

House of Lords committee tells UK to 'proceed with caution' on AI weapon systems

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Bringing AI into the realm of warfare through the use of AI-enabled autonomous weapons systems (AWS) could revolutionise defence technology, but the Government must approach the development and use of AI in AWS in a way that is ethical and legal, while providing key strategic and battlefield benefits. "Ambitious, safe and responsible" must be translated into practical implementation.

As part of this, the Government must seek, establish and retain public confidence and democratic endorsement in the development and use of AI generally, and especially in respect of Autonomous Weapon Systems. This will include increasing public understanding of AI and autonomous weapons, enhancing the role of Parliament in decision making on autonomous weapons, and retaining public confidence in the development and use of autonomous weapons.

These are some of the main conclusions of a report by the House of Lords**Artificial Intelligence in Weapon Systems Committee** published today (Friday 1 December); "Proceed with Caution: Artificial Intelligence in Weapon Systems".

The Committee's key recommendations include:

* **The Government should lead by example in international engagement on regulation of AWS.** Outcomes from international debate on the regulation of AWS could be a legally binding treaty or non-binding measures clarifying the application of international humanitarian law. A key element of international engagement will also include leading on efforts to prohibit the use of AI in nuclear command, control and communications. * **The Government should adopt an operational definition of AWS.** The Committee was surprised the Government does not currently have one and believes it is possible to create a future-proofed definition which would aid the UK's ability to make meaningful policy on AWS and engage fully in international discussions. * **The Government should ensure human control at all stages of an AWS's lifecycle.** It is essential to have human control over the deployment of the system both to ensure human moral agency and legal compliance. This must be buttressed by our absolute national commitment to the requirements of international humanitarian law. * **The Government should ensure that its procurement processes are appropriately designed for the world of AI.** The Committee heard that the Ministry of Defence's procurement suffers from a lack of accountability and is overly bureaucratic. It further heard that the Ministry of Defence lacks capability in relation to software and data, both of which are central to the development of AI. This may require revolutionary change. The Committee warns, "if so, so be it; but time is short."

Lord Lisvane, Chair of Artificial Intelligence in Weapon Systems Committee, said:

"Artificial Intelligence has spread into many areas of life and defence is no exception. How it could revolutionise defence technology is one of the most controversial uses of AI today.

"There is a growing sense that AI will have a major influence on the future of warfare, and there has been particular debate about how autonomous weapons can comply with international humanitarian law.

"In our report Proceed with Caution: Artificial Intelligence in Weapon Systems, we welcome the fact that the Government has recognised the role of responsible AI in its future defence capability. AI has the potential to provide key battlefield and strategic benefits. However, we make proposals that in doing so, the Government must approach the development and use of AI in AWS cautiously.

"It must embed ethical and legal principles at all stages of design, development and deployment, while achieving public understanding and democratic endorsement.

“Technology should be used when advantageous, but not at unacceptable cost to the UK’s moral principles.”