

A New Era of Conflicts, Types and Consequences of Nuclear War

Ajaz Ahmed Wani

Associate Professor and Head Dept. of Zoology Govt. Degree College Bhaderwah

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.13010013>

Received: 28 December 2025; Accepted: 03 January 2026; Published: 23 January 2026

ABSTRACT

The development of nuclear weapons added a new dimension to conventional conflict: The possibility that it could inadvertently escalate into a nuclear exchange. But when conflicts occur, they may be more aggressive and decisive. These results offer insight into the difficulty of substituting nuclear weapons for conventional arms. This era also sees the increasing impact of interconnected global challenges like resource competition and climate change, which fuel internal and international conflicts, alongside a growing trend of conflict types that may be more aggressive and decisive, demanding a renewed commitment to trust, cooperation, and disarmament to achieve global stability and prevent nuclear catastrophe. In this article author discussed the consequences of nuclear threat along with present scenario.

Keywords: War, Nuclear Threat, Conflicts, National, international

INTRODUCTION

War, in the popular sense, a conflict between political groups involving hostilities of considerable duration and magnitude. War is an armed conflict between the armed forces of states, or between governmental forces and armed groups that are organized under a certain command structure and have the capacity to sustain military operations, or between such organized groups [1]. Sociologists usually apply the term to such conflicts only if they are initiated and conducted in accordance with socially recognized forms. They treat war as an institution recognized in custom or in law. Military writers usually confine the term to hostilities in which the contending groups are sufficiently equal in power to render the outcome uncertain for a time. It is generally characterized by widespread violence, destruction, and mortality, using regular or irregular military forces. Warfare refers to the common activities and characteristics of types of war, or of wars in general [2]. War that is not restricted to purely legitimate military targets, and can result in massive civilian or other non-combatant suffering and casualties.

In all ages war has been an important topic of analysis. In the latter part of the 20th century, in the aftermath of two World Wars and in the shadow of nuclear, biological, and chemical holocaust, more was written on the subject than ever before. Endeavours to understand the nature of war, to formulate some theory of its causes, conduct, and prevention, are of great importance, for theory shapes human expectations and determines human behaviour [3]. The various schools of theorists are generally aware of the profound influence they can exercise upon life, and their writings usually include a strong normative element, for, when accepted by politicians, their ideas can assume the characteristics of self-fulfilling prophecies. The analysis of war may be divided into several categories. Philosophical, political, economic, technological, legal, sociological, and psychological approaches are frequently distinguished. These distinctions indicate the varying focuses of interest and the different analytical categories employed by the theoretician, but most of the actual theories are mixed because war is an extremely complex social phenomenon that cannot be explained by any single factor or through any single approach.

Since 1945, great power wars, interstate wars, territorial conquests and war declarations have declined in frequency.[4] Wars have been increasingly regulated by international humanitarian law. Battle deaths and casualties have declined, in part due to advances in military medicine and despite advances in weapons. In Western Europe, since the late 18th century, more than 150 conflicts and about 600 battles have taken place, but no battle has taken place since 1945.[5]

However, war in some aspects has not necessarily declined.[4] Civil wars have increased in absolute terms since 1945. A distinctive feature of war since 1945 is that combat has largely been a matter of civil wars and insurgencies.[6] The major exceptions were the Korean War, the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, the Iran–Iraq War, the Gulf War, the Eritrean–Ethiopian War, the Russo-Ukrainian War and latest Iran Israel war.

Types of War

Asymmetric Warfare

This method is used in conflicts between belligerents of drastically different levels of military capability or size.[7]

Biological warfare, or germ warfare

It is the use of biological infectious agents or toxins such as bacteria, viruses, and fungi against people, plants, or animals. This can be conducted through sophisticated technologies, like cluster munitions, or with rudimentary techniques like catapulting an infected corpse behind enemy lines and can include weaponized or non-weaponized pathogens.[8]

Chemical warfare

It involves the use of weaponized chemicals in combat. Poison gas as a chemical weapon was principally used during World War I, and resulted in over a million estimated casualties, including more than 100,000 civilians.[9]

Cold warfare

This type of war is an intense international rivalry without direct military conflict, but with a sustained threat of it, including high levels of military preparations, expenditures, and development, and may involve active conflicts by indirect means, such as economic warfare, political warfare, covert operations, espionage, cyberwarfare, or proxy wars.

Conventional warfare

It is a form of warfare between states in which nuclear, biological, chemical or radiological weapons are not used or see limited deployment.

Cyberwarfare

This involves the actions by a nation-state or international organization to attack and attempt to damage another nation's information systems.

Insurgency

Insurgency is a rebellion against authority, where irregular forces take up arms to change an existing political order. An insurgency can be fought via counterinsurgency, and may also be opposed by measures to protect the population, and by political and economic actions of various kinds aimed at undermining the insurgents' claims against the incumbent regime.

Information warfare

It is the application of destructive force on a large scale against information assets and systems, against the computers and networks that support the four critical infrastructures (the power grid, communications, financial, and transportation).[10]

Nuclear warfare

is warfare in which nuclear weapons are the primary, or a major, method of achieving capitulation.

Radiological warfare

This type of warfare involves any form of warfare involving deliberate radiation poisoning or contamination of an area with radiological sources.

Total war

It involves warfare by any means possible, disregarding the laws of war, placing no limits on legitimate military targets, using weapons and tactics resulting in significant civilian casualties, or demanding a war effort requiring significant sacrifices by the friendly civilian population.

Unconventional warfare

This can be defined as "military and quasi-military operations other than conventional warfare"[45] and may use covert forces or actions such as subversion, diversion, sabotage, espionage, biowarfare, sanctions, propaganda or guerrilla warfare.

Nuclear Threat and destruction

At present there are 9 countries in the world that possess nuclear weapons. They are:

1. Russia
2. United States
3. China
4. France
5. United Kingdom
6. Pakistan
7. India
8. Israel
9. North Korea

These states have roughly 12,331 nuclear warheads, with over 9,600 in active military stockpiles, according to the Federation of Atomic Scientists' 2025 Status of the World's Nuclear Forces. While this is a significant decline from the approximately 70,000 warheads owned by the nuclear-armed states during the Cold War, nuclear arsenals are expected to grow over the coming decade and today's forces are vastly more capable.

Who has the most nuclear weapons?

Russia has the most confirmed nuclear weapons, with over 5,500 nuclear warheads. The United States follows behind with 5,044 nuclear weapons, hosted in the US and 5 other nations: Turkey, Italy, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. Total nuclear warheads owned by these 2 countries alone counts for nearly 90% of nuclear weapons in the world.

Total number of warheads for North Korea and Israel is unconfirmed. However, it has been estimated that North Korea has enough fissile material to develop between 40-50 individual weapons, while Israel has material for up to 200, with an estimated 90 existing warheads.

A single nuclear warhead could kill hundreds of thousands of people, with lasting and devastating humanitarian and environmental consequences. Detonating just 1 nuclear weapon alone over New York would cause an estimated 583,160 fatalities. Combined, China, France, India, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, United Kingdom and the United States possess over 12,300 nuclear weapons, most of which are many times more powerful than the nuclear weapon dropped on Hiroshima. Thirty-two other states are also part of the problem, with six nations hosting nuclear weapons, and a further 28 endorsing their use.

Nuclear weapons are the most destructive, inhumane and indiscriminate weapons ever created. Both in the scale of the devastation they cause, and in their uniquely persistent, spreading, genetically damaging radioactive fallout, they are unlike any other weapons. A single nuclear bomb detonated over a large city could kill millions

of people. The use of tens or hundreds of nuclear bombs would disrupt the global climate, causing widespread famine.

Consequences of nuclear war

Short-term effects

A single nuclear weapon can destroy a city and kill most of its people. Several nuclear explosions over modern cities would kill tens of millions of people. Casualties from a major nuclear war between the US and Russia would reach hundreds of millions.

It takes around 10 seconds for the fireball from a nuclear explosion to reach its maximum size. A nuclear explosion releases vast amounts of energy in the form of blast, heat and radiation. An enormous shockwave reaches speeds of many hundreds of kilometres an hour. The blast kills people close to ground zero, and causes lung injuries, ear damage and internal bleeding further away. People sustain injuries from collapsing buildings and flying objects. Thermal radiation is so intense that almost everything close to ground zero is vaporized. The extreme heat causes severe burns and ignites fires over a large area, which coalesce into a giant firestorm. Even people in underground shelters face likely death due to a lack of oxygen and carbon monoxide poisoning.

Long-term effects

In the long-term, nuclear weapons produce ionizing radiation, which kills or sickens those exposed, contaminates the environment, and has long-term health consequences, including cancer and genetic damage. Their widespread use in atmospheric testing has caused grave long-term consequences. Physicians project that some 2.4 million people worldwide will eventually die from cancers due to atmospheric nuclear tests conducted between 1945 and 1980.

The use of less than one percent of the nuclear weapons in the world could disrupt the global climate and threaten as many as two billion people with starvation in a nuclear famine in the long-term. The detonation of thousands of nuclear weapons could result in a nuclear winter, which would destroy our fragile ecosystem. Physicians and first responders would be unable to work in devastated, radioactively contaminated areas. Even a single nuclear detonation in a modern city would strain existing disaster relief resources to the breaking point; a nuclear war would overwhelm any relief system we could build in advance. Displaced populations from a nuclear war will produce a refugee crisis that is orders of magnitude larger than any we have ever experienced.

Environmental and socio-economic impact of nuclear weapons

The existence of nuclear weapons has a strong impact on the environment. Nuclear war would mean a climate disruption with devastating consequences. The world would fall under a nuclear winter, be subject to a deadly global famine and exacerbated effects of global warming.

The socio-economic impacts would also be terrible, with developing countries and marginalized groups the ones that will suffer the most. Nuclear weapons are also a vacuum for financial support: in their development, maintenance and dismantlement. This is money that could be better spent funding assets such as green technologies and health facilities.

Lead to high levels of radiation:

Nuclear weapons produce ionizing radiation, which kills or sickens those exposed, contaminates the environment, and has long-term health consequences, including cancer and genetic damage. The legacy of nuclear testing means that up to 2.4 million people worldwide will die from illnesses linked to nuclear testing in the twentieth century. Even the production of nuclear weapons has an effect on the environment. Producing the explosive materials used in nuclear weapons leads to long-lasting radioactive pollution.

Humanitarian aid wouldn't be provided to victims.

There would be no humanitarian response. Physicians and first responders would be unable to work in devastated, radioactively contaminated areas. Even a single nuclear detonation in a modern city would strain

existing disaster relief resources to the breaking point; a nuclear war would overwhelm any relief system we could build in advance. Displaced populations from a nuclear war will produce a refugee crisis that is orders of magnitude larger than any we have ever experienced.

Cause a lot of destruction and death.

A single nuclear weapon can destroy a city and kill most of its people. The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are prime examples of the fatality caused by an atomic bomb. Several nuclear explosions over modern cities would kill tens of millions of people. Casualties from a major nuclear war between the US and Russia would reach hundreds of millions.

The extreme destruction caused by nuclear weapons cannot be limited to military targets or to combatants. Civilians are more often the majority of casualties from a nuclear attack; those within range are either killed or suffer long-term health implications from a nuclear blast and resulting radiation. Even those in neighbouring cities or countries would suffer from the impact of a nuclear detonation. Due to the inability of nuclear weapons to distinguish between civilians and militants, and the lack of control we have over nuclear blasts makes them a prime example of inhumane weaponry that needs to be outlawed.

They could lead to climate disruption and worldwide famine.

Use of less than one percent of the nuclear weapons in the world could disrupt the global climate and threaten as many as two billion people with starvation in a nuclear famine. The thousands of nuclear weapons possessed by the US and Russia could bring about a nuclear winter, destroying the essential ecosystems on which all life depends. The contemporary landscape of global conflicts is significantly shaped by the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the evolving nature of international relations. The end of the Cold War briefly seemed to offer a path toward disarmament, yet we find ourselves in a new era characterized by complex geopolitical rivalries, non-state actors, and the resurgence of nationalism. This has led to heightened tensions and a re-examination of nuclear arsenals as state actors seek to assert power and influence.

CONCLUSION

Navigating the complexities of nuclear threat in this new era requires a multifaceted approach that includes diplomatic engagement, robust arm control agreements and the strengthen of non-proliferation regimes. As the unpredictability of global conflicts grows an emphasis on dialogue, risk reduction and the eventual goal of disarmament is critical to safeguard future generations from the catastrophic consequences of nuclear war. Only through international cooperation and commitment to shared security can we hope to mitigate the threats posed by nuclear weapons and establish a more stable and peaceful world.

REFERENCES

1. How is The Term "Armed Conflict" Defined in International Humanitarian Law?" (PDF). International Committee of the Red Cross. ICRC. April 2024. pp. 13–14. Archived from the original (PDF) on 8 July 2024. Retrieved 7 July 2024.
2. "Warfare". Cambridge Dictionary. Archived from the original on 24 February 2021. Retrieved 1 August 2016.
3. Miller, Barbra; Wood, Bernard; Balansky, Andrew; Mercader, Julio; Panger, Melissa (2006). *Anthropology*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. p. 768. ISBN 978-0-205-32024-0.
4. Fazal, Tanisha M. (2025). "Is War in Decline?". *Annual Review of Political Science*. 28: 57–73. doi:10.1146/annurev-polisci-041923-115351.
5. World War One – A New Kind of War | Part II[usurped], From 14–18 Understanding the Great War, by Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Annette Becker.
6. Robert J. Bunker and Pamela Ligouri Bunker, "The modern state in epochal transition: The significance of irregular warfare, state deconstruction, and the rise of new warfighting entities beyond neo-medievalism." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27.2 (2016): 325–344.
7. Asymmetrical warfare | Britannica". www.britannica.com. Retrieved 5 May 2023.

8. Wheelis, Mark (2002). "Biological Warfare at the 1346 Siege of Caffa - Volume 8, Number 9—September 2002 - Emerging Infectious Diseases journal - CDC". *Emerging Infectious Diseases*. 8 (9): 971–975. doi:10.3201/eid0809.010536. ISSN 1080-6040. PMC 2732530. PMID 12194776.
9. D. Hank Ellison (2007). *Handbook of Chemical and Biological Warfare Agents* (2nd ed.). CRC Press. pp. 567–570. ISBN 978-0-8493-1434-6.
10. Lewis, Brian C. "Information Warfare". *Federation of American Scientist*. Archived from the original on 17 June 1997. Retrieved 27 February 2017.