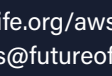
A DIPLOMAT'S GUIDE TO MILITARY AI

Available online at: futureoflife.org/aws-guide
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A Diplomat's Guide to Military AI

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Our Digital Military AI Resources

Autonomous Weapons

Check out our online resources, including technical military AI trend reports, our newsletter covering policymaking efforts, video resources, and more.

autonomousweapons.news

Autonomous Weapons Watch

Check out our databases to discover some of the most common autonomous weapons systems and decision support systems being developed and sold today.

autonomousweaponswatch.org

Abbreviations

AI-DSS: Artificial Intelligence-Enabled Decision Support Systems

AWS: Autonomous Weapons Systems

CARICOM: Caribbean Community

CCW: Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons

DSS: Decision Support Systems

ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States

GA: General Assembly

GGE: Group of Governmental Experts

HCP: High Contracting Parties

ICRC: International Committee of the Red Cross

IHL: International Humanitarian Law

LAWS: Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems

LLM: Large Language Models

The Basics

What is Military AI?

Militaries use AI for many types of functions, however when we use the term we refer to the weaponization of autonomy and the integration of artificial intelligence in the use of force.

What are Autonomous Weapons Systems?

Autonomous Weapons Systems (AWS) select and apply force to targets without human intervention.[1]

Unlike unmanned military drones, where a human operator remotely decides to take a life, AWS can use algorithms to make this decision independently.

AWS are pre-programmed to recognize and kill a specific "target profile" based on sensor data, such as image recognition, heat shape and radar signature.[2] **Autonomy is a function that can be embedded within a variety of weapons such as drones, ground vehicles, water surface vessels, submarines, and missile defense systems.**

While there are reports of AWS being deployed in recent conflicts, independently verified accounts are limited.

Meanwhile, in Ukraine..
In August 2026, the New York Times reported that a drone "guided entirely by A.I." killed three civilians.[3]

Why are they concerning?

Laws of war and accountability gap

AWS may not tell civilians from combatants,[4] avoid excessive civilian harm, or call off unlawful attacks, and no one may be held responsible for war crimes. Adherence to international humanitarian law is a complex process that requires human reasoning and cannot be reduced to binary code and probabilities.[5]

Global instability

- **Unpredictability:** Once activated, AWS pick targets based on what their sensors detect in the environment. When an environment is fast-changing and dynamic, sensor-processing and algorithmic reasoning can lead to unpredictable outcomes.[6]
- **Escalation:** AWS may interact with enemy systems in unexpected ways, faster than humans can step in, which risks "flash wars."[7]
- **Lower threshold for war:** The perception of faster and less costly warfare further incentivizes the decision to engage in armed conflict.[8]
- **Proliferation:** Many types of AWS are low-cost, accessible and can proliferate to non-state actors with the potential to destabilize national and regional security.[9]
- **Targeting:** AWS can be used for targeted killings or to attack groups of people based on ethnicity or other profiles, including acts of genocide.[10]
- **Vulnerability to cyberattack:** AWS are susceptible to cyberattacks, creating new ways for hackers to infiltrate and manipulate military operations.[11]

Ethics

- Religious leaders, including Pope Leo XIV, oppose machines making life and death decisions.[12]
- There have been significant number of employee resignations at several large tech companies in protest over the weaponization and militarization of AI.[13]
- Global opinion is largely opposed to the use of AI making the decision to use force and kill (see section "What does the global public think of Military AI?").

What are Decision Support Systems?

> Decision Support Systems (DSS) are computerized tools that present information or propose options in order for a human user to achieve a goal.[14]

DSS have been used across military operations for decades, but the introduction of machine-learning DSS marks a turning point. These DSS are known as Artificial Intelligence-Enabled Decision Support Systems (AI-DSS). DSS are known to be used in supply chain operations, logistics, human resources, planning, war-gaming, targeting, and the use of force. This guide specifically refers to DSS used in targeting and the use of force.

The incorporation of large language models (LLMs) into military decision support systems is a new phenomenon. LLMs are not designed specifically for military use. The rates of error and hallucination seen in today's LLMs raise significant concern when applied in military contexts.[15] These systems process huge amounts of data and generate recommendations faster than humans can verify them, so errors may go unnoticed.

There are various reported cases of military use of AI-DSS.

Please see our database, **Autonomous Weapons Watch**, for specific examples of systems including AWS and AI-DSS used in targeting.

> Meanwhile, in Gaza..
> According to Local Call and +972, the Israeli Army used the AI-DSS tool 'Lavender' to compile target lists of 37,000 Palestinians.[16]

> Meanwhile, in Iran..
> The United States CENTCOM used Maven Smart System, built by Palantir with AI-DSS integration from Anthropic's Claude to strike 1000 targets in the first 24 hours of Operation Epic Fury in Iran.[17]

Why are they concerning?

- **Speed:** Machine learning can automate each step of the kill chain, reducing human reasoning and judgment that simpler DSS required. Human operators under time pressure tend to defer to machine recommendations, which undermines meaningful human control. Some operators reportedly have spent as little as 20 seconds reviewing each target.[18]
- **Scale:** AI-DSS have reportedly been used to generate targets and enable strikes in unprecedented numbers.[19] At this scale, attacks risk violating the IHL principles of distinction, proportionality, and precautions, and can overwhelm those who respond to and investigate civilian harm, such as first responders, civilian harm assessment units, and lawyers investigating violations.
- **Hallucination and sycophancy:** LLMs can produce false information with confidence and are engineered to tell users what they want to hear. This can reinforce an operator's assumptions instead of challenging them.[20] Versions adapted for military use are built on the same underlying models.[21]
- **Hard to predict, understand or explain:** AI-DSS can generate different outputs for the same set of inputs, making it unclear why a particular action was recommended and hard to predict how they will function in use.[22] A human officer who accepts a recommendation they cannot explain or verify is not exercising meaningful human control and accountability, nor are they in compliance with IHL.

For a further explanation of how military AI is used in targeting, check out the interactive resource

"Anatomy of a Kill Chain" from Airwars and AI Now

Progress Toward AWS Regulation

In **October 2023**, the UN Secretary-General and the ICRC President called on States to conclude a legally binding instrument on AWS by 2026. In their submission on AWS to the UN Secretary-General in regards to ODA-2024-00019/LAWS, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) provided an example of what a legally binding instrument might look like. For further detail on this example text, see Annex I.

Through the work of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), a majority of States converged on the 'two-tier approach':

- Prohibiting unpredictable systems that do not allow for sufficient human control.
- Regulating all others by limiting their targets, duration, location, scale and situations of use, and by requiring human supervision with the ability to intervene and deactivate.[23]

In **September 2026**, the GGE on LAWS adopted by consensus a final report containing a set of elements of a potential instrument.[24] The elements include:

- **Characterization:** systems that identify, select and engage targets without human intervention. This is a working characterization of LAWS.
- **IHL applies:** fully, to both development and use.
- **Control and human judgment:** needed to comply with IHL, including limits on targets, duration, area and geographical scope.
- **Accountability:** humans remain responsible, and accountability cannot be transferred to machines.

While the consensus outcome is an important step, several valuable elements from earlier drafts were not retained in the final text. In future instrument negotiations, it is essential that States build on the two-tier approach, with clear prohibitions on certain systems, and regulations that address ethical considerations, legal reviews of modified systems, and requirements for

reliability, predictability, and traceability. The GGE recommended endorsing the consensus elements and deciding on next steps at the Seventh Review Conference (November 2026).

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Will AI make targeting more precise and lead to fewer civilian deaths?

We do not have evidence that supports the promise of precision and fewer deaths.

The Report of the UN Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict found that AI and other technologies increased risks to civilians.[25] The year of 2025 broke records. The killing of children in armed conflict rose by 34%, with drones and AI in targeting among factors that contributed "to a sharp increase in the scale of harm to children."[26]

AI enables targeting at speed and scale, which do not engender precision and can disincentivize actors from spending sufficient time to investigate, verify and decide before engaging in a strike.

Protecting civilians is ultimately a human choice, requiring human judgment and control, not faster targeting.

2. Will future technology make autonomous weapons compliant with IHL?

It takes human judgment, not technical progression, to ensure new weapons are compliant with IHL.

IHL obligations fall on humans. Distinction, proportionality and precaution all require human judgment in context, such as recognizing surrender, weighing civilian harm, or calling off an attack. Better sensors cannot replace that judgment. Delaying regulation until the technology improves would mean accepting unlawful attacks in the meantime. And more accurate technology brings its own risk: systems that identify people more accurately also become more effective tools for targeted killings and genocide.[27]

3. If our adversaries use AWS, shouldn't we as well?

States can defend against AWS without using them.

States can defend effectively against AWS using air defenses or conventional means. Deploying AWS against unpredictable autonomous systems brings risks of error and escalation: in a RAND war-game, "the speed of autonomous systems did lead to inadvertent escalation."[28]

4. Does a treaty need every state to join to be effective?

Universal participation is rare in disarmament, yet treaties can still work.

Universal participation is rare in disarmament, yet treaties regulating weapons have significant impact. There has been no confirmed use of cluster munitions by any state party to the Convention on Cluster Munitions since 2008, and only 11 States have used them since it entered into force, all of them outside it.[29] Most States outside the convention have never used them. Similarly, States not party to the treaty banning anti-personnel landmines, which are under no legal obligation not to use this category of weapon, rarely opt to use this weapon.

5. Are geopolitical tensions too great to attempt negotiations?

History would say otherwise.

Political tensions are an ever present reality, but many seminal treaties have been negotiated during periods of intense geopolitical competition. At the height of the Cold War, for example, states agreed on both the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Biological Weapons Convention.[30] Ongoing conflicts provide even more impetus to strengthen the protection of civilians.

What Does the Global Public Think of Military AI?

Outside of the United Nations, the militarization of AI is a great concern for many. Polls, public reactions, and accounts from industry insiders all point to growing concern about how AI is used in war.

Polling on Global Attitudes on the Use of AI to Target and Attack People

A 2026 Ipsos survey, commissioned by Lex International, polled over 6,000 adults in Brazil, China, France, Iraq, Pakistan, South Africa, Ukraine, and the United States.

Key Findings: [31]

1. **Majorities** in every country surveyed **support** a **ban** on the use of AI weapons to **target and attack people**.
2. **Opposition** to a ban is the **minority** opinion in every country surveyed.
3. **Conflict-affected populations endorse a ban at rates above the global average.**
4. Populations in **heavily militarized countries favor a ban**.

Support for regulation was highest in conflict-affected countries. This polling was conducted in a regionally diverse set of countries. Notably, it was conducted in countries in which citizens have witnessed applications of military AI due to ongoing regional conflicts. Citizens in these countries were **more supportive of a ban** on the use of AI-enabled weapons to target and attack people than the global average. This finding reveals that even while experiencing acute security threats, citizens do not see AI weapons as the solutions.

Polling commissioned by the Future of Life Institute and conducted by Dynata in the United Kingdom (UK), France, and Germany among samples of 2,000 adults in each, found that **overwhelming majority across the three**

countries were in support of an international treaty on AWS: 94% in the UK, 92% in France, 87% in Germany.[32] The polling found that 93% of respondents in the UK, 89% in France, and 86% in Germany were in favor of their **governments leading** on efforts to regulate AI weapons.[33]

Whistleblowers: Public Resignations at Leading US Companies over Military AI work

In May 2024, nearly 200 Google DeepMind employees signed a letter urging the company to end its military contracts.[34] Since early 2026, staff at OpenAI and Google DeepMind have resigned publicly over their companies' military AI work. In March, a hardware leader on OpenAI's robotics team resigned after the company agreed to deploy its models on the Pentagon's classified networks.[35] In June, a Google DeepMind research scientist resigned after Google signed its own agreement allowing the Pentagon to use its AI for classified operations.[36] Further resignations have followed since.[37]

History of Diplomatic Talks

Toward a Legally Binding Instrument on AWS

Sep 2026

The GGE on LAWS adopted by consensus a final report containing elements of a potential instrument.[38] In joint statements by the African Group[39] and a group of 47 States,[40] more than 70 States reaffirmed their readiness to move to negotiations.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights called for "urgent prohibition of weapons that can take lives without human involvement,"[41] and the Secretary- General said, "Life and death decisions must never be surrendered to machines, and killer robots must have no place in our future."[42]

Aug 2026

The UN Secretary-General and ICRC President renewed their joint call for negotiations on a legally binding instrument to regulate AWS, calling the CCW's Seventh Review Conference in November 2026 "the clearest path available."[43]

Jul 2026

At the first Global Dialogue on AI Governance, the UN Secretary-General called AWS his "main concern" and urged "let us not wait for atrocity to act."[44]

May 2026

Pope Leo XIV's first encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas,* said lethal decisions must remain under "effective, self-aware and responsible human control, not AI."[45]

Mar 2026

At the GGE on LAWS, more than 70 States, including a group of African States, backed moving to negotiations on the Chair's rolling text.[46]

Dec 2025 The UN General Assembly adopted its third resolution on LAWS, proposed by Austria, by 164 votes in favor, 6 against and 7 abstentions, calling on CCW HCP to work toward completing the elements of an instrument, "with a view to future negotiations."[47]

Sep 2025 At the GGE on LAWS, Brazil delivered a joint statement on behalf of 42 States declaring that they wete "ready to move ahead towards negotiations" on the basis of the Chair's rolling text."[48]

May 2025 The first informal consultations on LAWS were held at the UN General Assembly in New York, with discussions organized in accordance with the themes of humanitarian, legal, security, technological, and ethical considerations.[49]

Dec 2024 The UN General Assembly adopted its second resolution on LAWS, proposed by Austria, by 166 votes in favor, 3 against and 15 abstentions, convening informal consultations in New York in 2025 and urging the GGE to complete its mandate, preferably by the end of 2025.[50]

Jul 2024 The UN Secretary-General published a report on LAWS, which summarized the views of States and other stakeholders and renewed his call for a legally binding instrument to be concluded by 2026.[51]

Apr 2024

Austria hosted the largest global conference on AWS governance. Its Chair's Summary affirmed a "strong commitment to work with urgency" toward an international legal instrument.[52]

Sierra Leone convened a regional conference on AWS in Freetown where ECOWAS member States adopted the Freetown Communiqué, supporting "the urgent negotiation of a legally binding instrument to regulate AWS."[53]

Dec 2023

The Philippines convened the Manila Meeting on Indo-Pacific Perspectives on AWS.[54]

The UN General Assembly adopted its first resolution on LAWS, proposed by Austria, by 152 votes in favor, 4 against and 11 abstentions, requesting a report from the UN Secretary-General.[55]

Oct 2023

The UN Secretary-General and the ICRC President jointly called for negotiations on a treaty on AWS to be concluded by 2026.[56]

Sep 2023

At a regional conference in Port of Spain, hosted by Trinidad and Tobago, CARICOM States adopted the CARICOM Declaration calling for the "urgent pursuit of an international legally binding instrument."[57]

May 2023

At the GGE on LAWS, 14 States submitted a revised draft Protocol VI, which would prohibit AWS that cannot be used with meaningful human control.[58]

Apr 2023

Luxembourg hosted an international conference on AWS where the ICRC President called on States to negotiate a legally binding instrument.[59]

Mar 2023 At the 28th Ibero-American Summit in Santo Domingo, heads of state and government of the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking nations of Europe and the Americas endorsed a special communiqué committing to work together to promote the negotiation of a legally binding international instrument on AWS.[60]

Feb 2023 Costa Rica hosted a regional conference on AWS, where 33 Latin American and Caribbean States adopted the Belén Communiqué, calling for urgent negotiation of a legally binding instrument.[61]

Dec 2022 The Sixth Review Conference of the CCW failed to reach agreement on binding controls for LAWS.

Oct 2022 The UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on the human rights implications of new and emerging technologies in the military domain, stressing human control over the use of force.[62]

Aug 2022 At the CCW, 11 States proposed a draft Protocol VI that would prohibit AWS whose use violates IHL and that operate outside meaningful human control, and to regulate the rest.[63]

Nov 2019 CCW stated adopted the 11 'Guiding Principles.[64]

May 2014 The first CCW Informal Meeting of Experts on LAWS was held.

Nov 2013 CCW Parties decided to convene an informal Meeting of Experts on LAWS in 2014.

Apr 2013 The UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, Christof Heyns, submitted a report on "Lethal autonomous robotics" to the Human Rights Council.

An Anti-Personnel Prohibition

Throughout the history of humanitarian disarmament, there have been specific legally binding instruments that have sought to reduce the direct harm caused to individuals by armed conflict. For example, the Ottawa Treaty, or 'Mine Ban Treaty' specifically prohibits landmines that are designed to target humans, otherwise known as 'anti-personnel' landmines.

Many States, as well as the ICRC, civil society organizations, and the general public are particularly concerned by AWS that target individuals. They have voiced support for the inclusion of an anti-personnel prohibition in any future legally binding instrument on AWS.

In their 2024 submissions to the United Nations Secretary-General pursuant to Resolution 78/241 on AWS the following States from different regions advocated for specific prohibitions on systems that target humans.[65]

- **Austria** stated that AWS "that select and engage persons as targets in a manner that violates the dignity and worth of the human person as well as the principles of humanity or the dictates of public conscience are unacceptable and must be prohibited."
- **Fiji** proposed that an instrument should include "prohibitions on weapons systems that would target people."
- **El Salvador** wrote that AWS "whose primary objective is the identification of human targets, whether to cause damage or loss of life" should be prohibited.
- **Kiribati** proposed that a new instrument should "ban anti-personnel autonomous weapon systems."
- **Malawi** stated that AWS that target people must be prohibited "for legal and ethical reasons."
- **The Netherlands** proposed that a new instrument could include prohibitions on "AWS that are designed to apply force against civilians or civilian objects."

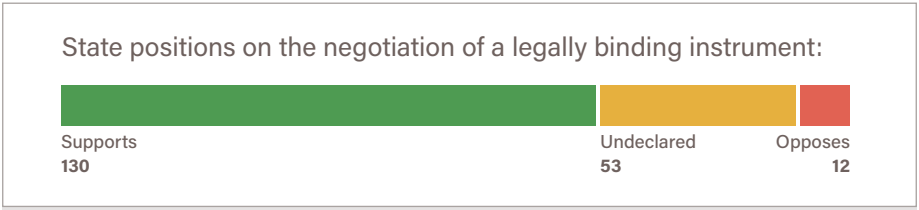
- **Palestine** expressed the need for prohibitions on the development and use of AWS "that are designed or used to target humans directly."
- **Trinidad and Toboago** stated that it called "for negotiations of an international legally binding instrument that...prohibits those designed or employed to apply force against persons."

At the September 2026 meeting of the GGE on LAWS, the Holy See stated that any set of elements that may form the basis of a future instrument must include "a clear and specific prohibition on AWS that target human beings."[66] Sri Lanka added to this call, stating that anti-personnel systems "must be subject to an explicit and unconditional ban ... to prevent digital dehumanization."[67]

Finally, the Ipsos polling commissioned by Lex International, which found strong opposition to the use of AI-enabled weapons, specifically asked about "AI-enabled weapons to target and attack people."[68]

Landscape

An overwhelming majority of States that have declared a position (130) support a legally binding instrument on AWS, while 53 States have not declared a position.[69] A selection of positions is highlighted below, with States grouped by the United Nations Regional Groups of Member States.[70] This is not a comprehensive summary of all State positions.



For an up-to-date overview of all state positions on the topic of AWS see the 'State Positions' directory from Automated Decision Research.

Africa

In May 2014, **Egypt** became the first African State, and one of the first States overall, to call for a ban on AWS.[71] In 2018, at the GGE on LAWS, the **African Group** called for a ban on autonomous weapons not under human control and for the conclusion of a legally binding instrument, stating that it was "inhumane, abhorrent, repugnant, and against public conscience for humans to give up control to machines."[72] In the 2024 Freetown Communiqué, adopted at a regional conference hosted by **Sierra Leone**, **ECOWAS Member States** committed "to support the urgent negotiation of a legally binding instrument."[73] In 2026, at the final session of the GGE on LAWS, **Algeria**, on behalf of the African States parties to the CCW, said the GGE's elements were "a sufficient foundation for negotiations on an instrument."[74] In 2025, 49 of 54 African States voted in favor of GA resolution 80/57 on LAWS, while **Burundi**, which had supported the 2023 and 2024 resolutions, voted against.[75]

Asia-Pacific

In 2023, the **Philippines** hosted the Manila Meeting, which amplified concerns about AWS voiced by **Indo-Pacific States**, including the risk of "armed escalation of existing conflict."[76] At the First Committee in October 2026, ASEAN delivered a joint statement underscoring "the development of a robust, future-proof, and legally-binding instrument."[77] **ASEAN** Member States have also voted in favor of all three GA resolutions on LAWS.[78] At the final session of the GGE on LAWS in 2026, **Sri Lanka** called for formal negotiations on a legally binding instrument within the CCW, and for anti-personnel autonomous weapons to be subject to "an explicit, unconditional ban."[79] **Pakistan** has proposed detailed elements for a legally binding instrument, to be adopted as a new CCW protocol, containing both prohibitions and restrictions.[80] In 2025, **China**, which abstained on all three GA resolutions on LAWS, said that the CCW is the most appropriate forum to discuss LAWS and that it supports "the negotiation of an international legally binding instrument when the conditions are mature."[81] **India** maintains that the CCW is "the appropriate forum"[82] and has cautioned against "fragmentation of the normative sphere,"[83] although it moved from voting against the 2023 resolution[84], to abstaining in 2024,[85] to voting in favor in 2025.[86]

Eastern European

At the October 2026 First Committee general debate, the **European Union**, whose members include **eleven Eastern European States**, called for the CCW Seventh Review Conference to adopt an "ambitious negotiating mandate" on an instrument, "without prejudging its nature."[87] Candidate countries **Albania**, **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, **Montenegro**, **North Macedonia**, the **Republic of Moldova** and **Ukraine**, aligned themselves with this statement.[88] **Estonia**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania** and **Romania** moved from abstaining on the 2024[89] GA resolution on LAWS to voting in favor in 2025,[90] while **Poland** abstained on both occasions. The **Russian Federation** and **Belarus** voted against both resolutions. The Russian Federation joined consensus on the final report of the GGE on LAWS, but a senior official has

described adopting a legally binding instrument as premature.[91] The Russian Federation considers it "unacceptable to introduce restrictions that impede legitimate innovative activities and technical progress."[92]

Latin America and the Caribbean

At a regional conference hosted by **Costa Rica** in February 2023, **Latin American** and **Caribbean States** adopted the Belén Communiqué, recognizing "the necessity for an international legally binding instrument that establishes prohibitions and regulations to guarantee meaningful human control."[93] **CARICOM Member States** echoed this call in the September 2023 CARICOM Declaration, adopted in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.[94] At the First Committee in October 2026, **Jamaica**, on behalf of CARICOM, stressed that AWS "raise legal, ethical and security concerns" and called for negotiations on a legal instrument.[95] At the final session of the GGE in September 2026, **Brazil** delivered a cross-regional joint statement on behalf of 47 States,[96] including eight others from the region,[97] describing the GGE's elements as a sufficient basis for negotiations on an instrument within the CCW. In September 2026, at the Preparatory Committee of the Seventh Review Conference of the CCW, **Brazil**, **Mexico** and **Panama**, together with **Austria**, **Ireland** and **Switzerland** opposed a mere "roll over" of the GGE's existing mandate.[98] **Argentina**, which voted in favor of the 2024 GA resolution on LAWS abstained in 2025, while **Nicaragua** abstained on both resolutions.

Western Europe and Others

In April 2024, **Austria** hosted the Vienna Conference, "Humanity at the Crossroads," attended by 144 States. Its Chair's Summary affirmed a "strong commitment to work with urgency and with all interested stakeholders for an international legal instrument to regulate autonomous weapons systems."[99] **France** and **Germany** have promoted a two-tier approach of prohibitions and regulations within the CCW since 2021.[100] At First Committee in October 2026, **New Zealand** stated that it was "time to move to negotiation of an effective, legally binding instrument building on the consensus set of elements."[101] **Ireland** delivered a cross-regional joint statement on behalf of 50 States,

including 17 others from the region. It described the GGE's elements as "a solid and sufficient basis for the establishment of a GGE mandate to negotiate an instrument", and called for "an ambitious negotiating mandate" at the CCW Seventh Review Conference.[102] The **United Kingdom** has stated that "there is no gap in the application of IHL in respect to autonomy in weapons systems,"[103] although it voted in favor of the GA resolutions on LAWS.[104] **The United States**, which had supported the 2023 and 2024 GA resolutions, voted against in 2025,[105] and at the September 2026 Preparatory Committee called for a "multi-year mandate" focused on "further elaborating and clarifying how IHL rules apply" to LAWS.[106] **Israel**, which abstained in 2023 and 2024, voted against the 2025 resolution,[107] and at the September 2026 Preparatory Committee stressed that the GGE's outcome "does not prejudge the nature" of the agreed elements.[108]

Relevant Forums

Military AI is being discussed in several international forums, both within and outside the UN system. This is not a comprehensive summary of all Military AI discussion forums.

United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC)

As early as 2013, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions called for national moratoriums on lethal autonomous robotics. He did so in his report to the HRC, a body of 47 member States, elected for three-year terms.

- In 2013, 20 States spoke out in the HRC against autonomous weapons systems, many calling for a ban.[109]
- In 2022, the HRC adopted resolution 51/22 on the human rights implications of new and emerging technologies in the military domain.
- In 2024, the Special Rapporteur recommended specific prohibitions on types of AWS that pose particular threats to human rights.

Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW)

In November 2013, High Contracting Parties to the CCW adopted a mandate to discuss lethal autonomous weapons systems.[110] The CCW has 128 High Contracting Parties, including all major military powers, and takes decisions by consensus. It has approached the issue primarily through the lens of international humanitarian law. The CCW is designed to respond to new weapons technologies through additional protocols, which States negotiate and adopt under the framework. In September 2026, the CCW's GGE on LAWS brought its three-year mandate to a conclusion with the Convention's **consensus adoption** of its final report, which includes a set of elements of a potential instrument.

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)

The UNGA is a universal forum in which all 193 UN member States can participate. It has adopted several resolutions on military AI issues.

The military AI topic with the greatest number of General Assembly resolutions is AWS, with one adopted each year since 2023:[111]

- **2023:** A/RES/78/241, the first-ever resolution on AWS was adopted by the General Assembly with 152 States in favor. The resolution was tabled by Austria and co-sponsored by a cross-regional group of States.
- **2024:** A/RES/79/62 was adopted by the General Assembly with 166 States in favor. It mandated two days of open informal multi-stakeholder consultations in New York in May 2025, which considered the legal, humanitarian, security, technological, and ethical aspects of AWS.
- **2025:** A/RES/80/57 was adopted by the General Assembly with 164 States in favor.

The Netherlands and the Republic of Korea addressed AI in the military domain more broadly through a separate line of resolutions:

- **2024:** A/RES/79/239, the first-ever resolution on the topic was adopted by the General Assembly with 159 States in favor.
- **2025:** A/RES/80/58 was adopted by the General Assembly with 167 States in favor. It mandated three days of informal multi-stakeholder exchanges in Geneva in June 2026. Sessions addressed topics including current trends, the AI life cycle, autonomy and AI in the use of force, convergence with other technologies, capacity building, and existing and emerging normative proposals.

In 2025, the UNGA also adopted A/RES/80/23, tabled by Mexico, on the risks of integrating AI into command, control, and communications systems of nuclear weapons with 118 States in favor.

United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

The UNSC is the 15 member body, including five permanent members with veto power, responsible for international peace and security. It held its first formal meeting on AI in July 2023 under the UK presidency, followed by three more high-level meetings, most recently in September 2026, with briefings from academic and industry experts. These meetings have addressed AWS, human control over the use of force, and AI in nuclear decision-making. Military AI and AWS also come up in the UNSC's broader open debates, such as on the protection of civilians. The UNSC has not adopted an AI-specific outcome.

Responsible AI in the Military Domain (REAIM)

REAIM emerged from a Dutch parliamentary motion and was designed to address AI in the military domain as a whole, including intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, decision support, logistics, cyber operations and command and control. Each summit to date has produced a non-binding outcome document that states can endorse.

- In 2023, the first REAIM Summit was held in The Hague, the Netherlands.
- In 2024, the second REAIM Summit was held in Seoul, South Korea.
- In 2026, the third REAIM Summit was held in A Coruña, Spain.
- In 2027, the fourth REAIM Summit will be held in Nairobi, Kenya.

Annex I: Example of Elements of a Potential Legally Binding Instrument on AWS

The ICRC Recommended Elements for a Legally Binding Instrument on Autonomous Weapon Systems, Submission on Autonomous Weapon Systems to the UN Secretary-General (2024), Sections 3-8. Access online at: https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/war-and-law/icrc_submission_on_autonomous_weapons_to_unsg.pdf.

Preamble

The new legally binding instrument could include preambular paragraphs that, inter alia:

Reaffirm the existing framework, and the need for States to comply at all times with applicable law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Rationale: The United Nations General Assembly has affirmed that international law, in particular the Charter of the United Nations, international humanitarian law and international human rights law, applies to AWS.[112] Further, the CCW's Group of Governmental Experts on lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS) has repeatedly emphasized that the rules and principles of IHL, including distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack, must be adhered to in the development, deployment and use of autonomous weapon systems.[113]

Acknowledge the range of concerns that have been expressed about the risks posed by autonomous weapons.

Rationale: The United Nations General Assembly has stressed the serious challenges that AWS raise from humanitarian, legal, security, technology and ethical perspectives.[114] The UN Secretary-General, in the New Agenda for

Peace, also recognized that, in the absence of specific multilateral regulations, the design, development and use of AWS raise humanitarian, legal, security and ethical concerns.[115]

Reaffirm the need to continue the codification and progressive development of the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict.

Rationale: Such reaffirmation would directly mirror the one found in the preamble to the CCW itself.[116] It also reflects the need to uphold protections for those affected by armed conflict and, when necessary, to strengthen these protections in the face of the development of new weapons, means and methods of warfare. A similarly progressive approach was taken with the St Petersburg Declaration, which pre-emptively prohibited the use in war of certain weapons that were foreshadowed by technological developments at the time.[117] It did so on the basis that their use would be contrary to the laws of humanity, and in order to prevent unacceptable harm before it occurred.

Reaffirm that, in cases not covered by the instrument or by other international agreements, civilians and combatants remain under the protection and authority of the principles of international law derived from established custom, from the principles of humanity and from the dictates of public conscience.

Rationale: The "Martens clause", first found in the 1899 Hague Convention (II) with respect to the laws and customs of war on land,[118] provides a link between ethical considerations and IHL, which makes it particularly relevant to the assessment of autonomous weapon systems. Ethical considerations provide an important basis for the adoption of prohibitions and restrictions on the development and use of autonomous weapon systems. The Guiding Principles affirmed by the GGE on LAWS state that relevant ethical principles should guide the GGE's work.

Reaffirm the need for States, in the study, development, acquisition or adoption of AWS, to determine whether the weapon system's employment would, in some or all circumstances, be prohibited by international law.

Rationale: Effective weapons reviews are a clear procedural obligation for States Party to Protocol I of 8 June 1977 additional to the Geneva Conventions and, for all States, they are a crucial step in ensuring compliance with international law.

Scope

The instrument should provide that it applies to all High Contracting Parties and that, in case of armed conflicts not of an international character occurring in the territory of one or more High Contracting Parties, each party to the conflict shall be bound to apply the instrument's prohibitions and restrictions.

Rationale: The instrument should make clear that its prohibitions and restrictions also bind non-state armed groups party to non-international armed conflicts occurring in the territory of one or more High Contracting Parties.

Definitions

The instrument should contain an unambiguous definition covering the general category of AWS, to which the whole instrument will apply. Within that category, certain types of AWS subject to specific prohibitions should be further defined (see discussion under section 6 below).

"Autonomous weapons system" means a weapon system that is designed to select and engage one or more targets without the need for human intervention after activation.

Rationale: In the understanding of the ICRC, as well as many States and other actors, AWS are weapon systems that operate in such a manner that the selection of, and application of force to, targets occur without human intervention.[119] This understanding of AWS is therefore not based on a specific technology, but rather on the role of humans in the process of target selection and application of force. Such a technology-neutral approach to

characterization of AWS is necessary to ensure that new rules address the key concerns raised by these weapons, and remain relevant in the face of technological developments.

"Without the need for human intervention" could be further defined as meaning that, after initial activation by a human, the application of force is triggered in response to information from the environment received through sensors measuring phenomena such as heat, light, movement, shape, velocity, weight or acoustic or electromagnetic signals; and on the basis of a generalized "target profile" such as the shape, infrared or radar "signature", speed and direction of a type of military vehicle, etc.[120] "Human intervention", for these purposes, should be understood as excluding human inputs or actions that do not materially affect the autonomous functions of target selection or engagement. The process of applying force in this manner can be implemented with a wide variety of weapons, munitions and platforms, which can be technically rudimentary or complex and may, but need not, rely on artificial intelligence technologies, including machine learning. The use in armed conflict of weapons that function in this manner is already a reality. Mines and sensor-fused munitions, certain "loitering" munitions, missile and rocket defence systems and "active protection" weapons that are already in use match this description of AWS, or have modes that operate in this manner. By contrast, autonomy in aspects of a weapon system other than the selection of, and application of force to, targets – for instance in navigation, intelligence collection or decision support – does not of itself render that system an AWS, and the analysis presented here does not extend to weapon systems that rely on autonomy solely in such other functions.

The following definitions, relevant to later provisions, could be incorporated from existing international agreements:

"Military objective" means, so far as objects are concerned, any object which by its nature, location, purpose or use makes an effective contribution to military action and whose total or partial destruction, capture or neutralization, in the circumstances ruling at the time, offers a definite military advantage.

Rationale: This definition can be found in the Protocol I additional to the Geneva Conventions, Article 52(2) and in Amended Protocol II to the CCW.

"Self-destruction mechanism" means an incorporated automatically functioning mechanism which is in addition to the primary initiating mechanism of the AWS and which secures the destruction of the AWS into which it is incorporated.

"Self-deactivating" means automatically rendering an AWS inoperable by means of the irreversible exhaustion of a component, for example a battery, that is essential to the operation of the AWS.

Rationale: Contained in the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Prohibitions

In accordance with the principles and objectives set out in the preamble, the instrument must contain specific prohibitions on types of AWS. These should be as clear and well defined as possible.

Unpredictable AWS

The instrument should provide that it is prohibited in all circumstances to develop, produce, otherwise acquire, stockpile or retain, or transfer, directly or indirectly to anyone, or to use any autonomous weapon system that is designed or of a nature, or used in such a manner that does not allow a human user to both (1) understand, predict and explain how the AWS will function in any normal or expected circumstances of use, in particular what circumstances or conditions will trigger the system to apply force, and (2) predict and limit the effects of the AWS in all such circumstances as required by IHL.

Rationale: Users of AWS must be able to, with a reasonable degree of certainty, predict the effects of that weapon, in order to determine whether it can be directed at a specific military objective and take steps to limit those predicted effects, as required by IHL. This entails the ability to understand

the functioning of the AWS: the nature and functioning of its sensors, the definition of its target profile and the potential effects in the circumstances of use, including any risk of error or malfunction.

This prohibition will be particularly relevant for AWS that function in opaque ways (the "black box" challenge), such as AWS relying on artificial intelligence techniques, which prevent the human user from being able to understand, predict or explain the system's output. This impossibility effectively results in a lack of control over the weapon's effects, rendering it indiscriminate by nature.

This concern would arise in AWS that incorporate machine learning, the functioning of which can change after the commencement of an attack so that force may be applied in circumstances and in a manner unforeseen to the human user. Complex swarm technologies may also exhibit emergent behaviors.

Anti-Personnel AWS

- The instrument should provide that it is prohibited in all circumstances to develop, produce, otherwise acquire, stockpile or retain, or transfer, directly or indirectly to anyone, or to use any autonomous weapon system:
- that is designed or used in such a manner to be triggered by the presence, proximity or contact of one or more persons, or

the target profile of which otherwise represents one or more persons.

Rationale: The ICRC finds it hard to envisage realistic combat situations where the use of autonomous weapons against humans would not pose a significant risk of IHL violations. While the user or commander may have made a general assessment that one or more people in the area constitute a lawful target at the time of launching the AWS, those peoples' actions, intentions (such as surrendering) and physical state (such as being wounded) – and hence their qualification as a lawful target – can change rapidly.

A prohibition against anti-personnel AWS is also required based on the unacceptability of such weapons from an ethical perspective, which is reflected in public conscience and in the principles of humanity.[121] The killing

of humans based on a machine process would simultaneously undermine the human agency of the person using force and the human dignity of the person against whom force is used.

This is consistent with the enhanced protection that the international community afforded to human beings compared to objects, when agreeing on prohibitions and restrictions on weapons such as bullets which explode within the human body, blinding laser weapons and anti-personnel mines.

Restrictions

The instrument should provide that, in the use of AWS other than those which are prohibited by the other articles, measures shall be taken to protect civilians and civilian objects, and other protected persons, from the effects of AWS. Such measures should include, but not be limited to:

- restricting targets of the AWS to only those which are military objectives by nature
- limiting the location where, time that and situation in which the AWS is operating, including to avoid concentrations of civilians or civilian objects[122]
- limiting the number of engagements that the AWS can undertake
- ensuring, to the maximum extent feasible, the ability for a human user:
  - to effectively supervise, and
  - to, in a timely manner, intervene and, where appropriate, deactivate operation of the AWS

AWS that do not allow a human user to, where appropriate and in a timely manner, intervene and deactivate operation of the AWS, must be equipped with an effective self-destruction or self-neutralization mechanism and have a back-up self-deactivation feature, which is designed so that the AWS will no longer function as an AWS when it no longer serves the military purpose for which it was launched.[123]

Rationale: Even in the use of an AWS that is sufficiently predictable and designed and used only against objects, the user's reduced ability to know all specifics of the attack, including the ultimate target and any incidental harm, will still create residual challenges for their context-specific application of IHL's rules on the conduct of hostilities. To reduce the risk of violations, and to preserve control over the effects of any attacks, stringent conditions must be adopted on the use of these AWS; on the types of objects to be targeted, the duration, geographical scope, scale and situations of use, and incorporation of possibilities for effective human supervision, intervention and deactivation, and/or self-destruction or self-neutralization.

The instrument could exclude from the scope of these restrictions the non-autonomous use of weapon systems that have the capacity to function as AWS but are not used as such in specific circumstances.

Further Provisions

Relevant existing IHL provisions could be restated in an instrument, in addition to the more specific provisions listed under sections 6 and 7, such as the prohibition of indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, and the obligations to take all feasible precautions in attack.

National legislation, policy and practical measures are necessary to implement any international instrument at the domestic level. The instrument should require States Parties to take all appropriate legal, administrative and other measures, including the imposition of penal sanctions, to prevent or suppress any activity prohibited to States Parties under the instrument undertaken by persons or on territory under their jurisdiction or control. The obligation to carry out legal reviews could be included in a substantive article, whether in addition to or replacing reaffirmation in the Preamble (see above).

Requirements for testing and training may be considered for incorporation as part of national implementation measures.

The instrument may also need to contain other elements such as:

- reporting requirements
- verification and compliance, and cooperation mechanisms
- procedures for amendments and entry into force.

However, the finalization of elements such as verification mechanisms should not stand in the way of establishing clear prohibitions and restrictions on development and use. Many norms of IHL prohibiting certain weapons have been enacted without such verification provisions.[124]

The ICRC is grateful for the opportunity to share the above views and recommendations on ways to address the challenges and concerns raised by AWS for the Secretary-General's consideration, and stands ready to contribute further to assist States in taking effective action to address the risks posed by AWS.

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123 Language of CCW Amended Protocol II.

124 For instance, the CCW protocols and the Biological Weapons Convention.

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