

MIT expert talks with USAWC students about tactical and strategic implications of emerging technology

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Erik Lin-Greenberg is an associate professor at MIT engaged virtually with USAWC students about the tactical and strategic implications of emerging technologies, Feb. 7.

An MIT expert on emerging technology shared his assessment of tactical and strategic implications of three types of emerging technology, speaking with the U.S. Army War College student body virtually Feb. 7.

Erik Lin-Greenberg is an associate professor at MIT who studies the effects of emerging technologies on armed conflict. His publications have appeared in The Washington Post, Foreign Policy, Security Studies,

Reserve officer, Lin-Greenberg works as a Political-Military Planner on the Joint Staff.

Greenberg discussed commercial satellites, artificial intelligence, and social media, using the Cuban Missile Crisis to frame his discussion. From an operational and strategic perspective, Lin-Greenberg discussed the positives and negatives of each technological capability.

Commercial satellites offer readily accessible instantaneous, high-resolution imagery by removing bureaucratic obstacles. This technology allows the immediate collection of precise and highly reliable intelligence. However, the satellites remove states' ability to control how, where, and when this sensitive imagery information is released. Adversaries, foreign governments, and organizations willing to pay can use the information.

Artificial intelligence, like satellites, exponentially increases the rate and accuracy of intelligence collection. The decision-making process is expedited, yet well informed. A lack of trust in AI is a significant barrier to using this technology, especially when using Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems.

According to a study Lin-Greenberg and his colleagues conducted, 72% of military officers and foreign affairs officers who participated in the project supported the use of force when the recommendation came from a team of human analysts, while less than 50% supported the use of force when AI systems conducted the analysis.

Social media presents benefits and challenges when used for crisis communication. Lin-Greenberg focused specifically on Twitter and noted that more than 190 world leaders use the platform. When posting a response on Twitter, questions of credibility arise. On the one hand, it keeps the leaders accountable since post functions as a type of written documentation. Yet, Twitter is a casual medium, meaning that this information has not gone through official channels and vetting. The increased speed of conveying information can lead to mixed messaging and mis/disinformation.

Lin-Greenberg's aim was not to discourage the use of these emerging technologies, HE SAID. Instead, government and military leaders need to be mindful of these technologies, their capabilities, and the negative and positive implications.
