

Northeast Texas Essay Contest - 2026

Artificial Intelligence in the Military: Strategic Enhancement or Serious Concern?

In recent years, there has been an exponential growth in research and the use of artificial intelligence, causing it to transform from a mere idea to a tool with the potential to impact global power. Today, AI influences everyday life through automated systems and generative models, as governments and corporations race to unlock AI's full potential. As defence strategies become increasingly dependent on speed, precision, and intelligence, this technology is not just needed to dominate but is crucial for survival. In light of the rapid development of AI, questions surrounding its risks, especially regarding its ability to make life-or-death decisions, have begun to arise. While the use of artificial intelligence does present ethical and legal risks, the adoption of AI in the United States military can enhance threat detection and strengthen deterrence, ultimately increasing national security as the nation progresses into a technologically-driven era of global warfare.

One of the most significant ways AI can improve national security is through enhanced threat detection. Modern conflicts generate "enormous quantities of information" from sources such as "satellite imagery, communications intercepts, and open-source intelligence" (Hall), too much for human analysts to efficiently sort through. Through the use of AI, threats across physical and digital spaces can be identified with far greater accuracy and speed. For example, the Phased Array Tracking Radar to Intercept on Target (PATRIOT) can "track incoming objects, classify them as threat or friendly, and launch surface-to-air missiles" (Zequeira) only by using a network of algorithms. Similarly, "AI gun detection systems" can analyze real-time video feed to "identify weapons and trigger immediate alerts before situations escalate" (Hall). Machine learning tools such as these systems can recognize patterns, adapt to different conditions, and

warn of threats faster than traditional methods can. This can enable a proactive response rather than a reactive one, making it less likely for surprise attacks to occur while also limiting human error and reducing response times. As AI continues to advance, threat detection systems will become more adaptive and accurate, further strengthening our national security by becoming an increasingly reliable source.

AI also strengthens the United States military's ability to deter potential attacks, a fundamental strategy to reinforce national security. Deterrence not just depends on the strength of a military force, but also on the belief that the threat will be detected and met with an effective counter-response. By utilizing AI, the military can “outpace the opponent’s OODA-loop (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act)” (Meerveld et al.), making it difficult for an attacker to rely on the chance of delays and uncertainty. AI tools in our military suggest to rival countries that the U.S. can identify threats quickly and respond effectively, making them less likely to attack. This is especially important because rival countries continue to invest in AI tools; choosing not to adopt AI would weaken the U.S. deterrence because it would signal that the country lacks technological advancements and is vulnerable. In light of this, having AI reinforces deterrence by strengthening responses.

As artificial intelligence becomes more common, it is understood that it will influence military operations worldwide. The question is no longer whether AI will shape militaries across the globe, but rather how it will be integrated. Although there are still ethical and legal implications yet to be explored and tested, it is safe to say that avoiding its adoption will put the United States in a vulnerable position, leaving it unprepared to respond to threats from countries that are trying to advance their own positions in power. The responsible integration of AI is important to ensure the United States can defend itself in the new era of technology.

Works Cited

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