

UNGA Resolution 79/239, Submission by Austria

Pursuant to the request in operative paragraph 7 of UNGA Resolution 79/239 (“[r]equests the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member States and observer States on the opportunities and challenges posed to international peace and security by the application of artificial intelligence in the military domain, with specific focus on areas other than lethal autonomous weapons systems, and to submit a substantive report summarizing those views and cataloguing existing and emerging normative proposals, with an annex containing these views, to the General Assembly at its eightieth session, for further discussion by States”), Austria would like to share the following reflections and observations on a national basis.

- AI related to cybersecurity and -defence

AI-enabled cybersecurity software is already widely used to help detect intrusions and other malicious activities in computer networks. Such AI tools will likely enable the increasingly automated protection of IT systems, by searching for vulnerabilities and suspicious activities to raise the resilience of software and hardware.

At the same time, AI tools are increasingly used to increase the sophistication of cyber attacks and create novel computer viruses, in a race of offensive against defensive cybersecurity AI models. In addition, AI-enabled software, including Large Language Models (LLMs), lower the entry barrier for malicious actors, who can increasingly create malware without the need for extensive programming skills.

- AI related to disinformation campaigns as an element of hybrid strategies

AI-enabled software to create and disseminate falsified content is increasingly used to enhance disinformation campaigns. Methods used include utilizing Generative AI to create tailor-made and localized content at large scale. Furthermore, AI-driven audio and video deepfake software is rapidly improving and already widely used. Such falsified content can be disseminated using massive AI-driven social media bot networks to create the appearance of shifting public opinion. AI therefore lowers the barriers to conduct large-scale disinformation campaigns, as amount and quality of fake content created is no longer limited by the number or skills of human operators.

However, AI algorithms can also be employed to uncover AI-generated content and astroturfing campaigns, while deceivingly real deep-fake audio and video can best be exposed using specialized AI tools. It is necessary to employ such AI-driven tools to counter the ill effects of AI used for the purpose of disinformation campaigns.

- AI related to the proliferation of weapons

AI can lower the barrier to acquiring weapons, including weapons of mass destruction. Due to their ability to provide expertise at the push of a button, LLMs and the applications based on them could make it easier for malicious actors to manufacture weapons. Use cases range from access to blueprints or printing components for Small Arms and Light Weapons to the modification of pathogens for biological warfare. If readily available knowledge reduces the scope and size of weapons programmes, it will be more difficult to detect, prevent and prepare for these threats.

At the same time, machine learning algorithms can also be used to combat the proliferation of weapons. Due to their anomaly detection and pattern recognition capabilities, they can help identify malicious activities, including through detecting illicit money flows for weapon programmes or analysing patterns in satellite data.

- AI related to arms control verification and decision-making in crisis situations

AI can help with the verification of arms control agreements. This is due to its ability to analyse large amounts of data, for example from sources such as satellite images, and to classify different objects. This makes it possible to identify military equipment such as tanks, missiles and barracks or military activities such as troop movements and exercises. In addition, as already mentioned, illegal weapons programmes could be detected more easily by AI. Violations of arms control agreements would therefore be much more difficult and the states parties could be sure that everyone is complying with the provisions.

More and better information based on the ability of AI to analyse and classify sensor data can not only facilitate the implementation of arms control agreements, but also contribute to better decision-making in situations where military tensions between states are particularly high. Political and military leaders could benefit from AI-supported improved situational awareness to de-escalate crises.

- Peace and security and the UN Charter

A particular challenge relating to applications of AI in the military domain is the potential risks to peace and security through unintended escalation and misunderstandings created through the use of AI. The use of machine-learning adds an additional layer of complexity as the functioning of a system might not be fully understood by all actors.

Measures and guardrails to ensure accountability and responsibility and to mitigate algorithmic bias are needed also for the use of AI in Decision-Support Systems with regard to human-machine interaction and the necessity of human agency.

All these risks have to be mitigated through oversight and measures that take into account the specific challenges that come with these technologies.

It is noted that Article 36 of the 1977 Additional Protocol I to the 1949 Geneva Conventions imposes the obligation to review the legality of all new weapons, means or methods of warfare before they are used in an armed conflict.

AI can be applied also in a way to support the effective implementation of IHL obligations, in particular when it comes to the protection of civilians, as a positive obligation and affirmative action including through specific projects, research and applications specifically designed for this task.

- Frameworks for multilateral cooperation and information exchange

As the issue of AI in the military domain is rapidly developing and presents challenges to all States, multilateral discussions and formats to exchange experiences and best practices are highly relevant. In this regard, Austria endorsed the Political Declaration on Responsible Military Use of Artificial Intelligence and Autonomy. As Co-Chair of the Oversight Working

Group of this Declaration, Austria together with Germany has been facilitating the sharing of best practices in addressing challenges and in formulating policies in this field. Austria also endorsed the REAIM “Blueprint for Action” as well as the “Paris Declaration on Maintaining Human Control in AI enabled Weapon Systems”.

- Relation between the work of the international community related to artificial intelligence in the military domain and the one related to autonomous weapons systems

Within the broader scope of application of AI and autonomy in the military domain, there is the specific issue of autonomous weapons systems to be highlighted. Autonomous weapons systems raise particular concerns from a legal, ethical and security perspective. This issue is not in the focus of UNGA Resolution 79/239, as discussions in the UN framework have already been going on since 2013, with a growing majority of states having expressed their wish to establish rules and limits to autonomous weapons systems at the international level. For this report, Austria would therefore limit its comments to emphasize its position in favour of a legally binding instrument on autonomous weapons systems and to refer here to the important work undertaken currently by the Group of Governmental Experts in the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons as well as the complementary efforts undertaken in the framework of the first ever UNGA Resolution 78/241 on “Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems”, pursuant to which a report was issued by the United Nations Secretary General (UN/79/88) and its follow up Resolution 79/62, which set up informal consultations on “Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems” to take place in New York on 12 and 13 May 2025.

- Considerations related to legal frameworks on Artificial Intelligence

The Artificial Intelligence Act of the EU establishes a legislative framework for the EU for AI systems across various sectors and aims to foster trust in AI applications and to harness the benefits of AI while safeguarding human rights, fundamental freedoms and democratic values. It emphasizes the importance of transparency, accountability and human oversight in the development and deployment of AI systems while promoting legal certainty, innovation and competitiveness. The AI Act does not apply to AI systems developed for military, defence or national security activities. However, the AI Act applies a risk-based approach, which might serve as useful on how to deal with the wide range of potential AI applications in the military domain.

Way forward

Austria values the work undertaken in the various formats and fora mentioned in its contribution regarding AI applications in the military domain and is confident that they will contribute to an emerging set of internationally agreed norms and standards to ensure responsible use of AI in the military domain in accordance with international legal obligations and ethical principles.