



Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems

Welcome delegates to the Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) of SharkMUN 2026.

In this committee, delegates will debate one of the most controversial developments in modern warfare: the rise of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS). Advances in artificial intelligence, robotics, and military technology have made it increasingly possible for weapons to identify, track, and engage targets with limited or no direct human intervention.

Supporters of autonomous weapons argue that these technologies may increase military precision, reduce casualties among soldiers, and improve operational efficiency. Critics, however, warn that delegating life-and-death decisions to machines raises serious ethical, legal, humanitarian, and security concerns.

Delegates must evaluate how the international community should regulate or restrict autonomous weapons while balancing national security interests, technological innovation, and international humanitarian law.

DISEC provides the primary United Nations platform for discussions regarding disarmament and global security. Delegates are encouraged to engage in realistic diplomacy, strategic negotiation, and policy-oriented debate throughout committee sessions.



Introduction

Technological innovation has transformed warfare throughout history, from industrial weaponry to cyber operations and artificial intelligence. Today, rapid advances in AI and robotics are accelerating the development of autonomous military systems capable of operating with reduced human oversight.

Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) are weapons capable of selecting and engaging targets independently through sensors, algorithms, and machine-learning technologies. These systems may include autonomous drones, robotic ground systems, naval platforms, and AI-assisted missile defense systems.

The development of LAWS raises major ethical and legal concerns. Critics argue that machines should never possess the authority to make decisions regarding human life without meaningful human control. Questions also emerge regarding accountability if autonomous systems commit war crimes, malfunction, or target civilians.

Supporters argue that autonomous systems may reduce human error, increase battlefield precision, and protect military personnel from dangerous combat environments. Some states additionally consider autonomous technologies essential for maintaining strategic and technological competitiveness.

The issue also creates geopolitical tensions. Major military powers increasingly invest in autonomous weapons development, creating fears of a global AI arms race. Smaller states worry that unequal technological capabilities could destabilize international security and widen military power gaps.



International law currently lacks comprehensive regulations specifically governing autonomous weapons. Existing humanitarian law principles, such as distinction, proportionality, and accountability, remain difficult to apply to fully autonomous systems.

The international community must therefore determine whether autonomous weapons should be regulated, restricted, or prohibited to preserve human oversight, international stability, and humanitarian protections.

Key terms

Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS)

Weapons capable of independently selecting and engaging targets without direct human control.

Meaningful Human Control

The principle that humans should maintain sufficient oversight and decision-making authority over the use of force.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Computer systems capable of performing tasks requiring human-like analysis, learning, and decision-making.



International Humanitarian Law (IHL)

The legal framework regulates conduct during armed conflict and protects civilians and non-combatants.

Background Information

The development of autonomous military technologies has accelerated rapidly in recent years due to advances in AI, robotics, sensors, and computing systems.

Many modern military systems already include semi-autonomous capabilities such as automated defense systems, target recognition software, and autonomous surveillance drones. Some countries continue researching technologies that could operate with minimal human intervention during combat.

Supporters of LAWS argue that autonomous systems may improve military efficiency and reduce casualties by increasing reaction speed and precision. AI-assisted systems may also process battlefield information faster than humans and operate in high-risk environments where human deployment is dangerous.

However, critics warn that autonomous weapons could create severe humanitarian and security risks. Machines may fail to distinguish civilians from combatants, misinterpret data, or behave unpredictably during complex conflicts.

Accountability represents another major challenge. If an autonomous weapon violates



international law, responsibility may become unclear between programmers, commanders, manufacturers, and governments.

The issue additionally raises concerns regarding global arms races. Countries increasingly compete to develop advanced AI-based military technologies to avoid falling behind geopolitical rivals.

Non-state actors and terrorist organizations may also eventually gain access to autonomous technologies, increasing fears regarding assassination systems, mass attacks, and destabilization.

International organizations, scientists, human rights groups, and technology experts have repeatedly called for stronger international regulation regarding autonomous weapons and meaningful human oversight.

Main Countries Involved

China

China rapidly expands research in artificial intelligence and autonomous military systems as part of its strategic modernization programs.





United States

The United States invests heavily in AI-assisted military technologies and supports maintaining flexibility regarding autonomous weapons development.



Russia

Russia actively develops autonomous combat technologies and emphasizes military technological competitiveness.



Israel

Israel is a major developer of autonomous defense technologies and advanced military AI systems.



Pakistan

Pakistan has expressed concerns regarding the destabilizing effects of autonomous weapons and supports stronger international regulations.



Previous attempts to solve the issue

The United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) has hosted multiple international discussions regarding Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems.



The Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on LAWS was established to examine legal, ethical, and military implications associated with autonomous weapons technologies.

Numerous human rights organizations and scientific communities have advocated for preventive international bans or strict regulations regarding fully autonomous weapons.

Some countries support legally binding treaties prohibiting autonomous systems without meaningful human control, while others oppose restrictions that could limit technological and military development.

Despite ongoing negotiations, no comprehensive international treaty currently regulates or prohibits LAWS.

Possible solutions to the issue

1. Establishing international legal frameworks regulating autonomous weapons.
2. Defining and enforcing standards for meaningful human control.
3. Expanding transparency regarding military AI development programs.
4. Strengthening international humanitarian law applications to autonomous systems.
5. Preventing autonomous weapons proliferation to non-state actors.
6. Promoting international oversight and ethical AI governance.



7. Encouraging confidence-building measures between major military powers.
8. Developing global agreements limiting fully autonomous lethal systems.