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#### Alliances are strong.

**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.

#### 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**.

In addition, **both China and Russia have been tied to recent revelations about cyberattacks on Sellafield**, a nuclear site located on the Cumbrian coast in the UK, by groups with close ties to the two countries. The investigation raised eyebrows about the state of cybersecurity for nuclear sites.

**The report also notes that Small Modular Reactors** (**SMRs**) **have not seen significant progress in the past year, with no units under construction** in the western world. The most advanced project, based in the US and involving NuScale, terminated in November 2023 due to a 75% increase in the cost estimate. Canada, nevertheless, plans to build four SMRs in Ontario, arguing that they will contribute C$15.3bn ($11.25bn) to Canada’s gross domestic product.

#### Substantial investment necessitates huge exports---that 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**.

#### 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.

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Herrera and other experts hope that if a Saudi civilian nuclear program happens, the US government will enforce strict guardrails. These might include deferring uranium enrichment inside Saudi Arabia until later or setting up an enrichment facility that only American citizens can access. It could also include allowing a Saudi-based conversion plant to turn refined uranium powder into gas, but not enriching uranium.¶ The Saudis could also be asked to adhere to conditions, including signing on to specific non-proliferation criteria under Section 123 of the US 1954 Atomic Energy Act and agreeing to additional inspections by the Austria-based International Atomic Energy Agency.¶ "As far as we know, the US is trying to put forward a deal very similar to the one that they did with the United Arab Emirates in 2009, in which they applied Section 123," Herrera explained to DW in an interview earlier this week. However, the Saudis have previously said no to that.¶ The United Arab Emirates became the first Arab state to operate a nuclear reactor in 2021 and is now planning its secondImage: Yonhap/picture alliance¶ What does Israel have to do with it now?¶ "The assumption has been that the various elements [of a US-Saudi agreement] would be mutually reinforcing," Robert Einhorn, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Brookings Institute, wrote in an April briefing.¶ "For example, normalization would make nuclear cooperation with [Saudi Arabia] more palatable to Israel, and a US security guarantee and nuclear cooperation would make normalization more palatable to [Saudi Arabia]."¶ But now that Israel is not involved, analysts say the "mega deal" may be another way to pressure the Israeli government. Israel's allies, including the US, have been pushing Israeli leaders towards a different, more careful approach in Gaza. The Israeli government has previously said it doesn't want the Saudis to get any kind of uranium enrichment capacities. ¶ US outbidding China?¶ However, there are also other equally significant motives for US-Saudi nuclear cooperation. As Davenport of the Arms Control Association pointed out, Saudi Arabia's interest in nuclear energy predates the "push for a broader Israeli-Saudi normalization."¶ "And there are also some other countries who have been putting offers on the table," Herrera told DW, referring to China.¶ If a US-Saudi nuclear deal goes ahead, this would sideline any Chinese influence in this area. From a commercial perspective, it would also result in healthy contracts for US companies.¶ The recent progress on a US-Saudi deal also has a lot to do with upcoming US elections, Davenport argued. "The Biden administration wants an agreement before the presidential election."¶ Other experts have suggested that closer cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the US may also mean the Americans have more influence over Saudi Arabian decisions on oil prices. The US government would obviously prefer these to stay lower in the run-up to elections.¶ But could a deal still end up causing a nuclear race of some kind in the Middle East?

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"**There is a risk … if you give one actor access to this technology, then the race will be on**," Herrera agreed. But he thinks that, with sufficient guardrails and monitoring in place, risks could be minimized.

#### 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**.

### 1NC---DA---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] tristan

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.

Until recently, the green paradox was a problem for climate change economists, but the one who should be most concerned is, in fact, Vladimir Putin. The green paradox has the potential to turn radical climate policy into a weapon against Putin’s regime. It is especially important because Russia, the second-largest worldwide gas producer and the third-largest oil producer, currently uses fossil fuels as a weapon against the West for the purpose of pacification.

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**.

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

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**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**.

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

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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).

## 2NC

**Investing in nuclear empirically leads existing plants to cut jobs & trades off with other investments**

**NIRS ND** [Nuclear Information and Resource Service, non-profit advocacy group “devoted” to a “carbon-free world”, “How Nuclear Bailouts Would Cost over 60,000 Green American Jobs,” xx-xx-xxxx, accessed 4-4-2025; https://www.nirs.org/how-nuclear-bailouts-would-cost-over-60000-green-american-jobs/] squasha

Specifically:  how many jobs would a nuclear bailout actually create?

Spoiler alert! None.

Over the last few weeks, we’ve shown why subsidizing nuclear power is a bad investment for climate, environmental justice, and renewable energy. Earlier this month, we co-released a major report with Friends of the Earth that shows why nuclear bailouts fail on all counts: climate, jobs, and justice.

To be sure, this country has needed a major jobs program for at least a generation. As proponents of the Green New Deal note, because the climate crisis requires the transformation of our entire energy economy, we will need to create millions of jobs to take it on. President Biden’s American Jobs and Families Plan–and the $4.1 trillion in legislation members of Congress are advancing–are also supposed to create millions of jobs.

So this week, it’s time to dig into jobs and climate–and how subsidizing nuclear reactors hurts both.

Billions for a Nuclear Bailout = No New Jobs (at most)

That’s right. Investing tens of billions in old, uneconomical nuclear reactors will create, at most, zero actual jobs. The subsidies would go to power plants that are currently operating, ostensibly to prevent any more of them from closing because they are not making enough profits. The reality is, that the reactors that would be bailed out were built 30-50 years ago and are currently operating with full-time staff. So the best the subsidy could do is to avoid potential layoffs of nuclear workers, not create any new jobs for people who are currently unemployed or underemployed.

In reality, the subsidy could actually result in a loss of jobs. That is because the subsidies would not require the companies to keep workers employed at current levels. We know that nuclear power companies have cut jobs at reactors that are already receiving subsidies. Earlier this year, Exelon revealed that it cut its nuclear workforce in Illinois by 15% since 2016, despite receiving nearly $1 billion in subsidies over the last four years. Three of its eleven reactors in Illinois (Clinton and Quad Cities 1&2) have been receiving $235 million/year in ratepayer subsidies under a 2016 law. Yet Exelon cut its nuclear workforce statewide by about 720 jobs, averaging 65 per reactor, including at Clinton and Quad Cities. Given the financial conditions of the nuclear industry, it’s possible that thousands of nuclear workers could still lose their jobs even if Congress passes $50 billion in nuclear subsidies.

Opportunity Costs: Subsidizing nuclear power could prevent over 60,000 jobs from being created

Budgets are about choices. Senate Democrats have agreed to $3.5 trillion to fund a package of physical and social infrastructure, with funds raised by increasing the minimum income tax rates on corporations and very wealthy people (household incomes more than $400,000/year).

So the budget is set. The proposed nuclear subsidy would come out of that budget–diverting funds from other programs, priorities, and investments. By our calculations, knowing that President Biden’s American Jobs Plan proposed  $469 billion for renewable energy and other electricity infrastructure, the nuclear subsidy would take up more than 10% of that budget. This would be a massive amount of money to waste on a program that would not create a single job and, at best, would sustain a few thousand jobs at nearly four times the cost of the rest of the energy budget.

If those billions were spent on other energy programs–renewable energy, energy efficiency, battery storage, and/or grid modernization–it would create over 67,000 new jobs. That would be enough to re-employ all of the nuclear workers in other energy industries and create jobs to employ 60,000 more people who are currently unemployed or underemployed.

#### Reactors cause electricity prices to skyrocket.

**Cooper ’9** [Mark; Senior Fellow @ the Institute for Energy; August 28; Nuclear Monitor; “The Economics of Nuclear Reactors: Renaissance or Relapse?,” https://www.nirs.org/wp-content/uploads/mononline/nm692\_3.pdf; DOA: 3-23-2025] tristan

Within the past year, estimates of the **cost** of **nuclear** **power** from a new generation of reactors have ranged from a low of 8.4 cents **per** kilowatt hour (**kWh**) to a high of **30 cents**. The paper tackles the debate over the cost of building new nuclear reactors, with the key findings as follows:

* The **initial** cost **projections** put out early in today's so-called "nuclear renaissance" were about **one**-**third** of what one would have expected, based on the nuclear reactors completed in the 1990s.
* The most recent **cost** projections for new **nuclear** **reactors** are, on average, over **four** **times** as high as the initial "nuclear renaissance" projections
* There are numerous options available to meet the need for electricity in a carbonconstrained environment that are superior to building nuclear reactors. Indeed, nuclear reactors are the worst option from the point of view of the consumer and society.
* The **low** **carbon** **sources** that are less costly than nuclear include efficiency, cogeneration, biomass, **geothermal**, **wind**, **solar** thermal and **natural** **gas**. Solar photovoltaics that are presently more costly than nuclear reactors are projected to decline dramatically in price in the next decade. Fossil fuels with carbon capture and storage, which are not presently available, are projected to be somewhat more costly than nuclear reactors.
* Numerous studies by Wall Street and independent energy analysts estimate efficiency and **renewable** **costs** at an average of **6 cents** per kilowatt hour, while the cost of electricity from **nuclear** reactors is estimated in the range of 12 to **20** cents per **kWh**.
* The additional **cost** of **building** **100** new nuclear **reactors**, instead of pursuing a least cost efficiency-renewable strategy, would be in the range of $1.9**-$4.4 trillion** over the life the reactors.

Whether the **burden** falls on **ratepayers** (in **electricity** **bills**) or taxpayers (in large subsidies), incurring **excess** **costs** of that magnitude would be a **substantial** **burden** on the **national** **economy** and add **immensely** to the **cost** of **electricity** and the cost of reducing carbon emissions.

#### High electricity prices crush the economy.

**Febrizio ’15** [Mark; Policy Analyst @ George Washington University; August 20; IER; “Lesson For EPA: Higher Energy Prices Harm People,” https://www.instituteforenergyresearch.org/the-grid/lesson-for-epa-higher-energy-prices-harm-people/; DOA: 3-23-2025] tristan \*\*brackets r og\*\*

Access to **affordable**, **reliable** **electricity** is **crucial** to modern **life**. Electricity prices are a big deal for American families and businesses because **higher** energy **prices** can lead to **severely** **negative** economic **consequences**. A recent study commissioned by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) assesses the impact of higher electricity rates on economic growth and employment by simulating a 10 percent and 25 percent increase in electricity prices.

The economic forecasting and analysis firm Regional Economic Models, Inc. (REMI) produced the study, which incorporates a two-region REMI-PI+ computerized model to evaluate the rise in prices. The study illustrates the resulting impact on gross domestic product (GDP), jobs, and disposable personal income. In order to emphasize the impact that price increases have on rural America, the study compares the results for areas served by not-for–profit rural electric cooperatives (and their vicinity) alongside the results for the rest of the U.S.

The study reveals that higher electricity prices have a **negative** **impact** on **jobs** and economic **growth**: from 2020 to 2040, cumulative job **losses** in the U.S. range from **18.5 million** to **31.3 million** and national **GDP** cumulatively **declines** by **$2.8 trillion** to **$5.4 trillion**.

Overall, the regions **hit** the **hardest** by high electricity prices are areas served by rural electric cooperatives, which prominently feature **crucial** **industries** like **agriculture** and **manufacturing**. Ensuring that American families and businesses have affordable and plentiful electricity is an essential priority of energy policy. Unfortunately, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) policies, especially the so-called “Clean Power Plan” or carbon rule, will make it harder for Americans to access affordable energy. EPA’s recently finalized mandate to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from existing power plants will increase electricity prices for Americans and have no tangible impact on climate change. According to one estimate of the proposed rule, residents of 43 states could see double-digit percentage increases in their electricity bills under EPA’s rule. Now that the regulation is finalized, states are faced with a choice: submit plans to EPA or reject the rule.

<<TEXT CONDENSED, NONE OMMITTED>>

Given the huge costs and minimal benefits, states should reject EPA’s pleas for state implementation plans and wait until the rule’s legal issues are resolved in the courts. ¶ Higher Energy Prices Hit Poor, Rural America Hardest ¶ Electricity is an ubiquitous part of modern life. Higher electricity prices not only require families to dedicate more resources to electric bills, but also harm employment and inhibit growth.[1] Based on NRECA’s results, these negative effects would be primarily concentrated in areas that are served by rural electric co-ops and their surrounding vicinity. ¶ Regions served by rural co-ops are especially sensitive to energy price hikes because they tend to feature more energy-intensive businesses and have more households that spend a larger proportion of their income on energy. Critical industries like manufacturing (32 percent of the industry’s employment) and agriculture (64 percent) are disproportionately located in areas served by rural co-ops.[2] ¶ Residential households in this area also spend more on electricity as a percentage of their total expenditures, devoting 1.72 percent of consumer spending on electricity compared to 1.45 percent of spending from the rest of Americans.[3] Since families living in regions supplied by co-ops have, on average, a lower real income per capita than those living in the remainder of the U.S. ($39,000 per year to $48,000 per year, respectively),[4] they have less income in the first place to devote to electricity, making the impact of rising prices more significant. ¶ In its study, NRECA estimated the effects of a 10 percent and 25 percent increase in electricity prices over the 2016–2040 period, applied linearly.[5] The results were measured against the baseline, which was a business-as-usual forecast where prices do not change.[6] The study quantifies these results in the context of employment, GDP, and real disposable personal income (RDPI). ¶ Economic Impacts Intensify as Prices Increase ¶ The study examines the impact of a 10 percent and 25 percent increase in electricity prices and shows how accelerating the rise in electricity prices has additional economic impacts. ¶ Under the 10 percent scenario: ¶ - Rural co-op areas would experience average annual job loss of 360,000 from 2020 to 2040. ¶ - The rest of the U.S. would see an average annual job loss of 522,000. ¶ - Rural co-op areas would see annual GDP reductions averaging $48 billion; cumulative GDP losses would reach $1 trillion from 2020–2040. ¶ - The rest of U.S. would see annual GDP reductions averaging $86 billion; cumulative GDP losses would reach $1.8 trillion from 2020–2040.¶ - In rural co-op areas, the average decline in per capita RDPI would be $479 over the 2020–2040 timeframe.¶ - In the rest of the U.S., the average decline in per capita RDPI would be $323. ¶ Under the 25 percent scenario: ¶ - Rural co-op areas would experience average annual job loss of 614,000 from 2020 to 2040. ¶ - The rest of the U.S. would see an average annual job loss of 875,000.¶ - Rural co-op areas would see annual GDP reductions averaging $92 billion; cumulative GDP losses would reach $1.9 trillion from 2020–2040. ¶ - The rest of the U.S. would see annual GDP reductions averaging $165 billion; cumulative GDP losses would reach $3.5 trillion from 2020–2040. ¶ - In rural co-op areas, the average decline in per capita RDPI would be $1028 over the 2020–2040 timeframe. ¶ - In the rest of the U.S., the average decline in per capita RDPI would be $681.[7] ¶ Discussion: Study’s Impacts Comport with Reality

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NRECA’s results make intuitive and economic sense. When **businesses** pay **more** for their inputs, they have **less** **capital** to devote to **paying** and **retaining** **employees**. For energy prices, this is compounded by the fact that some companies purchase inputs from other businesses also affected by price increases. In rural areas, the “relatively small populations and electricity-intensive industry mixture” cause a greater proportional loss of jobs compared to the rest of the country.[8]

Due to the electricity-intensive industry mixture in rural America, higher electricity prices have a greater relative impact on GDP in rural areas compared to the rest of the U.S.[9] The national impact would also be severe. Overall, the U.S would experience either a $2.8 trillion or $5.4 trillion cumulative loss in GDP from 2020–2040, depending on the scenario. This decline in GDP would permanently **harm** national **economic** **output**.[10] The end result would be a **less** **competitive** **economy** and a population more sensitive to **economic** **recessions**.

While measurements of employment and GDP losses show the macroeconomic effects of higher electricity prices, they don’t speak specifically to the impact on households and families. To address this, the study evaluates the consequences for real disposable personal income (RDPI), which “is the net of labor and capital income, minus taxes, and adjusted for a price index (including housing prices and electricity prices) to make real income.”[11] Essentially, RDPI provides a good indication of the overall state of the economy and future prospects for growth as well as a measure of the prosperity of households. In particular, a higher price index and **higher** **production** costs for **businesses** correspondingly **increase** **prices** for **consumers** and **decrease** **RDPI**.[12] When electricity **prices** **increase**, Americans must **pay** **more** to meet their electricity **needs**, leaving households with **fewer** **resources** to devote to other areas and priorities. Since average incomes are lower in rural areas than in other parts of the U.S., the impact on rural America would be substantial.

#### Plants take too long.

**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.

#### Nuclear energy is terrible and trades off with renewables.

**Haynes ’21** [Jeff; Cofounder & Chairman Emeritus, Recipient of numerous prizes & 12 honorary doctorates, Top 2% of world scientists, Published 32 books & 900+ papers, Adjunct Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering @ Stanford University; December 17; Bloomberg; “Why Nuclear Power Is Bad for Your Wallet and the Climate,” https://news.bloomberglaw.com/environment-and-energy/why-nuclear-power-is-bad-for-your-wallet-and-the-climate; DOA: 3-26-2025] tristan

Making 10% of world and 20% of U.S. commercial electricity, nuclear power is historically significant but now stagnant. In 2020, its global capacity additions minus retirements totaled only 0.4 GW (billion watts). Renewables in contrast added 278.3 GW—782x more capacity—able to produce about 232x more annual electricity (based on U.S. 2020 performance by technology). Renewables swelled supply and displaced carbon as much every 38 hours as nuclear did all year. As of early December, 2021’s score looks like nuclear –3 GW, renewables +290 GW. Game over.

The world already invests annually $0.3 trillion each, mostly voluntary private capital, in energy efficiency and renewables, but about $0.015–0.03 trillion, or 20–40x less, in nuclear—mostly conscripted, because investors got burned. Of 259 US power reactors ordered (1955–2016), only 112 got built and 93 remain operable; by mid-2017, just 28 stayed competitive and suffered no year-plus outage. In the oil business, that’s called an 89% dry-hole risk.

Renewables provided all global electricity growth in 2020. Nuclear power struggles to sustain its miniscule marginal share as its vendors, culture, and prospects shrivel. World reactors average 31 years old, in the U.S., 41. Within a few years, old and uneconomic reactors’ retirements will consistently eclipse additions, tipping output into permanent decline. World nuclear capacity already fell in five of the past 12 years for a 2% net drop. Performance has become erratic: the average French reactor in 2020 produced nothing one-third of the time.

China accounts for most current and projected nuclear growth. Yet China’s 2020 renewable investments about matched its cumulative 2008–20 nuclear investments. Together, in 2020 in China, sun and wind generated twice nuclear’s output, adding 60x more capacity and 6x more output at 2–3 times lower forward cost per kWh. Sun and wind are now the cheapest bulk power source for over 91% of world electricity.

Nuclear Power Has No Business Case

Nuclear power has bleak prospects because it has no business case. New plants cost 3–8x or 5–13x more per kWh than unsubsidized new solar or windpower, so new nuclear power produces 3–13x fewer kWh per dollar and therefore displaces 3–13x less carbon per dollar than new renewables. Thus buying nuclear makes climate change worse. End-use efficiency is even cheaper than renewables, hence even more climate-effective. Arithmetic is not an opinion.

Unsubsidized efficiency or renewables even beat most existing reactors’ operating cost, so a dozen have closed over the past decade. Congress is trying to rescue the others with a $6 billion lifeline and durable, generous new operating subsidies to replace or augment state largesse—adding to existing federal subsidies that rival or exceed nuclear construction costs.

But no business case means no climate case. Propping up obsolete assets so they don’t exit the market blocks more climate-effective replacements—efficiency and renewables that save even more carbon per dollar. Supporters of new subsidies for the sake of the climate just got played.

Fashionably rebranded “Small Modular” or “Advanced” reactors can’t change the outcome. Their smaller units cost less but output falls even more, so SMRs save money only in the sense in which a smaller helping of foie gras helps you lose weight.

They’ll initially at least double existing reactors’ cost per kWh; that cost is ~3–13x renewables’ (let alone efficiency’s); and renewables’ costs will halve again before SMRs can scale. Do the math: 2 x (3 to 13) x 2 = 12–52-fold. Mass production can’t bridge that huge cost gap—nor could SMRs scale before renewables have decarbonized the US grid.

Even free reactors couldn’t compete: their non-nuclear parts cost too much. Small Modular Renewables are decades ahead in exploiting mass-production economies; nuclear can never catch up. It’s not just too little, too late: nuclear hogs market space, jams grid capacity, and diverts investments that more-climate-effective carbon-free competitors then can’t contest.

**Emissions increase.** Empirics prove.

**Jacobson '24** [Mark Z. Jacobson; Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Stanford; 10-10-2024; "7 reasons why nuclear energy is not the answer to solve climate change"; One Earth; https://www.oneearth.org/the-7-reasons-why-nuclear-energy-is-not-the-answer-to-solve-climate-change/; accessed 03-01-2025] leon

**There is no such thing as a zero- or close-to-zero emission nuclear power plant**. Even **existing plants emit due to the continuous mining and refining of uranium needed for the plant**. Emissions from new nuclear are 78 to 178 g-CO2/kWh, not close to 0. Of this, 64 to 102 g-CO2/kWh over 100 years are emissions from the background grid while consumers wait 10 to 19 years for nuclear to come online or be refurbished, relative to 2 to 5 years for wind or solar. In addition, **all nuclear plants emit 4.4 g-CO2e/kWh from the water vapor and heat they release**. **This contrasts with solar panels and wind turbines, which reduce heat or water vapor fluxes to the air by about 2.2 g-CO2e/kWh for a net difference from this factor alone of 6.6 g-CO2e/kWh**.

In fact, **China’s investment in nuclear plants that take so long between planning and operation instead of wind or solar resulted in China’s CO2 emissions increasing 1.3 percent from 2016 to 2017 rather than declining by an estimated average of 3 percent**. The resulting difference in air pollution emissions may have caused 69,000 additional air pollution deaths in China in 2016 alone, with additional deaths in years prior and since.

**Even if they cut all of US emissions, China and other countries will still emit and the world would grow even hotter. The US makes up a small amount of emissions globally and US emissions are already decreasing. That means that the aff has zero impact. They have not explained how it is scalar and**