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TITLE

The Next World War: The new age of global conflict and the fight to stop it

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DAMNING EVIDENCE OF THE GATHERING STORM

Peter Apps recently briefed the United Kingdom Defence Academy and mentioned that his mother stresses the importance of the sub-title – *The new age of global conflict and the fight to stop it* – of his new book, *The Next World War*. Apps, a global defence commentator for Reuters and a Reserve British Army officer, places the likelihood of a major war at 30–35 per cent over the coming decade, although is clear-eyed that “a serious battle for the future of the world is already underway”.

The book uses, as its model, a re-telling of recent global events with the author pointing out that if journalism is “the first draft of history”, this is a second, repeatedly rewritten, draft of events as they unfurled. As a result, many readers should be familiar with the catalogue of international incidents he includes. However, with news avoidance, according to a recent Reuters report, at a record high with roughly 40 per cent (up from 29 per cent in 2017) of people globally eschewing the headlines because of their negative effect on their mood, information overload or a distrust in the media,¹ it is a book that should be marked ‘required reading’ for all defence and security professionals. And, indeed, for anyone who wants to understand the fault lines, flashpoints and human influences on the ‘gathering storm’ that will cloud geopolitics for the remainder of this century.

Apps does an excellent job of breaking down the constituent parts of current defence and security issues. The chapter entitled *The challenge for democracies* details the legal, societal and cultural legacy of conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq and the reduction in the size of the British Army over the past decades, partly due to poor recruitment and retention and lack of funding – a factor he contrasts with the increase in German defence spending that will “change the [future] balance of power”. This is juxtaposed with concerns over US reliability by their traditional allies and NATO more broadly.

Indeed, Apps quotes Sir Alex Younger (former Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service) in suggesting that the UK has been “infantilised by US dependence”, a comment even more startling given it was made by an individual at the centre of the ‘special relationship’. Throughout *The Next World War*, Apps supports his insights with diligently researched evidence. One observation that struck this reviewer, relating to the existence of an ‘Axis of Upheaval’, is that 60 world leaders attended the 2008 Summer Games in Beijing, whereas only 22 attended the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. If dialogue, mutual understanding and collaboration are the lifeblood of peace and stability, this erosion in numbers suggests more turbulent times ahead.

What flies off the page throughout the book, Apps’ second in as many years, after the highly successful *Deterring Armageddon: A biography of NATO*, is the author’s access to people that matter. The extensive footnotes are testament to this. First-hand accounts of personal conversations with political and military leaders, at multiple levels, litter the title, adding credibility, authenticity and validity to the conclusions. I would hate to see Apps’ Christmas card list. As we near the fourth decade of the 21st century, democratic nations around the world are far from confident they are prepared enough to deter even a short conflict, let alone an enduring, attritional fight like the one being played out in Ukraine. As a result, those who work in defence and security in the UK and NATO would be well served to remember Apps’ mother’s focus on trying to stop another global conflict, rather than how to fight it.

Apps is brutally frank in pointing out “all the confrontations and flashpoints of the 2020s had been growing in plain sight for decades”. I would suggest reading this book, and others like it, is a necessary first step, especially in the context of news avoidance, to ensure we don’t miss the growing evidence we are too busy to see. I commend it to you.

¹Josie Harvey, “Why more and more people are tuning the news out: Now I don’t have that anxiety”, *The Guardian*, 1 September 2025.