

Position Paper

Central region: Ames, Ankeny, and Grinnell High Schools

What should be the U.S. position in the United Nations on Lethal Autonomous Weapons

Background Information:

Lethal Autonomous Weapons are defined as follows: “Lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS) are a special class of weapon systems that use sensor suites and computer algorithms to independently identify a target and employ an onboard weapon system to engage and destroy the target without manual human control of the system.” (Sayler, 2025). While humans may not have direct control over LAWS, operators still are able to exercise human judgment over the system. This is different from true control. Furthermore, LAWS typically require “broader human involvement in decisions about how, when, where, and why the weapon will be employed. This includes a human determination that the weapon will be used 'with appropriate care and in accordance with the law of war, applicable treaties, weapon system safety rules, and applicable rules of engagement.'” (Sayler 2025). Regulations have already been set on this developing technology. According to [congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov) in 2025, “DODD 3000.09 requires that all systems, including LAWS, be designed to 'allow commanders and operators to exercise appropriate levels of human judgment over the use of force.'” As noted in an August 2018 U.S. government white paper, "'appropriate' is a flexible term that reflects the fact that there is not a fixed, one-size-fits-all level of human judgment that should be applied to every context. What is 'appropriate' can differ across weapon systems, domains of warfare, types of warfare, operational contexts, and even across different functions in a weapon system.” (Sayler 2025). The definition of ‘appropriate levels of human judgement’ is widely disagreed on. Many countries already express concern about LAWS and their ethical implications, with some countries even calling for bans. According to [congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov) in 2025, “In addition, approximately 30 countries and 165 nongovernmental organizations have called for a preemptive ban on LAWS due to ethical concerns, including concerns about operational risk, accountability for use, and compliance with the proportionality and distinction requirements of the law of war.” (Sayler, 2025). On the other hand, LAWS are considered to be potentially more effective in a combat situation. According to the Army University Press, “Some military experts hold that autonomous weapons systems not only confer significant strategic and tactical advantages in the battleground but also that they are preferable on moral grounds to the use of human combatants.” (Etzioni 2017). Regardless of either side of the debate, LAWS are in development today, and are only becoming more deadly and accurate.

United States Position:

In the wake of an unprecedented era of reckless military escalation and civilian deaths, the United States recognizes a need for change in the global community; therefore, the United States believes that the United Nations ought to stand firmly in support of Lethal Autonomous Weapons systems (LAWS). With such support, the United States will emerge as a leading innovator, paving the way for mass military reform around the world. The United States will prove as leader in such systems by working towards goals under the following criteria:

- i. Research & Development.
 - The United States will stand as leader for complete financial-based military reform. Under its goal to rejuvenate its military efficiency, the U.S. will encourage fellow member delegations to follow suit in hosting public grants awarded to businesses that drive research and development of LAWs in accordance with UN guidelines forward. Furthermore, the U.S. will encourage the establishment of a Department for Autonomous Weapons, serving with the intention of researching and conducting development of autonomous weapons, and creating/overseeing guidelines.
- ii. Regulation
 - While the US acknowledges the benefits of LAWs, the country also understands a need for limitations on deployment. In active war zones, the U.S. recommends the use of autonomous weapons; however, in areas where civilian presence is reasonably expected, the U.N. ought to prohibit the use of such weaponry. The U.S. encourages the creation of a United Nations oversight committee responsible for upholding global norms and regulations in an era of LAW advancements. Such a committee is responsible for holding member states accountable under international humanitarian law, *jus in bello*. The oversight committee plays a role in assigning responsibility for acts conducted by autonomous weapons to the countries that deploy them. The United States will advocate for guidelines intended to prevent the loss of civilian lives, enforced by economic and diplomatic consequences. Such guidelines ought to include the requirement for human intervention in the use of autonomous weapons, direct and constant human supervision when such systems are deployed, and each weapon must have a readily available and fast-acting kill switch. Lastly, the United States recommends the use of LAWs to be limited to defensive use.

Justification and Summary:

The United States envisions a future that is able to take armed conflict to the next level. In the American-backed future proposed in this paper, LAWs will not only be a factor but will stand as the focus point. This mission, however, cannot be accomplished with the simple implementation of LAW. In order to earn the fullest from the implementation and support of LAW, discussions on research & development and regulation must be held.

Under the research & development portion of the United States' goal, such grants mentioned will be awarded to businesses and individuals who further advance the international humanitarian law-based goals and guidelines of autonomous weapons. This project intends to create an increase in positive focus surrounding autonomous weapons in order to create an incentive for more advanced research methods. Secondly, such grants are intended to incentivize third-party work and solutions to be sought outside of governing bodies. Likewise, the United States urges for the creation of a Department for Autonomous Weapons Systems (DAWS). By implementing a UN Department for Autonomous Weapons Systems, there would now be three separate sectors in the research &

development industry for autonomous weapons: private organizations/peoples, individual governing organizations, and a unified group of governing bodies. Together, this would foster a world of numerous perspectives that are necessary for the creation of such complicated weapons.

The next step in creating a positive and effective environment surrounding LAWs is to include regulation of such weapons. Such guidelines previously mentioned serve the purpose to minimize potential civilian casualties. The creation of such an oversight committee will hold the world closer-bound to the international humanitarian law, *jus in bello*, creating guidelines and making conflict involving autonomous weapons in the best interests of civilian populations. Lastly, the ability for intervention is necessary to ensure last-minute decisions can be made in accordance with previously set guidelines.

Together, these goals make it possible for the United States and international community to cooperate and move forward into a new era of lethal autonomous weapons.

Works Cited

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