

2. Anthropic–U.S. Defense Clash Over Ai Safety – Defence

A controversy has emerged after the U.S. Department of Defense reportedly blacklisted AI company Anthropic after it refused to enable its AI systems for domestic surveillance and autonomous weapon applications. The incident has triggered global debate on AI ethics, military use of artificial intelligence, and governance standards

1. Areas of Military AI Use

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly transforming modern warfare. Militaries worldwide are integrating AI to enhance decision-making, surveillance, combat capability, and operational efficiency.

A. Autonomous Weapons Systems

1. Autonomous weapons are systems capable of selecting and engaging targets without direct human intervention.
2. These include–
 1. Autonomous drones
 2. Robotic combat vehicles
 3. AI-guided missile systems.
3. Such systems rely on machine learning algorithms, sensor data, and automated targeting mechanisms.
4. Their use raises serious concerns about the loss of human control over lethal force.

B. Surveillance and Intelligence

1. AI significantly enhances the ability to process large volumes of intelligence data.
2. Key applications include–
 1. Satellite imagery analysis
 2. Facial recognition systems
 3. Signals intelligence monitoring
 4. Pattern recognition in battlefield environments.
3. Example–
 1. The United States' Project Maven uses AI algorithms to analyse drone footage and identify objects such as vehicles, infrastructure, and potential threats.
 2. This reduces the workload of human analysts and speeds up intelligence processing.

C. Cyber Warfare

1. AI is increasingly used in both offensive and defensive cyber operations.
2. Major capabilities include–
 1. Automated detection of cyberattacks
 2. Rapid response systems
 3. Identification of malware patterns
 4. Predictive threat analysis.
3. AI-powered cyber tools can detect vulnerabilities faster than traditional cybersecurity systems.

D. Logistics and Decision Support

1. AI improves military logistics and operational planning.
2. Important applications include–
 1. Predictive maintenance of military equipment
 2. Optimization of supply chains

3. Troop deployment planning
4. Battlefield simulations and war-gaming.
3. These tools enable commanders to make data-driven strategic decisions.

2. Key Issues Emerging from Military AI Deployment

The rapid militarization of AI has created several strategic and ethical challenges.

A. State Security vs Ethical Deployment

1. Governments prioritize national security and technological superiority.
2. However, many technology companies emphasize-
 1. Ethical use of AI
 2. Long-term safety risks
 3. Avoidance of harmful applications.
3. This creates tension between state security objectives and corporate ethical commitments.

B. Militarization of Artificial Intelligence

1. AI is becoming a central component of 21st-century geopolitical competition.
2. Major powers are investing heavily in military AI capabilities.
3. The United States-China rivalry particularly focuses on-
 1. Artificial intelligence
 2. Semiconductor technology
 3. Autonomous weapons systems.
4. This competition is often described as an AI arms race.

C. Governance Gap in Military AI

1. There is currently no comprehensive global treaty regulating military AI systems.
2. Some existing frameworks include-
 1. Geneva Conventions
 2. United Nations discussions on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS).
3. However, these frameworks were designed for traditional warfare and do not fully address AI-driven combat systems.

D. Risk of Algorithmic Bias

1. AI systems rely heavily on training datasets.
2. If datasets contain biases or incomplete information, AI systems may-
 1. Misidentify targets
 2. Produce inaccurate threat assessments.
3. In military contexts, such errors could result in civilian casualties or unlawful attacks.

E. Dual-Use Technology Problem

1. AI technologies developed for civilian applications can easily be adapted for military purposes.
2. Examples include-
 1. Computer vision systems
 2. Autonomous navigation technologies
 3. Data analytics platforms.
3. This dual-use nature makes regulation difficult because restrictions may hinder civilian innovation.

3. Ethical Dimensions of Military AI

Military AI raises fundamental ethical questions regarding accountability, justice, and the role of human judgment in warfare.

A. Responsibility and Accountability

1. Autonomous systems complicate the chain of accountability in warfare.
2. If an AI-controlled weapon causes unintended damage, determining responsibility becomes difficult.
3. Possible responsible actors include–
 1. Software developers
 2. Military commanders deploying the system
 3. The state authorizing the operation.
4. This creates significant legal and ethical ambiguity.

B. Utilitarian Perspective

1. Governments often justify AI surveillance and automation by arguing that it can prevent large-scale threats such as terrorism.
2. However, critics argue that excessive surveillance may undermine–
 1. Civil liberties
 2. Privacy
 3. Democratic freedoms.
3. Therefore, a balance must be maintained between collective security and individual rights.

C. Justice and “Digital Colonialism”

1. AI systems are often trained on datasets dominated by Western contexts.
2. When deployed in conflict zones in the Global South, these systems may misinterpret local environments, languages, or cultural contexts.
3. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as digital colonialism, where technological biases lead to unequal or unjust outcomes.

4. India’s Position and Strategic Considerations

For a country like India, which is emerging as a major technological and military power, military AI presents both opportunities and strategic challenges.

A. Strategic Autonomy

1. Reliance on foreign-developed AI models and platforms may create vulnerabilities.
2. Embedded “kill switches,” proprietary algorithms, or geopolitical restrictions could compromise national security.
3. Therefore, India must invest in indigenous AI capabilities for defence applications.

B. Developing a “Human-Centric AI” Framework

1. India can promote an approach grounded in ethical principles similar to the Martens Clause, which emphasizes the laws of humanity and public conscience.
2. This framework could balance–
 1. National security
 2. Human rights
 3. Ethical AI deployment.
3. Such an approach may position India as a norm-setting leader for responsible AI governance in the Global South.

C. Regulatory Sandboxes for Military AI

1. Military AI technologies should be tested in controlled environments known as regulatory sandboxes.
2. These environments allow developers to evaluate systems under realistic conditions while minimizing risks.
3. Testing should involve both-
 1. Technical experts
 2. Ethicists and legal scholars.
4. This multidisciplinary oversight can ensure safer and more accountable AI deployment.

5. Way Forward

1. Development of international norms and treaties regulating autonomous weapons.
2. Strengthening human oversight in AI-based military systems.
3. Promoting transparency and accountability mechanisms.
4. Investing in indigenous defence AI research and development.

6. Conclusion

1. Artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping the nature of warfare by enhancing military capabilities in surveillance, cyber operations, and autonomous systems.
2. However, its deployment raises serious concerns about ethical responsibility, global governance, and technological sovereignty.
3. For India, developing indigenous and human-centric AI systems while actively participating in global norm-setting will be essential to ensure both national security and responsible technological progress.

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