

Ily Johnston

True Texas Project

Scholarship essay

11/19/24

### Reflections on Current Global Tensions, Nuclear Threats, and Political Climate

Our country's political climate has been overtaken by polarization and division, but also a sense of distrust in others with opposing views. Historically the United States has been seen as a perfect republic, the goldilocks effect clearly placed out, where our country can have just enough freedom and just enough restrictions on the people. However the U.S. now has profound ideological gaps often associated with the two main political parties: Democrats and Republicans. The divisions between these two parties are not just on policy issues, but overall political, social, economic, and religious views of the two parties.

Politics has become increasingly aggressive, I have even lost friends because I believe something different than they do. I think the biggest and most upfront contribution to this political division is social media. Especially young people, they go on social media and think “Oh! My favorite singer is endorsing so-and-so, I should vote for them!” and that’s it, they don’t do any research on their own. I have seen this firsthand in the public school system as well where a substitute teacher has told kids who were eligible to vote that they should be voting blue to “save democracy”. Things like these seem so small but can have a lifelong effect on voters and which direction they are casting their votes.

I also believe that people are focusing on one issue and casting their vote in that direction without looking at the overall needs of the country. For example: In this past election many

people put their vote towards Kamala Harris because of the “abortion ban” that everybody thinks Trump will enforce. But what they don’t understand is that Donald Trump does not want to enforce an abortion ban, he just believes that abortion is a state issue and should not be handled on the national level. In turn giving all abortion powers to the individual states.

When it comes to nuclear weapons, potential use of them presents one of the most unsettling prospects facing humans today, as global tensions are promptly worsening. The cold war gave a grim anticipation of the use of more nuclear artillery. This problem has calmed down more due to the negotiating of various arms control agreements and disarmament projects with the assurance that large-scale action of such destructive weapons would be suppressed. However, with the rise in geopolitical tensions—especially between big powers like the United States, Russia, China, and even North Korea—the probability of nuclear escalation became a question.

Over recent years, the world has seen something of a renaissance of nuclear rhetoric, with great powers flexing their muscles and trying to exert influence. From a physical perspective, this takes in the War in Ukraine, tensions in the South China Sea, and an ever more assertive China on the world stage. The weapons of mass destruction, once considered a last resort for deterrence, in some quarters are now being seriously viewed as options in a world where conventional warfare more often than not tends to be ineffective or costly.

While highly unlikely, nuclear weapons might be used in an all-out conflict due to miscalculation or escalation, which could be due to lack of time given to calculate. The presence of tactical nuclear weapons, perceived to be more "usable" in conflict scenarios, enhances that risk. Although no major power appears hungry to use nuclear weapons, the eventuality of a chain reaction of events resulting in the usage of such weapons cannot be wholly excluded, especially

in the case of a breakdown in diplomatic channels or when national security is thought of as being in immediate danger.

The issue of escalation between NATO/USA and other countries, such as Russia, China, and Iran, has many facets, with each side blaming the other. To an extent, it has been argued that the eastward expansion of NATO after the end of the Cold War has become a factor that signals increasing tension with Russia. Russia, seeing NATO's increase as a direct attack on its influence and security, has been adopting some very aggressive postures during the past years, especially in Ukraine. In the Russian view, the Alliance's expansion means breaking the agreement reached in the 1990s to refrain from expanding NATO into former Soviet states.

On the other hand, NATO and the United States maintain that the dichotomy they created was in response to Eastern European nations yearning and striving to align themselves with the West for political and economic reasons, most especially after being subjected to decades of Soviet control. From this perspective, the U.S. and its allies believe that democratic values are being promoted and the sovereignty of the nations that want to avoid Russian authoritarianism is being protected.

China perceives the U.S. presence in Asia and especially in the South China Sea and Taiwan as a threat to its own geopolitical ambitions. China's rising power and its assertive foreign policy have caused concern in the West and have led to a renewed Cold War-like political atmosphere in the Pacific. As a country we have attempted and somewhat succeeded at shaping stronger alliances with Japan, Australia, and India because it aims to counter China's rise and keep China under control.

Iran is another contentious player, where tensions haven't seemed to stop for decades. The United States and our allies have been able to impose sanctions and no longer give funding to Iran, which has caused an economic uproar since Iran has been so dependent on that funding. Iran is continuing to do what they can to extend their influence throughout the Middle East by using proxy groups, which is essentially then spreading out their power to control what they can of the Middle East that they are striving to obtain and in turn challenging the U.S. 's interests and overall regional stability.

Blame for these escalating tensions is complicated and not easy to determine. The U.S. and NATO may have contributed to Russia's aggression and Russia's leadership drives the conflict with a desire to restore its former imperial grandeur. The national interests of China and Iran are being pursued and often clash directly with Western priorities. The combination of calculated miscalculations and nationalistic passion and the competition for global influence conclusively escalates the blame where military posturing and economic sanctions too often take a backseat to dialogue and diplomacy.

The important division and challenges that mark the current political climate in the United States threaten the country's unity and global standing and create a difficult environment for cooperation among citizens. While rising tensions between world powers are present, a chilling possibility is maintained by the potential for nuclear conflict, although it is considered unlikely on the global stage. Complex international dynamics compel the escalation of events among NATO, the U.S., and adversaries such as Russia, China, and Iran, and no singular country can be blamed for the situation at hand. Setting things right will require an international effort with each other, more sturdy diplomacy, and an agreement to prevent the world from slipping into another global conflict phase.