

Resolution 79/239 “Artificial Intelligence in the military domain and its implications for international peace and security”

Submission by the United States of America

The United States appreciates the opportunity to provide its views on the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in the military domain pursuant to General Assembly resolution 79/239. Advancements in the field of AI are changing warfare. Just as in the civilian domain, these technologies have transformative potential across the full range of military activities, from logistics management to decision-making to autonomy in systems on and off the battlefield. International discussions on AI in the military domain need to be informed by a realistic appraisal of the opportunities and challenges of AI, rather than being driven by fear and speculation over hypothetical capabilities.

The United States is the global leader in the development and deployment of AI technology in the civilian domain. The United States has also led the articulation of measures for the responsible military development, deployment, and use of artificial intelligence capabilities. The United States will lead in harnessing the full potential of AI in the military domain, with the U.S. approach continuing to serve as the gold standard for the rest of the world.

The United States recognizes that concepts of artificial intelligence and autonomy are subject to a range of interpretations. Artificial intelligence may be understood to refer to the ability of machines to perform tasks that would otherwise require human intelligence. This could include recognizing patterns, learning from experience, drawing conclusions, making predictions, or generating recommendations. AI can be used to enable autonomous functions and systems. For example, an AI application could guide or change the behavior of an autonomous physical system or perform tasks that remain purely in the digital realm. Autonomy may be understood as a spectrum and to involve a system operating without further human intervention after activation.

Harnessing the Opportunities of AI in the Military Domain

Just as in the civilian domain, AI affords many opportunities in the military domain to augment the capabilities of personnel, increasing productivity and efficiency and introducing improved ways of working. In particular, AI capabilities can help personnel make better decisions faster.

For example, AI applied to perception tasks can extract useful information from raw data -- alerting operators to hidden dangers and equipping leaders with increased situational awareness. AI capabilities can also support decision-making by generating options for planners and commanders to consider. AI also enables decision advantage by offloading tedious cognitive or physical tasks, reducing the number and costs of mistakes, and enabling personnel to focus attention on higher-value activities.

The transformative potential of AI in the military domain goes far beyond weapon systems. Some of the most significant impacts of AI will be seen in areas such as predictive maintenance; logistics management; training and simulation; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); and decision support.

Across these areas and functions, it is useful to recognize a basic convergence between the military interest in using force as effectively and efficiently as possible and the humanitarian interest in reducing the harmful incidental effects of war. Professional, law-abiding militaries have strong, fundamental interests in avoiding civilian casualties and unnecessary destruction. Thus, using AI to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in military operations also will save lives. For example, AI capabilities can improve commanders' awareness of the presence of civilians and civilian objects in the area of active military operations. Other humanitarian benefits can include: (1) enabling autonomous self-destruct, self-deactivation, or self-neutralization functions; (2) improving assessments of the likely effects of military operations; (3) automating or augmenting target identification, tracking, selection, and engagement; and (4) reducing the need for immediate fires in self-defense.¹

In considering the potential opportunities of AI in the military domain, it is important to be clear-eyed about the current realities of armed conflict without the use of AI capabilities. In war, there are often good faith mistakes and severe risks and harms. In the U.S. view, military AI capabilities can enable better and faster decision making, reduce unintended engagements, enhance awareness across the operational environment, and increase accuracy and precision in the use of force. These capabilities support both military and humanitarian interests, as described above, but they also can increase stability and strengthen international peace and security.

Because novel advances in AI capabilities afford significant opportunities to further military and humanitarian interests, as well as interests in international peace and security, the United States believes that States need to be deliberate in the development of those capabilities. It is important that we not stigmatize new technologies, discourage innovation, or hastily set new international standards which would put those potential benefits at risk. Instead, States should articulate and implement measures for the responsible development, deployment, and use of AI in the military domain.

The United States' Approach is the Gold Standard

The United States Department of Defense (DoD) has for many decades invested in efforts to unlock the transformative potential of AI. In 2018, DoD adopted its first AI strategy, "Harnessing AI to Advance Our Security and Prosperity", which not only articulated the Department's approach for accelerating the adoption of AI but also stated the Department's intention to "lead in the responsible use and development of AI by articulating our vision and guiding principles for using AI in a lawful and ethical manner." DoD has a range of policies, issuances, and other practices that, taken together, constitute the gold standard for responsible military development, deployment, and use of military AI capabilities.

The United States' approach starts with the recognition that the Law of War already provides the applicable framework for the use of AI capabilities, including AI-enabled weapon systems, in armed conflict just like it does for the use of any military capabilities.

¹ These are discussed in 2018 U.S. Working Paper, Humanitarian benefits of emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapon systems, U.N. Doc. CCW/GGE.1/2018/WP.4.

Under the Law of War, the lawfulness of a weapon or other means or method of warfare, as such, does not depend on the presence or absence of authorization, but, on the contrary, depends on whether the weapon or other means or method of warfare is prohibited. Thus, the mere fact that a weapon is novel or employs new technology does not inherently mean that the weapon is illegal. Restrictions on the right of the State to develop or use a new means or method of warfare cannot and should not be presumed. A general prohibition on new technologies would also be inconsistent with humanitarian objects and purposes of the Law of War (*e.g.*, the reduction of unnecessary suffering and the protection of the civilian population) because new technologies can be used to deliver important humanitarian benefits, such as by reducing the risk of civilian casualties in military operations.

No rule of the Law of War prohibits the use of AI capabilities as such. On the contrary, for many decades, States have been using computers in military operations to perform tasks that would otherwise require human intelligence, including to improve decision-making and to enable autonomous functions, without legal controversy. For example, computers have long been used to generate firing tables to assist in the use of artillery. Similarly, fire control computers had been used to improve the accuracy of cannons in ships in World War II. Modern examples include systems such as the AEGIS Weapon System, PATRIOT Air and Missile Defense System, and “lock-on-after-launch” homing weapons. The precision of “lock-on-after-launch” or “homing” munitions, such as Hellfire or Javelin missiles, the High-speed Anti-Radiation Missile (HARM), or SMARt 155 artillery shells, enables targets to be prosecuted with fewer munitions and smaller warheads. Far from prohibiting the use of military AI capabilities, the Law of War encourages the use of such capabilities when they can be used with greater precision and accuracy and less risk to civilians.

Although the Law of War does not specifically prohibit the use of AI capabilities and State practice reflects a recognition that the use of AI capabilities is a legitimate means and method of warfare, the use of AI capabilities can fall under existing principles and rules of the Law of War that regulate an activity regardless of the specific technological means to carry out that activity. For example, the rules on conducting attacks, apply regardless of the means used to conduct the attack. Therefore, if AI capabilities are used as part of a belligerent’s efforts to conduct an attack, then the rules governing attacks will apply to such use of AI capabilities.

The United States recognizes that States, parties to a conflict, and individuals remain legally responsible for their use of AI-enabled military capabilities, as with any other military capability. The legal and policy frameworks that the United States uses to ensure accountability for its activities also apply with respect to the use of military AI capabilities by its personnel. For example, the measures outlined in DoD Directive 2311.01, DoD Law of War Program, such as reporting and investigating incidents involving possible violations, also apply to the context of military use of AI in armed conflict.

DoD has in place an extensive policy framework informed by real-world experience developing and deploying these kinds of capabilities on the battlefield, which will continue to guide the United States’ adoption of AI capabilities in the military domain. This framework includes general policies that can apply to the development and use of AI capabilities, such as requirements for testing and evaluation or standards for system safety, as well as policies that specifically address AI and autonomous weapons. In fact, DoD was the first military in the

world to issue a policy on autonomy in weapon systems. In addition, by making many of its policies and practices publicly accessible, the United States leads States in encouraging the responsible development, deployment, and use of military AI capabilities and enhances international stability.

The Peril of Over-Regulation

As the United States continues to set the bar for the responsible development, deployment, and use of military AI capabilities, we will resist efforts to create restrictions that would stymie legitimate innovation and inhibit responsible development, deployment, and use of these capabilities. As described above, military AI capabilities have significant potential to advance both military objectives and humanitarian interests, as well as to contribute to the strengthening of international peace and security.

Moreover, AI capabilities continue to be developed and as engineers improve the effectiveness of AI capabilities, more situations will likely arise in which the use of AI capabilities is appropriate.

If States adopt ill-conceived restrictions or vague new standards, such as for “meaningful human control”, they threaten to hamper legitimate research, prohibit uses of AI capabilities that many militaries have engaged in for decades, and inhibit the development of AI applications that will save lives.

In the spirit of collaboration, the United States created a forum for such discussions based on the Political Declaration on Responsible Military Use of AI and Autonomy. The Political Declaration articulates ten foundational measures for oversight, accountability, and technical assurance of military AI and autonomous capabilities, such as training personnel, establishing well-defined use cases, and conducting rigorous testing and evaluation of capabilities. As of March 2025, 58 States have endorsed the Political Declaration and joined this forum for government-to-government dialogue on practical steps to implement these measures.

The United States will continue to robustly engage in discussions in multilateral fora on the application of AI in the military domain, including AI and autonomous weapons through the Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) Group of Government Experts (GGE), and we encourage other States to do so as well. At the same time, the United States believes that the creation of a new regulatory process under UN auspices would be inappropriate and undermine efforts to strengthen international peace and security.

Conclusion

The United States believes the Secretary-General's report could contribute to a more balanced and productive international discussion on AI in the military domain. States would benefit from a discussion centered on actual use cases and a realistic assessment of AI technology rather than hype or speculation. The challenges posed by the integration of AI capabilities are not going to be solved by generating new political slogans like “meaningful human control” or developing new legal prohibitions or restrictions. Rather, States should take concrete actions to harness the opportunities for AI in the military domain. In this respect, the United States will continue to set the gold standard and stands ready to work with others to unlock the benefits of AI.