

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

## **Report to the U.N. Secretary-General following A/RES/79/239**

The InterAgency Institute was established in December 2020 as a digital think tank, founded by expatriate and Global South women as a collective of researchers. It is in this condition that we address this submission on “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,” following A/RES/79/239. With this, we seek to craft a complementary set of suggestions to develop the policy discussion in points where understanding that AI encompasses a wide array of data-processing techniques, and may be integrated into different types of warfare, in multiple parts of the organization, and at different levels.

The InterAgency Institute would like to point to overarching trends that fall within our areas of expertise, namely: (1) a focus on the global south, specially in how to prevent furthering the security gap; and (2) in how interagency cooperation in a time of greater mistrust may be leveraged to ensure the integration of AI in the military does not. Additionally, we make the point that Decision Support Systems (DSS) create analogous problems when compared to Autonomous Weapon Systems (AWS).

### **1. Addressing the security gap between the Global South and the Global North**

The increasing technological intensity and digitalization of the battlefield are likely to increase the capacity gap between countries in the Global North & South. The “optimization of war” entails furthering this discrepancy, augmenting threats, and deteriorating the global security landscape. The wide range of AI-enabled solutions represents discrepant utility levels across tools.

While some tools require a low threshold (thus providing usually an equally low ceiling), the systems that pose the biggest military advantage require a high knowledge threshold to be implemented, therefore, will likely not be open source, and will only be available to entities with sufficient means to develop or acquire them. Given the experience in past decades on multilateral forums, it is important to recognize that interest in access to these technologies will play a role in the negotiations.

In the long term, the current trend of “technological sovereignty” (or more specifically of restricted technological access due to global inequalities) may be transformed to undermine such technological control, creating far-reaching implications of this new revolution in warfare, involving stakeholders that may be reluctant to shape modern discussions due to a lack of current development of these technologies in their ecosystem.

### **2. InterAgency cooperation in times of distrust**

These issues call for interagency cooperation at both the strategic and operational levels. The lack of interagency cooperation might lead to threat escalation and the eroding foundations for peace and security. Interagency cooperation should focus on formalizing specific channels for communication

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between different States, developing strategies for AI implementation that will not damage diplomatic relations, and generating more transparency in the interactions between agencies and contractors. The participation of different branches of government at the UN-level discussions is pivotal for a whole-of-government perspective in the deliberations. Beyond interagency cooperation at the governmental level, the wide array of applications of military AI calls for different sets of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs).

Since AI may be integrated in different warfare types and at different levels, its applications for different contexts have different ethical implications and consequences. Therefore, a monolithic understanding of risks posed by AI in the military context and consequently a unique set of CBMs would be inadvisable. CBMs for AI use in the strategic level of cyberspace will not be the same as CBMs for AI use in the tactical level of aerial warfare. Therefore, thinking about CBMs for military AI as a monolith will lead to inaccurate and in some cases inapplicable measures, undermining its effectiveness.

There is a necessity for sharing best practices in the introduction of AI into military procedures. In this sense, a trade-off should be made, prioritizing best practices that contribute to strengthening the aforementioned points of interagency cooperation and CMBs, and other practices that fall within the larger umbrella of strengthening international peace and security. Sharing of best practices relating to cybersecurity and reliability of the technology could also take place, but they should give priority to CBMs that focus on integration of AI at the strategic level and in manners that avoid the escalation of threats.

### **3. Decision Support Systems**

Target identification or recognition via AI-enabled Decision Support Systems (DSS) entail analogue problems to Autonomous Weapon Systems (AWS). Digital dehumanization, lowering the threshold of violence, and automation bias are byproducts of that process that may only be avoided by the creation of red lines prohibiting such systems that replicate those concerns.

This problem stems not only from AI, but from a wider trend. Other data processing techniques that involve deterministic sorting of data that is not adequately processed by human operators also generate these problems. This caveat should be made to understand that not only systems with AI-enabled technology in DSS pose these kinds of threats, but a wider array of data gathering/processing techniques.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

- Formal interagency bodies to interface with multilateral AI/military tech negotiations

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- Funding and support for academic research in the Global South focused on military AI implications;
- Regular technical-diplomatic summits focused on transparency, shared definitions, and threat perception;
- Prioritize capacity-building initiatives for Global South actors;
- Red lines and confidence building measures could be tailored to the specific technology and operational context;
- The discussions on Autonomous Weapon Systems encapsulate worries around AI-enabled Decision Support Systems. The creation of red-lines for these systems could benefit from building upon recommendations of the GGE on LAWS;