

Submission to the United Nations Secretary-General on “Artificial intelligence in the military domain and its implications for international peace and security”

Soka Gakkai International

The Soka Gakkai International (SGI) welcomes the opportunity to share our views on the important issue of artificial intelligence (AI) in the military domain. As an NGO whose work is guided by Buddhist principles, we urge that the United Nations, its Member States and other stakeholders take into careful consideration the impact of AI in the military domain from a standpoint of upholding and respecting human dignity.

Introduction

AI in the military domain is rapidly evolving and transforming modern warfare and international peace and security. These systems are being used for various purposes, including surveillance, autonomous weapons, decision-making support, and logistics. With such wide-ranging applications, the integration of AI technologies in military systems poses significant challenges. To better ensure compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL) and uphold protection for civilians and combatants alike there are several issues that we may consider.

Lack of transparency and accountability

- If an AI system were to make an error—such as identifying a target incorrectly—it could be difficult to pinpoint the cause of the error, “the black box problem”. Was it a flaw in the data used to train the AI, an issue with the algorithm, or a problem in the operational context? Without transparency within these systems, assigning responsibility is difficult.
- International laws and treaties, such as the Geneva Conventions, were created before AI systems became commonplace in warfare. Without global norms and legal frameworks, there is no consistent approach to ensuring accountability for AI decisions made in warfare.
- With inadequate accountability mechanisms in place, AI could be used for military strategies that violate human rights, suppress civil liberties, or engage in unethical operations.

Speed of decision-making and risk of escalation

- The ability of a military force to make decisions and execute actions faster than its opponent is increasingly viewed as having a strategic advantage. However, the drive for speed can lead to unintended and costly consequences.
- Decisions made too quickly without proper analysis or consideration can lead to poor outcomes, including tactical blunders, strategic missteps, or ethical violations.
- Instead of diffusing a tense situation or negotiating, if combatants react too quickly it could provoke an even greater confrontation, further escalation and prolonged conflict resulting in more human suffering including amongst civilians.
- The acceleration of decision-making processes closes down the possibility of meaningful human control, the growing trend to automate decision-making threatens the ability to achieve human oversight which is essential to facilitate compliance with IHL.

Bias in AI in the military domain

- AI bias refers to the presence of systematic and unfair discrimination in AI systems, such as historical bias, where systems may reinforce harmful stereotypes, bias in data processing and algorithm development which can lead to making biased decisions and bias in how the systems are used.
- AI bias in the military domain is a significant concern, particularly as AI systems are increasingly being integrated into defense and security operations. The potential for AI bias to emerge in these areas can result in human rights implications, exacerbating existing inequalities and lead to deadly consequences for certain groups.
- AI heavily relies on vast amounts of high-quality and reliable data for decision making. There are several potential violations when it comes to obtaining this data including issues around privacy and surveillance, challenges of bias also arise when dealing with incomplete and inaccurate data.
- When AI systems are biased, they not only perpetuate inequalities but also contribute to the digital dehumanization¹ of marginalized groups.

Proliferation

- Nations may rush to develop AI-based military technologies to outpace their adversaries, which could lead to a destabilizing arms race and increased global tensions.

¹ Digital dehumanization is a process where humans are reduced to data, which is then used to make decisions and/or take actions that negatively affects their lives.

- Without regulation autonomous weapons systems in particular, could proliferate globally, including amongst non-state actors which could increase crime nationally and regionally, exacerbating social inequalities, overwhelm resources and infrastructures of countries, as well as undermine social and national security.

Conclusion

The issue of AI within the military contexts is complex, and without regulation, it could lead to serious consequences for global peace and security. The desire to speed up decision-making processes within this context has yet to be proven as an effective way of resolving conflicts and achieving peace and security. Furthermore, you cannot divorce AI in the military and AI in civil uses, a failure to address AI in a military context could have widespread repercussions in all spheres of civil life including law enforcement, border control, education, housing and health care. Fundamentally, AI is here to stay, how we utilize it in the military and in our lives will shape the course of humanity. We have the possibility and the responsibility to decide how we want to use technology, knowledge, and the world's resources. To use it in a way that uplifts humanity or degrades it? This is an urgent question that requires moral, ethical and courageous leadership.