MUNelly Research Report

***Topic**: Extending regulations on the use of AI in autonomous weapon systems to improve global security.*

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence is playing an increasingly important role in the development of autonomous weapon systems, enabling machines to select and engage targets with minimal human intervention. Although these technologies may increase military effectiveness, they also raise significant ethical, legal, and security concerns, particularly in the absence of clear and enforceable international regulations.
Extending existing regulations on the use of AI in autonomous weapon systems is increasingly important to ensure accountability, uphold international humanitarian law, and prevent destabilizing arms races. By strengthening global governance over these technologies, states may reduce the risks of unintended conflict and contribute to improved international security.

2. Key Terms

- **Ceasefire:** A temporary or permanent suspension of armed conflict agreed upon by parties to a conflict.
- **International Humanitarian Law (IHL):** Laws and principles that seek to limit the effects of armed conflict on civilians and civilian infrastructure.
- **Protection of Civilians (PoC):** Actions taken to ensure the safety, dignity, and rights of civilians during armed conflict.
- **Humanitarian Access:** The ability of humanitarian organizations to deliver aid safely and without obstruction.
- **Two-State Solution:** A proposed framework envisioning Israel and Palestine existing as two independent states.
- **CCW:** It is a United Nations treaty that aims to restrict or ban conventional weapons that are considered to cause excessive injury or have indiscriminate effects, especially on civilians.

3. Background & Significance

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence has significantly influenced modern warfare, particularly through the development of autonomous weapon systems that operate with limited human intervention.

As states increasingly invest in these technologies, concerns have emerged over their ethical use, legal accountability, and potential to lower the threshold for armed conflict.

Existing international frameworks have struggled to keep pace with the speed of AI innovation, creating regulatory gaps in the governance of autonomous weapons.

The significance of extending regulations on the use of AI in autonomous weapon systems lies in their potential to enhance global security and stability.

Stronger regulatory measures can help ensure compliance with international humanitarian law, maintain meaningful human control over lethal decisions, and prevent a destabilizing global arms race.

Addressing these challenges is essential to reducing the risks of unintended escalation and safeguarding international peace.

Preventing the misuse of autonomous weapons is a key reason for extending regulations. Clear rules can help protect civilians and non-combatants by ensuring that AI systems operate within the limits of international humanitarian law and are not deployed irresponsibly.

Stronger regulations also reduce the risk of accidental or unaccountable military escalation. By requiring meaningful human control and clear accountability, states can minimize errors, miscalculations, and unintended conflicts arising from autonomous decision-making.

4. Historical Timeline

2012
USA: DoD Directive 3000.09 introduces rules for autonomous weapons, stressing human judgment but allowing autonomy.

2013
UN Human Rights Council: Raises concerns about accountability and human rights risks from autonomous weapons.

2014–2015
CCW (UN): First international discussions and expert meetings on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS).

2016
CCW: Establishment of a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) to explore regulatory options.

2019
CCW: Adoption of guiding principles confirming human responsibility and applicability of international humanitarian law.

2021
UNESCO: Global AI ethics framework calls for human control over life-and-death decisions.

2023
UN General Assembly & The Hague Summit: First UN resolution on autonomous weapons and political declaration on responsible military AI.

2024
UN Secretary-General: Calls for urgent, binding regulation; EU AI Act strengthens global momentum for AI governance.

2025
UN Talks: Renewed negotiations highlight the absence of binding global rules.

2026 (Target)
Global Goal: Legally binding agreement to ban or strictly regulate autonomous weapons without meaningful human control.

5. Past UN and International actions

Organization of UN Meetings of Experts (2015–2016)

The UN convened CCW Meetings of Experts, bringing together states, legal scholars, and technical experts to examine ethical, legal, and security implications of autonomous weapons.

Creation of a UN Group of Governmental Experts (2016)

The UN formally established a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on LAWS, giving the issue a permanent place in the UN arms-control framework.

6. Current Situation

The regulation of AI-enabled autonomous weapon systems is currently under discussion at the United Nations, primarily under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and in the UN General Assembly. However, no legally binding global rules exist so far.

At the same time, autonomous weapons are increasingly being developed and tested in real conflicts. This raises serious concerns about civilian protection, accountability, and the loss of meaningful human control over the use of force.

Human rights organizations and UN officials warn that existing international humanitarian law may not be sufficient to address these risks.

While many states support stronger regulation or a ban on fully autonomous weapons, several major military powers oppose binding restrictions.

As a result, progress is slow, and a gap remains between rapid technological development and effective international regulation, which continues to threaten global security.

7. Key Country Positions

United States

- ➔ Opposes a legally binding ban on autonomous weapons. Argues that existing international humanitarian law is sufficient and prefers national guidelines and human oversight rather than new global rules.

China

- ➔ Supports restrictions on the use of fully autonomous weapons but not a ban on their development or production. Promotes arms-control language while keeping strategic flexibility.

Russia

- ➔ Strongly opposes binding international regulation or bans. Claims that current international law is adequate and views restrictions as harmful to military balance and innovation.

United Kingdom

- ➔ Rejects a binding treaty and maintains that existing international humanitarian law already governs autonomous weapons. Emphasizes national responsibility and human judgment in decision-making.

France

- ➔ Supports regulation through principles rather than bans. Backs human control and international norms within the CCW but resists a legally binding prohibition.

Germany

- ➔ Advocates for stricter regulation and support banning fully autonomous lethal weapons without human control. Emphasizes ethical responsibility and international humanitarian law.

Israel

- ➔ Opposes pre-emptive bans and binding regulation. Argues that autonomous systems can be used responsibly under existing law and stresses national discretion.

Brazil

- ➔ Supports strong international regulation, including a legally binding instrument. Emphasizes human control, accountability, and prevention of an AI arms race.

South Africa

- ➔ Strong supporter of a legally binding treaty or ban. Highlights humanitarian risks, global inequality, and threats to civilian protection.

8. Blocs

Pro-Regulation / Pro-Ban Bloc (Supports extending regulations, often a binding treaty or ban)

Countries:
Germany
Brazil
South Africa
Egypt
Jordan

Middle-Ground / Norm-Based Regulation Bloc (Supports regulation, but not a binding ban)

Countries:
France
Canada
South Korea
Türkiye

Status-Quo / Anti-Ban Military Powers (Opposes new binding regulations)

Countries:
United States
United Kingdom
Russia
Israel

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, extending regulations on the use of AI in autonomous weapon systems is increasingly seen as essential for improving global security.

While there is broad agreement that human control and international humanitarian law must remain central, states remain divided over whether new, legally binding rules are necessary.

Rapid technological development and the growing use of AI in military systems have outpaced existing regulations, increasing risks to civilians, accountability, and international stability.

Without stronger and more consistent international regulation, the likelihood of misuse, arms races, and unintended escalation will continue to grow.

Therefore, advancing global cooperation and establishing clear limits on autonomous weapons will be crucial to ensuring that AI enhances security rather than undermines it.