

Forum: United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD)

Issue # 2: Measures to regulate the militarization of artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons systems.

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Introduction

The rapid militarization of artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping the nature of warfare and global security. As AI automated technologies become increasingly integrated in both military and security, ranging from autonomous drones to large volumes of data, AI has become an essential part of the future. However, its use also raises significant

ethical and legal challenges, such as transparency in decision-making and liability in case of errors or collateral damage (Márquez Díaz, 2024). The lack of a comprehensive international framework to control the use of AI in the military has created a dangerous gap. The lack of regulation encourages a weapons “race” between countries, increasing the risk that these powerful technologies could be used in ways that break international laws or harm civilians. This issue is highly relevant in today's international context. For instance, the use of AI in conflicts like the Ukraine and Russia war has demonstrated how governments can deploy powerful algorithms for surveillance and targeting. Paul Scharre, the Vice President and Director of Studies at the Center for a New American Security in an interview stated, “...we're already seeing AI being used on the battlefield in Ukraine.

Now, humans are still in control of the fighting. But one of the things that AI is doing is helping to process information faster” (Rogin & Zahn, 2023), raising ethical questions about the use of AI. Without clear global standards, the risk of unintended escalation, civilian harm, and instability becomes far more likely. Younger generations are especially vulnerable to the consequences of unchecked use of AI in the military as they face new forms of warfare, increased instability, and a world where the lines of ethical and regulatory use of military AI blur. For instance, in the Israel-Hamas conflict in May 2021, the utilization of an AI target-creation platform called “the Gospel” by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) had significant ramifications. Regrettably, the rapid generation of targets led to severe repercussions for innocent civilians (The Guardian, 2023). The normalization of AI warfare could change war and peace for the decades to come. But at the same time, the development of AI military can slow down progress on other important issues like climate change, health, and education. Resources and innovation might be diverted to military uses instead of helping build a better, more sustainable future for everyone. Consequently, the international community needs to work together to find a balance between ethical responsibility and innovation.

Definition of Key Terms

Artificial Intelligence (AI): The theory and development of computer systems able to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and translation between languages (Copeland, 2025).

AI Militarization: AI Warfare refers to the utilization and weaponization of AI in military operations, ranging from the use of autonomous weapon systems and cyber warfare to support for intelligence and operational decision-making. AI Warfare represents a possible shift in how wars are fought. (UNU, 2023)

National Security: National security refers to the protection of a nation's stability and well-being from various threats, including military, economic, social, and environmental factors that can significantly impact the quality of life and choices available to the government and its people. (ScienceDirect, 2001).

Autonomy: The ability of a system to perform tasks or make decisions independently, without direct human input, especially in dynamic environments. Autonomy in AI systems in warfare raises questions about ethics and possible mistakes, like hurting civilians. (Council of Europe, 2020)

Algorithm: A set of rules or instructions, often implemented in software, that enables AI systems to process data and make decisions (Oxford Internet Institute, 2021)

Ethical AI: Ethics is a set of moral principles that help us discern between right and wrong. AI ethics is a multidisciplinary field that studies how to optimize the beneficial impact of artificial intelligence (AI) while reducing risks and adverse outcomes (IBM, 2024).

Autonomous Weapon Systems (AWS): Weapons with autonomy in their critical functions are capable of selecting and attacking targets without human intervention after activation. (International Red Cross Committee, 2016).

The Gospel and Lavender database: The Gospel system and Lavender database assist compliance by making all information available on the status of a potential target instantly accessible.

Civilian casualties: Civilian casualties refer to civilians getting hurt or killed by non-civilians, typically police officers, military personnel, and criminals like terrorists or rebel groups. (Cambridge Dictionary)

Killer robots: Autonomous weapon systems are designed to kill without human intervention, meaning the robot can decide when and who to kill based on its set instructions. (Air University, 2020)

General Overview

The Big Picture

The rapid militarization of artificial intelligence and the use of autonomous weapons systems are changing the form of war. Autonomous weapons, which autonomously select and engage targets, are being employed in various forms of warfare globally. These technologies have their benefits in this context, but also pose clear ethical, legal, and security dilemmas. Lacking global policies, there exists a greater possibility for accidental escalations and civilian casualties, as well as an AI arms race. A serious and responsible international community should have an interest in articulating strong and guiding norms around the design and deployment of military AI. Guidelines ensure we do not find ourselves in situations where AI makes life-or-death decisions without human regulation (Unisci, 2025). Despite the increasing deployment of AWS, international regulations remain lacking. As of May 2025, over 200 autonomous weapon systems are reportedly active globally, with countries like Russia, Ukraine, and Israel utilizing them, keeping the lives of civilians at greater risk. (Reuters, 2025)

The public concern about AWS is clear. Ipsos conducted a global survey on adults between 16-74 on "Killer robots" (Term for AWS). Ipsos studies found the following: "66% say that these systems cross a moral line, as machines should not be allowed to kill."

"53% say they are concerned these weapons would be "unaccountable";

"42% worry that killer robots would be subject to technical failure."

"24% say they'd be illegal."

(Ipsos,2021).

These statistics indicate global support for prohibiting autonomous weapon systems (AWS), both on ethical grounds and practical ones. This reflects urgency for international legal reform, and there needs to be more accountability. This also supports the need for civil society and other NGOs to continue or intensify their push for bans or stricter regulation, as the public is already indicating support for more extensive controls around AWS in warfare.

AI's Growing Impact on War

Autonomous weapons platforms have already been used in war, such as recent conflicts like Ukraine and Gaza. These systems can analyze huge datasets to detect threats and carry out attacks autonomously, not requiring human intervention (Reuters, 2025). The ethical problems with this technology become evident in Israel's employment of the AI programs "The Gospel" and "Lavender" in Gaza, which facilitates quick targeting, but also leads to massive civilian casualties. The Lavender system, to identify threats, has led to many civilian casualties. In one reported case, the Lavender system identified a Hamas member, tracked him down, and led the IDF to bomb his residence, killing the target along with 15-20 family members (+972 Magazine, 2024). AI offers multiple advantages in military battles, including quicker and more accurate decision-making. Yet their autonomy also carries risks, such as the risks of algorithmic bias, accountability gaps, or violations of international humanitarian law (Geneva Academy of International Law, 2024). On the other hand, in Ukraine, AI-enabled drones have increased the success rate of target engagement from 10-20% to approximately 70-80%. The increases in success rates mean fewer explosive drones are wasted, benefiting defense teams during conflict. (Breaking Defense, 2025)

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United States of America

The United States is one of the leading military AI developers and emphasizes ethical guidelines on the usage of AI militarization, focusing on human judgment,

accountability, and compliance with international humanitarian law (The US Department of Defense AI principles). However, researchers Alexander Blanchard, Chris Thomas, and Mariarosaria Taddeo state “delineate the institutional attitude towards the adoption of AI, but they do not offer specific guidance to address the problems that may emerge in applying the principles to specific cases” meaning the US Department of Defense AI principles has created guidelines but lack clear instructions (Blanchard, Thomas, and Taddeo *Ethical Governance*). As a result, the tough job of making ethical decisions about AI is often left to people in the field, like soldiers or engineers, who might not have the right training to make those complex choices (Sweijts & Romansky, 2024).

Russia

Russia aims for significant automation of its military by 2030 and advocates for international regulation that does not hinder technological progress or sovereignty. In October 2019, Russia adopted the “National Strategy for the Development of AI Through 2030,” which, while not focusing on weaponized AI, mentions the “inadmissibility of using AI for the deliberate infliction of harm to individuals and legal entities, as well as prevention and minimization of risks of negative consequences of using AI technologies.” (Nadibaidze, 2022). It has a voluntary AI Code of Ethics emphasizing responsible use and transparency, though enforcement is limited.

China

China integrates AI into the military through the Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) strategy, blending civilian AI advances with defense applications. Chinese leaders, particularly Xi Jinping, are using MCF to position the country to compete militarily and economically in an emerging technological and strategic competition with the U.S (Bitzinger et al, 2021). China also supports international cooperation on AI governance, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and human oversight, promoting responsible use of AI. Analysts argue that while China promotes these principles internationally, its domestic and military use of AI lacks transparency and democratic oversight (Kania).

France

France leads Europe in the militarization of AI and comprehensive initiatives addressing ethical and legal challenges related to AI deployment in defense. It calls for stronger

international legal frameworks to ensure AI systems comply with international humanitarian law and respect human dignity. For instance, on January 31, 2025, France established the National Institute for the Evaluation and Security of Artificial Intelligence (INESIA), which is managed by the Secretary General for Defense and National Security, as well as the General Directorate for Enterprises (Kumar, 2025). This institute shows France's commitment to ethical AI governance.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom supports international humanitarian law on autonomous weapons and urges meaningful human control over lethal AI systems. Langford, a journalist, sought clarification on whether AI has been used to support routine operations. In his response, Defense Minister Luke Pollard stated that the "delivery of defense capabilities enabled by artificial intelligence (AI) will be ambitious, safe, and responsible." He noted that research is actively underway to "identify, understand, and mitigate against risks of applying AI for sensitive defense affairs" (Langford, 2025). The UK also participates actively in UN discussions on autonomous weapons, promoting transparency and accountability.

North Korea

North Korea is rapidly developing AI military systems. For instance, The new North Korean drones are capable of "tracking and monitoring different strategic targets and enemy troop activities on the ground and the sea", while the attack drones will "be used for various tactical attack missions" the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said, noting that both drone systems have been equipped with "new artificial intelligence" (Jazeera, 2025). North Korea's AI militarization is largely secretive and unregulated, raising concerns about ethical usage.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
1966-1972	Shakey the Robot, developed by SRI International, was the first to embody artificial intelligence. It had capabilities to perceive its surroundings, logically deduce implicit facts, navigate, make a plan to achieve a goal, monitor the execution of a plan in the real world, and recover from errors in plan execution. It also improved its planning abilities through learning and communicated in simple English (Media, 2019).
2014	U.S. Department of Defense unveils "Third Offset Strategy," which allows rapid advances in AI. This will define the next generation of warfare (Media, 2019).
2018	The DOD released its first <i>Artificial Intelligence Strategy</i> , intended to accelerate the adoption of AI by the U.S. military. The report highlighted the fact that China was "making significant investments in AI for military purposes," which "threaten to erode our technological and operational advantages." (ArmyUniversityPress, 2024)
2020	A United Nations report about a March 2020 skirmish in the military conflict in Libya says such a drone, known as a lethal autonomous weapons system — or LAWS — has made its wartime debut (Hernandez, 2021)
2023	The UN General Assembly called for the regulation of lethal autonomous weapons systems was adopted on 22 December 2023 as Resolution 78/241 on lethal autonomous weapons systems. This resolution was led by Austria and supported by 152 countries voting in favor, with only 4 countries against (Belarus, India, Mali, and Russia) and several abstentions, including China, North Korea, and Israel (UNGA, 2023).

2025

South Korea established the AI Framework Act, the first comprehensive AI legislation in the Asia-Pacific region. It explicitly provides carve-outs for AI use in national defense and supports AI development infrastructure, showing strong government backing for military AI innovation (FutureofPrivacyForum, 2025)

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

UN Involvement

In light of the increasing militarization of AI and the deployment of autonomous weapons, the UN has been actively working to address challenges. Adopted on December 22, 2024, the UN General Assembly Resolution 79/62 – Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, with widespread support from 166 countries, 15 abstentions, and 3 votes against (Belarus, North Korea, and Russia), shed light on the international concern over the potential negative consequences AWS could have on global security. The resolution calls for further examination to address the humanitarian, legal, and ethical challenges that AWS presents (Resolution 79/62 (A/RES/79/62)) (United Nations, 2024). The CCW is the UN-based forum for discussions on AWS. Since 2014, the CCW has organized sessions as part of a group of governmental experts to discuss the meaning of lethal autonomous weapons systems. In 2025, the group of governmental experts plans to further these discussions in Geneva on September 8 (United Nations).

Relevant Resolutions

In December 2023, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 78/241, titled “Lethal autonomous weapon systems”, a response to raised concerns about the militarization of artificial intelligence. The resolution was supported by 152 votes in favor, 4 against, and 8 abstentions. The resolution expresses deep concern about the possible negative consequences and destabilizing effects of lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS), as well as the protection of civilians and compliance with international humanitarian law. It recognizes the rapid development of new and emerging technologies, and recognizes further that they hold great promise for the advancement of human welfare. A key feature of this resolution is the request for the UN Secretary General to seek the views of Member States and relevant stakeholders, including

international organizations, civil society, and the scientific community. This includes the ethical, legal, humanitarian, and security challenges posed by LAWS. The Secretary General is then tasked with submitting a report to the General Assembly at its seventy-ninth session in 2024. The resolution also encourages states to actively participate in discussions about the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), in particular through the ongoing and valuable work of the Group of Governmental Experts on Emerging Technologies in the Area of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, and it mandates a report from the Secretary General. It lays the groundwork for more informed and structured debate at the discussions, and potentially opens a way to future rules or standards to guide how Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) should be used. It also allows participation from organizations, civil society, and the scientific community (UNGA 2023, Resolution 78/241).

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Evaluation of Resolution 78/241, titled “Lethal autonomous weapon systems,”

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Evaluation of Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has been a leading voice in critically assessing autonomous weapons. In their 2025 report, HRW argues that autonomous weapons systems inherently violate fundamental human rights obligations because they operate without meaningful human control, making them unable to reliably comply with international humanitarian law principles such as distinction and proportionality. The HRW is also a co-founder of Stop Killer Robots, a campaign of 270 civil society organizations. Together, they and IHRC are working for a new international treaty that ensures meaningful human control over the use of force and avoids digital dehumanization. Human Rights Watch argues that any regulatory instrument should prohibit autonomous weapons systems that operate without meaningful human control or target people, and that all other systems should only operate under meaningful human control (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The HRW has played an impactful role in regulating autonomous weapons by raising awareness among governments, international organizations, and the public about the ethical and humanitarian risks of autonomous weapons.

Evaluation of The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots is a coalition of over 270 civil society organizations that has been influential in advocating for a legally binding international treaty to ban or regulate autonomous weapons. The UN Secretary-General first called for a ban on killer robots at a Web Summit in Portugal, where he stated: "For me there is a message that is very clear – machines that have the power and the discretion to take human lives are politically unacceptable, are morally repugnant, and should be banned by international law." (Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, 2018). This campaign has influenced debates at the UN General Assembly by emphasizing the ethical, humanitarian, and human rights risks of autonomous weapons systems. Their advocacy has helped bring the issue into broader international awareness and pressured states to consider stronger regulatory measures, although major military powers remain resistant to binding restrictions.

Possible Solutions

AWS monitoring

Monitoring the development, use, and deployment of AWS is essential to secure the transparency, ethics, accountability, and compliance of treaties. By promoting greater surveillance in international communities and governments and by assessing the use of AWS in various countries, it can be determined whether international standards are being adhered to. Strengthening accountability can help build trust within nations and the public, reducing the risk of possible war escalations or misuse of autonomous weapons systems, particularly in urban and densely populated areas.

Banning the use of AWS in urban areas

One possible, but unlikely, solution is to completely ban the use of weapon systems that operate without any human oversight, thereby eliminating the chance that AI kills incorrect targets on its own. Such treaties are backed by the United Nations, advocating for this ban by 2026 (Carnegie Endowment, 2024). Furthermore, countries can implement regulations that protect civilians in conflict. Measures like prohibiting the use of AWS in densely populated areas, particularly in urban environments, are a good example. Implementing these particular measures decreases the risk of collateral damage in war.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

SDG 16, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

Sustainable Development Goal #16, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, ensure access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable institutions. One of its key targets is to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. The militarization of AI raises significant threats to global peace and security, the protection of civilians, and humanitarian law. The regulations of LAWS align with SDG 16's objective by putting a proper framework to prevent destabilizing warfare technologies, ensure accountability in armed conflict, and uphold the rule of law.

Appendix

The appendix contains sources with helpful information for delegates. The Appendix enhances your understanding of AWS and how it is being applied in wars. Delegates are encouraged to use the appendix for a deeper understanding of the issue to develop well-thought-out arguments during discussions.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geaXM1EwZlg&ab_channel=JohnnyHarris

Source A: Video about the rise of AI warfare.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-eS2lyyqEIM&ab_channel=Channel4News

Source B: Video about the utilization of AWS during the Ukraine-Russia war.

<https://unric.org/en/un-addresses-ai-and-the-dangers-of-lethal-autonomous-weapons-systems/>

Source C: United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe (UNRIC)

An article on the dangers of AWS. "UN addresses AI and the Dangers of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems"

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/01/the-gospel-how-israel-uses-ai-to-select-bombing-targets>

Source D: Article on how the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) utilize AI to select bombing targets.

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