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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Israel-Iran Conflict in Autonomous Weapons and Its Impact on Pakistan

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the intensifying military competition between Israel and Iran through the lens of autonomous weapons systems (AWS) and assesses its strategic implications for Pakistan. Anchored in the Realist theory of international relations, the analysis explores how both Israel and Iran are leveraging AWS to strengthen deterrence, gain regional influence, and prepare for potential conflict escalation. Israel's technological advantage and alliances, especially with Western nations, have allowed it to lead in AWS deployment, while Iran employs low-cost, asymmetric strategies using drones and AI-assisted systems to counterbalance Israeli superiority. Although Pakistan is not directly involved in the conflict, its proximity to the Middle East and strategic alliances necessitate a response to emerging threats. The diffusion of autonomous technologies has raised concerns about cyber vulnerabilities, arms races, and shifts in regional security balances. Pakistan's growing interest in AWS development reflects both external pressures and internal security needs. The absence of international regulation on AWS further complicates regional dynamics and reinforces Realist assumptions about power, survival, and strategic competition in an anarchic international system.

**Keywords:** Autonomous Weapons Systems, Israel-Iran Conflict, Pakistan Security, Realist Theory, Military AI, Regional stability, Cyber Warfare, Arms Race, International Law, Defense Strategy

## Introduction

"The Israel-Iran Conflict in Autonomous Weapons and Its Impact on Pakistan" is concerned with an important and emerging issue in the dispute between Israel and Iran. With the growth of system intelligence in military matters, an AWS becomes central to the current concept of warfare. Such robotic systems are a big issue in terms of ethics, law and military usage. Even so, using AWS has added more military influence on the already stressful Iran-Israel conflict and has boosted the unrest in the area. Although the technologies are being wielded to shore up power, the whole Middle East suffers the fallout (Gross, 2021; Defense Intelligence Agency, 2022). There are not significant changes in the impacts for countries such as Pakistan and non-conflict nations. Because of AWS and AI-based military changes, the neighbors have to adjust the way they respond. Because Pakistan is geographically close to the Middle East and takes part in regional power issues, it is now experiencing new security concerns (Anwar et al., 2023; Baig, 2024). Since Israel and Iran are attempting to make and use these types of weapons, this paper studies how that impacted Pakistan's defense decisions and view of the world using Realism.

## Literature Review

The increasing militarization of AI and self-reliant systems has changed the manner countries compete strategically in struggle zones, in particular within the center East. Boulanin and Verbruggen (2017) and different pupils have charted the evolution of independent weapons structures (AWS), emphasizing styles in nation investment, risks, and ethical discussions. The global Committee of the crimson go (2023) stresses

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the legal and humanitarian issues that AWS deliver up underneath present worldwide guidelines, however there's still no global framework this is binding.

Gross (2021) looks at how Israel has made development in army AI and the way it works with systems just like the Iron Dome and UAVs, which can be faster, more correct, and safer for human beings. The protection Intelligence agency (2022) talks about Iran's uneven method, which makes use of swarms of reasonably-priced drones and proxy operations. The middle for Strategic and worldwide studies (2023) appears greater closely at these tactics in strategic checks that communicate approximately how Iran's navy doctrine has changed in response to Israel's technological area.

A whole lot of the writing is on the people who are directly involved, but now not lots has been said about Pakistan's function. Anwar et al. (2023) and the Pakistan Ministry of Defense (2023) have pronounced at the authorities' developing hobby in battlefield AI and cybersecurity. They pressure that the country needs to conform to outside stress in preference to planning beforehand of time.
In fashionable, the contemporary literature talks approximately AWS improvement and strategic competition, but it does not talk approximately how this stuff affects 1/3-birthday celebration international locations like Pakistan. This paper seeks to address that vacuum by inspecting Pakistan's changing defense stance from a Realist perspective, inspired through the Israel-Iran AWS disagreement.

## Autonomous Weapons and Israel's Plans

The idea of deterrence has always been important to how Israel builds its military and lately, it has led the way among nations in developing autonomous weapons systems. Today, Israeli security systems that depend on AI include drones, Iron Dome and automated air defenses (Gross, 2021; National Defense Magazine, 2023; Gross, 2021), all working together to target important targets requiring the involvement of only a few people. These advancements mean the state of Israel can cope with its leading adversaries and react to any incoming threats without delay or error. The strong merging of military, civilians and technology in the Hebrew state results in quicker development of innovations in defense- the 'Startup Nation'.

For years, Iran focused its strategy on different warfare tactics as a result of being cut off from the global community. Even though Iran has not constructed the high technology required for laser weapons or Jewish-style drones, it has invested in large numbers of affordable assets such as swarms of drones, GPS disruptions and computerized target systems which have been utilized by proxy groups fighting in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Such decisions have been prompted by overwhelming odds and Iran's goal for external clout. In this circumstance, raising technology capacities is tied to growing military involvement in the region. The engagement of both countries is driving changes in what war means and in AWS which in turn changes how close neighbors view their threats.

## Pakistan is Classed as an Indirectly Affected Country

Pakistan isn't engaged in the conflict between Israel and Iran, even though it can feel the results because of its proximity to the Middle East and strong alliances with Muslim nations. Pakistan is now considering increasing its own military might as a result of AWS's wider presence in Asia. Because drone attacks are increasing and cyber-attacks connected to AI could happen, Pakistan needs to ensure its military and armored forces are prepared and its electronic networks are secure (Anwar et al., 2023; Clarke & Knake, 2010).

There are UAV, battlefield AI and smart surveillance programs being developed in Pakistan now. They have arisen due to the growth of regional dangers and the influences of world trends. Additionally, Amazon Web Services could reach Pakistan's neighbors, including India and the gulf which could worsen the balance in Southern Asia. Still, using AI in weapons is mostly concerning because hacking of the system or unintentional mistaken launches of the weapon are possible.

It affects Pakistan's diplomatic relations as well. It has to be careful with its ties to Iran on the west side and manage its partnerships with the gulf states, whom Israel has similar ideas on technology policies. Moreover, without worldwide controls on AWS, Pakistan has to deal with related problems in arms control, export control and international law (Hoppenbrouwers, 2024; ICRC, 2023). They are an important reason why Pakistan needs to decide if its security alignments and defense strategies should be reformed.

### Research Question

1. What role does Realist theory attribute to autonomous weapons in the fighting between Israel and Iran?
2. In what respects do autonomous weapons affect Pakistan's ability to keep itself secure and control its own strategy?
3. How do Realist assumptions about world politics explain why there are no international rules governing autonomous weapons?

## Answers

### 1. Given Realist theory, how are autonomous weapons viewed in the conflict between Israel and Iran?

For realism, a state is focused on preserving its power and security in all actions. Both countries compete by developing military technologies and both nations are actively working on AWS. Due to hostile neighbors, Israel has made AI part of nearly every defense strategy it uses. Later land, surveillance and Iron Dome acquisitions evidence Israel's will to keep a technological advantage.

According to these theories, Israel does this because it makes good sense for the country: by upgrading its independent resources, it can secure its national security. This also helps reduce the number of soldiers deployed, lowers political problems and increases how well the military can operate. For the IDF, AWS act as both tools for action and means to present strategic messages emphasizing their readiness, skills and strengths.

Likewise, although Iran's strategy looks different, it can be seen as consistent with Realist beliefs. Because of international sanctions and diplomatic isolation, Iran is now investing in drone swarms, technology that uses artificial intelligence to target and robotic vehicles. Thanks to these breakthroughs, Iran relies on groups outside its borders to confront Israel in unorthodox ways. Kamikaze drones are being used by one side in proxy conflicts in Syria and Yemen to illustrate this gap in military power.

Based on Realist views, the AWS competition between Israel and Iran is an illustration of how one country's defensive effort can make the other feel threatened and retaliate. This pattern of steps fully aligns with Realist theories of power balance.

### 2. What challenges do autonomous weapons create for Pakistan's national security and independence?

Pakistan is indirectly influenced by the technological competition happening between Iran and Israel. Because AWS is used more in regional conflicts, countries surrounding them, including Pakistan, must change their security practices accordingly. According to realism, when states discover they have less military power, they will do what they can to balance those differences.

The nation is located in a region that is subject to great international interest. As a result of close links with the Gulf and Iran and rising conflict with AI-focused India, Pakistan now sees its strategy changing because of AWS spread in its area. According to Realists, Pakistan increasing its work on UAVs, AI for surveillance and digital warfare teams is linked to the growing militarization in Middle Eastern countries.

Pakistan's ability to chart its own course is currently threatened. Because Pakistan may adopt more AWS technologies, it could need to get, grow or share advanced systems, possibly putting some of its autonomy at risk or pulling it closer to nations such as China or Turkey. According to Realism which describes

the world's main behavioral model in international relations, states that lack power or technology often join strong nations for protection.

AWS being introduced introduces new risks related to control functions. Technology connected by networks that uses algorithms is more vulnerable to attacks and mistakes made by AI. According to this school, this gives a strong incentive for countries to act suspiciously and nervously which repeats the theory that a lack of order leads to insecurity.

### 3. Why is there no global agreement on autonomous weapons if Realism is used to analyze current global events?

The absence of rules or complete prohibition for AWS globally is the greatest sign that Realist theory applies. Human rights organizations keep pressing for international treaties on AWS, but Israel, the U.S., China and Russia refuse to make any firm commitments. This is consistent with the Realist opinion that countries will always choose what's best for them over anything set by international rules.

Realists believe that international organizations put powerful countries first and cannot enforce matters themselves (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2023). This can be seen most clearly in the AWS discussion. States know that AWS are the future of combat—making things faster, less costly and causing less political risk. Regulations in the financial sector may reduce where banks stand, so Realists agree this could go against their main goal.

Being a mid-level power, Pakistan is part of this situation. The military may say it favors reducing stockpiles, but in fact it must first protect its country by using new technologies to avoid dangers from other countries. According to realism, vulnerable states would start competing to build arms instead of facing possible dangers.

Without worldwide regulation, thinking about strategy has become less certain. Proven or not, states have to watch out for dangerous intentions from rivals—which leads to even bigger security issues. As a result of this lack of norms, Pakistan builds policies and technologies that mainly rely on deterring opponents, showing strength and remaining unclear in its intentions.

## Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative, theory-pushed analytical framework, predominantly anchored in Realist theory in the context of international relations. It employs secondary facts analysis sourced from: • educational publications (e.g., Mearsheimer, Clarke & Knake), • authorities and defense papers (e.g., DIA, Ministry of Defense), • international businesses (e.g., ICRC, arms control association), • think tanks (e.g., CSIS, SIPRI, UNIDIR).

The term looked at is 2010–2023, which incorporates the technological growth of AWS and its strategic use via Israel and Iran. Pakistan is tested as a circuitously impacted 0.33-party country, that specialize in its evolving defense guidelines, relationships, and the development of AWS capabilities.

Analytical Lens the Realist paradigm directs the analysis of:

- Strength Maximization,
- safety challenges,
- Strategic balance,
- Autonomy and sovereignty in army selection-making.

AWS are tested as gear of countrywide energy, and their outcomes on nearby and sub-regional balance are assessed thru content synthesis and theoretical software rather than empirical records series or modeling.

## Theoretical Framework

Taking a Realist perspective is the best way to look at the Israel-Iran conflict over autonomous weapons. Grounded in the basic ideas of traditional state actions, independence and survival in a lawless global environment, realism gives an effective way to study how Israel and Iran act and respond when it comes to autonomous weapons. In addition, John Mearsheimer's point of view in Offensive Realism explains the use of aggressive strategies by states (Mearsheimer, 2001) in finely tuned areas, like the Middle East.

The idea in realism is that because no institution exists as an umbrella for international affairs, nations put the highest priority on security and developing power. For Israel and Iran, this results in both nations investing heavily in autonomous weapons while hoping to win strategic advantage and keep other nations at bay. Benefiting from its tight ties with the United States and its innovative technology, Israel has been one of the first countries to use artificial intelligence in weapons. Iran has designed ways to close the technology gap, for example, through using drones and adding robotics and artificial intelligence to its surveillance systems.

According to realism, autonomous weapons are tools that also serve as indicators of a country's strategic strength. Advanced autonomous devices help Israel remain ahead in the region, stop threats from Hezbollah and other Iranian allies and become ready for intense wars. According to Iran such nuclear programs are needed to challenge Israel and to use its influence in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon to project its power in the region.

Security dilemma, which is a main element of realism, is also very relevant to this case. Israel boosting autonomous weapons increases Iran's concerns and leads that country to enhance its military which leads to even higher concerns. Because of the latest technology, countries feel more mistrustful, and the region is less stable. Realism believes the cause of this phenomenon can be understood by its place in the structure of anarchic international relations instead of emotions.

It also makes clear how third-party states such as Pakistan, are affected. Being located at the point where Middle Eastern and South Asian politics meet, Pakistan should pay attention to how the conflict influences its own safety and its partnerships with Iran and Israel. While Pakistan has no diplomatic links to Israel and is near Iran, its national security experts cannot exclude the technology of self-guided strikes happening in that region. The growing competition in arming for war is more than likely behind Pakistan's moves to improve its defense and knowledge of drones and cyber security.

Aside from that, realism reflects on the influence of both alliances and other international powers. Joining with Western states in airpower technologies allows Israel to stop possible opponents and support the existing order. Working with Russia and China on military technology means Iran is creating an alternative relationship based on realist thinking about what serves their country's interests.

In addition, realism provides valuable insights into the ongoing and future problems facing regional security. If there aren't yet international rules against autonomous weapons and technology is developing rapidly, it makes it more possible for miscalculations to happen and for states to resort to preemptive action. From the point of view of realists, the lack of regulation in relations among powers is what makes such unrest standard. Autonomous weapons are important elements in the developing strategies of both Israel and Iran.

## An examination of the three entities.

### Israel

Israel is a world leader when it comes to developing and putting to use autonomous weapons systems (AWS) in the military. Given its tough neighbors and history of hostility toward Israel, the country makes sure to have a military advantage over them. Due to this strategy, Israel spends a lot on AI, robotics and unmanned systems (National Defense Magazine, 2023). Surveillance, air defense and targeting have all included

autonomous technologies in the work of the IDF. Importantly, Israel is one of the front-runners in using loitering munitions, sometimes called kamikaze drones and has deployed them both to defend and attack during fights with non-state organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah.

Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) head the domestic defense industry and join forces with the government to develop new military tools. By combining its skills, Israel is able to build AWS that feature ground vehicles that drive themselves, unmanned towers for border surveillance and UAVs that can spot and deal with threats thanks to AI.

The strategy of Israel is affected both by dangers in the region and by its links to major Western countries, chiefly the United States. Participation in co-research and receiving military aid helps Israel obtain the newest technology and fasten its military deployment. Thanks to this alliance, Israel maintains a lead in AWS, discourages its opponents and keeps its soldiers safer. Still, having this powerful technology is also fueling the arms competition across the Middle East and pushing tensions with Iran higher.

### Iran

Iran's place in the AWS race is not the same as Israel's. Given the sanctions, restrictions on trading defense goods and closed international markets, Iran has chosen to fight in asymmetric ways. Rather than try to compete with Israel on technology, Iran concentrates on making drone and cyber systems that are easy to use and affordable (Defense Intelligence Agency, 2022). Iran's drone program has developed aircraft authorized for long-distance strikes, offensive maneuvers by many drones and even drones that watch and wait for targets—however, their precision is not on par with what Israeli drones offer.

AWS are also part of the Iranian plan to challenge the substantial influence of Israel and the U.S. in the region. Iran often uses its proxies, including the Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, militias in Syria and others in Iraq, to deliver its weapons. With the help of drones and automated weapon systems, Iran is able to make its mark without fighting directly.

In addition, Iran is trying to gain AWS to oppose Israel and to balance out the United States' influence across the Middle East. Tehran is working to develop offensive methods that get around barriers of standard missile defense. AI-assisted drones and systems for cyber-warfare are crucial for Iran. They permit it to hit vital infrastructure, oil sites or Israeli defense, all without getting involved directly in warfare.

Yet, Iran's AWS development is held back by being unable to access advanced computers, trained AI software and good materials. Iran continues to be a serious player in regional conflicts because it skillfully uses dual-use technology and reverse engineering. Because exporting drones to non-states groups is possible, Israel's and Iran's differences now affects unstable regions and risks stretching the conflict.

### Pakistan

Pakistan needs to handle its role in the Israel-Iran fight with great care. While Pakistan has cut diplomatic ties with Israel and has usually backed Muslims in regional politics, it remains cautious in the conflict because of its relationship with Iran and its need for national security.

Pakistan is slowly developing its ability to manufacture autonomous weapons on its own. Joint work with China has helped Russia obtain military drones and develop artificial intelligence in its military field. Pakistan is concentrating its military updates on network systems that include modernized surveillance, automatic targeting and combat vehicles run by AI. Even though Pakistan does not directly join the conflict, the results of the Israel-Iran race could have a major impact on its regional security.

Pakistan should consider that AWS might spread to its nearby countries. Should Iran export better drones or robotic systems to Afghanistan or to the Shia militias along the Pakistan-Iran border, Pakistan

could become more at risk. Should the conflict between Israel and Iran lead to larger regional fighting, Pakistan's airspace, trading routes and internal sectarian balance could all be disturbed.

Technology plays a big role in the impact on international trade. Because AWS is shaping future warfare, Pakistan's military must consider new priorities and make bigger investments in AI and robotics (Anwar et al., 2023; Clarke & Knake, 2010). Among other things, nations should make ethical guidelines, protect themselves online and perhaps exchange views regionally to prevent any misuse of autonomous systems (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2023).

Because Pakistan is cautious about Israel and preferring to stay neutral in the Israel-Iran dispute, it may not get actively involved soon. All the same, it has to take into account the effects of the wider AWS arms race. The nation must account for rising threats from groups who use semi-autonomous technology and keep both borders and airspace safe.

## Entity 2

### Iran

Because Iran is isolated politically, its governing authorities have determined that AWS can help counter the Western and Israeli weapons advantage. Since Iran cannot use leading Western technology or join formal alliances, it has built up its own strength in arms production. This situation led Iran to adopt a way of war where drones and effective, inexpensive technologies have the greatest impact.

Iran has made strong progress in both designing and using UAVs, loitering munitions and remotely controlled ground systems. Even if Iran's systems are not as advanced as those of Israel, they allow the country to influence regional events across the Middle East. The sector commonly uses Iranian drones like the Shahed-129 and Mohajer series for watching over areas and, more and more, for attacking. Iran is able to assert its power in Syria, Iraq and Yemen by having UAVs delivered onto the battlefield by groups it supports or controls, thus avoiding open confrontation.

Iran uses AI to improve how its weapons find their targets and read images during navigation. Iran purchases commercial and dual-use technologies, sometimes by crooked means or through that country's research institutes, to develop autonomous weapons suitable for battle in dangerous situations. These systems play a big role in parts of the world where Iran wants to oppose the U.S. and Israel, for instance, in the Persian Gulf or near the Golan Heights.

Tehran does not only think about its own defense but also wants to be influential in the region. By offering AWS to Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen and militias in Iraq and Syria, Iran teaches its allies to resist and diminishes the strengths of its enemies in standard battles. Both using autonomous airplanes to assault Saudi Arabia's energy industry in 2019 and financing terrorists who hit Israeli targets from Lebanon in 2006 are good examples.

Even so, Iran is dealing with serious difficulties when it comes to setting up high-level autonomous systems. Because of sanctions, Amazon Web Services has been prevented from using advanced microprocessors, advanced data links and the best artificial intelligence programs. Iran solves some of its problems by using reverse engineering, platforms based on open-source AI and by working together with countries such as Russia and China. Still, Iran's efforts have not completely narrowed the gap between its own capabilities and those of Israel.

Even with these barriers, Iran's improved use of low-cost, automated weapons shakes up the stability of the Middle East. The growing number of such weapons in the hands of groups other than states increases worries about how they will be handled and where they might end up. Additionally, their cyber investments fit with the AWS program, allowing them to coordinate actions between the physical and digital realms—a field they have already fought over.

When it comes to Pakistan, there are both opportunities for increased regional security together with Iran and risks from sectarian issues, disputes handled by proxies and a rise in weapons. Through AWS, Iran is making military decisions oneself not only to secure its independence but also to change the traditional order in the region by using novel approaches and by spreading control of warfare.

## Pakistan

Pakistan is not actively part of the conflict, but it matters enough in the region that it must stay informed about autonomous weapons systems being created by Israel and Iran. Given how close AWS is to both the Muslim world and important nations such as China, plus its own security issues, Islamabad sees development of AWS and cyber defenses in this region as very significant.

Clean Rooms in Pak has only just started using AWS for their technology needs. Pakistan has relied mainly on China for partnerships to help modernize its own drone, UCAV and automated ground systems (Baig, 2024). Pakistan is making it clear that it wants to be among the countries using semi-autonomous weapons systems, as the Buraq UCAV shows. Although Pakistan's systems are not nearly as skilled as those in Israel or being developed in Iran, they are an essential move forward in Pakistan's defense plan.

Several security factors motivate Pakistan to use AWS: its long-term conflict with India, worries about cross-border terrorism and a need to keep border regions including Balochistan and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) safe. Because these areas are threatened by insurgents, AI-powered systems for watching and patrolling them could help without placing soldiers in harm's way.

With increasing involvement of autonomous weapons in the Israel-Iran conflict, there are indirect results for Pakistan. A clear indicator is the possibility for AWS to be used more extensively in the region. Technology being transferred by Iran to proxies and non-state entities in the Middle East could eventually come to South Asia. Should any of these systems be secured by hardline foreign forces near Pakistan's western frontiers, they could threaten local security forces and increase religious conflicts within Pakistan which is largely Sunni and Shia.

Besides, the fight attracts attention to how Pakistan is seen in the wider regional politics. Even though Pakistan is cautious with Iran and does not recognize Israel, it works closely militarily with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates—two Muslim nations that generally support Israel to counter Iran. The outbreak of a wider war between Israel and Iran could mean Pakistan is expected to choose diplomatic or military support for one side which might stress its ability to stay unaffiliated and keep its country safe.

The battle between Israel and Iran in autonomous weapons places new pressure on Pakistan to move ahead in AI and robotics. Because warfare is moving toward automation, those who have not developed automation technology may face new dangers arising from cyber and drone use. In order to keep up, Pakistan should put money into research, secure state-of-the-art components and teach its armed forces in AI and autonomous systems.

Besides, Pakistan should follow ethical and legal standards for AWS deployment. While international debates continue about the ethics of autonomous killer machines, Pakistan's leaders need to consider the issue together with obeying international humanitarian rules. Overall, Pakistan is not engaged in the conflict, but weak points within the country, regional ties and important factors in the Middle East make it involved in the upcoming events. In deciding about military development, alliances and dealing with non-state groups over the next decade, China will show how navigates changes in warfare and its region.

## Conclusion

The rising conflict between Israel and Iran over autonomous weapons systems signals a major change in how the region will operate and face future wars. This is not only about fighting, but also about building high

technology that changes how Middle East countries approach security, shape alliances and influence power dynamics. Israel and Iran are spending much on AI-powered defense technologies, including drones, targetable munitions, sensors and vehicles capable of making their own decisions. As a result, deterrence and conflict management are changing, as these new technological advancements make warfare faster, more exact and more unexpected.

The Israeli data strategy links closely with Western technology, supports a well-structured defense system and counts on an advanced cyber military. It depends on autonomous systems for every mission, to ensure it stays ahead of other nations in the region. Because of international sanctions and limitations on technology, Iran has favored low-cost weapons made at home and regularly uses nearby allies to increase its influence in the region. Drones and cyber tools used by Russia have already caused plenty of trouble for others.

Pakistan's security situation is greatly influenced by the rivalry in autonomous weapons. Pakistan is not part of the Israel-Iran conflict, but because of its position, it cannot ignore the results of this arms race. Many non-state actors in Pakistan's nearby regions are now using autonomous systems to create serious issues for security. In addition, wanting to defend itself in modern times, the Pakistani military feels obligated to improve quickly or else its strategy may become outdated.

Three things are important for Pakistan: boosting its own research and investment, defining a strong national AWS policy and keeping diplomatic ties with countries in the Middle East balanced. Similar attention must be given to preparing for the moral, legal and human consequences of using autonomous warfare. If there is no action plan, Pakistan may simply observe as conflict touches on its own stability and security.

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