

Forum: Security Council

Issue: Addressing the Military Use of Artificial Intelligence in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict.

Student Officer: Victor Kubler

Position: President

Introduction

Ever since February 2022, the war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine has developed into one of the most technologically advanced conflicts in human history. Both sides have used a large number of drones to observe the battlefield, to defend their own territory and to strike enemy targets. Though, as time moves on, these drones increasingly rely on artificial intelligence to navigate and to identify objects in their surroundings. In some cases, they have also been used to select targets instead of humans.

Both countries have developed and started to use these technologies to the point that each has their own resources. Ukraine said that AI helps their forces operate even with enemy jamming and it reduces the risks to their soldiers. Russia has also implemented their drones with AI features and has created systems that can attack and act on their own with little operator intervention. Many claims about these systems do come from the countries themselves, therefore it is difficult to verify the integrity of the information.

Supporters of military AI argue that using AI can make strikes more precise and protect certain personnel. However, some argue that machines may make mistakes that lead to serious outcomes, such as harming civilians. After such outcomes, the responsibility also becomes unclear on whom to blame as it was a machine that made the decision.

Finally, these changes to the war raise important questions for everyone. The existing rules of war do apply to all weapons; however, these rules slowly become outdated as modern technologies grow further away from the tools that existed during the creation of such rules.

Definition of Key Terms

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Computer systems that perform tasks that normally require human intelligence. Examples vary from recognising objects in images, planning routes, or making predictions. In a military context, AI can be used for similar functions like navigating through the battlefield, recognising a target, and analysing the battlefield data.

Autonomous Weapons System (AWS)

A weapon that selects and engages on specific targets based on input information from its sensors and backing data without a human choosing the target during the attack. The sub-term “Lethal Autonomous Weapons System” (LAWS) refers to those that were designed to cause death or to harm. However, there is no universally agreed definition and the how each one interprets “autonomy” ranges from limited, such as AI only assisting the attack during the final stages, to fully controlling the weapon during the entire attack.

Human Control

The degree to which a human being supervises, controls, and could override a weapon. Many states and organisations do argue that it is necessary for human judgement to exist in this context to ensure weapons are used lawfully. However, the exact amount of control and the way the weapon must be controlled remain heavily debated on.

International Humanitarian Law (IHL)

Also named as the laws of war, it is the set of rules that limit how armed conflicts should be fought and protects civilians. The core principles include distinction (telling soldiers from civilians), proportionality (avoiding excessive harm to civilians, it is best to keep it as low as possible), and precaution (steps taken prior to limit harm).

Electronic Warfare (EW)

The use of radio signals and technology to disrupt, block, or deceive an opponent’s communications and navigation. This includes jamming the link between a drone and its respective operator. EW is a major reason that both sides are developing drones that can operate without continuous human intervention.

Loitering Munition

A drone carrying explosives that flies toward or circles an area before striking a target. Informally known as a “kamikaze” drone, examples in this context include Russia’s Lancet and Shahed drones.

Drone Swarm

Large group of drones that communicate between each other and coordinating together. Potentially with AI, it can adapt without direct human instructions. Research consider swarms a probable future to military AI. However, this “swarm intelligence” would make human supervision much more difficult.

Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW)

A United Nations treaty framework in Geneva that restricts specific weapons that are considered excessively harmful. Its Group of Governmental Experts have been the main forum for discussing autonomous weapons and it makes decisions by a consensus.

Two-Tier Approach

A proposed framework for regulating autonomous weapons separated into two major parts. The first tier would prohibit systems that cannot be used as they do not fall in line with IHL or that operate without human control. The second tier would place limits and conditions on all other autonomous weapons. The UN Secretary-General and the ICRC have promoted it.

Background

How Autonomy Works and Why It Became Attractive

Autonomy in a drone is not a simple switch to turn it on and off. Instead, it acts like a range from minimal to full. At one end, a pilot controls every movement through a live video feed. On the other side, a drone can search for, choose and attack a target all by itself with background and sensor input data. Most systems used in the current situation fall somewhere in between these two points. A common example is a drone where the pilot firsts select a target after nearing their destination and then hands control to the onboard AI that flies the last few hundred metres. These systems typically rely on computer vision (camera sensors, infrared sensors etc.) in which the sensors and software communicate with each other to recognise shapes such as vehicles, then communicating with the onboard motors to track them and to steer toward them.

An important driver to this shift has been EW. Both sides jamming the radio signals that connect drones to their operators lead to remote controlled drones to fail mid flight and cause unwanted issues. Now, both sides have started to rely on either connecting the drones to optic fibre cable or to simply implement an onboard AI. A drone with AI capabilities can keep flying and potentially complete its own mission even when the signal runs out. However, costs matter as well, though it has been getting more affordable as some AI guidance kits are currently reported to sell in Ukraine for as little as 150 USD.



Figure 1: A photo of a Ukrainian frontline village covered by fibre-optic cables like a spiderweb. (The Chosun Daily)

Drones in the Conflict: Ukraine and Russia

Drones have become central to the war for both sides: Ukraine has expanded their national production to industrial levels after the April 2022 DJI ban. Analysts estimated that over three million drones a year have been received by the Ukraine defence. The approach emphasises modular AI packages, including chips and software that can be fitted onto various drone types. Ukrainian officials and companies have described these tools as a necessary step to defend against a vastly larger opponent. Most reported systems still do involve some levels of human participation, though Ukraine has claimed that they have gotten more advances autonomous systems in development.



Figure 2: Ukrainian FPV (First Person View) attack drone equipped with a warhead and a system that carries out the final stage of the attack autonomously. (Forbes)

Russia has developed a large-scale production of long range Shahed-type drones to be launched in waves against Ukrainian cities and infrastructure. Originally sourced from Iran, Russia has recently shifted their Shahed attack drone supply chain from importing from Iran to localised and inland mass production. It is reported to be quite behind Ukraine in autonomous systems, but some say that they are closing the gap. The Lancet loitering munitions have been upgraded with an AI targeting module, and researchers describe that the V2U drone has been configured to select and engage targets even after launch without operator input. There have already been recorded cases of fully autonomous Russian attack drone launches and many similar claims with Ukraine stating that drones caused most Russian battlefield casualties in early 2026.

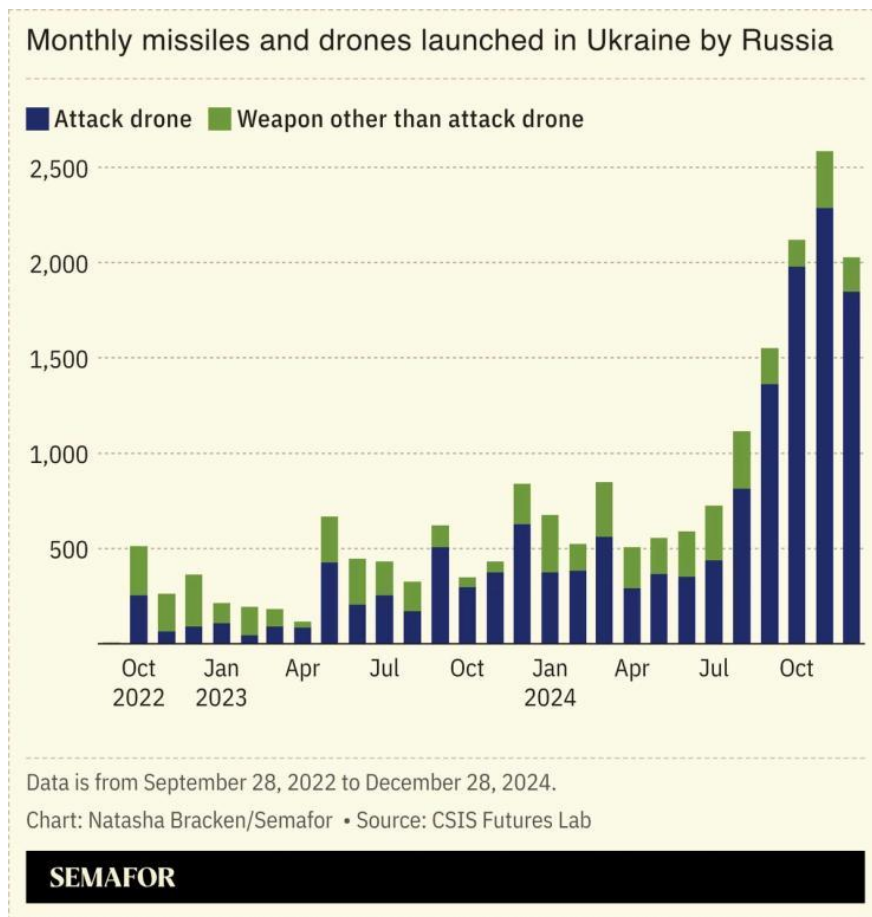


Figure 3: A graph of the number of monthly missiles and drones launched towards Ukraine by Russian forces throughout the war (Semafor/CSIS Futures Lab)

Human Control and International Efforts

The use of AI in these drones has sparked flames in long-running debates over human control. Supporters argue that autonomy can protect both soldiers and civilians as it eliminates human error, it also keeps drones working under jamming, and it improves accuracy. They also provide less controversial points with defensive implementations of AI such as intercepting incoming drones. However, critics warn that machine error do exist and machines may fail to properly distinguish soldiers from civilians, that responsibility becomes unclear when autonomous systems accidentally cause unlawful harm and finally, that the technology may spread to other armed groups, leading to the loss of control over AI even before the updated laws have been written.

Major Parties Involved

Ukraine

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Ukraine became independent in 1991. Since 2014, it has conflicted with Russia with a full-scale invasion beginning in 2022. The government has promoted a technological approach to defence, this includes the “Army of Drones” project led by the Ministry of Digital Transformation.

Ukraine's practical stance is that military AI is a necessity for defending against a much larger opponent under EW. Diplomatically, Ukraine aligned itself with a 2024 European Union statement at the CCW that backs a "two-tier" approach which was previously defined as to insist on human control. Thus, creating a tension between the stated principles and the actual needs in war.

Russian Federation

Russia has invested heavily in drone production in recent years and has started to invest in AI-enabled drones in Ukraine. In 2024, along with Belarus and North Korea it voted against the General Assembly's resolution on lethal autonomous weapons. It prefers that the issue is to be overseen within the CCW, where decisions are made by a unilateral consensus.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

The ICRC was founded in 1863 and based in Geneva. The ICRC is an independent and neutral humanitarian organisation mandated by the Geneva Conventions to protect victims of war. Together with the UN Secretary-General, it has called on states to develop a legally binding instrument by the end of 2026. Finally, the ICRC also argues for a two-tier approach.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
April 2013	Stop Killer Robots Campaign is launched by a group of NGOs, including the Human Rights Watch, calling for a ban on fully autonomous weapons.
2014	States have begun discussing lethal autonomous weapons in the UN under the CCW
24 th February, 2022	Russia launches its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, beginning the war that will eventually lead to the acceleration of AI and drone use.
October 2023	The UN Secretary-General and the President of the ICRC both call on states to finish a legally binding instrument on autonomous weapons by the end of 2026.
2 nd December, 2024	The General Assembly adopts a resolution on lethal autonomous weapons by 166 votes for, three votes against (Belarus, North Korea, Russia), with fifteen abstentions.
6 th November, 2025	The General Assembly adopts a follow up resolution with 156 states voting for. It does not launch treaty negotiations.
31 st Augus – 4 th September 2026	The CCW Group of Governmental Experts holds its final session and ends without any binding agreements, although seventy-six states do call for negotiations.
16-20 th November, 2026	The 7 th CCW Review conference will take place in Geneva and is expected to decide whether a formal negotiating process begins.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

- Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, 22nd December 2023 (A/RES/78/214): The first General Assembly resolution on the subject, passed with 152 votes for, four against, and 11 abstentions. It asked the Secretary-General to gather the views of states and other organisations on the humanitarian, security, ethical etc. challenges posed by these weapons, and placed the issue on the Assembly's agenda.
- Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, 2nd December 2024 (A/RES/78/62): Follow up resolution that was adopted with 166 votes in favour, 3 against, and 15 abstentions. Reaffirming that international law, including IHL, applies to autonomous weapons. It also referred to a “two-tier” approach and aimed to add on to the CCW rather than to replace it.

Possible Solutions

Definitions and Accountability

An obstacle that keeps surfacing is the absence of an agreed definition of autonomy and of “Human Control.” A drone that only navigates on its own and a drone that chooses its own target are completely different, yet both are currently described as autonomous. This complicates any attempt at regulations. Furthermore, accountability should not be left unchecked. If a system acts on its own and causes unlawful harm, it is currently unclear for who answers the accountability call: the operator, commander, the state, the developer? Clarifying this can be a starting point and it is worth considering how approaches would fit alongside the “two-tier” approach.

Verification, Different Uses, and Limiting the Unwanted Spread

Most claims about autonomous strikes come from the parties and countries themselves. This makes independent confirmation exceedingly difficult. Another method might be able to be considered; however, states will be reluctant to expose sensitive technology and data. There is also the other question on whether all military AI deserve the same treatment. AI that intercepts incoming drones raise different concerns than systems that were designed from the ground up to attack and to harm even though both purposes use the same systems to solve the issues. Furthermore, tactics seen in this war have already begun spreading to armed groups elsewhere. The relevant tools are also usually built by private contracted companies which are harder to regulate than states.

The “Are You Sure?” Button

Much like a computer asking for confirmation before deleting a file, implementing a similar step to a drone before doing something serious might be a small solution. Such a checkpoint could be baked into the system itself, preventing easy bypass and the placement could vary with the risk involved. The

problematic question is where to place the pause, how to integrate to be able to keep up with the fast pace of combat and how would it work if under jamming and cannot contact an operator?

Bibliography

- “156 States Support UNGA Resolution on Autonomous Weapons – Stop Killer Robots.” *Stopkillerrobots.Org*, 6 Nov. 2025, www.stopkillerrobots.org/news/156-states-support-unga-resolution/. Accessed 1 Oct. 2026.
- Bondar, Kateryna. “How Russia Is Building a Sovereign Drone Ecosystem for AI-Driven Autonomy.” *CSIS*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 22 Apr. 2026, www.csis.org/analysis/how-russia-building-sovereign-drone-ecosystem-ai-driven-autonomy. Accessed 2 Oct. 2026.
- Bondar, Kateryna, and Nicole Errera. “From Shahed to Geran: How Russia Continues to Reinvent the One-Way Attack Drone.” *CSIS*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 4 Sept. 2026, www.csis.org/analysis/shahed-geran-how-russia-continues-reinvent-one-way-attack-drone. Accessed 25 Sept. 2026.
- BROOKE, JAMES. “Putin’s Close Call with Ukrainian Drones Spotlights New Technology Defining the Russia-Ukraine War.” *NewYorkSun*, The New York Sun, 31 May 2025, www.nysun.com/article/putins-close-call-with-ukrainian-drones-spotlights-new-technology-defining-the-russia-ukraine-war. Accessed 1 Oct. 2026.
- “CCW Conference 2024 - Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the CCW - EU Statement.” *EEAS*, 2024, www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/ccw-conference-2024-meeting-high-contracting-parties-ccw-eu-statement_en?s=62. Accessed 29 Sept. 2026.
- Chivers, Tom. “Romania Accuses Russia of Incursion after Drone Enters Airspace.” *Semafor.Com*, 15 Sept. 2025, www.semafor.com/article/09/15/2025/romania-accuses-russia-of-incursion-after-plane-enters-airspace. Accessed 1 Oct. 2026.
- “DISEC 2026 Update Brief: Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems | IMUNA | NHSMUN | Model UN.” *IMUNA | NHSMUN | Model UN*, 19 Jan. 2026, imuna.org/blog/dise-2026-update-brief-lethal-autonomous-weapons-systems/. Accessed 1 Oct. 2026.
- Estevez, Julian. “The UN Has Spent a Decade Trying to Regulate Killer Robots. This Week It Tried Again.” *Substack.Com*, Permanent Future, 7 Sept. 2026, jeibros.substack.com/p/the-un-has-spent-a-decade-trying. Accessed 1 Oct. 2026.
- Fitchew, Charles. “How AI Is Rewriting the Rules of Modern Warfare.” *Vision of Humanity*, 22 Apr. 2026, www.visionofhumanity.org/how-ai-is-rewriting-the-rules-of-modern-warfare/. Accessed 1 Oct. 2026.

- “GGE on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems | Digital Watch Observatory.” *Digwatch*, 7 Sept. 2026, dig.watch/processes/gge-laws. Accessed 1 Oct. 2026.
- Hambling, David. “Ukraine Rolls out Target-Seeking Terminator Drones.” *Forbes*, 21 Mar. 2024, www.forbes.com/sites/davidhambling/2024/03/21/ukraine-rolls-out-target-seeking-terminator-drones/. Accessed 2 Oct. 2026.
- Hansberry, Cate. “The Coming Compute War in Ukraine.” *Atlantic Council*, 16 Mar. 2026, www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/the-big-story/the-coming-compute-war-in-ukraine/. Accessed 1 Oct. 2026.
- Human Rights Watch. “Crunch Time on Killer Robots.” *Human Rights Watch*, 1 Dec. 2021, www.hrw.org/news/2021/12/01/crunch-time-killer-robots. Accessed 29 Sept. 2026.
- . “Killer Robots: New UN Report Urges Treaty By 2026.” *Human Rights Watch*, 26 Aug. 2024, www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/26/killer-robots-new-un-report-urges-treaty-2026. Accessed 29 Sept. 2026.
- . “Killer Robots: UN Vote Should Spur Treaty Negotiations.” *Human Rights Watch*, 5 Dec. 2024, www.hrw.org/news/2024/12/05/killer-robots-un-vote-should-spur-treaty-negotiations. Accessed 1 Oct. 2026.
- ICRC. “Our History | ICRC.” *Www.Icrc.Org*, 28 July 2014, www.icrc.org/en/our-history. Accessed 29 Sept. 2026.
- “Inflection Point at the CCW: Taking Action on a Decade of Work.” *Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (GGE on LAWS) Briefing Paper*, Mar. 2026, www.stopkillerrobots.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/SKR_CCW-paper-March2026_FINAL.pdf. Accessed 1 Oct. 2026.
- Kirichenko, David. “Inside Ukraine’s Race to Build Autonomous Strike Capabilities.” *Forbes*, 9 Aug. 2026, www.forbes.com/sites/davidkirichenko/2026/08/09/inside-ukraines-race-to-build-autonomous-strike-capabilities/. Accessed 1 Oct. 2026.
- . “Inside Ukraine’s Race to Build Autonomous Strike Capabilities.” *Forbes*, 9 Aug. 2026, www.forbes.com/sites/davidkirichenko/2026/08/09/inside-ukraines-race-to-build-autonomous-strike-capabilities/. Accessed 1 Oct. 2026.
- Kirton, David. “China’s DJI Halts Russia, Ukraine Sales to Prevent Use of Its Drones in Combat.” *Reuters*, 27 Apr. 2022, www.reuters.com/technology/chinese-drone-maker-dji-suspends-business-activities-russia-ukraine-2022-04-26/. Accessed 28 Sept. 2026.

Kyiv Post. "UN: Ukraine Civilian Casualties Surge 55% In 2026." *Kyiv Post*, 4 Oct. 2026,

www.kyivpost.com/post/86061. Accessed 1 Oct. 2026.

Le Poidevin, Olivia. "Opposition by US and Russia Raises Doubts over Autonomous Weapons Talks Outcome, Diplomats Say." *Defense News*, 4 Sept. 2026, www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2026/09/04/opposition-by-us-and-russia-raises-doubts-over-autonomous-weapons-talks-outcome-diplomats-say/. Accessed 28 Sept. 2026.

"Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems & International Law: Growing Momentum Towards a New International Treaty - ASIL." *ASIL*, 7 Oct. 2025, asil.org/insights/volume-29-issue-1/. Accessed 29 Sept. 2026.

"Mandate and Mission - ICRC in Iran." *ICRC in Iran*, 22 Sept. 2016, ir.icrc.org/en/who-we-are/mandate-and-mission/. Accessed 28 Sept. 2026.

Marsi, Federica, and Mansur Mirovalev. "'Attacks Will Be Fully Autonomous': Russia, Ukraine Race Towards AI Warfare." *Al Jazeera*, 14 Sept. 2026, www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/9/14/attacks-will-be-fully-autonomous-russia-ukraine-race-towards-ai-warfare. Accessed 1 Oct. 2026.

McAuliffe, Amy. "Russia-Ukraine War Is Accelerating the Dangerous Race toward Fully Autonomous Drones." *Salon.Com*, 24 Sept. 2026, www.salon.com/2026/09/24/russia-ukraine-war-is-accelerating-the-dangerous-race-toward-fully-autonomous-drones-partner/. Accessed 29 Sept. 2026.

———. "Ukraine War Speeding Lethal Race toward Fully Autonomous Drones." *Asia Times*, 24 Sept. 2026, asiatimes.com/2026/09/ukraine-war-speeding-lethal-race-toward-fully-autonomous-drones/. Accessed 1 Oct. 2026.

Overview of Submissions to the UNSG Report on Lethal Autonomous Weapons AUGUST 2024 SUMMARY REPORT. 2024, automatedresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Overview-of-Submissions-UNSG-report-on-autonomous-weapons-FINAL-.pdf. Accessed 29 Sept. 2026.

Saballa, Joe. "After 'Army of Drones,' Ukraine Now Wants 'Army of Robots.'" *The Defense Post*, 11 Aug. 2023, thedefensepost.com/2023/08/11/ukraine-army-robots-russia/. Accessed 1 Oct. 2026.

Seo Bo-beom. "Fiber-Optic Drones Weave Spiderweb Barriers in Ukraine War." *The Chosun Daily*, 조선일보, 26 Dec. 2025, www.chosun.com/english/world-en/2025/12/26/RQHU7BS6CJAGRLXK3MIWKFMEUU/. Accessed 1 Oct. 2026.

"These Are the Drones You're Looking for: Join Mark Hamill and the Army of Drones." *U24.Gov.Ua*, u24.gov.ua/dronation. Accessed 28 Sept. 2026.

- Tucker, Patrick. "Thanks Largely to Robots, Ukraine Is Now Talking about Winning, Not Just Surviving - Defense One." *Defenseone.Com*, 2026, www.defenseone.com/technology/2026/06/ukraine-robots-winning/413902/. Accessed 1 Oct. 2026.
- "Ukraine - 2022 World Factbook Archive." *Www.Cia.Gov*, www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/about/archives/2022/countries/ukraine/. Accessed 28 Sept. 2026.
- UN. General Assembly (79th sess. : 2024-2025). "Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems : Resolution / Adopted by the General Assembly." *United Nations Digital Library System*, UN, 10 Dec. 2024, digitallibrary.un.org/record/4071100. Accessed 29 Sept. 2026.
- "Under the Canopy of Drone Nets Covering Ukraine's Frontlines." *Reuters*, 10 Dec. 2025, www.reuters.com/pictures/under-canopy-drone-nets-covering-ukraines-frontlines-2025-12-09/. Accessed 27 Sept. 2026.
- "United Nations Resolution A/RES/79/62: General and Complete Disarmament: Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems." *General Assembly*, 10 Dec. 2024, documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/391/35/pdf/n2439135.pdf. Accessed 29 Sept. 2026.
- Zadorozhnyy, Tim. "Ukraine on Track to Receive Total of 3 Million FPV Drones in 2025, Defense Minister Says." *The Kyiv Independent*, 24 Dec. 2025, kyivindependent.com/ukraine-on-track-to-receive-total-of-3-million-fpv-drones-in-2025/. Accessed 26 Sept. 2026.