



Ministry of Defence

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
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THE RT HON BARONESS GOLDIE DL
MINISTER OF STATE IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS

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13th, January 2022

Dear Steering Committee Members,

Thank you for your letter to the Secretary of State for Defence dated 3 December concerning the international discussions on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS). As this topic falls under my area of responsibility, I am responding on his behalf.

As set out in the Integrated Review, the UK is committed to supporting the rules-based international order; and to bolstering the institutions, laws and norms that enable open societies and economies to flourish. You will be aware that we were disappointed that the outcomes of the recent Group of Government Experts (GGE) and the CCW Review Conference were not more ambitious. Nevertheless, we are pleased that the mandate of the GGE was renewed. We will remain actively engaged in the CCW and other fora to enable this important work to continue. As you note, our objectives overlap significantly, and I can assure you that we share many of your concerns.

Our position with regard to fully autonomous weapon systems is clear and unchanged. The UK does not possess fully autonomous weapon systems and has no intention of developing them. The point, in terms of 'context-appropriate human involvement', is that meaningful control may be exercised in different ways, depending on the system and the operational circumstances.

While we support international discussions around norms and positive obligations for autonomy in warfare at the UN CCW in Geneva, we oppose calls for new legal instruments. International Humanitarian Law (IHL) provides the most appropriate and robust framework for the regulation of weapons development and use. It imposes positive obligations that take account of the core principles of IHL when engaging in military activity – distinction, humanity, proportionality and feasible precautions – and it applies to all weapons systems, AI-enabled or not.

More generally, it is important for Defence to work with a broad range of public and private entities to ensure that our Armed Forces are equipped with the best cutting-edge military capabilities. We are transparent about our requirements and intent, though it is essential to balance transparency with the need to safeguard sensitive information from adversaries and protect commercial confidentiality and intellectual property rights. We engage directly with partners in industry and academia, and we follow best practice,

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By email to: donaldson@una.org.uk

clearly specifying how and why we will utilise algorithms and applications and ensuring that pathways exist for developers to raise concerns.

The recently published National AI strategy focussed extensively on the need to get national and international governance of AI technologies right. The Defence AI Strategy – to be published shortly – will build on this, setting out our approach to support the Defence and Security AI sector and shape the emergent regulatory ecosystem. In addition, we will shortly publish details of our approach to safe and responsible use of AI in Defence, including ethical considerations.

Finally – and on behalf of my officials – let me thank you for the close engagement that UK officials have had with civil society groups such as yourselves. We will be working hard to ensure progress at this year's GGE and looking forward to working with you in 2022.

*Yours sincerely,
Annabel Su. Goldie,*

BARONESS GOLDIE DL