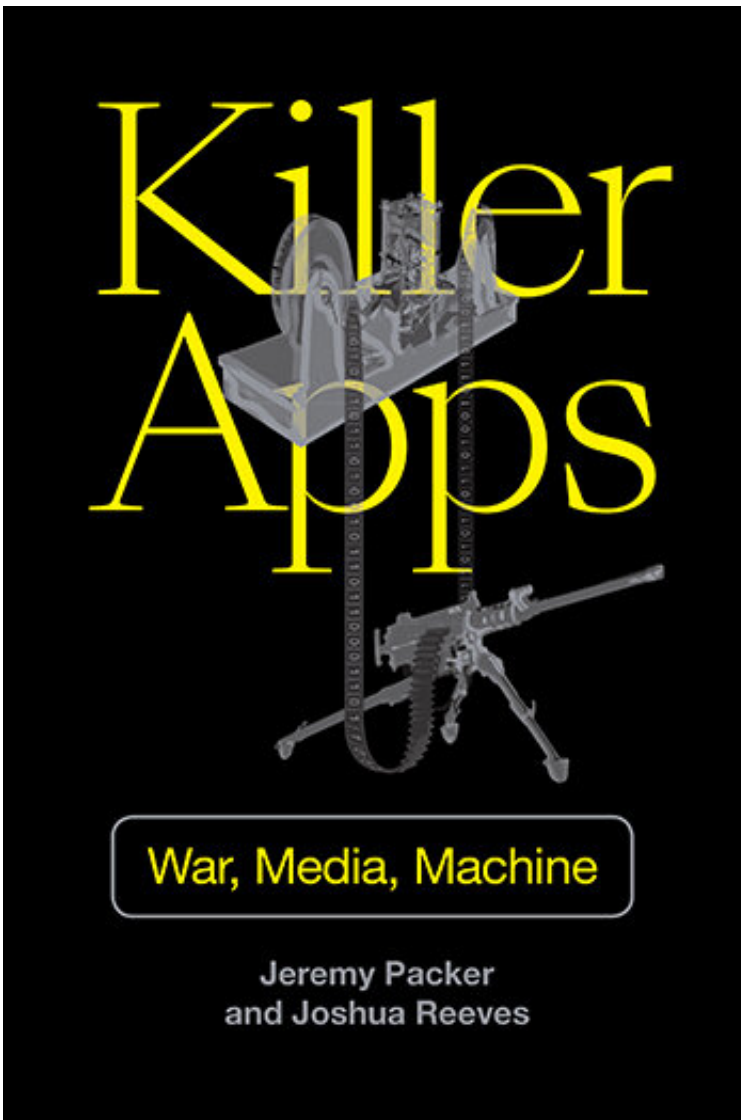


# Killer apps: New book explores media systems and the rise of military automation

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A U of T Mississauga researcher is challenging naïve assumptions that technology can be easily controlled or grounded by policy and law, arguing that all technologies will be weaponized as the military establishment continues to seek increasingly sophisticated systems.

"It's kind of a naïve notion that you can create technology and keep it separate from the military realm," says Jeremy Packer, associate professor with UTM's Institute of Communication, Culture, Information and Technology. "Any AI ([artificial intelligence](#)) system will inevitably be used by militaries."

In his newest book, "[Killer Apps: War, Media, Machine](#)," Packer and co-author Joshua Reeves, provide a detailed account of the rise of automation in warfare, focusing on the underlying military strategies and logic that drive how warfare is conducted and how technologies are used and developed.

"Fundamental technologies in our lives have military roots," Packer says, noting the digital environment is built on [military technology](#). The Internet was created by the United States military to maintain communications while GPS systems were used to guide and direct missiles.

Even the seemingly most mundane technologies can be weaponized. Packer points to Twitter as an example, explaining the platform was seen as a simple and straightforward communications tool, but now it is a weaponized environment where there is both military and geopolitical subterfuge.

Manipulating [political campaigns](#) is the oldest form of geopolitical warfare, he explains, and it's just as important as ensuring tank formations move in unison.

"Warfare is constantly taking place between geopolitical actors," Packer says, noting there's a long history of media, communications and information technology development directly tied to the military. Even those that don't seem to have a military connection are part of military objectives.

The British development of a near-global telegraph network, for example, was about maintaining military colonial dominance as much as it was about having news travel quickly, he explains.

As the tools of warfare become more sophisticated on all sides, the military establishment increasingly turns to automation.

The world saw widescale use of drones in the late 2000s, and the public was assured there would always be a human in the kill chain, Packer says. But by the mid-2010s suggestions emerged that machines could be more ethical than humans because they don't respond to emotion.

The drive for automated intelligence, which has deep roots in [warfare](#), is spurring a new arms race because the only way to detect an enemy AI system is to develop a better AI system.

Packer explains the United States military is convinced the Chinese or Russian militaries will create fully autonomous AI guided munitions, so the United States has no choice but to develop their own because the only way to detect and fight a fully autonomous weapon to develop a better AI system. Packer says it's an argument built into the logic of military escalation.

Packer suggests fully autonomous weapons are inevitable. Yet developing bots that determine which [social media accounts](#) to infect or amplify, or drones that decide who to execute, turns over both military and political capacity to an automated system.

Where that might lead isn't settled, but Packer and Reeves put a great deal of thought into where it could go, while providing a new theory for understanding how the intersection of media and military strategy drives today's AI arms race.

"Before new technologies are embraced widely, think about how militaries will use them, because they will be used," says Packer.

Provided by University of Toronto Mississauga

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