**Resolved**: Nuclear weapons are the biggest threat to humanity.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Pro** | **Con** |
| 8+ countries with nuclear weapons | No historical nuclear war |
| Other threats easier to outlive  | Humans can outlive nuclear war |
| Several potential flashpoints | Mutual destruction acts as deterrent  |
| Nuclear winter  | *Alternative Causes* |

**Pro 1: Nuclear Winter**

#### *The Five Biggest Threats To Human Existence*. ***IFLScience*. (2019).** Retrieved 5 December 2019, from https://www.iflscience.com/plants-and-animals/five-biggest-threats-human-existence/

**A full-scale nuclear war between major powers would kill hundreds of millions of people directly or through the near aftermath – an unimaginable disaster.** But that is not enough to make it an existential risk.

**The real threat is nuclear winter – that is, soot lofted into the stratosphere causing a multi-year cooling and drying of the world.**[**Modern climate simulations**](http://climate.envsci.rutgers.edu/nuclear/)**show that it could preclude agriculture across much of the world for years. If this scenario occurs billions would starve, leaving only scattered survivors that might be picked off by other threats such as disease. The main uncertainty is how the soot would behave: depending on the kind of soot the outcomes may be very different, and we currently have no good ways of estimating this.**

**Pro 2: Nuclear Winter**

#### *This is exactly how a nuclear war would kill you*. ***Vox*. (2018).**  Retrieved 5 December 2019, from https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2018/10/19/17873822/nuclear-war-weapons-bombs-how-kill

Scientists have calculated what would happen if the US and Russia launched their nuclear arsenals during a war of mutually assured destruction. **This cataclysmic conflict would cause a post-apocalyptic nuclear winter that is almost too grim to imagine. They confirmed that burning cities and forests would throw so much soot into the air that the whole planet would cloud over and shiver through a chilly period lasting up to 10 years.** This would blot out the sun’s light, stop crops from growing and cause a ‘global famine’ that could kill billions or even kill off our species. A team from Rutgers University and the University of Colorado carried out sophisticated simulations to reveal the severity of a nuclear winter.

**This would mean temperatures barely get above freezing in midsummer in many parts of the world, causing a ‘near 90% reduction in the growing season’ and leaving billions at risk of starvation.**

**Pro 3: Flashpoints**

#### *This is exactly how a nuclear war would kill you*. ***Vox*. (2018).**  Retrieved 5 December 2019, from https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2018/10/19/17873822/nuclear-war-weapons-bombs-how-kill

Kroenig and his students are not alone. **A January 2018 World Economic Forum survey of 1,000 leaders from government, business, and other industries identified**[**nuclear war**](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2018/01/17/risk-nuclear-weapons-extreme-weather-top-risks-2018-report/1035252001/)**as a top threat.**

**The widespread concern is understandable. Last year, it seemed a nuclear conflict between**[**the US and North Korea**](https://www.vox.com/world/2018/2/7/16974772/north-korea-war-trump-kim-nuclear-weapon)**was on the horizon.**[**India and Pakistan**](https://www.military.com/daily-news/2018/04/23/op-ed-nuclear-risks-india-pakistan-rivalry-south-asia.html)**, two nuclear-armed enemies, could restart their decades-long squabble at any time. And the**[**US and Russia**](https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Nuclearweaponswhohaswhat)**— the world’s foremost nuclear powers — have had warheads pointed at each other since the earliest days of the Cold War.**

**Con 1: Alternative Causes / Climate Change**

#### *What could end the world as we know it?*. (2019).***BBC News*.** Retrieved 5 December 2019, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-47030233>

**Human extinction may be the stuff of nightmares but there are many ways in which it could happen.**

The same cannot be said for many global threats induced by people.

For example, **the**[**World Health Organization**](https://www.who.int/emergencies/ten-threats-to-global-health-in-2019)**and the**[**World Economic Forum**](https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-risks-report-2019)**both listed climate change and its effects as one of their top risks for 2019.**

**Recent UN talks heard climate change was already "a matter of life and death**" for many regions. While **many, including Sir David Attenborough, believe it**[**could lead to the collapse of civilisations**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-46398057)**and the extinction of "much of the natural world".**

The threats are complex and diverse, from killer heatwaves and rising sea levels to widespread famines and migration on a truly immense scale.

**Con 2: Humans will Outlive**

#### Shostak, S. ***Quartz*. (2019).** *Humanity will outlive climate change and nuclear war, no matter how bad it gets*.  Retrieved 5 December 2019, from https://qz.com/1716016/why-humans-will-outlive-climate-change-and-nuclear-war/

**The simplest and deadliest scenario is that the world’s 10,000 most populous urban areas will be targeted and thoroughly obliterated.** This includes all cities the size of Sheboygan, Wisconsin, or larger. Each will witness its own deadly mushroom cloud, and destruction by both blast and radiation.

**A rough estimate indicates that the total complement of humans in those 10,000 cities is about 1.6 billion. No one could argue that the death of so many people—more than were alive at the start of the 20th century—would be anything less than an unprecedented horror. But even if the missiles were to fly tomorrow, there would still be 6 billion people on the planet next month. And they could eventually pick up the pieces. The knowledge that built modern society would still be extant. We can’t nuke ourselves back to the Stone Age.**