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Computer Says “War”? AI and Resort-to-Force Decision Making (Prospects, Peril, and Proposed Policies)

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Computer says, ‘war’? Our question is intended as a provocation. Yet, it is not the product of futuristic forebodings directed at ‘the singularity’, a hypothetical point at which artificial intelligence (AI) would surpass our human capacities, escape our control, and (some argue) threaten our existence. Rather, it aims to paint a picture that is more mundane and more immediate. It depicts a scenario in which existing AI-driven technologies influence state-level decisions on whether and when to wage war –either through AI-enabled decision-support systems or various manifestations of automated self-defence. Such a scenario is soberly informed by what we maintain are impending changes in strategic decision making –changes that we have robust reasons to anticipate and can already observe in nascent form. This panel, which marks the final stage of a 2.5-year collaborative research project funded by the Australian Department of Defence, will address themes of trust, responsibility, nuclear deterrence, and institutional change as it explores the risks and opportunities that will accompany AI infiltrating state-level deliberations over war initiation. Moreover, panellists will propose policies to mitigate the former and enhance the latter as we anticipate this transformation.

Track Classification: International Studies and Emerging Technologies Working Group