



Statement by Ambassador Khalil Hashmi, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations and CD in Geneva at the First Committee's Thematic Debate on Other Disarmament Measures and International Security, (24 October 2022)

Mr. Chairman,

The military application of new and emerging technologies continues to outpace the application of existing principles and norms of international law. Efforts to develop commensurate norms, laws and rules to regulate these technologies remain largely stalled.

There are increasing dangers arising from the development and use of weapon systems based on these technologies as they reduce or eliminate risks of human casualties for the user states. Resultantly, the possession of these systems increases the propensity of their use and the likelihood of symmetric and asymmetric responses, thereby lowering the threshold for armed conflict.

As a result, risks and threats to peace, security and stability at the global and regional levels are growing. These risks are particularly worrisome given the growing geo-political tensions.

Mr. Chairman,

It is in this context that my delegation would like to draw attention to two particular issues: Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) and cyber weapons.

The development of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) has emerged as perhaps the defining concern on the international arms control agenda, along with WMDs.

LAWS neither exist in isolation or a vacuum. Nor are these weapons science fiction. These weapon systems are not one or two types of weapons but a capability category with layers of unpredictability and cascading destabilizing impacts on regional and international security.

These weapons also amplify aspects of force multiplication and asymmetry. Their growing sophistication and integration with missiles, nuclear weapon systems, outer space and cyber weapons, carries huge human costs and destabilization effects.

The growing autonomy of these weapons, based on machine learning algorithms and increased speed of their actions during operations, will further reduce predictability of their behaviour.

On top of lowering the thresholds for war, such weapons would also entail additional consequences such as anonymous and clandestine operations including targeted killings in the territory of other states.

The dangers of one-sided killing would not only deny combatants of the targeted state the protection offered by international law governing armed conflict, the use of LAWS would also risk the lives of civilians and non-combatants on both sides, since non-availability of a legitimate human target of the user State on the ground could lead to reprisals on its civilians. In a nutshell, States would be tempted to mitigate the military advantage of adversaries through asymmetrical means.

Mr. Chairman,

The deliberation of this Committee continues to highlight that these weapon systems are already being factored into the strategic and security doctrines of many states.

It is obvious that such developments do not augur well for the already crisis ridden international arms control agenda. Absent any meaningful restraints, these developments would only trigger costly arms races in the area of LAWS. Such a scenario could also lead to access, possession, production and use of these weapons by non-State actors, with unimaginable consequences.

Cumulatively, these developments will entail possibilities of unintended or uncontrolled levels of escalation. The spiral of reprisals, perpetuating or expanding the conflict, particularly in crisis situations, is a foregone conclusion.

Yet rather than addressing these fundamental concerns, a handful of states continue to stall meaningful progress on the normative track and overtly oppose the development of internationally agreed legal norms, rules or regulations to govern the design, development and use of these weapon systems.

We reiterate our call on all such states to lift their opposition to the urgent commencement of negotiations on a legally binding instrument stipulating appropriate prohibitions and restrictions on LAWS.

Mr. Chairman,

The weaponization of ICTs and cyber space poses serious risks to peace, security and stability at the international as well as regional levels.

The ability to act anonymously without traditional geographical limitations, coupled with the ability to mass produce cyber weapons cheaply, makes them extremely attractive and dangerous. Several States are developing ICTs as instruments of warfare to achieve political objectives.

Continued absence of common understandings on what constitutes acceptable State behaviour to use cyber space is heightening risks, thereby elevating the destructive potential of cyber weapons to a level at par with other weapons of mass destruction.

The unique differences between the physical and cyber spheres, the extent and scope of the applicability of existing international law and its interpretation requires expedited consideration, elaboration and development of commensurate norms and rules to govern the use of cyber space.

The on-going deliberations at the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on ICTs have the potential to develop common understandings that can form the basis for further normative efforts to prevent the cyberspace from becoming another domain of conflict.

Mr. Chairman,

Given the increasing salience of LAWS and cyber space to the questions of international and regional peace, security and stability, the Conference on Disarmament (CD) represents an enduring platform to elaborate and codify the normative work through relevant international conventions.

Thank you.