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How Implementation of AI in US Military Flight Platforms Reinforces Patriarchy and Capitalist Systems

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Abstract: In this paper, the heteropatriarchal triad was revealed to be a powerful tool to critically analyze how AI implementation into US military flight platforms reinforces patriarchy and capitalist systems, concentrating power in for-profit defense contractors.

INTRODUCTION

Though the Cold War officially ended more than 35 years ago at the Malta summit in December 1989 [4], marking the end of the intense U.S.-Soviet Nuclear Arms race, the U.S. military industrial complex not only endured, but expanded particularly through the increasing privatization of power. In fact, the nominal budget for defense has grown significantly since the end of the Cold War and has tripled since a relative low point in the 1990s [5]. And more than half of the defense budget spent by the Pentagon since 9/11 has been funneled to for-profit defense contractors [6]. In the present day, this budgetary expansion is driven increasingly by AI weapons systems which this specific paper focuses on the autonomous flight platform “Fury” produced by Anduril. The implementation of AI directly into US military operations further solidifies the concentration of power in private, for-profit defense contractors by embedding decision-making authority into proprietary systems. This AI system is developed by a private corporation whose profit model ties directly to global conflict, surveillance infrastructure, and technological escalation which all reflect the dynamics of the heteropatriarchal triad in practice.

This paper applies the triad of personhood, sovereignty, and property to more deeply analyze how the integration of AI into US military flight platforms such as Anduril’s “Fury” reinforces modern systems of patriarchal and capitalist control. This system functions as property which is privately owned, and consolidates power over data, intelligence, and imperialist dominance. Ownership by Anduril partnered with the US DoD enables them to exercise a form of sovereign authority over decision making of surveillance priorities, and more control over what constitutes a military target. Through the lens of the heteropatriarchal triad, integration of AI into military flight platforms has emerged not only as a means to streamline rudimentary processes, but as a mechanism that systematically challenges “the democratic conduct of warfare by introducing problematic risk factors such as reduced oversight, opacity, and automation bias” [7]. This work is in partial fulfillment of the ENGR184 course using the blueprint curriculum in Ref.[1,2] and captured in a collection [3]

METHODS

This paper examines how the integration of AI into US military flight platforms reinforces modern patriarchy and capitalist systems through the use of the heteropatriarchal triad of sovereignty, property, and personhood. What is being analyzed here is not the technical performance of AI flight weapon systems themselves, but the veritable epistemic, political, and economic restructure that takes place when decision-making authority is embedded in proprietary autonomous systems. This triad framework was utilized in this paper because it is able to connect broadly to the scope of modern patriarchy.

The heteropatriarchal triad of sovereignty, property, and personhood as the primary analytical framework for this paper can be described as follows: [11]

- Sovereign Authority: Who grants and enforces property rights? Who defines and legitimizes personhood? Who or what determines what constitutes a military target or a civilian?

- Property: What is the tangible/intangible object being owned? Who gets to own this system? This entails evaluating intellectual property ownership of the technological framework for “Fury”, and contractual agreements between the US DoD and Anduril.
- Personhood: Who is recognized as a legitimate decision maker in this system? Are private corporate actors like Palmer Luckey and Brian Schimpf shielded from accountability?

To fully utilize this framework, this paper uses a qualitative case study of Anduril Industries’ novel AI powered flight platform Fury. Technical descriptions, publicly available corporate materials, defense policy reporting, and budgetary data surrounding this flight platform are analyzed to trace how proprietary AI systems function simultaneously as property, instruments of sovereign authority over foreign countries, and disruptors in defining personhood.

RESULTS

Delegation of Sovereign Authority through Proprietary AI

Through the Collaborative Combat Aircraft (CCA) program, the US Air Force granted Anduril the right to develop and prototype the YFQ-44A “Fury”. With this, Anduril retains the intellectual property rights over the platform’s design, software architecture, and manufacturing processes which positions this system firmly within the hands of a private property regime. As the IP holder, Anduril, backed by the federal government maintains complete control over the technological infrastructure that enables Fury’s operational capabilities.

Operationally, Fury itself determines what constitutes a military target as opposed to a civilian. Although it is true that the system requires human intervention prior to executing lethal actions such as missile strikes [9], that only occurs only after Fury has algorithmically classified, prioritized, and framed potential targets. Therefore human judgement operates in a decision environment structured by proprietary AI. With this, sovereign judgement is not completely eliminated, but is mediated through privately owned algorithmic architectures instead of exercised independently of them.

AI as Property and Capital Accumulation

As property, “Fury” is not only made up of its physical weapon systems and airframe but also of the proprietary software architecture and algorithmic infrastructure that enables it to function autonomously. More pressing is that this encompasses the environmental data the platform produces and processes when it is fielded. This ability to collect, aggregate, and analyze aerial surveillance data consolidates control over the entire lifecycle of aerial intelligence production from detection, to designation, to engagement. Control over this vast data infrastructure gives both the US government and private defense contractors the ability to concentrate authority in themselves over real-time information, narrowing the window for public oversight. What results in the acceleration of this decision making cycle is a rise in potential for unintended, rapid escalation of conflict. [8]

Mirroring “platform capitalism” dynamics, Anduril’s Fury has the capacity to operate in a similar way to how large tech companies like Google do with respect to how they gain economic power by aggregating massive amounts of user data to build behavioral profiles and then monetize them through targeted advertising. [15] The way Anduril mirrors this dynamic is that their strategic value to the DoD stems from Fury having the capacity to generate algorithmic data on surveilled populations to provide to the DoD. In both cases, the company that owns the platform owns the data, and the company that owns the data holds disproportionately more power than the DoD, surveilled populations, and the public.

Economically, Fury exists in a production model that is both capital intensive and state dependent. Since this weapon system costs tens of millions of dollars to produce per unit, this system is inaccessible to regular citizens. Though Anduril retains IP rights over Fury, continued production of this platform

critically depends on authorization and contracting with the Department of Defense (DoD), specifically through sponsorship with the US Air Force. [10] Access to classified data and authority over the fielding of Fury are dependent on US government approval, which binds corporate ownership of Fury to federal defense structures. With this configuration, AI weapon systems function both as property and an instrument of state power.

Algorithmic Targeting and Reconfiguration of Personhood

In the heteropatriarchal triad, personhood applies to anyone who is recognized as a legitimate decision maker within a system of power. In the context of Anduril's "Fury", personhood is unevenly distributed.

The legitimate decision makers include Anduril as a corporate entity and any DoD component they have a contract with. Who isn't recognized as a decision maker in this system are people who are surveilled, and categorized as potential military targets that might be struck by "Fury" in a lethal attack. These individuals are not recognized as political subjects that have decision making power, but are rather simply objects of algorithmic assessment.

At the same time, private corporate actors like Palmer Luckey and Brian Schimpf are shielded from accountability due to their products in general being used by government agencies like the US CBP and any subsidiary of the DoD with their explicit uses not being publicly disclosed. This keeps these two corporate actors shielded from public scrutiny leaving those most adversely affected by surveillance or violent force enacted by Fury excluded from meaningful decision making power while corporate actors retain the economic benefits and political protection of this configuration. [12]

INTERPRETATIONS / KNOWLEDGE GENERATED

The case study of Anduril's "Fury" within the context of the heteropatriarchal triad has revealed that the integration of AI into US military flight platforms has not only modernized the way we do warfare - but it has veritably restructured the foundational categories through which power is exercised and legitimized. Combined, the findings across each node of the heteropatriarchal triad point toward a single conclusion: AI integrated military flight platforms like Anduril's "Fury" functionally consolidate power and operate as a form of property, an instrument of sovereign authority, and a disruptor of personhood simultaneously.

Critically, each of the three nodes of the heteropatriarchal triad do not operate independently of each other. In this context, they instead mutually reinforce each other. Anduril's intellectual property (property) ownership over Fury is what grants the corporation the ability to shape how targeting decisions are made (sovereign authority), which in turn determines whose lives are legitimate concerns within this system (personhood) and whose lives are not. The exclusion of surveilled and targeted people from legitimate personhood is what makes it possible for sovereign authority to be entrusted in private corporations in the first place. This circularity is the defining feature of how contemporary heteropatriarchal systems sustain themselves today as each node of the heteropatriarchal pyramid legitimizes and reproduces the others, which makes the entire system resistant to reform.

In this analysis, the most valuable knowledge that was produced is that the privatization of autonomous decision-making processes in the military creates a structural gap in accountability. When the sovereign decision to inflict harm on someone is entrusted to a privately owned proprietary algorithm, there is no single entity or person that bears full responsibility for the devastating consequences of that decision. Anduril is shielded from public scrutiny as the way their systems are used by government organizations such as the DoD and CBP are not publicly disclosed. Because of this, the US government is able to maintain plausible deniability. This gap in accountability is not a mistake but rather a feature of this system. This is particularly predictable when the sovereign decision-making authority is privatized to a proprietary system that is not transparent to the public eye.

Furthermore, this analysis has also demonstrated that the heteropatriarchal triad can act as a generative framework in understanding how novel technology like autonomous military flight platforms reinforce current power stratifications. Vis a vis the heteropatriarchal triad, the three markers of patriarchal control in contemporary society are selective recognition of personhood, concentration of property in people who are regarded as persons, and assertion of sovereign authority - all of which are still present in the age of algorithmic warfare. They are actually embedded in Fury's software, but simultaneously obscured by its technical complexity. Those that are surveilled or targeted by Fury are not considered people that have rights but are instead objects of algorithmic classification, which closely mirrors how marginalized communities have historically lacked the protections that come with full personhood.

Finally, this work has generated a critical intervention on how the ethics of AI flight weapon systems in defense is addressed in mainstream media which often focuses too narrowly on the operational efficiency of those weapon systems and automation bias. [13] The findings in this analysis suggest that the ethical issues that should be addressed are concerned with ownership, accountability, and whose lives are considered legitimate concerns in these weapon systems. So addressing the militarization of AI requires not just technical safeguards like needing human intervention prior to executing lethal actions [9] but also structural reform which includes stronger Freedom of Information Act enforcement, which was passed in 1967 and gave the public "the right to request access to records from any federal agency." [14], mandated public disclosure of agreements that the DoD has with private corporations, and democratic oversight from all branches of government that extend beyond the internal review processes of the Pentagon.

CONCLUSIONS

When applying the heteropatriarchal triad of personhood, property, and sovereign authority to the implementation of AI in US military flight systems it is glaringly evident that flight platforms like Anduril's "Fury" do not exist in a political vacuum. They are active instruments that reinforce modern patriarchal systems and capitalist models of control. The privatization of sovereign authority in military targeting, concentration of data infrastructure in the hands of a for-profit corporation, and algorithmic exclusion of surveilled populations from legitimate personhood all collectively reveal that the militarization of AI is a social and political phenomenon as it is a technological one. The heteropatriarchal triad proves to be a powerful tool with which to analyze precisely the dynamics of Fury being structural rather than incidental - the product of deliberate configurations of ownership, authority, and recognition of personhood that serve the interests of a narrow set of corporate actors at the expense of democratic accountability.

Addressing the problems introduced by implementing AI in US military systems will require intervention that goes beyond technical ethics frameworks. Future work on how to solve this issue should prioritize advocacy for stronger enforcement of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to compel greater transparency around Anduril's contractual agreements with the DoD and make the full scope of Fury's deployment visible to the public. However, FOIA advocacy is not sufficient as much of the operational data that Fury generates falls under one of the nine exemptions of FOIA which "protect interests such as personal privacy and national security". So in order for any impactful reform to occur, broader structural intervention beyond FOIA is required. One such intervention is congressional oversight over AI flight weapon systems by introducing policy proposals like requiring descriptive, detailed reports from trusted, third party sources that verify that any AI weapon system deployed on the battlefield is compliant with the Geneva Conventions and International Humanitarian Law and not being used unethically in any way on the battlefield. By mobilizing our communities to take action and demand our politicians speak up against the unaccountable deployment of these systems, they can regain their agency against these autonomous weapon systems and the corporate actors that own them. Until the status quo of ownership and authority that govern AI weapon systems are torn down and rebuilt into something more transparent, the democratic conduct of warfare will be far out of reach.

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