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Artificial intelligence in the military domain and its implications for international peace and security

Definition of key Terms

Artificial Intelligence (AI) are defined in the *United Nations Development Program* through the *Oxford English Dictionary*[1] as:

AI is the theory and development of computer systems that can perform tasks normally requiring human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and translation and interpretation.

Background Information

Artificial intelligence is increasingly integrated into military systems, raising concern about its implications for international peace and security. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has identified three key military subdomains where AI is playing a significant role[2]. These include AI in autonomous weapon systems (AWS), military decision-making and information and communications technology. There are currently no comprehensive international treaties which prohibit the use of AI in the military however several frameworks exist which restrict how AI can be used in warfare. AI in weapon systems have to follow International Humanitarian Law 3 (IHL) and the human rights.

Due to the rapid development of AI in recent years there is a serious risk of a widespread arms race. This arms race driven by the development of lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS) has started in the mid 2010's. LAWS use AI to identify and kill human targets without human intervention. LAWS have already been involved in a deadly strike when a human was killed by a drone in the Libyan conflict without human input in 2020[4]. The main forces involved in this arms race are the United States and China as both have been investing in this technology for at least a decade[5]. For instance, the United States plan on investing $6 billion dollars over the next five years for unmanned aircrafts. The Pentagon intends on building a fleet of 1.000 AI-enabled fighter jets[6]. The first remotely operated drone strikes by NATO have been carried out in 1999 during the Kosovo War to identify Serbian strategic positions[7]. Later in the aftermath of 9/11 automated and remotely operated systems (AROS) were one of the main weapon systems used in the war on terror. Drones successfully located Osama Bin Laden and The United States carried out 14.000 lethal drone strikes in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen from 2010 to 2020[8].

Concerns over the use of AI and the ethical complications in automated warfare are omnipresent. AI powered weapons may not be able to differentiate between soldiers and civillians[9]. Furthermore, AI weapons without human oversight could fuel conflicts because of immediate retaliative measures. This issue arises if AI can decide itself on how to respond on an attack[5]. The „Stop Killer Robots" campaign launched by several NGO's including Human Rights Watch advocates for a complete ban of autonomous weapons and emphasizes the ethical, legal, and humanitarian risks of leaving a life and death decision to AI and algorithms[10]. The campaign faces

serious challenges in convincing major powers in banning automated weapons due to their importance in military and strategic significance.

Weapons with AI input have been used in conflict like in Gaza by Israel[16] and in the Russia-Ukraine conflict where most of the war is fought by drones and remotely operated systems some controlled by AI[14]. Some diplomats and experts warn about exceeding an important threshold about AI weapons. They warn about a too rapid development of AI and the risk that AI is not controllable anymore in the future[17].

Major parties involved

NATO**:** Almost every NATO country is capable to use drones in warfare. The United Kingdom used drone strikes in Syria from 2014 to 2018 on average twice a day. The United States is one of the most advanced countries when it comes to AI-weapons and automated systems[11].

China: The People's Republic of China is committed to develop AI in the military domain and is the most advanced. China could deploy fully autonomous AI weapons on the battlefield by 2026. Furthermore China supplies countries like the UAE, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and Iraq with drone technology[12].

Russia: The Russian Federation plans on extending their military with AI enabled weapons in the next 10 years although parts of artificial intelligence have already been used by the Russian military[13].

Ukraine: In the war with Russia, Ukraine has equipped long-range drones with artificial intelligence to identify potential targets and then strike. This has been working as the Ukrainian armed forces have launched many successful attacks on Russian oil and gas refineries[14].

Israel: During the conflict between Israel and the Hamas, Israel has used several AI technologies in the war. One is the „Lavender AI system" which was able to identify 37.000 potential targets in the Gaza strip. Another use of AI in this conflict is the "Iron Dome", which is a missile defence system designed to intercept and destroy incoming rockets. AI has been implemented into the iron dome system to improve accuracy and respond faster on attacks[23]. Some called the conflict the first „AI war"[15,16].

Relevant Treaties, UN Resolutions and Actions

Resolution A/RES/79/239 adopted by the General Assembly on 24 December 2024 affirms that international law applies to military uses of AI and urges responsible, human-cantered development to prevent risks like arms races and misuse. 159 countries in favour, 2 against (Iran, Russia) and 5 abstentions (Belarus, China, India, Pakistan, Syria)[18].

Resolution A/RES/79/62 adopted by the General Assembly on 2 December 2024 urges responsible use of lethal autonomous weapons, reaffirms international law applies, and calls for continued global dialogue and human accountability. 166 countries voted in favour, 3 against (DPRK, Russia, Belarus) and 15 abstentions[19].

Political Declaration on Responsible Military Use of Artificial Intelligence and Autonomy is a non-binding international treaty launched by the USA in 2023. It states its compliance with international law, human accountability, safety and reliability, transparency and international cooperation. It was signed by over 60 countries and was not signed by China or Russia[20,21,22].

Possible Solutions

Transparency and confidence building measures: promote dialogue between countries and transparency on AI development and information sharing to reduce risk of misunderstanding and escalation.

Ban or limit systems: Consider prohibiting fully autonomous lethal weapons that operate without human intervention and limit AI use in nuclear command and control, critical infrastructure, or other destabilizing areas.

Human Oversight: Ensure that AI systems do not operate without meaningful human control, especially in decisions involving lethal force.

Global norms and ethical guidelines.

Technical safeguards and testing.

Useful Links and Sources:

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6:https://www.theguardian.com/technology/article/2024/jul/14/ais-oppenheimer-moment-autonomous-weapons-enter-the-battlefield

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11:https://www.sustainability-times.com/in-depth/ai-arsenal-unleashed-chinas-world-leading-weapons-set-to-redefine-global-power-dynamics/

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18: https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/UN_General_Assembly_A_RES_79_239-EN.pdf

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