ASIS MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2026

Al Saad Indian School, Al Ain

DISEC STUDY GUIDE

Committee	Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC)
Agenda	Autonomous Weapon Systems & AI in Combat: Establishing a Global Framework to Regulate Autonomous Kinetic Weapons and Algorithmic Targeting in Urban Warfare
Prepared by	ASIS MUN Policy Department

I. Introduction to the Committee

The Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) is the **First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly**, one of its six main committees. It was established in 1945 with the founding of the United Nations, in the aftermath of the Second World War and at the dawn of the nuclear age. All 193 Member States are members.

Mandate and purpose

DISEC considers "all disarmament and international security questions within the scope of the Charter or relating to the powers and functions of any other organ of the United Nations". This mandate rests on Article 11 of the UN Charter, which allows the General Assembly to consider the general principles of cooperation in maintaining international peace and security, including disarmament and the regulation of armaments.

DISEC organises its work into seven thematic clusters:

1. Nuclear weapons
2. Other weapons of mass destruction
3. Outer space (disarmament aspects)
4. Conventional weapons
5. Regional disarmament and security
6. Other disarmament measures and international security
7. Disarmament machinery

DISEC works closely with the **UN Disarmament Commission**, a deliberative subsidiary body of the General Assembly, and the **Conference on Disarmament** in Geneva, the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, which reports to the General Assembly each year.

The first resolution ever adopted by the General Assembly, **resolution 1 (I) of January 1946**, created a commission to deal with the problems raised by the discovery of atomic energy. Since then, the First Committee has become one of the main forums for debate on arms control and emerging threats, from nuclear non-proliferation to cyber warfare, outer space and, now, artificial intelligence.

II. Understanding the Agenda

A. Definition and Scope

The agenda concerns weapons that can select and engage targets without human intervention, often using artificial intelligence (AI), and their use in dense urban areas where civilians and combatants are mixed together.

- **Autonomous weapon systems (AWS)** are weapons that, once activated, can select and engage targets without further intervention by a human operator. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) describes them as weapons that select and apply force to targets without human intervention.
- **Autonomous kinetic weapons** use physical force, such as missiles, drones and gun turrets, as opposed to non-kinetic systems such as cyber weapons and electronic warfare.

- **Algorithmic targeting** refers to the use of AI to identify, prioritise or recommend targets, even where a human formally approves the attack.

The central tension is that International Humanitarian Law (IHL) was built for human decision-makers. Its principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in attack are addressed to "those who plan or decide upon an attack". When a machine makes or shapes targeting decisions, it becomes harder to apply the law and to hold anyone responsible.

B. How Autonomous Weapons Work

An autonomous weapon system typically combines sensors (cameras, radar, thermal imaging), a processing unit running machine-learning models trained to recognise targets, and an engagement mechanism such as a warhead, gun or missile. Autonomy lies in the targeting cycle (search, detect, identify, select and attack) taking place without a human directly making each decision.

These systems fall broadly into three categories:

1. **Semi-autonomous systems ("human in the loop"):** a human decides whether to fire, while AI assists with navigation or flags possible targets.
2. **Supervised autonomous systems ("human on the loop"):** the machine selects and engages targets on its own, but a human operator monitors it and can intervene.
3. **Fully autonomous systems ("human out of the loop"):** the system finds and engages targets with no human involvement once activated.

C. Bias, Errors and Urban Warfare

AI systems learn from training data, and that data can reflect human biases around race, gender, ethnicity and age. Research by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) notes that military machine-learning models rely on pattern recognition and proxy indicators, so biased data can lead demographic characteristics to influence who is flagged as a threat. This creates two failure modes that matter greatly in cities:

- **False positives:** civilians wrongly identified as threats, leading to unlawful deaths.
- **False negatives:** real threats missed, creating operational risk.

Because systems are often trained in one context and deployed in another, their reliability can change unpredictably with new environments, populations and types of conflict. In densely populated areas, these errors are multiplied by the presence of civilians, homes, hospitals and infrastructure.

Media investigations have reported that the Israel Defense Forces used AI-enabled decision-support systems, known as "Gospel" and "Lavender", to generate large numbers of targets in Gaza. The Israel Defense Forces state that humans make the final decisions. These reports have intensified debate on whether AI decision-support tools, and not only fully autonomous weapons, should be regulated.

D. Military Arguments and Spending

Supporters argue that autonomous systems act as a "force multiplier": fewer soldiers can achieve more, operations can reach areas too dangerous for troops, and human casualties among soldiers can be reduced. There is also a cost argument, as keeping soldiers in combat zones is extremely expensive. Some argue that, in future, machines could apply force more precisely than stressed human soldiers.

According to SIPRI, **world military expenditure reached a record USD 2,887 billion in 2025**, the eleventh consecutive year of growth, up 2.9% in real terms and equal to 2.5% of global GDP. The United States remained the largest spender at USD 954 billion (down 7.5%), followed by China at an

estimated USD 336 billion (up 7.4%) and Russia at an estimated USD 190 billion. Spending in Europe rose 14% to USD 864 billion, and in Asia and Oceania by 8.1% to USD 681 billion. A growing share of this spending goes to AI, drones and autonomy.

E. Global Proliferation: Loitering Munitions

Loitering munitions, sometimes called "kamikaze" or "suicide" drones, carry a built-in warhead and circle over an area until a target is found, then strike it by crashing into it. Many can operate with high levels of autonomy, and they have been used widely in recent conflicts.

Country	Example system	Notes
United States	Switchblade	Supplied to Ukraine.
Russian Federation	Lancet	Used extensively in Ukraine.
Israel	Harpy, Harop	Among the earliest systems able to attack radar targets autonomously; widely exported.
Türkiye	Kargu-2	A UN Panel of Experts report (S/2021/229) on Libya in 2020 described its possible use in an autonomous mode.
Iran	Shahed-136	Used by Russia against Ukraine.
Ukraine	Various domestic systems	Rapid wartime development of AI-assisted drones.
Poland	Warmate	Exported to several states.
India	Nagastra-1	Domestically produced loitering munition.

III. Major Conventions and Legal Frameworks

1. **International Humanitarian Law (IHL):** the Geneva Conventions (1949) and Additional Protocols I and II (1977). **Article 36 of Additional Protocol I** requires states to review whether new weapons comply with international law.
2. **The Martens Clause:** states that, where the law is silent, people remain protected by "the principles of humanity and the dictates of public conscience", often cited in debates on AWS.
3. **Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW, 1980):** its Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems has discussed the issue since 2017. In 2023, CCW parties mandated the GGE to develop, by consensus, the elements of an instrument, with the aim of completing its work before the CCW's Seventh Review Conference in 2026.
4. **International Human Rights Law:** including the right to life under Article 6 of the ICCPR, which applies to uses of force in law enforcement and beyond.
5. **Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (2022):** adopted in Dublin and endorsed by more than 80 states, it is directly relevant to the urban warfare dimension of this agenda.
6. **Political Declaration on Responsible Military Use of Artificial Intelligence and Autonomy (2023):** a non-binding US-led declaration endorsed by a group of states.

IV. Past Action

- **2013:** the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions called for national moratoria on lethal autonomous robotics.
- **2014–2016:** informal expert meetings on lethal autonomous weapons were held under the CCW.
- **2017:** the CCW GGE on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems began formal work, chaired in 2017–2018 by India.
- **2019:** the GGE agreed 11 guiding principles, including that IHL applies fully to all weapons and that human responsibility for decisions on the use of force must be retained.
- **2023:** the UN Secretary-General and the President of the ICRC jointly called on states to conclude a legally binding instrument by 2026. The General Assembly adopted its **first resolution on lethal autonomous weapons systems, resolution 78/241**.
- **2024:** Austria hosted the Vienna conference "Humanity at the Crossroads". The Republic of Korea hosted the second REAIM summit on responsible AI in the military domain. The General Assembly adopted **resolution 79/62**, supported by 166 states.
- **2025:** the General Assembly adopted **resolution 80/57** on lethal autonomous weapons systems with the support of 164 states.

V. Key Actors

Major powers

- **United States:** opposes a new legally binding instrument at this stage and prefers non-binding measures. Its policy (Department of Defense Directive 3000.09, updated 2023) requires "appropriate levels of human judgment" over the use of force. It launched the 2023 Political Declaration and backs proposals in the CCW based on existing IHL.
- **Russian Federation:** argues that existing IHL is sufficient and opposes a new treaty. It has used AI-enabled loitering munitions such as the Lancet extensively in Ukraine and has voted against the General Assembly resolutions on the topic.
- **China:** distinguishes between "unacceptable" fully autonomous weapons, which it says should be prohibited, and "acceptable" systems that should be regulated. It is pursuing "intelligentised warfare" and has prioritised AI in its military modernisation.
- **United Kingdom:** considers existing IHL sufficient, prefers the CCW as the forum, and has endorsed the US-led Political Declaration.
- **France and Germany:** support a "two-tier" approach: prohibiting systems that operate fully outside human control and regulating other autonomous systems. Germany is also developing its own loitering munitions.

Other key actors in this committee

- **Ukraine:** the main battlefield where AI-assisted drones are being developed and used at scale; it prioritises self-defence and is unlikely to support restrictions that limit its ability to respond to Russian drones.
- **Türkiye:** a major drone manufacturer and exporter (Bayraktar, Kargu-2); participates in CCW discussions but has not joined the states calling for a ban.

- **India:** prefers discussions within the CCW and is wary that new rules could widen the technology gap or legitimise these weapons; it is investing in its own autonomous systems.
- **Japan:** states it has no plans to develop fully autonomous lethal weapons and supports a two-tier approach in the CCW.
- **Republic of Korea:** hosted the 2024 REAIM summit on responsible military AI in Seoul.
- **Egypt:** among the first states, in 2014, to call for a ban, and supports a legally binding prohibition of systems that operate without human control.
- **Nigeria and South Africa:** the African Group supports negotiations on a legally binding instrument and stresses meaningful human control.
- **Brazil and Mexico:** Latin American states are among the strongest supporters of a legally binding instrument, expressed in the Belén Communiqué (2023).

Key actors not currently in this committee

Delegates may refer to: **Austria**, the main sponsor of the General Assembly resolutions and host of the 2024 Vienna conference; **Israel**, one of the most advanced developers of autonomous and AI-enabled military technology, which opposes a new treaty; and **Iran**, a major producer and exporter of drones such as the Shahed-136.

VI. Key Challenges

- **Speed and escalation:** AI compresses the "OODA loop" (Observe–Orient–Decide–Act). A system that misidentifies a threat could strike before humans can intervene.
- **Automation bias:** commanders may rely too much on AI recommendations under time pressure.
- **Miscalculation:** spoofing, false positives or the unpredictable behaviour of drone swarms could cause unintended engagements.
- **Escalation across domains:** clashes between conventional autonomous systems could escalate towards nuclear thresholds.
- **Lower threshold for war:** cheap, expendable systems could make the use of force more frequent and harder to control.
- **Accountability gap:** when an autonomous system commits a violation, it is unclear whether the commander, programmer, manufacturer or state is responsible.
- **No agreed definition:** states disagree on what counts as "autonomous", which makes regulation easy to avoid.

VII. Possible Areas of Debate

1. Should regulation cover only fully autonomous "kill decisions", or also semi-autonomous systems and AI decision-support tools that shape targeting?
2. Should states negotiate a legally binding treaty, and if so, in the CCW, the General Assembly or a separate process?
3. What does "meaningful human control" require in practice: real-time override, explainable recommendations, limits on time and area of operation?
4. Should certain systems be prohibited outright, for example those that target people directly or cannot be controlled, with others regulated (the "two-tier" approach)?

5. How should systems that learn and change their behaviour during deployment be treated compared with pre-programmed systems?
6. What special restrictions should apply to autonomous weapons in populated urban areas?
7. How can export controls prevent proliferation to non-state armed groups?
8. What legal review, testing and certification should be required before deployment?

VIII. Guiding Questions

1. Can autonomous weapon systems reliably comply with distinction, proportionality and precaution in built-up areas where civilians and fighters are mixed together?
2. How will your state make sure that commanders can understand, question and override algorithmic recommendations under time pressure?
3. Who should be held responsible when an autonomous system causes unlawful harm?
4. Does your state support a legally binding instrument, a political declaration, or reliance on existing IHL, and why?
5. How can regulation avoid widening the technology gap between developed and developing states?
6. How should the international community respond to the use of autonomous weapons by non-state actors?

IX. Key Terms

Term	Meaning
Autonomous weapon system (AWS)	A weapon that, once activated, selects and engages targets without further human intervention.
Lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS)	The term used in UN and CCW discussions for autonomous weapons designed to kill.
Meaningful human control	The principle that humans must keep sufficient control over weapons to ensure legal and ethical use.
Loitering munition	A drone carrying a warhead that circles an area until it finds and strikes a target.
Algorithmic targeting	The use of AI to identify, prioritise or recommend targets.
Distinction	The IHL rule requiring parties to distinguish between combatants and civilians.
Proportionality	The IHL rule prohibiting attacks where expected civilian harm is excessive compared with the military advantage.
Article 36 weapons review	The legal review that states must carry out on new weapons under Additional Protocol I.
Automation bias	The tendency of humans to over-trust decisions or recommendations made by machines.
Two-tier approach	Prohibiting some autonomous weapons outright while regulating the rest.

X. Committee Procedure

- This committee follows the **ASIS MUN 2026 Rules of Procedure (ROP)**. Where this guide and the ROP differ, the ROP applies.
- **Position papers** are compulsory and must be submitted to the Executive Board during the **first committee session**. Maximum two pages, excluding the bibliography, in the format given in **Appendix A of the ROP**. Wikipedia must not be cited.
- **Working papers** may have up to 5 authors and are voted on by simple majority. Only a passed working paper can be developed into a draft resolution.
- **Draft resolutions** may have a maximum of **3 authors per bloc** and must follow the format in **Appendix C of the ROP**. The committee opening line is *The Disarmament and International Security Committee,*
- **Voting on draft resolutions:** a draft resolution passes with a **two-thirds majority of Yes over No votes** (abstentions are not counted), unless the Chair announces a different threshold before voting procedure. Draft resolutions are voted on by roll call.
- **Mandate:** as the First Committee of the General Assembly, DISEC adopts recommendations, not binding law. It can call for negotiations on a treaty, recommend principles and standards, request reports from the Secretary-General and encourage work in other forums such as the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW).
- **Use of AI** by delegates is allowed but results in a deduction of marks, with a greater deduction for paperwork.

XI. Conclusion

The integration of artificial intelligence into combat systems marks a turning point in the history of warfare. As autonomous weapons move from prototypes to deployed capabilities, the central question is no longer whether machines can assist in targeting, but how to ensure that the use of force remains compatible with International Humanitarian Law and with basic principles of humanity, accountability and stability.

Delegates should focus on three areas. **Clarity:** without an agreed definition of autonomous weapons and levels of autonomy, regulation will remain fragmented and easy to evade. **Control:** meaningful human control must be more than a slogan; it needs concrete standards for when, how and by whom humans intervene, especially in cities. **Consequence:** accountability cannot be outsourced to code, so responsibility must be mapped across the entire life cycle of these systems, from design to deployment and review, with remedies for victims. The goal is not to halt innovation, but to ensure that human judgment, legal obligation and moral responsibility remain at the heart of decisions over life and death.

XII. References

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Note on the preparation of this guide

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation of this study guide. The content has been reviewed by the ASIS MUN Policy Department, but delegates should verify key facts and figures against the original sources before using them in debate or in their position papers.

If you find any errors, please email **asis.mun@student.bhavansalain.com**.