-term, strategic goals might employ more pre-delegative command-and-control systems that would support a bargaining use and therefore a field capacity to deploy nuclear weapons or materials that can calibrate actual attack based on communications with the central leadership with the risk of interdiction through surveillance and counter-attack. These differing strategic motivations, timelines, and strategies in many respects invert those of nuclear weapons states that rely on large organizations, procedures, and technical controls, to ensure that nuclear weapons are never used without legitimate authorization; and if they are used, to minimize needless civilian casualties (at least some nuclear armed states aspire to this outcome). The repertoire of state-based practices that presents other states with credible nuclear threat and reassures them that nuclear weapons are secure and controlled is likely to be completely mismatched with the strengths and strategies of non-state nuclear terrorists that may seek to maximize civilian terror, are not always concerned about their own survival or even that of their families and communities-of-origin, and may be willing to take extraordinary risk combined with creativity to exploit the opportunities for attack presented by nuclear weapons, umbrella, and non-nuclear states, or their private adversaries.

For non-state actors to succeed at complex engineering project such as acquiring a nuclear weapons or nuclear threat capacity demands substantial effort. Gary **Ackerman** specifies that to have a **chance** of succeeding, non-state actors with nuclear weapons aspirations must be able to **demonstrate** that they **control** substantial **resources**, have a **safe** **haven** in which to conduct research and development, have their **own** or **procured** **expertise**, are able to learn from failing and have the stamina and strategic commitment to do so, and manifest long-term planning and ability to make rational choices on decadal timelines. He **identified** **five** such violent non-state **actors** who already **conducted** such engineering **projects** (see Figure 3), and also noted the important facilitating condition of a global network of expertize and hardware. Thus, **although** the skill, financial, and materiel **requirements** of a non-state nuclear weapons project present a **high** **bar**, they are **certainly** **reachable**.

Along similar lines, James Forest examined the extent to which non-state actors can pose a threat of nuclear terrorism.[10] He notes that such entities face practical constraints, including expense, the obstacles to stealing many essential elements for nuclear weapons, the risk of discovery, and the difficulties of constructing and concealing such weapons. He also recognizes the strategic constraints that work against obtaining nuclear weapons, including a cost-benefit analysis, possible de-legitimation that might follow from perceived genocidal intent or use, and the primacy of political-ideological objectives over long-term projects that might lead to the group’s elimination, the availability of cheaper and more effective alternatives that would be foregone by pursuit of nuclear weapons, and the risk of failure and/or discovery before successful acquisition and use occurs. In the **past**, almost all—but not all—non-state **terrorist** **groups** appeared to be **restrained** by a combination of high practical and strategic constraints, plus their own cost-benefit analysis of the opportunity costs of pursuing nuclear weapons. However, should some or all of these constraints diminish, a **rapid** **non**-**state** nuclear **proliferation** is **possible**.

Although only a few non-state actors such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State have exhibited such underlying stamina and organizational capacities and actually attempted to obtain nuclear weapons-related skills, hardware, and materials, the **past** is **not** **prologue**. An incredibly diverse set of variously **motivated** terrorist **groups** **exist** already, including politico-ideological, **apocalyptic**-millenarian, politico-**religious**, nationalist-separatist, ecological, and **political**-**insurgency** **entities**, some of which converge with criminal-military and criminal-scientist (profit based) networks; but also **pyscho**-**pathological** mass **killing** **cults**, lone wolves, and ephemeral copy-cat non-state actors. The **social**, economic, and deculturating **conditions** that **generate** such **entities** are **likely** to persist and even **expand**.

In particular, rapidly growing coastal mega-cities as part of rapid global urbanization offer such actors the ability to sustain themselves as “flow gatekeepers,” possibly in alliance with global criminal networks, thereby supplanting the highland origins of many of today’s non-state violent actors with global reach.[11] Other contributing factors contributing to the supply of possible non-state actors seeking nuclear weapons include new entries such as city states in search of new security strategies, megacities creating their own transnationally active security forces, non-states with partial or complete territorial control such as Taiwan and various micro-states, failing states, provinces in dissociating, failing states that fall victim to internal chaos and the displacement effects of untrammeled globalization, and altogether failed states resulting in ungoverned spaces. To this must be added domestic terrorist entities in the advanced industrial states as they hollow out their economies due to economic globalization and restructuring, adjust to cross-border migration, and adapt to cultural and political dislocation.

In short, the prognosis is for the fifth tier of non-state actors to beset the other four tiers with intense turbulence just as waves on a beach swirl around sandcastles, washing away their foundations, causing grains of sand to cascade, and eventually collapsing the whole structure.

Observed non-state nuclear threats and attacks

In light of the constraints faced by non-state terrorist actors in past decades, it is not surprising that the constellation of actual nuclear terrorist attacks and threats has been relatively limited during and since the end of the Cold War. As Martha Crenshaw noted in a comment on the draft of this paper:

We still don’t know why terrorists (in the sense of non-state actors) have not moved into the CBRN [chemical,biological, radiological or nuclear ] domain. (Many people think biosecurity is more critical, for that matter.) Such a move would be extremely risky for the terrorist actor, even if the group possessed both capability (resources, secure space, time, patience) and motivation (willingness to expend the effort, considering opportunity costs). So far it appears that “conventional” terrorism serves their purposes well enough. Most of what we have seen is rhetoric, with some scattered and not always energetic initiatives.[12]

Nonetheless, those that have occurred demonstrate unambiguously that such threats and attacks are not merely hypothetical, in spite of the limiting conditions outlined above. One **survey** **documented** **eighty** actual, planned **attacks** on **nuclear** **facilities** containing **nuclear** **materials** between 1961-2016[13] as follows:

* 80 attacks in 3 waves (1970s armed assaults, 1990s thefts, post-2010, breaches)
* High threat attacks: **32**/80 attacks **posed** **substantial**, verified **threat** of which 44 percent involved insiders.
* All types of targets were found in the data set—on reactors, other nuclear facilities, military bases leading Gary Ackerman and to conclude: “Overall, **empirical** **evidence** suggests that there are **sufficient** **cases** in each of the listed categories that **no** type of **threat** can be **ignored**.”[14]

**No** **region** was **immune**; no year was without such a threat or attack. Thus, there is a likely to be a coincidence of future non-state threats and attacks with inter-state nuclear-prone conflicts, as in the past, and possibly more so given the current trend in and the generative conditions for global terrorist activity that will likely pertain in the coming decades.

Of these attacks, about a quarter each were ethno-nationalist, secular utopian, or unknown in motivation; and the remaining quarter were a motley mix of religious (11 percent), “other” (5 percent), personal-idiosyncratic (4 percent), single issue (2 percent) and state sponsored (1 percent) in motivation.

The conclusion is unavoidable that there a **non**-**state** nuclear terrorist **attack** in the Northeast Asia region is **possible**. The following sections outline the possible situations in which nuclear terrorist attacks might be implicated as a **trigger** to interstate conflict, and even **nuclear** **war**. Particular attention is paid to the how **nuclear** **command**, **control** and **communications** systems may play an **independent** and unanticipated **role** in leading to **inadvertent** **nuclear** **war**, separate to the contributors to inadvertency normally included such as **degradation** of **decision**-**making** due to **time** and other **pressures**; accident; “wetware” (**human** **failures**), software or hardware failures; and **misinterpretation** of intended or unintended **signals** from an **adversary**.

Regional pathways to interstate nuclear war

At least five distinct nuclear-prone axes of conflict are evident in Northeast Asia. These are:

* US-DPRK conflict (including with United States, US allies Japan, South Korea and Australia; and all other UNC command allies. Many permutations possible ranging from non-violent collapse to implosion and civil war, inter-Korean war, slow humanitarian crisis. Of these implosion-civil war in the DPRK may be the most dangerous, followed closely by an altercation at the Joint Security Area at Panmunjon where US, ROK, and DPRK soldiers interact constantly.
* China-Taiwan conflict, whereby China may use nuclear weapons to overcome US forces operating in the West Pacific, either at sea, or based on US (Guam, Alaska) or US allied territory in the ROK, Japan, the Philippines, or Australia); or US uses nuclear weapons in response to Chinese attack on Taiwan.
* China-Japan conflict escalates via attacks on early warning systems, for example, underwater hydrophone systems (Ayson-Ball, 2011).
* China-Russia conflict, possibly in context of loss-of-control of Chinese nuclear forces in a regional conflict involving Taiwan or North Korea.
* Russia-US conflict, involving horizontal escalation from a head-on collision with Russian nuclear forces in Europe or the Middle East; or somehow starts at sea (mostly likely seems ASW) or over North Korea (some have cited risk of US missile defenses against North Korean attack as risking Russian immediate response).

Combinations of or simultaneous eruption of the above conflicts that culminate in nuclear war are also possible. Other unanticipated nuclear-prone conflict axes (such as Russia-Japan) could also emerge with little warning.

Precursors of such nuclear-laden conflicts in this region also exist that could lead states to the brink of nuclear war and demonstrate that nuclear war is all too possible between states in this region. Examples include the August 1958 Quemoy-Matsu crisis, in which the United States deployed nuclear weapons to Taiwan, and the US Air Force has only a nuclear defense strategy in place to defend Taiwan should China have escalated its shelling campaign to an actual attack; the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, when a US nuclear armed missile was nearly fired from Okinawa due to a false fire order; the March 1969 Chinese-Soviet military clash and resulting consideration of nuclear attacks by both sides; and the August 1976 poplar tree crisis at Panmunjon in Korea, when the United States moved nuclear weapons back to the DMZ and the White House issued pre-delegated orders to the US commander in Korea to attack North Korea if the tree cutting task force was attacked by North Korean forces.

Loss-of-control of Nuclear Weapons

As is well known, nuclear armed states must routinely—and in the midst of a crisis—ensure that their nuclear weapons are never used without legitimate authority, but also ensure at the same time that they are always available for immediate use with legitimate authority. This “always-never” paradox is managed in part by a set of negative and positive controls, reliant upon procedural and technical measures, to maintain legitimate state-based command-and-control (see Figure Four).

In this framework, Jerry Conley has produced a taxonomy of nuclear command-and-control structures that embody varying notional national “command-and-control” orientations (also referred to as stability points or biases).  Each nuclear armed state exhibits a distinct preference for technical and procedural measures to achieve negative and positive control of nuclear weapons.  The way that a state constructs its control system varies depending on its size, wealth, technology, leadership, and strategic orientation, lending each state a unique use propensity affected by the information processing and transmission functions of the nuclear command-and-control system, that in part determines the use or non-use decisions made by the leaders of nuclear armed states.  The resulting ideal nuclear command-and-control state structures are shown in Table 1.

In Northeast Asia, a four-way nuclear threat system exists that has a three world-class nuclear armed states, the United States, Russia and China, interacting with a fourth tier, barely nuclear armed state, the DPRK.  In this quadrilateral nuclear standoff, the DPRK’s simple NC3 system likely is an amalgam of a poorly resourced, militarized, and personalized leadership—which may lead it to oscillate between procedural and technical measures as the basis of control, with a primary emphasis on positive use control, not negative control to avoid unauthorized use.  China’s large, centralized NC3 system co-mingles nuclear and conventional communications between national commanders and deployed nuclear forces and may emphasize negative more than positive use controls to ensure Party control. Russia’s highly centralized, complex NC3 system relies on legacy technology and limited economic base for modernization.  It too may be more oriented towards negative controls in peacetime, but have the capacity to spring almost instantly to primary reliance on positive controls in times of crisis or tension.  The US NC3 system is large, complex and based on wealth and technological prowess. It is under civilian, not military control, at least in principle and in peacetime, and is redundant, diverse, and relatively resilient.

Non-state nuclear attack as trigger of inter-state nuclear war in Northeast Asia

The critical issue is how a **nuclear** terrorist **attack** may “**catalyze**” inter-state **nuclear** **war**, especially the **NC3** **systems** that **inform** and partly determine how **leaders** respond to nuclear threat.  Current conditions in Northeast Asia suggest that **multiple** precursory **conditions** for nuclear terrorism **already** **exist** or exist in nascent form.  In Japan, for example, low-level, individual, **terroristic** **violence** with nuclear materials, against nuclear **facilities**, is **real**.  In all countries of the region, the risk of diversion of nuclear material is real, although the risk is likely higher due to volume and laxity of security in some countries of the region than in others. In all countries, the risk of an insider “sleeper” threat is real in security and nuclear agencies, and such insiders already operated in actual terrorist organizations. Insider corruption is also observable in nuclear fuel cycle agencies in all countries of the region.  The threat of extortion to induce insider cooperation is also real in all countries.  The possibility of a cult attempting to build and buy nuclear weapons is real and has already occurred in the region.[15] Cyber-terrorism against nuclear reactors is real and such attacks have already taken place in South Korea (although it remains difficult to attribute the source of the attacks with certainty). The stand-off ballistic and drone threat to nuclear weapons and fuel cycle facilities is real in the region, including from non-state actors, some of whom have already adopted and used such technology almost instantly from when it becomes accessible (for example, drones).[16]

Two other broad risk factors are also present in the region. The **social** and **political** **conditions** for **extreme** ethnic and xenophobic **nationalism** are **emerging** in China, Korea, Japan, and Russia.  Although there has been no risk of attack on or loss of control over nuclear weapons since their removal from Japan in 1972 and from South Korea in 1991, this risk continues to exist in North Korea, China, and Russia, and to the extent that they are deployed on aircraft and ships of these and other nuclear weapons states (including submarines) deployed in the region’s high seas, also outside their territorial borders.

The most conducive circumstance for catalysis to occur due to a nuclear terrorist attack might involve the following nexi of timing and conditions:

Low-level, tactical, or random individual terrorist attacks for whatever reasons, even assassination of national leaders, up to and including dirty radiological bomb attacks, that overlap with inter-state crisis dynamics in ways that affect state decisions to threaten with or to use nuclear weapons. This might be undertaken by an opportunist nuclear terrorist entity in search of rapid and high political impact.

**Attacks** on major **national** or **international** **events** in each country to **maximize** **terror** and to de-legitimate national leaders and whole governments. In Japan, for example, more than ten heads of state and senior ministerial international meetings are held each year.  For the strategic nuclear terrorist, patiently acquiring higher level nuclear threat capabilities for such attacks and then staging them to maximum effect could accrue strategic gains.

Attacks or threatened attacks, including deception and disguised attacks, will have maximum leverage when nuclear-armed states are near or on the brink of war or during a national crisis (such as Fukushima), when intelligence agencies, national leaders, facility operators, surveillance and policing agencies, and first responders are already maximally committed and over-extended.

At this point, we note an important caveat to the original concept of catalytic nuclear war as it might pertain to nuclear terrorist threats or attacks.  Although an attack might be disguised so that it is attributed to a nuclear-armed state, or a ruse might be undertaken to threaten such attacks by deception, in reality a catalytic strike by a nuclear weapons state in conditions of mutual vulnerability to nuclear retaliation for such a strike from other nuclear armed states would be highly irrational.

Accordingly, the effect of nuclear terrorism involving a nuclear detonation or major radiological release may not of itself be catalytic of nuclear war—at least not intentionally–because it will not lead directly to the destruction of a targeted nuclear-armed state.  Rather, it may be **catalytic** of non-**nuclear** **war** between **states**, especially if the **non**-**state** **actor** turns out to be **aligned** with or **sponsored** by a **state** (in many Japanese minds, the natural candidate for the perpetrator of such an attack is the pro-North Korean General Association of Korean Residents, often called Chosen Soren, which represents many of the otherwise stateless Koreans who were born and live in Japan) and a further sequence of coincident events is necessary to drive escalation to the point of nuclear first use by a state. Also, the catalyst—the non-state actor–is almost assured of discovery and destruction either during the attack itself (if it takes the form of a nuclear suicide attack then self-immolation is assured) or as a result of a search-and-destroy campaign from the targeted state (unless the targeted government is annihilated by the initial terrorist nuclear attack).

It follows that the **effects** of a non-state nuclear **attack** may be characterized better as a **trigger** **effect**, bringing about a **cascade** of **nuclear** use **decisions** within NC3 systems that shift each state increasingly away from nuclear non-use and increasingly towards nuclear use by releasing negative controls and enhancing positive controls in multiple action-reaction escalation spirals (depending on how many nuclear armed states are party to an inter-state conflict that is already underway at the time of the non-state nuclear attack); and/or by inducing concatenating nuclear attacks across geographically proximate nuclear weapons forces of states already caught in the crossfire of nuclear threat or attacks of their own making before a nuclear terrorist attack.[17]

An example of a cascading effect would be a **non**-**state** **attack** on a key node of linked **early** **warning** **systems** that is **unique** to and **critical** for **strategic** nuclear **forces** to be employable, or the effect of multiple, coincident and erroneous sensor alerts of incoming attacks (as occurred during the Cuban Missile Crisis with radar in Florida monitoring Soviet missiles in Cuba that mistakenly fused an erroneous reading of a missile trajectory with a real observation of a Soviet satellite that happened to be passing overhead).

An example of a concatenating effect would an attack that **leads** a nuclear **weapons** **state** to **target** two other **states** **forces** because it **cannot** **determine** **whose** forces **attacked** its **own**.  This circumstance might arise if key anti-submarine forces or an aircraft carrier battle group were attacked and it was impossible to determine in a given waterway or area of ocean whose submarines were present or responsible for the attack, leading the attacked state to destroy all the submarines presenting on-going threat to its strategic forces.

As we noted above, a terrorist nuclear shock may take various forms and appear in different places.  Ever since an extortion attempt in Boston in 1974 based on the threat of nuclear detonation, the threat of an improvised nuclear device has been credible.  For such a threat to be credible, a non-state terrorist entity must release a plausible precursor such as nuclear material or warhead design information, or stage an actual demonstration attack that makes it plausible that the attacker controls a significant quantity of fissile material (most likely plutonium, or simply radioactive materials suitable for a radiological device that might be used to draw in first responders and then detonate a warhead to maximize damage and terror). Such an attack might be combined with a separate attack on critical infrastructure such as a cyberattack.  The attacker might retain sufficient material for bargaining and insurance should the initial attack fail. Given the need to adapt to circumstances, such an attacker is likely to be patient and strategic, in the terms defined earlier, and to have extensive organizational and communication capacities; and to be able to operate at multiple targeted sites, possibly in multiple countries. Given its patience and stamina, such an attacker would select a highly symbolic target such as a high level meeting. Such a case would present the targeted state with an exquisite dilemma: bargaining and negotiation with the non-state actor threatening such an attack may be justified given the explicit and plausible nature of the threat, which may be politically impossible while making counter-terrorism operations very risky and only possible with extreme caution. And, such an **attacker** might well **issue** a **false** **statement** about **state**-**sponsorship** to **invoke** third **parties** in ways that vastly **complicate** the response to the **threat**.

If the attacker is less capable and driven for immediate political or other returns, then it may be satisfied with highly delegated delivery with no recall option, and no use of communications to minimize the risk of discovery or interdiction. Such an attacker is also less likely to wait for the circumstances in which inter-state nuclear war is more likely due to inter-state tension; and also less likely to seek third party effects beyond the damage to the immediate target and resulting terror. Should **surveillance** **indicate** that an **improvised** nuclear **device** is in motion, then an all-out **search** to interdict the attackers and to retrieve the device or materials would likely **ensue**.

In these two instances of credible threat of non-state nuclear attack, the insider versus outsider perpetrator factor will affect significantly how the attack affects possible inter-state conflicts.  In Kobe’s terms, if the **perpetrator** is confirmed to be an **outsider**, then a **country**-of-**origin** **suspicion** **matrix** may **cast** **suspicion** onto **another** **state** as possible sponsor.  For an attack threatened in China, the linkage might be back to Russia, the United States, or North Korea.  For an attack threatened in Russia, the linkage might be back to the United States, China, or North Korea. For an attack threatened in North Korea, the linkage might be back to the United States, China, or Russia.  And for an attack threatened in one of the umbrella states in the region, South Korea and Japan, such an attack might be linked to each other, as well as to China, North Korea, or Russia. In each case, the **shadow** of **suspicion** and **possible** **accusations** could **tilt** **decision**-**making** processes in one or more of these states and ways that could worsen pre-existing views about the **nuclear** **use** propensity of an opposing nuclear armed state.

Should an **actual** nuclear **attack** occur, the situation is even more complex and problematic.  Such an attack might be purely accidental, due to hardware, software, or human error while nuclear materials or weapons are in transit.  In principle, this limits the site of such an event to the nuclear weapons states or their ships and aircraft as neither South Korea nor Japan host nuclear weapons today.  If an insider is involved, then the perpetrator may be identified quickly, and whether there is a linkage with another state may become evident (depending on nuclear forensics as well as insight obtained from surviving attackers).

If an outsider is the perpetrator, then the **suspicion** **matrix** will come into **play** again, with possibly **severe** **effects** on inter-state **tension** due to **accusation**, **suspicion**, and **fear** of **follow**-on **attacks**. During the attack, especially if it is a hostage-taking type of attack, the **identity** of the **perpetrator** may be **unknown** or **ambiguous**, and maintaining this ambiguity or even opacity as to the attacker may be deliberate—as was the case with the 2008 Mumbai attack in which the controller tried to ensure that all the attackers were killed in the course of the twelve separate but coordinated attacks across the city over four days.  Although much progress has been made in establishing local nuclear forensics capability in Japan,[18] China, and South Korea, there is no certainty that it is sufficiently developed to identify the perpetrator of an act of nuclear terrorism, especially if there is a state sponsor and deception involved.

Conclusion

We now move to our conclusion. Nuclear-armed states can place themselves on the edge of nuclear war by a combination of threatening force deployments and threat rhetoric. Statements by US and North Korea’s leaders and supporting amplification by state and private media to present just such a lethal combination. Many observers have observed that the risk of war and nuclear war, in Korea and globally, have increased in the last few years—although no-one can say with authority by how much and exactly for what reasons.

However, states are restrained in their actual decisions to escalate to conflict and/or nuclear war by conventional deterrence, vital national interests, and other institutional and political restraints, both domestic and international. It is not easy, in the real world, or even in fiction, to start nuclear wars.[19] Rhetorical threats are standard fare in realist and constructivist accounts of inter-state nuclear deterrence, compellence, and reassurance, and are not cause for alarm per se. States will manage the risk in each of the threat relationships with other nuclear armed states to stay back from the brink, let alone go over it, as they have in the past.

This argument was powerful and to many, persuasive during the Cold War although it does not deny the hair-raising risks taken by nuclear armed states during this period. Today, the multi-polarity of nine nuclear weapons states interacting in a four-tiered nuclear threat system means that the practice of sustaining nuclear threat and preparing for nuclear war is no longer merely complicated, but is now enormously complex in ways that may exceed the capacity of some and perhaps all states to manage, even without the emergence of a fifth tier of non-state actors to add further unpredictability to how this system works in practice.

The possibility that non-state actors may attack without advance warning as to the time, place, and angle of attack presents another layer of uncertainty to this complexity as to how inter-state nuclear war may break out. That is, non-state actors with nuclear weapons or threat goals and capacities do not seek the same goals, will not use the same control systems, and will use radically different organizational procedures and systems to deliver on their threats compared with nuclear armed states. If used tactically for immediate terrorist effect, a non-state nuclear terrorist could violently attack nuclear facilities, exploiting any number of vulnerabilities in fuel cycle facility security, or use actual nuclear materials and even warheads against military or civilian targets. If a persistent, strategically oriented nuclear terrorist succeed in gaining credible nuclear threat capacities, it might take hostage one or more states or cities.

If such an event coincides with already high levels of tension and even military collisions between the non-nuclear forces of nuclear armed states, then a **non**-**state** nuclear **terrorist** **attack** could **impel** a **nuclear** armed **state** to **escalate** its threat or even military **actions** against **other** state**s**, in the **belief** that this **targeted** **state** may have **sponsored** the non-state attack, or was simply the **source** of the **attack**, whatever the declared identity of the attacking non-state entity. This **outcome** could **trigger** these states to go onto one or more of the pathways to inadvertent **nuclear** **war**, especially if the terrorist attack was on a high value and high risk nuclear facility or involved the seizure and/or use of fissile material.

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**Policy Circle 24** (Policy Circle is a digital platform that offers in-depth coverage of public policy issues in governance, environment, and society. It was launched in 2020 by a group of policy experts who share a vision of promoting evidence-based policymaking and constructive policy dialogue. It also organises summits, roundtables, and online discussions to bring together policymakers, researchers, corporate executives, professionals, and other stakeholders to deliberate on policy issues. December 27, 2024 “End of American hegemony: Can the superpower reinvent power for the 21st century” Policy Circle,<https://www.policycircle.org/world/end-of-american-hegemony/>, DOA: 3/28/25) LLO

**In 2010, a** [**historian**](https://www.fairobserver.com/author/alfred-w-mccoy/) **predicted that the American hegemony might end by 2025 — not with a bang but with a whimper** **— as domestic divisions deepened and rival powers rose to challenge its authority. Today, that prediction appears prophetic** as America faces increasing pressures from within and outside. Even as the US retains military dominance and an economy capable of immense influence, **the structural underpinnings of its global power are eroding. This decline, though not necessarily terminal, signals a transition away from the so-called American Century. Historically, the US leveraged its unmatched economic strength, technological innovation, and cultural influence to dominate the post-World War II global order. However, the foundations of the American hegemony are crumbling. The US share of global GDP has steadily declined,** falling from 50% in the mid-20th century to approximately 15% today when adjusted for purchasing power parity. **The globalisation, initially championed by the US, has redistributed industrial power, with China emerging as a key beneficiary. China’s rise has reoriented global economic networks, particularly in the Global South.** In contrast to America’s interventionist foreign policy, **China has cultivated influence through infrastructure investments, soft power campaigns**, and state-sponsored media. The United States, while still a major player, has failed to present an alternative vision that resonates with developing nations, where perceptions of Chinese leadership are increasingly favourable.

Other BRI things

**China isn’t focused on exporting.**

**Willis ’24** [Matthew; News Reporter @ NSB; May 16; New Security Beat; “Don’t Panic US: China’s Nuclear Power Ascendancy Has Its Limits,” https://www.newsecuritybeat.org/2024/05/dont-panic-us-chinas-nuclear-power-ascendancy-has-its-limits/; DOA: 3-27-2025] tristan

Nonetheless, nuclear projects have encountered hurdles in developing countries where substantial financial support, technical oversight, and design adaptations to local conditions are often required. Moreover, China has rarely mobilized its vast financial resources to support nuclear abroad.

Even ignoring prospective stagnation at home and the unlikeliness of that leading to major exports, China’s nuclear sector will be preoccupied with domestic commitments for some time.

These constraints, paired with the Belt and Road Initiative’s focus on other energy projects and the failure of past bilateral nuclear agreements, make it unlikely China will build 30 or more reactors overseas by 2030. Beijing will finance only so many projects abroad, especially with current high debt levels and other economic headwinds.

Competition with China Should Not Drive US Nuclear Power Policy

American policymakers should resist the drumbeat of some advocates pushing a boost of the US nuclear industry to “keep up” with China’s nuclear construction. China’s domestic nuclear constraints and lack of overseas expansion means increased US nuclear support for competitive reasons is not warranted.

**Threat perceptions cause war.**

**GT '24** [Global Times; Chinese news source; 01-10-2024; "US attempt at global domination no longer sustainable"; https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202401/1305118.shtml; accessed 01-18-2025] leon

Historically, large **regional powers** try to **dominate** their **region**. The US is no exception. So I think it's a case of looking in the mirror and not projecting what you see onto China. I try to explain to people in the book that China's **military doctrine** is **based** on **area denial** to try and keep **people out** of China's **immediate space**. The US' **own policy** is the **one** that's **based** on **global domination**. The **US** is **prepared** to **fight** a war anywhere **over anything** at **any time**. That is not the capacity that China is building up. Realistically, our **government** is **bankrupting itself**. It's only a matter of time before this **attempt** at **global domination** is no longer **sustainable**.

GT: How dangerous is this "China threat" theory that is prevailing in the US? Why is it necessary to dispel this myth?

Solis-Mullen: It's very dangerous. If a **conflict happens** - people always say it won't go nuclear. First of all, you **don't know** that it won't **go nuclear**. And even if we say it will stay below the nuclear threshold, **conventional wars** between **major powers** are **horrifying**. My grandfather fought in one, my father experienced a more minor but equally serious conflict. These are horrible. We're **talking** about potentially **millions** of **people dying**.

**Pursuit causes short-termism---extinction.**

**Pampinella '19** [Stephenis Pampinella; Assistant Professor of Political Science and International Relations at the State University of New York; 01-23-2019; "The Internationalist Disposition and US Grand Strategy"; The Disorder of Things; https://thedisorderofthings.com/2019/01/23/the-internationalist-disposition-and-us-grand-strategy/; accessed 01-18-2025] leon

Finally, **attempts** to revive **US hegemony** will doom **transnational efforts** to **deal** with **existential** non-state **threats**. **Hegemonists** like Thomas Wright **argue** that **Russia** and **China** are the **greatest threat** to the **United States**, and that **Washington** should **never** make **concessions** to either power as a means of ensuring cooperation on issues of global governance. However, “**ring**-**fencing**” **global capitalism** and **climate change** as **separate issues** will **fail** to **achieve** the **necessary level** of **cooperation** to **cope** with these **threats**. **National security** policymakers **cannot recognize** that the **greatest dangers** faced by **US citizens** are non-state **economic** and **ecological** global **processes** that shape **domestic politics** from the **inside**-**out**, and not rival sovereigns. Economic destitution to the point of embracing fascist dictators coupled with environmental collapse are near-certain non-state threats which transcend our boundaries – in fact, as a global power, the United States has been complicit in creating them.

The **internationalist disposition** would **suggest** that the **priorities** of US **foreign policy** must **change**. Regulating global processes should be the primary objective, and it requires that the United States pursue intense macro-levels of cooperation with all other states, including its rivals, to achieve them. **Yet** it will be **unlikely** to do so if it **remains wedded** to **liberal hegemony** and **consumed** by **g**reat **p**ower **c**ompetition. **Short**-**term** incentives to **accumulate resources** and **power** will **override** the **long**-**term** need for **global governance**. The **result** will be a **world** whose **people** live in **precarity**, **ravaged** by **climate change**, and **constantly** on the **verge** of **g**reat **p**ower **w**ar.

**The US is already leading in nuclear energy.**

**Bhambhani ’24** [Dipka; July 3rd; Senior Energy Reporter for Forbes; “U.S. Government Helps Nuclear Energy Allies Catch Up to Russia, China”; Forbes; https://www.forbes.com/sites/dipkabhambhani/2024/07/03/us-government-helps-nuclear-energy-allies-catch-up-to-russia-china/] cameron

**U.S. Government** Helps **Nuclear Energy** Allies **Catch Up** to Russia, China While two of America’s pernicious rivals—Russia and China—have already deployed one advanced nuclear reactor each, **U.S. companies and** the **government**, strategically working to catch up, are **sanguine**. “We have **ramped up** our activities to enable U.S. industry to pave the Yellow Brick Road internationally for these **advanced technologies** to **regain** U.S. leadership along with our likeminded friends and allies,” Kirsten Cutler, Senior Strategist for Nuclear Energy Innovation at the U.S. State Department, told high-level executives and government officials at a meeting in Washington last week hosted by the United Coalition of Advanced Nuclear Power. In other words, the **U.S. government** is **in the game**. Cutler leads a program at the U.S. State Department—Foundational Infrastructure for Responsible Use of Small Modular Reactor Technology —along with the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), to **help** 45 allied countries build nuclear power programs. Seventeen **more countries** are on a waiting list. The State Department has spent $75 million on its program since 2021. The governments of Japan, South Korea and Canada are **helping the U.S.** implement the program to help countries like Kenya, Ghana Philippines, Indonesia and many more to “**enable** them to build them the foundational infrastructure they need under the **highest standards** of safety and security and nonproliferation,” Cutler said. “There’s **huge demand**,” Cutler said.

### AI

**US AI leadership is inevitable. 2 Warrants**

**A. Political popularity**

James **Cooper** and Kashyap Kompella **22**. [Cooper](https://www.linkedin.com/in/james-cooper-b985a887/) is professor of law and director of International Legal Studies at [California Western School of Law](https://www.cwsl.edu/) in San Diego and a research fellow at Singapore University of Social Sciences.  [Kompella](https://www.linkedin.com/in/kashyapkompella/) is CEO of [RPA2AI](https://rpa2ai.com/), a global artificial intelligence advisory firm. “No, China is not winning the AI race” <https://thehill.com/opinion/technology/592270-no-china-is-not-winning-the-ai-race/>

Around the globe, **Big Tech’s** rising power has resulted in calls for more oversight. In a drastic move that stunned the industry and analysts alike, the Chinese government [recently rewrote](https://www.economist.com/the-world-ahead/2021/11/08/xi-jinpings-crackdown-on-chinese-tech-firms-will-continue) the rulebook for the country’s technology industry. In effect, China is **vacating** entire swaths of **digital and creative** industries, arenas that serve as training grounds and talent factories for other industries. This more restrictive approach **may not bode well** for China’s AI industry in the long term. China may find itself **constrained** on the **extent of automation** and AI in its **manufacturing** sector — **labor-intensive** manufacturing remains China’s **main strength**, and a high degree of **automation** can result in **job losses**, labor unrest, and instability. ¶ Meanwhile, there is **bipartisan** support for AI in the United States. Former [President Trump](https://thehill.com/people/donald-trump/) proposed [increasing funding](https://thehill.com/policy/technology/482402-trump-budget-proposal-boosts-funding-for-artificial-intelligence-quantum) for AI development through the National Science Foundation. The [National AI Initiative Act](https://www.congress.gov/116/crpt/hrpt617/CRPT-116hrpt617.pdf#page=1215) of 2020 signaled a sense of urgency and suggested that several federal agencies create a national strategy on artificial intelligence. The Biden administration has formed the [Artificial Intelligence Research Resource Task Force](https://www.whitehouse.gov/ostp/news-updates/2021/06/10/the-biden-administration-launches-the-national-artificial-intelligence-research-resource-task-force/) to develop a roadmap to foment AI research and spark innovation nationwide. There is **draft legislation**, at both the state and federal level, to **promote responsible use of AI** and prevent its misuse. ¶ Strong objections to the use of facial recognition and other AI systems by law enforcement in the U.S., raised by civil liberties advocates, have led some local authorities, such as the City of San Francisco, to [ban such systems](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/15/business/facial-recognition-software-controversy.html?action=click&module=MoreInSection&pgtype=Article&region=Footer&contentCollection=Technology). To use a Silicon Valley phrase, these debates are “not a bug, but a feature.” They shine a light on the limitations of AI systems and help to set the “rules of the road” for proper use of AI. This will establish the U.S. as a global leader in AI regulation, once lawmakers and regulators do their work. China, meanwhile, has faced strong [global criticism](https://www.forbes.com/sites/zakdoffman/2019/05/03/china-new-data-breach-exposes-facial-recognition-and-ethnicity-tracking-in-beijing/#5623644334a7) for using facial recognition software to [monitor and surveil Uyghurs](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/14/technology/china-surveillance-artificial-intelligence-racial-profiling.html?module=inline.) in its Xinjiang region. China has outlined a set of [AI ethics principles](https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/01/04/china-s-new-ai-governance-initiatives-shouldn-t-be-ignored-pub-86127), but the jury is still out on enforcement and how they function in practice.

**B. Education talent**

James **Cooper** and Kashyap Kompella **22**. [Cooper](https://www.linkedin.com/in/james-cooper-b985a887/) is professor of law and director of International Legal Studies at [California Western School of Law](https://www.cwsl.edu/) in San Diego and a research fellow at Singapore University of Social Sciences.  [Kompella](https://www.linkedin.com/in/kashyapkompella/) is CEO of [RPA2AI](https://rpa2ai.com/), a global artificial intelligence advisory firm. “No, China is not winning the AI race” <https://thehill.com/opinion/technology/592270-no-china-is-not-winning-the-ai-race/>

The increasing number of AI research papers and [patents](http://ipjournal.law.wfu.edu/files/2021/12/22-Wake-Forest-J.-Bus.-Intell.-Prop.-L.-43.pdf) by Chinese researchers is often cited as proof that China has caught up with the United States in this field. The increased focus is good for the Chinese AI ecosystem, and it will help them solve China-specific problems. But **dominance** in this emerging strategic industry is **not guaranteed**. The U.S. has **several strategic advantages**, including: the strengths of its **higher education** and **research institutes**, which attract the **best STEM talent** from across the **world**; the [largest **venture capital** ecosystem](https://cset.georgetown.edu/publication/tracking-ai-investment/); and the largest number of **technology unicorns** (start-ups with private valuations greater than $1 billion).

**Fears are overblown and companies solve.**

**Ramachandran ’24** [Vijaya; Director for Energy & Development @ the Breakthrough Institute, Board Member of the Energy for Growth Hub, PhD in Business Economics from Harvard University; July 9; Breakthrough Institute; “Unmasking the Fear of AI’s Energy Demand,” https://thebreakthrough.org/journal/no-20-spring-2024/unmasking-the-fear-of-ais-energy-demand; DOA: 3-24-2025] tristan

In a detailed thread on X, MIT Innovation Fellow and former National Economic Council director Brian Deese argues that forecasters consistently overestimate electricity demand, in part because they emphasize static load growth over efficiency gains. Deese points out that in the early 2000s, analysts predicted surging electricity demand. Instead, U.S. electricity demand has stayed flat for two decades. And although data center energy use is increasing, energy intensity (energy use per computation) has decreased by 20% every year since 2010. Nvidia—one of the largest companies designing graphics processing units (GPUs) for gaming, professional visualization, data centers, and automotive markets—is continuously improving the energy efficiency of its GPUs. Its new AI-training chip, Blackwell, for example, will use 25 times less energy than its predecessor, Hopper. Deese points out that analysts may be double-counting energy use by data centers because technology companies initiate multiple queries in different utility jurisdictions to get the best rates.

A (carbon-heavy) query to ChatGPT suggests AI and data service providers have considerable room to improve the energy efficiency of data center infrastructure using various measures:

Virtualization and Consolidation: Virtualization technology can be used to consolidate servers and reduce the number of physical machines running. This can lead to significant energy savings by optimizing server utilization rates.

Efficient Cooling Systems: Cooling accounts for a substantial portion of a data center's energy consumption. Implementing efficient cooling techniques such as hot/cold aisle containment, using free cooling when ambient temperatures allow, and employing modern cooling technologies like liquid cooling can reduce energy usage.

Energy-Efficient Hardware: Energy-efficient servers, storage devices, and networking equipment can be a priority, as can the use of products with high energy efficiency ratings (such as ENERGY STAR certified devices), with use configurations optimized for lower power consumption.

Power Management Software: Power management tools and software can monitor and adjust power usage based on demand. This includes dynamically adjusting server power levels during periods of low activity (e.g., using power capping techniques).

Optimized Data Center Layout: Data center layouts can be designed to minimize energy waste and optimize airflow. This includes proper rack layout, efficient cable management, and ensuring equipment is placed to minimize cooling requirements.

Energy-Efficient Data Storage: Efficient data storage technologies and practices, such as data de-duplication and compression, can be used to reduce the overall storage footprint and associated energy requirements. Continuous monitoring and optimization will also help.

Electricity demand from electric vehicles (EVs) may prove to be comparable or even higher than that of AI. The Princeton REPEAT model estimates the demand for electricity in the United States at 391 TWh for EV transportation (light-duty vehicles and other electric transport) in 2030, which is similar to BCG’s 2030 estimates for data centers (320 - 390 TWh). Rystad Energy predicts EV usage will grow from 18.3 TWh to 131 TWh for the same period. Despite the additional energy demand, policymakers strongly encourage the purchase of EVs and the construction of charging infrastructure, while commentators seem relatively unconcerned about EV charging needs. This may be because EVs are seen to be filling an existing societal need for transportation, as well as a solution to the problem of climate change. Even though AI has potential to raise productivity and improve lives, it is a new and energy-intensive technology whose value runs counter to the priorities of the environmental community.

No matter the level of future AI use, AI’s energy demand will make it more difficult—if not impossible—to dismiss the intermittency challenges associated with powering commercial and industrial loads with wind and solar energy. Data centers’ real-time power demand requires continuous, dispatchable power which cannot be provided solely by renewables without significant excess generation capacity and large amounts of cheap storage.

Technology companies like Microsoft and Google are taking steps to meet their data center energy needs. Microsoft recently inked an agreement with Constellation Energy to supply its data center with nuclear-produced power. Other firm clean energy sources may also play crucial roles in decarbonizing AI energy consumption. Last year, Google partnered with Fervo Energy to power its Nevada-based data center with geothermal power. At least one hydropower developer—Rye Development—is planning to develop hydroelectric facilities to match data center electricity use.

The bottom line is that we do not need to fear AI’s challenge to the energy grid. Utilities and tech companies will meet increased demand by using a mix of energy sources, including clean and firm electricity supplies like nuclear energy, geothermal power, and even hydropower. AI is not the first—and nor will it be the last—game changer in society’s energy consumption. The discourse on AI's energy footprint must therefore shift from apprehension to proactive problem-solving, focused on energy efficiency gains and diversification of clean energy sources, driven by the notion that a high-energy planet is essential for human progress.

**AI tech companies thrive despite higher costs.**

Sheryl **Astrada 24**. senior business writer and managing editor. “Inflation is no match for AI, top analyst says: ‘We’re at the start of a 3- to 5-year tech bull market’” 2024. https://fortune.com/2024/02/14/inflation-no-match-ai-top-analyst-tech-bull-market/

Good morning. **Inflation** in the U.S. remains slightly **hotter than expected**, but as far as its effect on tech stocks, at least one top analyst still expects AI to “hands down” boost the whole sector. ¶ The Labor Department’s report released on Tuesday indicated that the consumer price index rose 0.3% from December to January, up from a 0.2% increase the previous month, and that over the last 12 months, prices rose 3.1%. That’s certainly lower than the 9.1% inflation peak in mid-2022, and even less than the 3.4% figure in December, but core prices, a closely watched metric that excludes food and energy categories, rose faster than anticipated, up 0.4% in January. Driven by costs for shelter, transportation, and medical care, core prices remained up 3.9% year over year. ¶ The Fed’s favored supercore CPI measure (core services excluding shelter costs) “rose a hot 0.85%” in January, according to EY Chief Economist Gregory Daco. However, he added in a statement, January CPI readings are “always volatile, so this reading should be taken with a pinch of salt.” ¶ “While this report will undoubtedly spark a wave of inflation pessimism,” he added, “five key elements should still form the perfect mix for disinflation through 2024: cooler consumer demand growth, declining rent inflation, narrower profit margins, moderating wage growth, and stronger productivity growth.” ¶ The tech effect ¶ The central bank’s Federal Open Market Committee said on Jan. 31 that it doesn’t expect to reduce interest rates until it has gained greater confidence that inflation is moving toward 2%. ¶ But some **tech analysts** remain **bullish** on AI in the **face of inflation**. Gene Munster, managing partner and cofounder at Deepwater Asset Management, said that the **AI revolution marches onward**. ¶ Munster wrote in a X post on Tuesday: “Nasdaq is down 2% today, which begs the question: Which force will win the battle for tech stocks? Inflation or AI? On the one side, today’s hot CPI number is a headwind for tech stocks. Rates higher for longer have a negative impact on higher multiple companies. ¶ “On the other side, AI companies will see **increased growth** rates and **margins** in the years to come. Putting those two forces together, the **AI tailwind** is going to **win hands down**. We’re at the start of a three- to five-year **tech bull market**.” ¶ Daniel Ives, a managing director at Wedbush Securities, also is doubling down on AI, writing—with a nod to Microsoft and Sunday night’s Super Bowl—in a note to investors on Tuesday: “**Tech earnings** season so far has delivered in Kelce-like fashion as the jaw-dropping monetization and Copilot success seen at Redmond is the tip of the spear for AI across the broader tech industry, as we predict $1 trillion of incremental tech spending over the next decade.”

#### No chance of private sector follow-on.

**Miklovis ’25** [Carmine; 3rd year student @ American University; February 15; World Mind; “Failure After Failure: Let’s Ditch Small Modular Reactors,” https://www.theworldmind.org/briefing-archive/failure-after-failure-lets-ditch-small-modular-reactors2025/2/25; DOA: 3-25-2025] YL

Unfortunately, however, it seems increasingly likely that these reactors will fail to live up to their promise. Talks of deploying small modular reactors have been ongoing for over a decade, and while around a hundred designs exist, only two reactors have been deployed–one in China and one in Russia. In the U.S., while private companies and the federal government have invested billions into their development, projects have faced delays and cancellations. Long construction times, issues with quality control, and disproportionately high energy costs (for producers and consumers alike) have led many to conclude that the energy source is a false promise. Recognizing this failure, many of the largest energy companies, such as Babcock & Wilcox and Westinghouse have withdrawn their investments, leaving many other investors hesitant to put any of their assets in the nuclear cause. Investors would much rather hedge their bets on just about anything else.

**SMRs are expensive**---our evidence accounts for ‘economies of scale.’

**Lyman ’24** [Ed; Director of Union of Concerned Scientists, Internationally Recognized Expert; April 30; Equation; “Five Things the “Nuclear Bros” Don’t Want You to Know About Small Modular Reactors,” https://blog.ucs.org/edwin-lyman/five-things-the-nuclear-bros-dont-want-you-to-know-about-small-modular-reactors/; DOA: 3-24-2025] tristan

1. SMRs are not more economical than large reactors.

In theory, small reactors should have lower capital costs and construction times than large reactors of similar design so that utilities (or other users) can get financing more cheaply and deploy them more flexibly. But that doesn’t mean small reactors will be more economical than large ones. In fact, the opposite usually will be true. What matters more when comparing the economics of different power sources is the cost to produce a kilowatt-hour of electricity, and that depends on the capital cost per kilowatt of generating capacity, as well as the costs of operations, maintenance, fuel, and other factors.

According to the economies of scale principle, smaller reactors will in general produce more expensive electricity than larger ones. For example, the now-cancelled project by NuScale to build a 460-megawatt, 6-unit SMR in Idaho was estimated to cost over $20,000 per kilowatt, which is greater than the actual cost of the Vogtle large reactor project of over $15,000 per kilowatt. This cost penalty can be offset only by radical changes in the way reactors are designed, built, and operated.

For example, SMR developers claim they can slash capital cost per kilowatt by achieving efficiency through the mass production of identical units in factories. However, studies find that such cost reductions typically would not exceed about 30%. In addition, dozens of units would have to be produced before manufacturers could learn how to make their processes more efficient and achieve those capital cost reductions, meaning that the first reactors of a given design will be unavoidably expensive and will require large government or ratepayer subsidies to get built. Getting past this obstacle has proven to be one of the main impediments to SMR deployment.

**Even the government believes SMRs are a sham.**

**BNI ’19** [Beyondnuclearinternational; News Organization; April 6; Beyond Nuclear International; “Small modular reactors are dead on non-arrival,” https://beyondnuclearinternational.org/2019/04/06/small-modular-reactors-are-dead-on-non-arrival/; DOA: 3-25-2025] tristan

No-one wants to pay for SMRS

No company, utility, consortium or national government is seriously considering building the massive supply chain that is at the very essence of the concept of SMRs — mass, modular factory construction. Yet without that supply chain, SMRs will be expensive curiosities.

In early 2019, Kevin Anderson, North American Project Director for Nuclear Energy Insider, said that there “is unprecedented growth in companies proposing design alternatives for the future of nuclear, but precious little progress in terms of market-ready solutions.”

Anderson argued that it is time to convince investors that the SMR sector is ready for scale-up financing but that it will not be easy: “Even for those sympathetic, the collapse of projects such as V.C Summer does little to convince financiers that this sector is mature and competent enough to deliver investable projects on time and at cost.”

A 2018 US Department of Energy report states that to make a “meaningful” impact, about US$10 billion of government subsidies would be needed to deploy 6 GW of SMR capacity by 2035. But there’s no indication or likelihood that the US government will subsidise the industry to that extent.

To date, the US government has offered US$452 million to support private-sector SMR projects, of which US$111 million was wasted on the mPower project that was abandoned in 2017.

**TIME.**

**Jacobson ’24** [Mark; Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering & Director of the Atmosphere/Energy Program @ Stanford University; October 10; One Earth; “7 reasons why nuclear energy is not the answer to solve climate change,” https://www.oneearth.org/the-7-reasons-why-nuclear-energy-is-not-the-answer-to-solve-climate-change/; DOA: 3-25-2025] tristan

The time lag between planning and operation of a nuclear reactor includes the times to identify a site, obtain a site permit, purchase or lease the land, obtain a construction permit, obtain financing and insurance for construction, install transmission, negotiate a power purchase agreement, obtain permits, build the plant, connect it to transmission, and obtain a final operating license.

The planning-to-operation (PTO) times of all nuclear plants ever built have been 10-19 years or more. For example, the Olkiluoto 3 reactor in Finland was proposed to the Finnish cabinet in December 2000 to be added to an existing nuclear power plant. Its latest estimated completion date is 2020, giving it a PTO time of 20 years.