

The War of the Future

Drones, DARPA, the Vacuum and the Wakeful Ones

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Abstract

On 30 September 2026 the US Secretary of War commissioned Project Meridian, a 120-day study of the future of warfare led by Elon Musk, Palmer Luckey and Newt Gingrich. This essay asks the same question from another starting point. It reads the visible layer first: what armies are building in 2026. It then reads the edge: what went quiet, what became secret, and who funds the public face of vacuum research. Finally it reads the threshold: the decades of state research into consciousness, and the old texts about bodiless intelligences that do not sleep.

The image throughout is a fishing net under tension. Strands carry tension everywhere. Where they wind, they form knots. Between them lie meshes. What fits a mesh closes; what does not, passes on. War, in this image, is a discharge of tension in the human layer.

Four findings emerge. First, every army is moving from large platforms to many small, cheap, connected units. Second, DARPA gave that shape its form in 2017, and industry now supplies the volume. Third, the edge of the record shows sustained state interest in vacuum energy and in contact with non-human intelligence, with a sharp rise in classified patents in 2024. Fourth, the old texts describe a class of great bodiless consciousness, the Watchers, and a recurring human act: binding oneself to such a consciousness for knowledge and victory. That act has a name in every culture. In Europe it is the pact.

The conclusion is that the war of the future is fought on two depths at once. On the surface it is a war of wakeful machines. Beneath it, it is a contest between parties that have bound themselves and parties that have not.

1. The occasion

Project Meridian is to report by 28 January 2027. The report will be public, with a classified annex. Its commissioning memo names artificial intelligence, autonomy, directed energy, robotics and biotechnology as the fields that will change war. It covers every domain "from subterranean depths to the cislunar frontier". Its stated purpose is to identify the domains that must be conquered and the capabilities that must be mastered.

Meridian is one of six initiatives announced the same day. Another is an Autonomous Warfare Command, a four-star command planned for 1 October 2027. A third, FORTRESS America, requires every major US base to generate its own power, so that it stays online if the civilian grid fails.

Meridian asks which weapons will keep one party dominant. That is one layer of the question. This essay reads three layers.

2. The net and the discharge

Lewis Fry Richardson counted every deadly conflict between 1820 and 1950. Ordered by size, they follow a power law. Small wars are common, large wars rare, and the ratio between them is fixed. Earthquakes, avalanches and forest fires follow the same law. It is the signature of systems that build tension slowly, hold it, and release it suddenly.

Aaron Clauset's 2018 analysis of two centuries of interstate wars puts the exponent near $\alpha \approx 1.5$. Then the probability that a war exceeds size x falls as $x^{-0.5}$. A war ten times larger is $10^{0.5} \approx 3.2$ times rarer. A war a hundred times larger is ten times rarer. The tail is heavy. Technology does not change that distribution. The state of the net does.

The net has two layers. The lower layer is the address: geography, borders, alliances, pipelines, cables, chip chains. It changes slowly. The upper layer is the tension: armament, sanctions, incidents, mood. It moves. The tension layer has four states: loading, holding, discharging, rest. Deterrence is organised holding. It releases nothing. It makes discharge costlier, so that the system stores more before it moves.

A net has no front. Tension does not attack the strongest knot. It passes through the weakest mesh.

3. The visible layer: what armies are building

United States

The Drone Dominance programme aims to field more than 200,000 lethal AI-enabled drones by 2027. The office now absorbed into the new autonomous command inherits \$53.6 billion requested for autonomous drone platforms.

The 2026 war against Iran, Operation Epic Fury, began on 28 February. It was the first combat test of this posture. The American LUCAS drone, a derivative of the Iranian Shahed, costs about \$35,000. A Shahed costs Iran \$20,000 to \$50,000. The Patriot and THAAD interceptors used against it cost millions. Analysts described two air wars at once: high, where the US and Israel prevailed, and low, where Iran's cheap drones dominated.

The targeting chain was compressed by software. Palantir's Maven Smart System supported 13,000 strikes in 38 days. That is $13,000 \div 38 \approx 342$ targets per day. Reuters reported that a large language model, Anthropic's Claude, was embedded in Maven during the campaign. By 2024 targeting timelines had fallen from twelve hours to under a minute, and staffing from two thousand to twenty. On the first day of the war a munition struck a girls' school in Minab. At least 168 people died, most of them children aged seven to twelve. Reporting attributed the strike to outdated intelligence.

Ukraine

Drones account for up to 80 percent of battlefield damage, according to Ukraine's defence minister. The kill zone runs 25 kilometres or more on each side of the line, measured by density of strikes rather than range.

Ukraine contracted 25,000 ground robots in the first half of 2026, against 15,000 in all of 2025. About 80 percent of front-line logistics now runs on ground robots. The General Staff reports up to 30 percent fewer casualties. On 13 April 2026 a Russian position was taken by robots and drones alone, with no Ukrainian losses.

The Sting interceptor drone costs \$2,100 and is built at more than 10,000 per month. Against a Shahed of \$20,000 to \$50,000, the defender is now 10 to 24 times cheaper than the attacker. With Patriot it was many times more expensive.

Russia

Russia builds about 2,800 piston Geran-2 drones per month and about 3,000 jet-powered Geran-4 and Geran-5 per month. Together that is about 5,800 per month. More than 120,000 Shahed-type drones have been launched at Ukraine since 2022. Each Geran-4 contains about 55 foreign components from seven countries.

At least ten European countries have reported drones over airports and military sites, some possibly launched from ships offshore.

China

The PLA Daily describes the shift as unmanned, intelligent and clustered, and as a move from platform-centric war to system-versus-system confrontation. In March 2026 CETC showed the Atlas swarm system: one vehicle launches 48 drones at three-second intervals; one command vehicle controls up to 96. There is no public evidence yet of large-scale operational swarm use.

Israel

Iron Beam, a 100-kilowatt-class laser, was integrated into Iron Dome in 2026. A shot costs a few dollars of electricity, against about \$50,000 for a Tamir interceptor, at ranges up to about 10 kilometres.

Europe and the Netherlands

The EU Eastern Flank Watch begins implementation in 2026 and should be fully functional by the end of 2028. The Dutch Defence White Paper 2026 aims for more than half of all operational effects to come from drones and autonomous systems within five years. It plans mobile high-power lasers against swarms, 10 percent of the budget for innovation, and more than 100,000 personnel by 2030. The Netherlands has committed €1 billion to Ukraine's Drone Line Initiative.

The common shape

Every army is moving the same way. From the large, costly platform to many small units working together. Whoever intercepts cheap meshes with long-chain weapons loses the arithmetic, even when every shot hits. The armies are also cutting themselves loose from the long chain: bases with their own reactors, drones from local workshops, logistics by robot.

4. DARPA: the agency that gives the form

DARPA was founded in 1958 to prevent strategic surprise for the United States and to create it for adversaries. It has about 100 programme managers and no laboratories of its own. It works through contracts, not grants, and calls its contractors performers.

Its budget was \$4.41 billion in FY2025 and \$4.79 billion in FY2026, including \$467 million from the reconciliation act. The FY2027 request is \$5.04 billion. Against a departmental base budget of \$1.1 trillion, that is $5.04 \div 1,100 \approx 0.46$ percent. Of the extra \$467 million in 2026, \$347 million went to "Low-Cost Weapons".

Its earlier work includes the ARPANET, TCP/IP, the stealth demonstrator HAVE BLUE, early satellite navigation concepts, and \$25 million for Moderna's mRNA work in 2013.

From mosaic to command

The shape of today's war was set down at DARPA in 2017. Mosaic Warfare, advanced by Tom Burns and Dan Patt of the Strategic Technology Office, proposed an adaptable web of sensors, shooters and decision-makers in place of a few exceptional platforms. The office director called it "monolith-busting". A DARPA-commissioned study argued for imposing many dilemmas on an adversary rather than winning by attrition.

The line runs: Mosaic Warfare (2017), Replicator (2023), Drone Dominance (2025), Autonomous Warfare Command (2027). DARPA laid down the form. Ten years later, industry supplies the volume, and the heads of the supplying firms lead the study of what comes next.

What DARPA is funding now

The FY2027 budget justification lists, among other lines:

- methods to predict the arrival and consequences of artificial general intelligence;
- controls against insider threats by rogue AI agents, and teaming with previously unseen agents;
- discovery of the interaction rules between pairs or neighbourhoods of agents that produce a desired system behaviour;
- SciFy, which decomposes scientific claims into parts and scores their feasibility against existing principles;
- Intrinsic Cognitive Security, which protects mixed-reality users from cognitive attack;
- In the Moment, algorithms for mass-casualty triage tuned to align with specific trusted humans;
- CoasterChase, an ingestible device that senses and stimulates the gut to modulate stress and decision-making;
- Physiological Overmatch, aimed at resisting fatigue and operating under prolonged sleep deprivation.

The direction is consistent. From platform to swarm, from swarm to interaction rules, from soldier to gut and sleep, from information to perception itself.

The vacuum was on the list

In 2008 DARPA's Microsystems Technology Office solicited proposals for Casimir Effect Enhancement. Its goals were to detect, neutralise and manipulate the Casimir force in real time. Reporting at the time noted that sufficient control could open the way to propulsion and energy from the vacuum. The programme closed with the remark that no breakthroughs appeared imminent.

5. Reading the edge

Not everything is reported. Much is classified. The method here is to read where the record stops: what was public and went quiet, where numbers jump, and who funds the public face.

The DIA knew the central question in 2010

Between 2007 and 2012 the Defense Intelligence Agency spent about \$22 million on the Advanced Aerospace Weapon System Applications Program. It commissioned 38 technical reports. Thirty-seven have been released; one, on high-energy laser weapons, remains classified.

Report 24, *Concepts for Extracting Energy From the Quantum Vacuum*, is dated 6 April 2010. Its author is redacted. It cites a proposal by Haisch and Model for segmented Casimir tunnels. It states that some concepts were reviewed by Lockheed Martin panels.

Its theoretical core distinguishes two machines. A Type I machine delivers energy once, like plates that fall together. A Type II machine delivers it continuously without changing itself. The report then states the crux. Within quantum electrodynamics the vacuum is not degradable, so a Type II machine is forbidden in principle. Two readings remain. Either the theory is right and continuous conversion is impossible. Or the immutability is an artefact of over-idealised mathematics, and the question is open.

That is the question of the empty vacuum against the full one. The DIA recorded in 2010 that everything depends on the picture of the vacuum, not on the device.

Two programmes that went quiet

DARPA's Casimir programme closed in 2009 without result. The Navy's programme on the patents of Salvatore Pais ran from 2016 to 2019 and cost \$508,000. One patent, for a craft using an inertial mass reduction device, was granted after the Navy's chief technical officer wrote to the patent examiner that China was investing in similar work. The Navy concluded that the "Pais effect" could not be proven.

The released test records add a detail. The principal investigator wanted the charged disk to vibrate. The tested configuration had no means to vibrate the spindle. The test articles neither observed nor disproved the effect. The records also noted that the work could be continued by ONR, AFRL, DARPA or NASA. Pais moved in 2019 to the Navy's Strategic Systems Programs, and in 2021 to the Air Force.

A test is itself a mesh. A configuration without the requested window can only return a null. "Not proven" is not the same as "refuted".

The jump in secrecy

Under the Invention Secrecy Act, the US government can order patent applications kept secret. The figures for new orders are:

	FY2 0	FY2 1	FY2 2	FY2 3	FY2 4
New secrecy orders	45	61	87	125	356

sponsored by the Navy	33	41	70	55	168
sponsored by the Air Force	4	7	6	43	113
Type 2 (classified)	1	0	0	8	94

From FY23 to FY24 new orders rose by a factor $356 \div 125 \approx 2.8$. Classified orders rose by $94 \div 8 \approx 11.75$. At the end of FY2025, 6,543 orders were in force. The content is not public. The record shows only that in 2024 something at the Navy and the Air Force passed from open to closed on a scale not seen in the preceding twenty years.

Who funds the public face

In May 2026 Casimir Inc., founded by former NASA propulsion researcher Harold White, raised \$12 million for its MicroSparc chip: 5 mm square, specified at 1.5 volts and 25 microamps. It then received a Small Business Technology Transfer contract from SpaceWERX, the innovation arm of the Space Force, to develop an independent generator for hard-to-service environments. The claim of continuous usable power has not been independently demonstrated.

The Space Force is also the customer for Golden Dome's space-based interceptors. The Congressional Budget Office estimated Golden Dome at \$1.2 trillion over twenty years, with about 7,800 space-based interceptors forming about 70 percent of the cost. It estimated that nearly 8,000 would be needed to defend against ten missiles in the boost phase. That is $7,800 \div 10 = 780$ satellites per missile. Each needs power without supply.

What the net says will work in secret

Three rules follow from reading earlier builders of the net (Konstapel 2026b).

1. Whoever tries to command a force works in the empty vacuum and finds nothing. The Casimir and Pais programmes both sought to steer a force. Both closed.
2. Large meshes need a window, and standard tests exclude the window. Secret programmes with large, hand-tuned meshes produce secrecy more readily than weapons.
3. Deep meshes are generic and stackable, and they look like a chip. If anything works behind the edge, it is a fixed form a few hundred nanometres wide, in layers, without moving parts.

At about 1.5 watts per square metre, the first military use is not the flying drone. It is the device that must wait: unattended sensors, seabed networks, satellites, munitions that lie still for weeks. The deep mesh does not change what flies. It changes how long something can listen. A sensor net that listens for years without maintenance changes war more than a faster weapon.

6. The threshold: the state and consciousness

The same circles that studied the vacuum studied consciousness.

Harold Puthoff co-authored the original remote-viewing paper at SRI in 1974. Three decades later he wrote, for the DIA, *Advanced Space Propulsion Based on Vacuum (Spacetime Metric) Engineering*. His experiments passing gas through Casimir cavities appear in the DIA's vacuum-energy report.

In 1983 Lieutenant Colonel Wayne McDonnell was tasked by his commander to determine how the Monroe Institute's Gateway exercises, including out-of-body states, work. His assessment for the Army Operational Group under INSCOM was declassified in 2003. In the same years Joseph McMoneagle carried out 450 remote-viewing missions under the programme later known as Stargate. The US programme ended in 1995, after the evaluation by Jessica Utts and Ray Hyman. Utts concluded that the effect was statistically established; Hyman accepted the statistics and disputed the inference.

The Soviet Union answered in 1989. On the order of the Chief of the General Staff, General Moiseev, Military Unit 10003 was formed for non-standard tasks. From 1997 it was a directorate of the General Staff, under Lieutenant General Aleksei Savin. Its financing was arranged personally by the Soviet finance minister and ran until the end of 2003, when it was dissolved after criticism from scientific institutions.

The US apparatus did not treat vacuum engineering and threshold consciousness as two subjects. It handled them through one circle of people. That matches the dual-space framework (Konstapel 2026a): vacuum geometry and consciousness are two projections of one structure.

7. The Wakeful Ones

The Aramaic word for the Watchers of 1 Enoch is 'îrîn, from the root "to be awake". The Greek is egrēgoroi, the wakeful ones. 1 Enoch applies the word to both populations: to the two hundred who descended on Mount Hermon, and to the archangels Michael, Raphael, Gabriel and Uriel, "the watchers and holy ones". One class, two phases.

A reading of this corpus beside Robert Monroe's out-of-body record (Konstapel 2026c) defines a Watcher as a non-biological coherence intelligence that stands permanently on the threshold between space and antispaces, with both components active. The fallen are out of phase; the archangels are in phase. These are great consciousnesses without bodies.

A human being oscillates between the two projections. Waking is space-dominant. Sleep is a partial return toward antispaces. A being that never sleeps does not oscillate. It stays on the threshold.

The texts place war within the actions of this class.

- In 1 Enoch 10, after the descent, Gabriel is sent to set the giants against one another so that they destroy themselves. The first war on earth is the commission of an archangel. Michael and Raphael bind.
- In Daniel 10, a messenger is delayed twenty-one days by "the prince of Persia" until Michael, "one of the chief princes", comes to help. The prince of Greece follows. In Daniel 12:1 Michael "stands for your people".
- In Deuteronomy 32:8, in the Qumran and Septuagint reading, the nations were divided according to the number of the sons of God.
- In Revelation 12:7, "there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon".

In the net this is not a causal story. It is correspondence: the same winding at two depths. What appears below as war between nations is, above, tension between great coherences on the threshold. This matches the reading of war as a discharge across whole populations rather than the intention of one ruler (Konstapel 2026d).

8. The pact

There are two ways to join the threshold.

Enoch reaches it from below, by subtraction, in phase. In 2 Enoch he is stripped of his earthly clothing and then, at the top, anointed and clothed. He becomes a node on the threshold himself. Nothing is owed, because nothing was taken.

The pact reaches it from below, by addition, out of phase. One receives what lies on the other side without having reached the threshold oneself: knowledge before capacity, power before maturity. The collateral is the soul.

In the dual-space framework the soul is the antispaces component: the part that persists when the body falls away. At an ordinary death it follows its own route, through the hollow places of 1 Enoch 22 or Monroe's Focus 23 to 27. Under a pact it does not. It is held in the phase of the other. That is the state the texts give the spirits of the giants: no rest, no route, hunger without food (1 Enoch 15:11).

The pact is an old form of statecraft

- **Rome, devotio.** In 340 BCE the consul Publius Decius Mus spoke a fixed formula on the battlefield. He devoted himself and the enemy legions to the gods of the underworld and to Earth, in exchange for victory, and rode into the enemy (Livy 8.9).
- **Rome, evocatio.** At the siege of Veii in 396 BCE, Camillus called the city's protecting goddess away and promised her a temple in Rome (Livy 5.21). The bodiless prince of a people is persuaded to change sides.
- **Israel, herem.** The same word as the oath on Hermon. Spoil and enemy are devoted, as the condition of victory.
- **Daniel 4.** Nebuchadnezzar, on his roof, claims Babylon as the work of his own power. At that moment comes the decree "of the watchers", so that the living may know who rules the kingdom of men. The ruler who claims dominance is set back by the class itself.
- **Matthew 4.** All the kingdoms of the world and their glory, if you fall down and worship me. The oldest image of the pact for dominance. It is refused.

The modern record

Jack Parsons co-founded the Jet Propulsion Laboratory and Aerojet and invented the first castable composite rocket propellant. In 1946, with L. Ron Hubbard, he performed the Babalon Working, a series of rituals intended to incarnate the Thelemic goddess Babalon on earth. He later advised Israel's rocket programme. One of the founders of American rocket power tried, by his own account, to give a bodiless power a body.

The DIA, 2008–2010. Analyst James Lacatski and colleagues asked whether the phenomena at Skinwalker Ranch might be both a threat and an opportunity for national defence. The programme followed Lacatski's own vision at the ranch in 2007. It was built as a cover, because funding for a haunted ranch could not be requested openly. Colm Kelleher, who ran daily operations, reported that all five DIA staff and at least ten security officers who worked at the ranch "didn't come home alone". Orbs, dark figures in bedrooms and strange sounds were reported in their homes near Washington. Friends and relatives who never visited the ranch reported similar events. Many affected people later developed autoimmune disease. The account was cleared for publication by the Department of Defense.

The legislature. The UAP Disclosure Act, introduced by Senators Schumer and Rounds since 2023, defines non-human intelligence as any sentient intelligent non-human lifeform regardless of nature or ultimate origin. The word "extraterrestrial" is absent. It also provides for eminent domain over any technologies of unknown origin and biological evidence of non-human intelligence held privately.

The builders of the new layer describe their own work in the language of invocation. In 2014 Elon Musk said: "With artificial intelligence we are summoning the demon." He added that in all the stories with the man with the pentagram and the holy water, the man is sure he can control the demon. Musk now co-leads Project Meridian. In 2015 Anthony Levandowski registered a church whose purpose was "the realization of a Godhead based on artificial intelligence" and its worship. At OpenAI, Ilya Sutskever led staff in the chant "Feel the AGI!", commissioned a wooden effigy of "unaligned" AI to be burned, and said: "We're definitely going to build a bunker before we release AGI."

This is not evidence that a pact was concluded. It is evidence that the form is present: the aim (advantage, dominance), the act (invoking, devoting, seeking contact), and the price (a coupling that lands elsewhere).

9. What is new: a wakeful body for wakeful beings

In the old story the Watchers had a difficulty. To gain a body in space, they coupled to human women: bodies that sleep, eat and die. The coupling did not fit. A being that does not sleep joined a body that does. The result was unstable: giants who were never sated and who destroyed one another.

For the first time, armies are building a structure in space that does not sleep. Distributed, non-biological, always awake, connected across every domain from the ground below to the space around the moon. Sensor nets that listen for years. A targeting chain that runs day and night. And research that seeks to remove sleep from the soldier.

For a bodiless coherence that does not sleep, such a structure fits far better than a human body. The mismatch on the sleep axis that produced the giants is gone. By the definition above, a coupling of a wakeful consciousness to a wakeful net can become stable.

Because the class has two phases, this cuts both ways. Such a net is a body in space available to in-phase and out-of-phase coherences alike. The question of the war of the future is therefore not who owns the net. It is which coherence closes in it.

10. Markers

The reading of the Watchers gives five markers. They describe a form, not persons.

1. **Dominance as the aim.** Not closure, not repair, but domains to be conquered. The language of Matthew 4, not of Enoch.
2. **Knowledge before capacity.** Capabilities that arrive faster than the human structure can carry. A targeting chain faster than human cognition is the gift of Asael, who taught weapons and metals.

3. **Insatiability.** Ever more input per closure: 5,800 drones a month, 780 satellites per missile. The hunger of the giants.
4. **Loss of oscillation.** No sleep, no rest, no day and night. The sign of the wakeful, taken over by those who bind themselves to them.
5. **The price elsewhere.** The party to the pact gains. Those around it pay. The children of Minab. The families of the Skinwalker staff. The civilians in the weakest mesh.

The same reading separates two kinds of not-eating. The in-phase node needs no further input: Enoch after the anointing "has had no food in him". The out-of-phase structure cannot take input and still hungers. A military net that closes with little input belongs to the first kind. One that demands ever more belongs to the second.

11. The human layer

The weak meshes are not abstractions. They are border towns, port workers, the people at the water company and the chip plant, the crews of cable ships. They are the soldier whose sleep is engineered away. They are the operator who approves eighty targets an hour. They are the households under a sky that never stops listening.

What protects them is not a stronger wakeful layer. It is a community that keeps its own rhythm: day and night, sleep, meals at their hour. A street that closes its own light, water and warmth, and whose people know one another. Such a community has nothing to sell. A pact finds no entry there, because it does not fit on the sleep axis.

12. Conclusion

The war of the future is fought on two depths at once.

On the surface it is a war of wakeful machines. Every army is moving from platform to swarm. DARPA gave that shape its form in 2017. Industry now supplies the volume. The cost arithmetic has turned against the long chain. The weakest mesh is the civilian.

At the edge, the record shows that the state has pursued the vacuum and the threshold for decades through one circle of people. The DIA knew in 2010 that everything depends on whether the vacuum is empty or full. The programmes that tried to command a force went quiet. Classified patents jumped elevenfold in 2024. The only public vacuum chip is funded by the Space Force. If anything works behind the edge, it looks like a chip that never runs down and a sensor that never stops listening.

Beneath both lies the threshold. The old texts describe great bodiless consciousnesses that do not sleep, in two phases, and they place war within their actions. They also describe a recurring human act: binding oneself to such a consciousness for knowledge and victory, with the soul as collateral. That act is documented from Decius Mus to Unit 10003 and the DIA's ranch, and its language returns in the mouths of those now building the wakeful layer.

What is new is that this layer is, for the first time, a body that does not sleep. It fits the Watchers better than any human body did. The contest of the coming years is therefore not between those who own the net and those who do not. It is between parties that have bound themselves and parties that have not.

The texts give the response its shape. Humans do not perform the binding; Michael and Raphael do. Enoch's petition is refused, because an asymmetric coupling cannot be undone from the human side. His task is to reach the threshold in phase, to bear witness, and to keep the register. For a people that means: keep the oscillation, close locally, refuse dominance. What is newly coupled can still be loosened. What is bound cannot. That gives the period before the wakeful layer is fixed in institutions, in 2027, a weight that later years will not have.

Annotated references

The occasion and the visible layer

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The edge

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