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SECRETARIAT

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 30th Annual Brigham Young University Model United Nations Conference (BYUMUN)! I am pleased to welcome you to the General Assembly First Committee. Being selected as a participant at this Conference speaks to what kind of student you are, so I congratulate you on your efforts and am eager to see how this experience will shape your future endeavors.

My name is Max Collins and I am the Director of the General Assembly First Committee (GA1). I am currently a junior at BYU studying Political Science and Creative Writing. Last fall, I worked with BYUMUN29 as a member of the Dais for the General Assembly Fourth Committee, and in the spring, I competed with BYU at the National Model United Nations (NMUN) New York Conference representing Turkmenistan for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Participating in Model United Nations has taught me skills and helped me develop abilities that I use in every facet of life, from my studies to my future career. I'm certain it will do the same for you!

The topics under discussion for the General Assembly First Committee are:

- I. Addressing the Use of Lethal Autonomous Weapons;
- II. Biological Weapon Non-Proliferation.

Both of these topics are of the utmost importance and have personal, immediate, and future implications for every citizen of the world. GA1 is responsible for a wide range of critical topics and issues; however, these two issues have been specifically selected based on their urgency and ever-growing impact on the international community. As representatives of your respective Member States, you are expected to devote the necessary time and energy into researching these topics so that you can come to the conference ready to collaborate with your fellow delegates and establish solutions in the pursuit of international peace.

The purpose of this Background Guide is to act as a launch pad for your individual research. During your research, consider your countries' policies and points of view regarding these topics.

If you have any questions regarding the Conference, committee, or topics, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. I look forward to meeting you in November!

Best,

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Committee History

"Indeed, the very first resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations - adopted unanimously - called for the elimination of nuclear weapons."

— Joseph Rotblat, 1995 Nobel Peace Prize Recipient

Introduction

The United Nations General Assembly (GA), established by the *Charter of the United Nations* (1945), was designed to be the main representative body of the United Nations (UN). It is comprised of all 193 Member States and contains six Main Committees, each of which have a specific focus. When a Committee is finished addressing their assigned topics, Member States propose resolutions to be adopted by the GA. These resolutions are not legally binding, but rather seek to establish standards and guidelines for the behavior of the international community. They can also instigate the creation of new treaties and international legal norms. These outcomes are in line with the goal of the GA, which is to discuss and make recommendations for maintaining global peace and cooperation.¹

As one of the six Main Committees, the First Committee considers all matters related to disarmament and international security.² To this end, several disarmament-related entities report to the GA through the First Committee. These include the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) and the Conference on Disarmament.³

Mandate, Functions, and Powers

Being the center of the UN System, the GA and its Main Committees represent the principal deliberative, policymaking, and representative organs; their outcomes thus define new norms that can become treaties or conventions among UN Member States. The GA is tasked with initiating studies and making recommendations to promote international cooperation in the political field; encouraging the development of international law; promoting the implementation of cultural, social, and human rights; and promoting fundamental freedoms free from discrimination. Specifically, Chapter IV, Article 11 of the UN Charter states that “the General Assembly may consider the general principles of co-operation in the maintenance of international peace and security, including the principles governing disarmament and the regulation of armaments, and may make recommendations with regard to such principles to the Members or to the Security Council or to both”.⁴

This mandate has evolved over time, and the growing range of issues facing the international community resulted in the decision to delegate the GA’s role in disarmament and international

¹ Reaching Critical Will, 2014, *UN General Assembly First Committee*, August 28, accessed June 14, 2019, <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/disarmament-fora/unga>.

² United Nations, 2014, *un.org*, July 15, accessed June 14, 2019, <https://www.un.org/en/ga/first/>.

³ Switzerland, 2011, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, Geneva: The Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations, https://www.unitar.org/ny/sites/unitar.org.ny/files/UN_PGA_Handbook.pdf.

⁴ United Nations, 1945, *un.org*, June 26, accessed June 14, 2019, <https://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/>.

security issues to the First Committee.⁵ The question of disarmament is organized into seven clusters: nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), disarmament aspects in outer space, conventional weapons, regional disarmament and security, the disarmament machinery, and other disarmament measures and security.⁶

The mandate of the General Assembly allows it to be a conduit for ideas that can become the driver of new policies and shared norms through discussion and debate.⁷ This can be regarded as one of the main differences between the General Assembly and the Security Council. The Security Council is more concerned with concrete threats to security, including ongoing conflicts, whereas the General Assembly focuses on habits and principles. It is important to note, however, that the General Assembly considers matters of international security only when the issue is not under the consideration of the Security Council.⁸

Recent Sessions and Current Priorities

Prior to the start of the 73rd session, a number of reports were submitted to the First Committee. The majority were from the Secretary-General and discussed issues like the risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons (SALW), leading to the adoption of applicable resolutions in 2018.⁹

At its 73rd session, the First Committee approved a total of twenty-seven draft resolutions, including two separate proposals to develop rules for Member States on responsible cyberspace conduct.¹⁰ Although topics of all kinds were discussed, the majority of draft resolutions focused on nuclear weapons. Other topics included the *African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty*, developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security, the prevention of an arms race in outer space, and making arrangements for the protection of non-nuclear-weapon states against the use of nuclear weapons.

In recent years, the First Committee has, in addition to its traditional focus on nuclear-related topics, placed greater emphasis on information security as Member States become more and more interconnected through technology. During the 73rd session, General Assembly resolutions A/C.1/73/L.65/Rev.1 (2018) and A/C.1/73/L.37 (2018) both addressed the vital role of technology in the context of international security and disarmament. Looking forward to the 74th session, information and telecommunication security are both potential items to be placed on the agenda in addition to biological weapons. Other potential topics include the reduction of military

⁵ UN General Assembly, 1993, "Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly." September 14, accessed June 14, 2019, <https://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/47/a47r233.htm>.

⁶ Switzerland, 2011, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 93.

⁷ Thakur, Ramesh. 2006. *The United Nations, Peace and Security*. Tokyo: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511755996>, 91, 162.

⁸ Switzerland, 2011, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 13.

⁹ UN General Assembly, 2018, "A/C.1/73/L.32," October 19, <https://undocs.org/A/C.1/73/L.32>.

¹⁰ United Nations, 2018, "First Committee Approves 27 Texts, Including 2 Proposing New Groups to Develop Rules for States on Responsible Cyberspace Conduct," Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, November 8, accessed June 27, 2019, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/gadis3619.doc.htm>.

budgets, the role of science and technology in international security and disarmament, as well as women, disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control.¹¹

In addition to information and telecommunication, as technology has developed over the last twenty years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a recurring topic for the GA. Fear over the ability to integrate AI with current weaponry and the potential devastation it presents has rapidly spread over the last five sessions of the GA. The number of Member States speaking out against Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) at the GA has increased from sixteen in 2013 to thirty-four in 2017.¹² As of November 2018, twenty-six Member States have called for a prohibition of fully autonomous weapons.¹³

An increase in awareness and opposition have led the UN to establish a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on LAWS. The first and second meetings of these experts took place during the 72nd Session, where they established a mandate of examining emerging technologies, particularly regarding LAWS, with a view toward identifying the rules and principles that should be applied to such systems.¹⁴ From March 25-29 of this year, the GGE met for the third consecutive year to further discuss developments and strategies surrounding LAWS.¹⁵

Where autonomous weapons have been a relatively recent topic addressed by the First Committee, biological weapons have been a long-recurring theme. As part of an ongoing response to the continued presence of biological weapons, the GA created The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA). UNODA is an organization that supports the First Committee in working toward general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control (UNODA 2019). In 2016, at the eighth Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction (a yearly convention held by UNODA), attending Member States reaffirmed their conviction and the importance of complete international disarmament.

At its 72nd session the following year, the GA adopted a resolution based on the findings of the eighth Review Conference. However, at the 73rd session the First Committee was still grappling with how to eliminate banned lethal biological agents.¹⁶ Recent attacks using lethal chemicals in Syria, Iraq, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom caused delegates to voice concerns over other existing stockpiles, calling for their immediate destruction. Representatives from New Zealand

¹¹ UN General Assembly, 2019, "Annotated Preliminary List of Items to be Included in the Provisional Agenda of the Seventy-fourth Regular Session of the General Assembly," June 14, <https://undocs.org/en/A/73/100>

¹² CSKR, 2018, "UN Head Calls for a Ban," Killer Robots, accessed July 15, 2019, <https://www.stopkillerrobots.org/2018/11/unban/>.

¹³ CSKR, 2018, "Country Views on Killer Robots," accessed July 15, 2019, https://www.stopkillerrobots.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/KRC_CountryViews13Nov2018.pdf

¹⁴ United Nations Office of Geneva – UNOG, 2017, "2017 Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS)," accessed July 15, 2019, [https://www.unog.ch/80256EE600585943/\(httpPages\)/F027DAA4966EB9C7C12580CD0039D7B5?OpenDocument](https://www.unog.ch/80256EE600585943/(httpPages)/F027DAA4966EB9C7C12580CD0039D7B5?OpenDocument).

¹⁵ GGE, 2019, "Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (GGE LAWS)," GIP Digital Watch, accessed July 16, 2019, <https://dig.watch/events/group-governmental-experts-lethal-autonomous-weapons-systems-gge-laws>.

¹⁶ United Nations, 2018, "Amid Reports of Continued Chemical Weapon Use, First Committee Delegates Debate How Best to Effectively Eliminate Banned Lethal Agents," Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, accessed July 16, 2019, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/gadis3608.doc.htm>.

and Ukraine warned that allowing these attacks to go unanswered would undermine basic justice and lead to erosions of regimes currently participating in non-proliferation and disarmament.

Conclusion

Disarmament remains an important issue in the pursuit of international peace. New threats arise every year, complicating questions like nuclear disarmament, the use of arms in outer space, and cyber security threats. New hostile organizations and military regimes seek to undo the progress made by the international community. However, efforts made in the field of combating the illicit trade of SALW and strengthening global counter-terrorism efforts are a testimony of the GA's dedication to a safer world.

Addressing LAWS and Biological Weapons Non-Proliferation are currently the most pressing issues for the First Committee. Resolving both topics will have profoundly positive effects for the global population. And although some argue that the First Committee has not been able to achieve its full potential, it continues to play a critical role in the pursuit of international peace and security.¹⁷

¹⁷ Reaching Critical Will, 2014, *UN General Assembly First Committee*.

Annotated Bibliography

CSKR. 2018. "UN Head Calls for a Ban." Killer Robots. Accessed July 15, 2019.
<https://www.stopkillerrobots.org/2018/11/unban/>.

The CSKR (Campaign to Stop Killer Robots) is a coalition of non-governmental organizations that work to ban fully autonomous weapons. This article discusses the most recent session of the General Assembly and the progress made, including countries' updated stances, regarding autonomous weapons.

CSKR. 2018. "Country Views on Killer Robots." Accessed July 15, 2019.
https://www.stopkillerrobots.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/KRC_CountryViews13Nov2018.pdf

This document contains the most recent monitoring done by the CSKR regarding Member states and other countries who are opposed to, and spoken out against, lethal autonomous weapons.

GGE. 2019. "Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (GGE LAWS)." GIP Digital Watch. Accessed July 16, 2019.
<https://dig.watch/events/group-governmental-experts-lethal-autonomous-weapons-systems-gge-laws>.

This is the third annual meeting of the UN Group of Governmental Experts focused on autonomous weapons systems. Reports from all three days, including the working papers submitted by attending Member States, can be found here.

Reaching Critical Will. 2014. UN General Assembly First Committee. August 28. Accessed June 14, 2019. <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/disarmament-fora/unga>.

Reaching Critical Will is an organization devoted to disarmament and an associated program of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. This article contains their general research into the First Committee's role in disarmament.

Switzerland. 2011. *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. Geneva: The Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations. https://www.unitar.org/ny/sites/unitar.org.ny/files/UN_PGA_Handbook.pdf.

The PGA Handbook is compiled by Switzerland and contains lengthy, detailed descriptions, histories, and functions on the General Assembly and any associated committees. Though not a replacement for the GA Rules of Procedure, it is a helpful addition to better understand how UN bodies relate to each other.

Thakur, Ramesh. 2006. *The United Nations, Peace and Security*. Tokyo: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511755996>.

This book examines the transformation in UN operations, analyzing its changing role and structure. It also addresses the legitimate use of force amid what Thakur argues is an eroding international community.

UN General Assembly. 1993. "Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly." September 14. Accessed June 14, 2019. <https://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/47/a47r233.htm>.

By "revitalization," it is meant that this resolution was adopted in an effort to reorganize the General Assembly. Here we see the formation of the various Committees of the General Assembly with their particular considerations and charges.

UN General Assembly. 2018. "A/C.1/73/L.32." October 19. <https://undocs.org/A/C.1/73/L.32>.

This resolution, adopted during the 73rd session, outlines international assistance given to Member States in an effort to curb the production and distribution of small arms and light weapons.

UN General Assembly. 2019. "Annotated Preliminary List of Items to be Included in the Provisional Agenda of the Seventy-fourth Regular Session of the General Assembly." June 14. <https://undocs.org/en/A/73/100>

This document, compiled in preparation for the 73rd session, contains topics that were to potentially be placed on the agenda for the General Assembly. It contains topics that concern the First Committee, and although not all of the items ended up on the finalized agenda, the list can still be useful as a source of ideas for what types of issues the First Committee considers addressing.

United Nations. 2018. "Amid Reports of Continued Chemical Weapon Use, First Committee Delegates Debate How Best to Effectively Eliminate Banned Lethal Agents." Meetings Coverage and Press Releases. Accessed July 16, 2019. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/gadis3608.doc.htm>.

This webpage highlights unresolved issues surrounding biological weapons following the 73rd session.

United Nations. 2018. "First Committee Approves 27 Texts, Including 2 Proposing New Groups to Develop Rules for States on Responsible Cyberspace Conduct". Meetings Coverage and Press Releases. November 8. Accessed June 27, 2019. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/gadis3619.doc.htm>.

This webpage contains the official post-meeting coverage of the First Committee's thirtieth and thirty-first meetings at the 73rd session, which took place in October and November of 2018.

United Nations. 2014. *un.org*. July 15. Accessed June 14, 2019.
<https://www.un.org/en/ga/first/>.

The official webpage of the United Nations General Assembly First Committee, outlining its duties, concerned matters, working methods, and landmark documents.

United Nations. 1945. *un.org*. June 26. Accessed June 14, 2019.
<https://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/>.

The Charter of the United Nations.

United Nations Office for Disarmament - UNODA. 2019. "About Us – UNODA." United Nations. Accessed July 16, 2019. <https://www.un.org/disarmament/about/>.

This website contains some of the background and purposes of UNODA

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. 2017. "Final Document of the Eighth Review Conference." Accessed July 16, 2019.
[https://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/\(httpAssets\)/3604FF0C6D1C7C80C12582100046035D/\\$file/BWCCONF.VIII4 Final Document of the 8RC.pdf](https://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/(httpAssets)/3604FF0C6D1C7C80C12582100046035D/$file/BWCCONF.VIII4%20Final%20Document%20of%20the%208RC.pdf).

This document contains the notes, findings, and resolutions made by attending Member States at UNODA's convention on biological weapons.

United Nations Office of Geneva - UNOG. 2017. "2017 Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS)." Accessed July 15, 2019.
[https://www.unog.ch/80256EE600585943/\(httpPages\)/F027DAA4966EB9C7C12580CD0039D7B5?OpenDocument](https://www.unog.ch/80256EE600585943/(httpPages)/F027DAA4966EB9C7C12580CD0039D7B5?OpenDocument).

This website provides an overview of the 2017 session of the General Assembly that saw the formation of a group of experts focused on addressing the needs arising from developments in autonomous weapons systems.

I. Addressing the Use and Development of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems

“Machines with the power and discretion to take lives without human involvement are politically unacceptable, morally repugnant, and should be prohibited by international law.”

— António Guterres, UN Secretary-General

Introduction

During the Second World War, Alan Turing, a British computer scientist, invented what would come to be considered the first computer. A decade later in 1956, the term “Artificial Intelligence” (AI) would first be adopted at a computer science conference held at Dartmouth College. Over the next several decades, massive strides would be made in the field of machine learning, a precursor to AI, including the development of the first ‘intelligent’ humanoid robot. In the mid-1990s, due to a surge in AI investments in America and Japan, technology was approaching a point where computer processors could handle the massive amounts of data required for AI programming.¹⁸

Since then, technology has seen exponential growth regarding processor power, with the last two decades containing some of the most significant advancements in the history of modern computing. Because of these advancements, military technology has become synonymous with computer technology. Today, computer technology plays a significant role in military training, communication, testing, and more. Military crises like the Cold War are even responsible for the pursuit and development of supercomputers.¹⁹ Additionally, world governments and corporations are all racing to develop better AI technology. Amazon’s Alexa and Google’s Assistant are obvious examples of AI development moving from the fringe of the tech world into the mainstream.

In order to better understand the potential vulnerabilities of AI, it helps to understand the shortcomings of algorithms. Simply put, an algorithm is a set of instructions, a kind of recipe that performs an action when it is commanded to. AI is a group of self-modifying algorithms that can edit existing algorithms and create original ones as it learns and takes in new external data.²⁰ The ability of AI to function continuously, independent of any human intervention, is simultaneously one of its most appealing features and daunting traits. Because current AI approaches rely on these machine-learning algorithms, inherent susceptibilities exist in addition to outside algorithm manipulation (hacking) and the misappropriation of collected data.

The developing rate of technology and its application for world militaries will continue to result in weaponry that is more efficient, lethal, and accessible. The First Committee feels that a lack of action on LAWS could leave countless future human lives, non-civilian and civilian alike, to be

¹⁸ Shaan Ray, 2018, *Towards Data Science*, August 11, accessed July 1, 2019, <https://towardsdatascience.com/history-of-ai-484a86fc16ef>.

¹⁹ U.S. Army Research Lab, 2019, *ARL Computing History*, accessed July 1, 2019, <https://www.arl.army.mil/www/default.cfm?page=148>.

²⁰ Kaya Ismail, 2018, *CMS Wire*, October 26, accessed July 5, 2019, <https://www.cmswire.com/information-management/ai-vs-algorithms-whats-the-difference/>.

decided by computer programming. Already, global defense forces are using AI in instances like surveillance drones that observe civilians in militarized areas and cybersecurity teams that prevent hostile online invaders from gaining control over vital military communications, including early-warning defense systems that protect against nuclear threats.²¹

International and Regional Framework

At the 71st session of the United Nations General Assembly (GA) on 29 September 2016, the Director of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), an organization affiliated with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) that supports forming, understanding, and implementing policies on crime prevention, announced the opening of the first Centre on Artificial Intelligence and Robotics within the UN.²² The purpose of the Centre is to improve international understanding of the risks and benefits of AI and improve coordination and understanding among policy makers and government officials. Since 2017, the Centre has published several reports to the GA and other international criminal justice organizations. One such report highlighted a meeting between UNICRI and Interpol in July 2018 that addressed the contribution AI makes to law enforcement, which notes that AI is “not a future possibility, but rather a present reality.”²³

AI is also being considered by other UN committees as a potentially viable solution to a number of problems, both current and future. For example, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Second Committee are considering how AI could aid sustainable development projects.²⁴ However, Article 11 of the *Charter of the United Nations* makes clear the role of the First Committee with regards to AI. As AI has become more prevalent in the technological world, so too has it become a pressing topic for the First Committee. With the rapid development of Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWS), the mandate to regulate armaments and call attention to situations likely to endanger international peace and security will likewise soon apply to AI and LAWS alike.

Another organization concerned with AI inside the UN is the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR). Beginning in 2013, the UNIDIR began a two-year, three-phase research project aimed at addressing the Weaponization of Increasingly Autonomous Technologies.²⁵ Member States involved in this project include Canada, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, demonstrating the international community’s strong interest in the future of autonomous weapons. Each phase of the UNIDIR also has a different focus: the first

²¹ Naveen Joshi, 2018, *Forbes*, August 26, accessed July 1, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/cognitiveworld/2018/08/26/4-ways-the-global-defense-forces-are-using-ai/#27be5b35503e>.

²² UNICRI, 2017, *UNICRI Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics*, April 28, accessed July 2, 2019, http://www.unicri.it/in_focus/on/UNICRI_Centre_Artificial_Robotics.

²³ UNICRI, 2019, "New Report: Artificial Intelligence and Robotics for Law Enforcement The Hague, 21 March 2019," United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, accessed July 18, 2019, http://www.unicri.it/news/article/Artificial_Intelligence_Robotics_Report.

²⁴ Future of Life Institute, 2015, *AI Policy - United Nations*, October 15, accessed July 2, 2019, <https://futureoflife.org/ai-policy-united-nations/>.

²⁵ UNIDIR, 2017, "The Weaponization of Increasingly Autonomous Technologies: Concerns, Characteristics and Definitional Approaches," Observation Report no. 6, Geneva.

deals with implications for security and arms control; the second addresses competing narratives; the third aims to promote practical understanding among policy makers of any potential challenges. The UNIDIR has also released eight publications since 2014, all focused on different aspects of the weaponization of increasingly autonomous technologies. The most recent publication specifically addresses AI.

Role of the International System

As the primary body within the UN responsible for ensuring international peace, the First Committee of the GA must take an active, preventative role in framing and guiding regulations for weapons, technology, and weapons-technology whenever it poses a threat to international security or potentially requires disarmament. Although AI has been shown to be a boon in a number of legitimate, humanitarian ways, its viability for weaponization and mass destruction requires that the First Committee consider the future of AI now, before it becomes a fully functioning member of the modern battlefield.

Because of the rapid pace of technological advancement over the previous two decades, the international community has seen an explosion of AI-related activity. In 2013, the States Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) began discussions on “emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons systems” in an effort to get ahead of what they saw as an inevitable union between AI and global militaries.²⁶ These discussions would continue until July 2017, when the Secretary-General’s Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters recommended the GA commission UNIDIR to study the possible impact of AI on international security. While the majority of agencies working on AI do so in the hopes of improving response to disease outbreaks, energy monitoring, sustainable development, among other social concerns, the responses from the Secretary-General are all due to unavoidable, but hopefully preventable, risks AI presents in maturing autonomous systems.

The annual “AI for Good Global Summit” was first held in 2017, connecting AI developers with public and/or private sector policy-makers. The 2018 Summit resulted in a UN-wide partnership of different agencies purposed towards scaling-up AI solutions and fostering inter-agency collaboration. According to a report following the 2018 Summit, the UN currently has at least twenty-seven different agencies researching or utilizing AI in some way.²⁷ Of those agencies, at least seven are affiliated with the aims of the First Committee.

The Current Status on LAWS and AI

Several themes exist that are central to the relationship between artificial intelligence and international security. One of these themes is concern over the functionality of LAWS. Functionality includes the impending deployment of AI, the potential increase in reliance on AI, and any associated accidents that are not uncommon among machines. These accidents include things like coding and design errors that may cause the machine to malfunction. User-errors due to insufficient training, poor interface design, and automation bias may also result in accidents.

²⁶ United Nations, 2018, "United Nations Activities on Artificial Intelligence (AI)," https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/opb/gen/S-GEN-UNACT-2018-1-PDF-E.pdf, 40.

²⁷ United Nations, 2018. "United Nations Activities on Artificial Intelligence (AI)."

One of the most alarming potential functionality accidents involves concerns over hacking, jamming, the misidentification of civilians as targets, and enemies using civilians as human shields.²⁸

Legitimately programmed algorithms are alleged to have been used in the influencing of foreign elections. Critics suggest that eventually, mature AI will be used to enhance cyber-attacks and even create and control cyberweapons.²⁹ The aforementioned ability of AI to expand and adapt autonomously makes the prospect of these potential cyberweapons (including LAWS), and the First Committee's charge to maintain international security, all the more pressing.

Conclusion

Of all the technological advancements of the previous two decades, LAWS have the highest potential to fundamentally change the nature of international conflict. When everything from security measures to social interactions are assisted by AI, it is only natural to assume that global militaries will follow suit.

As the international community develops an increased reliance on AI, interactions on the battlefield will be irrevocably altered – we may find conflicts increasing in frequency as the cost of human life decreases. This will necessitate that military decisions be made faster as national vulnerabilities are more rapidly exposed, causing security actors to function in a constant state of high alert, permanently affecting international security. The mandate of the First Committee requires that AI and LAWS be addressed, and potential issues quickly resolved.

Questions to Consider

1. What specific regulations could be implemented to reap the benefits of AI while curbing potential conflict?
2. Looking at existing committees and organizations, how can the UN more efficiently address AI problems as they arise?
3. How can your Member State contribute to the AI question?

²⁸ UNIDIR. 2016. "Safety, Unintentional Risk and Accidents in the Weaponization of Increasingly Autonomous Technologies." Observation Report no. 5, Geneva.

²⁹ United Nations, 2018, "United Nations Activities on Artificial Intelligence (AI)," 40.

Annotated Bibliography

Future of Life Institute. 2015. *AI Policy - United Nations*. October 15. Accessed July 2, 2019. <https://futureoflife.org/ai-policy-united-nations/>.

The Future of Life Institute is an organization that aims to catalyze and support research initiatives for a safe future, with a particular emphasis in considering new technologies. This article provides an overview of the recent, current, and future plans of the UN regarding AI policy.

Ismail, Kaya. 2018. *CMS Wire*. October 26. Accessed July 5, 2019. <https://www.cmswire.com/information-management/ai-vs-algorithms-whats-the-difference/>.

This article examines the differences between AI and algorithms, their pros and cons, and best use cases.

Joshi, Naveen. 2018. *Forbes*. August 26. Accessed July 1, 2019. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/cognitiveworld/2018/08/26/4-ways-the-global-defense-forces-are-using-ai/#27be5b35503e>.

This article examines four different ways global defense forces use AI, including surveillance, soldiers, information analyzation, and cybersecurity.

Ray, Shaan. 2018. *Towards Data Science*. August 11. Accessed July 1, 2019. <https://towardsdatascience.com/history-of-ai-484a86fc16ef>.

This document contains a history of AI technology, beginning with the birth of computing and noting every major advancement from World War Two to the modern day.

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II. Biological Weapon Non-Proliferation

“We need the UN to deal with the threats to our common security from nuclear, chemical and biological weapons... They must be tackled by the international community together, by strengthening conventions, treaties and agreements.”

— Anna Lindh, Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs (1998-2003)

Introduction

Biological weaponry has a long history; the earliest recorded biological attacks date back to 1155 CE.³⁰ Since then, various biological agents, including viruses, bacteria, and toxins, have been used against individual and national enemies by countries hoping to gain an upper hand during military conflicts. Examples include the Mongols catapulting plague-ridden bodies over city walls, the Spanish selling leprosy-tainted wine to the French, and the British distributing blankets contaminated with smallpox to Native Americans.³¹

Over the last one hundred years, the diversity and lethality of biological agents has substantially increased. In World War Two alone, the Japanese Imperial Army used biological weapons to infect around 1000 water wells, rice fields, and roadways in Chinese cities, leading to more than 30,000 deaths (even after the war had ended).³² Additionally, it is not only state-sponsored research programs that the international community must concern itself with; individuals and non-governmental groups also have access to dangerous microorganisms, allowing opportunities for extremist factions and cults to conduct attacks on local communities.³³

Following World War Two and decades of study into weaponized agents, world leaders quickly realized that biological weapons could become “the poor man’s nuclear bomb” and sought to outlaw completely their production and stockpiling. However, this would not be the first time the international community attempted to solve the bio-weapons problem. In 1874, fifteen European States met in Brussels to try and draft an international agreement concerning the laws and customs of war.³⁴ Article Thirteen of the Brussels Declaration contains some of the earliest language in an international document outlawing certain behavior in warfare, including “employment of poison or poisoned weapons.”³⁵ Though the draft would ultimately not be ratified, it was an important step in the movement towards codifying laws of war. Years later in

³⁰ Friedrich Frischknecht, "The History of Biological Warfare," *EMBO Reports* 4, Suppl 1 (2003), doi: 10.1038/sj.embor.embor849, 48.

³¹ Friedrich Frischknecht, "The History of Biological Warfare," Table 1.

³² *Ibid*, 48.

³³ *Supra*, 49-50.

³⁴ International Committee of the Red Cross, 2017, "Project of an International Declaration concerning the Laws and Customs of War," Treaties, States Parties, and Commentaries - Brussels Declaration, 1874, accessed July 19, 2019, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/135>.

³⁵ Brussels, 1874, "Project of an International Declaration concerning the Laws and Customs of War," *Brussels Declaration 1874*, accessed July 19, 2019, <https://web.ics.purdue.edu/~wggray/Teaching/His300/Handouts/Brussels-1874.html>.

1899, a convention held at the Hague would see the successful ban “of asphyxiating or deleterious gases” and “poison or poisoned weapons.”³⁶

Unfortunately, the use and development of biological weapons continues today, despite numerous calls for bans and prohibitions on development. At the 73rd session of the First Committee last October, delegates discussed how to effectively address continued threats and ensure the destruction of remaining stockpiles. Many pointed out the disturbing chemical attacks that have transpired in the Middle East. Representatives from Kazakhstan and Nepal both called for better mechanisms to suppress the threat posed by biological weapons.³⁷

International and Regional Framework

In 1972, the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) would be opened for signing by the international community. Three years later in 1975, it would become the first multilateral disarmament treaty banning an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. The BWC is sponsored by 182 Member States (including Palestine) and has five signatories. Specifically, the BWC bans the development, stockpiling, acquisition, retention, and production of biological agents and toxins that have “no justification for...peaceful purposes.” Likewise, the Convention bans any weapons, equipment, or vehicles “designed to use such agents or toxins for hostile purposes in armed conflict,” as well as the transfer of or assistance with acquiring anything previously described.³⁸ Though the BWC does not explicitly ban the use of these biological weapons, it does reaffirm the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which prohibits the use of chemical and biological weapons in war.

After the initial 1972 meeting, Review Conferences of the BWC would be held every few years to evaluate progress, updates, establish new bodies of experts, and make recommendations to the GA. The Second Review Conference was held a decade later, where Member States agreed to implement new confidence-building measures. These measures were designed to reduce ambiguities, doubts, and suspicions in order to improve international cooperation regarding biological weapons non-proliferation. A Third Review Conference, held in 1991, would expand on these measures.³⁹

The most recent meeting was at the Eighth Review Conference held in 2016. By its end, States Parties submitted eighty-three working papers covering topics like new developments in science and technology, codes of conduct for biological scientists, and the Geneva Protocol.⁴⁰ However, where hopes had been high prior to the start of the Conference, by the end the general feeling among many States Parties was one of disappointment and frustration.

³⁶ Detlev F. Vagts "The Hague Conventions and Arms Control," *The American Journal of International Law* 94, no. 1 (2000): 31-41, doi:10.2307/2555229.

³⁷ United Nations, 2018, "Amid Reports of Continued Chemical Weapon Use, First Committee Delegates Debate How Best to Effectively Eliminate Banned Lethal Agents," Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, accessed July 16, 2019, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/gadis3608.doc.htm>.

³⁸ Daryl Kimball, 2018, "Fact Sheets & Briefs," The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) At A Glance | Arms Control Association, accessed July 20, 2019, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/bwc>.

³⁹ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, 2019, "Biological Weapons – UNODA," United Nations, accessed July 20, 2019, <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/bio/>.

⁴⁰ Maylis David, Ekaterina Konovalova, and Clarisse Bertherat, 2017, *Trust and Verify*, no. 155, <http://www.vertic.org/media/assets/TV/TV155.pdf>.

Role of the International System

Because of its concern with disarmament, the First Committee is responsible for regulating the future of biological weapons. However, a number of other agencies, like the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), are designed to help address the biological weapons problem.

The Special Sessions of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament (SSOD) are unique meetings of the GA, only called when occasion may require. There have only been three SSOD's in the history of the UN: SSOD-I in 1978, SSOD-II 1982, and SSOD-III 1988. Of these, SSOD-I was the only Session to produce a final document, though the other sessions were able to make successful recommendations to the GA. The final document of SSOD-I also led to the establishment of other disarmament organizations that persist today.

UNODA was originally established in 1982 on the recommendation of the GA's SSOD-II. It supports the ultimate goal of general and complete disarmament under effective international control; weapons of mass destruction, which biological weapons are classified as, are of primary concern due to their destructive power and threat posed to humanity. Additionally, the Office also addresses the humanitarian impact of weapons technologies, highlighting the increased attention these issues has received from the international community. One of UNODA's roles is to provide support for norm-setting in the area of disarmament through the work of the First Committee, the Disarmament Commission (UNDC), and the Conference on Disarmament (CD).⁴¹

The UNDC that functions today was established by SSOD-I in June 1978 as a successor to the original Disarmament Commission created in 1952. It is a subsidiary organ of the GA mandated to consider and make recommendations on various disarmament-related issues. The Commission also follows up on relevant decisions and recommendations of the special sessions. The body of the Commission consists of all Member States and holds yearly sessions to discuss disarmament-related questions.

The Conference on Disarmament (CD) was also recognized by the First SSOD in 1978; it was to be the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community, succeeding other organizations like the Ten-Nation Committee on Disarmament, the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament, and the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament. While in session, the CD discusses any multilateral arms control or disarmament concern. The CD submits annual reports to the GA that are used to negotiate major arms limitation agreements, such as the Production and Stockpiling of bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction. Currently, one of the CD's primary concerns is new types of weapons of mass destruction and new systems of such weapons (including biological and chemical weapons).

Implementing Existing Biological Weapons Frameworks

The 1972 BWC banned the development, stockpiling, transfer, and use of biological weapons. However, it did not include any formal measures to ensure compliance by Member States.

⁴¹ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, 2017, "About Us – UNODA," United Nations, <https://www.un.org/disarmament/about/>.

Lacking an enforcement mechanism, the effectiveness of the BWC has since been undermined and rendered incapable of preventing systematic violations over the last four decades. The 1972 BWC also lacks a formal inspection regime to monitor violations of the Convention. These two missing aspects of the BWC led to an increase in countries pursuing biological weapons, with the total number going from five to twelve over from 1972 to 1997. In an effort to increase transparency and deter violations of the BWC, Member States held another Convention in 1994 to negotiate a more legally binding protocol.

At the Sixth Review Conference of the BWC held in 2007, it was decided that an Implementation Support Unit (ISU) was needed to assist the Convention within the United Nations Office at Geneva, a branch of UNODA. This ISU would be renewed by the Seventh and Eighth Review Conferences, prolonging the ISU's mandate through 2021. The ISU provides administrative support, support for implementation at the national level, and support for Confidence-Building Measures and obtaining universality. To this end, the ISU assists the Chair of the review conference and States Parties, conducts outreach with signatories and states not party to the BWC, maintains details of progress towards universality, and reports on any progress to the Meeting of States Parties.

Problems such as accountability, enforcement, and monitoring still require permanent solutions. Biological weapons are unique – where chemical weapons must be produced in multi-ton quantities, only fractional amounts of biological agents are needed to be militarily significant. Likewise, biological toxins and pathogens have a number of peaceful or defensive applications, making an outright prohibition more difficult than their nuclear counterparts. Because of this and other dual-use dilemmas, the BWC Protocol was not designed to be capable of detecting violations with a level of confidence comparable to that of verification systems for treaties controlling nuclear or chemical arms.

Conclusion

Since the earliest wars of the modern era, biological weapons have been a prevalent topic for policy-makers and military strategists. Their effectiveness on the battlefield led to a massive proliferation in the early-20th century, warranting the attention of international leaders and peacekeepers. Since the inception of international organizations like the UN, the containment and control of biological arms has been a constant source of discussion and debate.

If biological weapons continue to exist in the modern day, they pose a threat not only to the region of conflict, but the entire world population. The contagious and lethal nature of these agents make biological weapons both unpredictable and the responsibility of the international community and the First Committee. Thus, the total non-proliferation of biological weapons is one of the most important topics the Committee can address.

Questions to Consider

1. What legitimate deterrents will help the discontinuation of the use of biological weapons on the battlefield?
2. What is my Member State's history with biological weapons?
3. How would a total proliferation of biological weapons benefit the international community, my continental region, and my domestic affairs?
4. What strategies or organizations does the UN potentially lack to accomplish this goal?

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This is the 1874 Brussels Declaration, one of the earliest documents attempting to codify rules of procedure for warfare between international powers.

David, Maylis, Ekaternina Konovalova, and Clarisse Bertherat. 2017. *Trust and Verify*, no. 155. <http://www.vertic.org/media/assets/TV/TV155.pdf>.

A publication considering the outcome of the Biological Weapons Convention Eighth Review Conference

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This journal article contains a brief history of biological warfare from the last nine hundred years, with an emphasis on the developments made during the twentieth century. Here, Frischknecht focuses on the scientists responsible for expanding the number of weaponized agents, the reactions of world governments, and their martial impacts.

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This website contains histories on a number of treaties and other international legal documents. It also contains the documents themselves and is useful for providing context about previous efforts made by the international community regarding certain military agreements.

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This webpage highlights unresolved issues surrounding biological weapons following the 73rd session.

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. 2017. "About Us – UNODA." United Nations. <https://www.un.org/disarmament/about/>.

This webpage contains a brief overview of the relevant duties, mandates, and concerns of UNODA. It is helpful in gaining an understanding about one of the more important subsidiary bodies of the First Committee.

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. 2019. "Biological Weapons – UNODA." United Nations. United Nations. Accessed July 20, 2019. <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/bio/>.

This website provides a useful history of some of the recent actions taken by the UN in the effort against biological weapons.

Vagts, Detlev F. "The Hague Conventions and Arms Control." *The American Journal of International Law* 94, no. 1 (2000): 31-41. doi:10.2307/2555229.

This journal article discusses the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907, the conventions they produced, and how they marked the beginning of international arms control.