Essay and Discussion Questions

Conflict Higher Education Questions

Help students understand the various types, causes, and consequences of conflict through these essay and discussion questions.

Question 1

What are the arguments supporting and opposing the use of lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS)? Does the rise of LAWS technology require new regulation through international law? If so, in what way(s) should international law develop in response, and what might be some of the opportunities and challenges to developing and implementing new standards to govern LAWS?

- How are weapons operated by AI different from weapons wielded by humans?
- What seems to be the correlation between military spending and support for a ban on LAWS?

Question 2

What, if any, purpose does the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) serve in the post–Cold War world? Should it remain a purely defensive alliance or expand its mission? Defend your answer by citing specific examples.

- What role does NATO play today? How has this evolved since 9/11?
- Should NATO continue to expand? How has Russia's War against Ukraine reignited this discussion?
- In what ways is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) effective in addressing modern-day conflict?

Question 3

Why has interstate war become less common since the end of World War II? How has conflict changed as interstate war has declined? Do you agree with democratic peace theory (the idea that democracies rarely fight one another)? Why or why not?

- How do non-violent forms of interstate conflict pose a threat to civilians?
- What examples do the United States and China provide in terms of interstate conflict between rival nations?

Question 4

How have the civilian costs of conflict evolved over time with the rise of technology and conflicts driven by non-state actors? What do the harms of conflict look like (consider physical, mental, economic and other dynamics)? What do you think should be done to minimize the harms caused by conflict on civilians in today's security landscape?

- What future challenges does the development of artificial intelligence pose?
- What are advocates of AI weaponry saying?

Question 5

What are some ways the international community should address conflict-driven refugee crises? What role(s) should national governments, international organizations, NGOs, or other actors play?

- How does conflict lead to refugees?
- What role do you think foreign countries should play in intrastate conflicts?

Question 6

Given U.S. and Soviet involvement in proxy wars, would you describe the Cold War as hot or cold?

- How are proxy wars different from non-proxy wars?
- What are hot and cold wars?

Question 7

How do natural resources shape conflict? What can be done to protect against conflict in resource-rich countries? What role(s) should national governments, international organizations, NGOs, or other actors play in addressing the risk factors for resource conflict?

- What is the "resource curse"?