

Interclass 2026

Huntington Beach High School

Disarmament and International Security Committee

Topic: *Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems*



Welcome from the Secretariat

Dear HBHS Delegates,

Welcome to Interclass 2026! We have done our very best to create a strong and diverse group of committees and topics to provide you with a great experience for your first conference, and we hope you are as excited as we are for you to begin exploring the world of MUN!

Model United Nations is more than just a simulation. It is an opportunity to challenge yourself and grow as a communicator, a negotiator, and global citizen. We hope that at this conference, you will not only gain experience in United Nations procedure and debate, but also strengthen your understanding of international issues that shape our world.

As Secretaries General, we would like to highlight the values that define a successful delegate: research, preparedness, and a commitment to representing your country's stance with integrity. Your ability to understand the perspectives of the country you represent, and to back your position with accurate, thoughtful research, is what supports meaningful debate and drives comprehensive resolutions. We also encourage you to approach each committee session with empathy, respect, and compassion. Diplomacy is about more than defending your position; it is about listening, collaborating, and finding common ground. The most effective delegates are those who not only speak well but also lead without losing sight of their goal: collaborating to find a solution to global issues.

We know that this is your first conference, so we are happy to support you through any confusion or nerves you may encounter throughout both the research stage and during the conference itself. You are free to reach out to us at any time should you have any questions. We would be happy to help! We sincerely wish all delegates the best of luck and we can't wait to see you in debate.

Sincerely,



Haley Dang, *Secretary General*



David Iverson, *Secretary General*



Abigail O'Rourke, *Secretary General*



Joleen Vansomphone, *Secretary General*



Zane Shaiyen, *Secretary General of Technology*

Introduction to the Dais

Chloe Shellhammer (she/her)

Hi delegates! My name is Chloe, and I'm so excited to be one of your chairs for Interclass DISEC! I'm a senior at HBHS, this is my fourth year in MUN, and I'm also serving as Chief of Staff this year. MUN has taught me so much about international issues and public speaking, but some of my favorite memories have come from the amazing people I've met in this program. Outside of MUN, I love reading, finding new hiking trails, and trying new coffee shops. I also LOVE a great sitcom, especially *How I Met Your Mother*, *The Office*, or *Friends*. I'm so excited to see how all of you approach Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems, especially since this will be your first MUN conference! Don't worry about being perfect, just try your best to bring your own ideas into the room, and most importantly, to participate. I'll also be around most of the conference taking photos, so please come say hi! I'm looking forward to meeting you all and having a great committee!

Benny Ferguson (he/him)

Hello Delegates, my name is Benjamin Ferguson, and I will be one of your chairs for Interclass 2026. At Huntington Beach, I'm currently a Junior who is going into his third year of MUN. Outside of MUN, I participate in Lacrosse, Surfing, and going to the gym. Outside of school, I love to go to the beach, play Hackysack, Beach Volleyball, Spikeball, and Football. Through this conference, I will be looking forward to seeing all of the creative solutions with strong implementation on the topic of LAWS. I will also be looking for charismatic delegates with funny and creative hooks (school-appropriate).

Submit Papers No Later Than **October 18th, 2026** at 11:59pm to

disec.interclass@hbhsmun.com

Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems

Background

Defined as weapons capable of independently identifying, selecting, and engaging targets with limited or no human control, lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS) have emerged in unison with advances in military technology and computing, with their simplest forms developing over a century ago.¹ Early developments in this technology can be traced to the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), when mechanical triggers were used in naval and land mines to detonate without a person directly activating them.² While these systems were not LAWS in the modern sense, they represented an early example of removing humans from the immediate firing process. By World War II, weapons such as Germany's V-1 flying bomb used gyroscopes and autopilot systems to navigate towards predetermined targets with limited human control.³ Advancing alongside computer and radar technology, military systems gradually developed the ability to detect and respond to threats automatically. Beginning in the 1970s, defensive systems such as the U.S. Phalanx Close-In Weapon System could use radar to track incoming objects and automatically engage them, further reducing the need for continuous human control.⁴ Since then, technology, most notably artificial intelligence, has allowed for weapon systems to perform increasingly complex tasks with greater independence. Loitering munitions and autonomous systems have further shown the potential to combine automated targeting, tracking, and engagement with limited human interaction.⁵ As these systems grow more sophisticated, concerns have grown in the international community about whether machines should be permitted to make decisions that determine who or what is targeted.

Developing alongside artificial intelligence and advanced robotics, LAWS have shifted from relatively simple automated defense systems to complex weaponry capable of processing information and making decisions with limited human interaction. These capabilities have made autonomous weapon systems increasingly attractive to major military powers, including the United States, China, and Russia, along with other emerging powers such as Israel, the United Kingdom, South Korea, and Türkiye.⁶ Although each of these nations has taken different approaches to developing the technology, they view autonomy as a potential military advantage due to the speed of decision-making and the potential to reduce soldier casualties. A possible downside to this rapid development is the growing security dilemma, as countries may feel pressured to develop autonomous weapons due to the fear of a rival gaining an upper hand.⁷ As competition over military AI continues to grow, ethical concerns have emerged surrounding the rapid decision-making that could cause unintended escalation. On the other hand, failures or inaccurate data could result in unlawful attacks. These developments have therefore raised the fundamental question of how much control humans should retain over lethal decisions and whether existing international rules are enough to prevent unintended harm to civilians.

The rapid development of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems has created significant

consequences in the international community, particularly for humanitarian law and legal accountability. Unlike standard weapon systems, LAWS introduce a new challenge to conflict by allowing lethal decisions to be made with limited or no human interaction. On complex battlefields, this lack of direct human involvement means these systems may lack the human judgment needed to distinguish innocent civilians from military personnel. Such a blind spot is particularly harmful when accounting for individuals who are surrendering, wounded, or no longer participating in active fighting.⁸ Although these machines are particularly useful for identifying patterns through sensors, they lack the ability to understand the context or intent needed to make such complex decisions. This creates situations in which autonomous systems could make decisions that violate international humanitarian law. Accountability is another aspect of this topic that becomes increasingly complicated when an autonomous system makes an unlawful decision. The debate centers on whether responsibility belongs to the operator of the machine, the commander who deployed it, the programmer who designed it, or even the manufacturer, particularly if the system made a targeting decision independently.² Beyond legal accountability, cyber attacks and failures in the technology create additional risks, including malfunctioning systems or hacked data, which could cause unintended attacks or turn the weapons against their own forces.¹⁰ The use of autonomous weapon systems could further destabilize international security because many of the technologies used to create them, including AI and advanced computer software, are becoming more accessible to the general population, leaving them vulnerable to attacks. Additionally, because LAWS can reduce casualties among a country's own soldiers and potentially reduce the political fallout for the country's leaders, their use could make war an easier choice rather than a last resort.¹¹ Together, the combination of uncertain accountability, risk to civilians, and technological vulnerabilities creates a wide array of challenges not just to the nations directly interacting with LAWS but to the stability of international security as a whole.

Despite the growing concerns in the international community, countries remain divided over how lethal autonomous weapon systems should be addressed. More than 120 countries have supported international negotiations toward restrictions or bans on weapons that can operate with little or no human control, while major military powers such as the United States, Russia, and China lean more towards regulation.¹² This disagreement is partly driven by ethical concerns and accountability issues surrounding how much human control is necessary for a weapon to be considered autonomous. Another part of the debate comes from the fear that the development of LAWS could put a country's own military capabilities at a disadvantage. As a result, the international community is facing the challenge of balancing national security with the protection of civilians.

United Nations Involvement

The United Nations has addressed the usage of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) primarily through the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), an international treaty established in 1980, which aimed to restrict the creation and usage of certain conventional weapons, especially those which cause excessive suffering.¹³ As technology such as artificial intelligence and unmanned weapon systems continues to develop, the CCW has become increasingly relevant. The international community utilizes the CCW to examine the ethical, legal, and security challenges that come with the development of LAWS.

In 2016, the CCW established the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) whose established goal was to examine the emerging technologies in the area of LAWS.¹⁴ Between 2018 and 2019, the group established 11 guiding principles that focused on the ethical usage of LAWS. Approved by the CCW High Contracting Parties in 2019, the principles outlined by the group restated that International Humanitarian Law continues to apply to LAWS, with a special emphasis on the importance of maintaining human control over the usage of lethal force.¹⁵ Despite this progress, not all states are in agreement about how LAWS should be defined, what degree of human control is required over these weapon systems, and whether or not certain systems should be outlawed. The GGE has recently focused a majority of its effort on outlining theoretical frameworks for LAWS.¹⁶

On December 22, 2023, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 78/241, which was the first standalone resolution that targeted LAWS.¹⁷ This resolution targeted the humanitarian, ethical, and security risks of LAWS and provided perspectives from member states in order to further regulate LAWS. While not establishing a binding law, it urged the Secretary General to report on the issue. This effort continued in 2024 through resolution 79/62, which brought back up the importance of humanitarian law and urged the GGE to fulfill the mandate outlined in Res/78/241.¹⁸ In late 2025, Resolution 80/57 reaffirmed the previous resolutions, while also contributing to the growing discussion among international communities about whether a governing body should be established over autonomous weapon systems.

Case Study: The Ukraine War

Since the full-scale invasion in February of 2022, the war in Ukraine has become a testing ground for artificial intelligence and autonomous military technology. In the early stages of the conflict, drones were mainly used for surveillance and attacks while being controlled by human operators or following pre-programmed routes.¹⁹ However, as a result of Russia's widespread use of electronic warfare and GPS jamming, these systems became more complicated to operate. This pushed both sides to develop drones that could function without constant connection to a human operator.²⁰ As the war continued, this need for greater technological independence led to the development of more sophisticated autonomous systems.

The first weapon with reported autonomous targeting abilities used in the conflict was Russia's Zala KUB-BLA, which appeared in Ukraine in March 2022 and used onboard technology to identify and engage targets.²¹ Only a few months later in July 2022, Russia introduced the Zala Lancet, which became one of the most widely used Russian loitering munitions in the conflict. As electronic warfare continued to intensify, both sides began to incorporate computer-aided vision and AI into military drones. By 2023, Ukraine had developed the Saker Scout, an AI-assisted UAV that had been approved by Ukraine's Ministry of Defense earlier that year.²² The system was designed to detect, track, and identify military objects using its onboard technology, something that allowed it to continue operating even when the communication with the operator was disrupted. Russia similarly developed increasingly autonomous versions of lethal weapons, demonstrating how the competition on the battlefield accelerated the development of LAWS. By 2024, these developments had begun moving beyond standard target detection and tracking towards autonomous terminal guidance, where a human operator could identify a target before the weapon's onboard system took control of the final stage of an attack.²³ In 2025 and 2026, reports began to indicate that the war had transformed into fully autonomous human targeting, a stage that is commonly referred to as "Terminator mode".²⁴ At this point, experimental Ukrainian drones were reportedly capable of using automated object recognition to identify and engage enemy soldiers without real-time human oversight, while systems such as the AI-powered Hornet used autonomous navigation to strike targets far behind enemy lines.²⁵

Overall, the war in Ukraine demonstrates how quickly LAWS can develop when military forces are met with new technological challenges. It shows that in order to protect soldiers and achieve faster decision-making, countries are willing to give weapons more independence while sacrificing human control and civilian protection. The international community can therefore learn from Ukraine that clear international rules are needed to address the risks of lethal autonomous weapon systems before their use becomes even more widespread.

Questions to Consider

1. Should fully autonomous weapons capable of independently selecting and attacking targets be prohibited?
2. What level of human involvement is necessary to ensure proper use of autonomous weapons?
3. Who should be held responsible when autonomous systems cause unintended harm?
4. How can countries ensure that LAWS are able to distinguish between civilians and soldiers?
5. How can countries prevent the spread of LAWS to governments or groups that may misuse the technology?
6. How should international laws regulate the testing and development of LAWS?
7. How should the UN enforce agreements regarding the use of LAWS?
8. How can the UN ensure that LAWS agree with International Humanitarian Law?
9. What can the international community learn from the use of autonomous weapons in the war in Ukraine?

Endnotes

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