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The Strategic Imperative of Inclusion: Global South and Middle Power Perspectives on AI in the Military Domain

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Executive Summary

The deployment of artificial intelligence (AI) in military contexts represents a transformative frontier in international security, yet discussions remain dominated by great powers like the United States and China, marginalising the Global South and middle powers.¹ This paper argues that excluding these actors risks creating an imbalanced and unstable AI governance framework, amplifying ethical breaches, geopolitical tensions, and technological disparities. Their inclusion is strategically essential to address the multifaceted challenges of military AI, from cybersecurity vulnerabilities to lethal autonomous weapons. The paper is structured in three key parts: first, it examines the unique vulnerabilities and insights of the Global South, highlighting their exposure to AI-driven threats and contributions to ethical governance; second, it analyses the pivotal role of middle powers—such as India, Turkey, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—in bridging great power divides through technological innovation and multi-aligned diplomacy; and third, it proposes actionable recommendations for inclusive governance, including multilateral forums and capacity-building measures. By weaving together case studies, data, and theoretical lenses (e.g., multipolarity's stabilising potential), the argumentation builds toward a framework that prioritises diverse perspectives to ensure accountable and balanced military AI deployment.

1. **Global South:** These nations, often in volatile regions, face unique risks such as cybersecurity vulnerabilities and algorithmic biases. Their insights, shaped by experiences with proxy wars and arms races, are vital for building inclusive governance frameworks.²
2. **Middle Powers:** States like Turkey, South Korea, India, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE are leveraging advanced AI capabilities and strategic investments to influence global norms while balancing relationships with major powers.³
3. **Geopolitical Stakes:** Exclusion risks entrenching a two-tiered global order, exacerbating inequalities, and creating blind spots in regulating technologies like lethal autonomous weapons.⁴
4. **Recommendations:** Inclusive governance requires multilateral forums, regional dialogues, capacity-building, and confidence

¹ Martino Luigi and Favarotto Ludovica, 'Redefining Security: How AI Is Changing the Future of Defense', *Italian Institute for International Political Studies*, 28 January 2025, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/redefining-security-how-ai-is-changing-the-future-of-defense-198182>.

² Chinasa T. Okolo, 'AI in the Global South: Opportunities and Challenges towards More Inclusive Governance', *Brookings Institution*, 1 November 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/ai-in-the-global-south-opportunities-and-challenges-towards-more-inclusive-governance/>.

³ Nikolaus Lang et al., 'How CEO's Can Navigate the New Geopolitics of GenAI', 9 December 2024; Kristina Kausch and Sharinee L. Jagtiani, 'The Dawn of Pivotal Powers in Artificial Intelligence', in *Pivotal Powers 2024: Innovative Engagement Strategies for Global Governance, Security, and Artificial Intelligence*, 2024, 27–34, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep65042.7?seq=1>.

⁴ Reva Goujon, 'The Real Stakes of the AI Race', *Rhodium Group*, 27 December 2024, <https://rhg.com/research/the-real-stakes-of-the-ai-race/>.

1. Introduction

The deployment of artificial intelligence (AI) in military contexts represents a transformative frontier in international security.⁵ While discussions on the subject are often dominated by major powers such as the United States and China, the perspectives of the Global South and middle powers are strategically vital.⁶ These nations bring unique insights into regional security dynamics and asymmetric threats, offering practical solutions to the ethical and geopolitical challenges posed by military AI. This oversight is a strategic liability in a world where multipolarity increasingly defines global politics.⁷ Integrating perspectives from the Global South and middle powers is essential for shaping a more stable and balanced military AI architecture—one that accounts for diverse interests, regional security dynamics, and the potential for unintended escalation.⁸ China's recent unveiling of DeepSeek's open-source model has also disrupted the global AI landscape with respect to both its competition with the United States, and its relationship with the Global South, given the U.S.-China technology competition over influence in middle powers such as Turkey, South Korea, India, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and others.⁹

⁵ Denise Garcia, *The AI Military Race: Common Good Governance in the Age of Artificial Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), <https://academic.oup.com/book/55186>.

⁶ Kellee Wicker, 'The Rise of AI in the Global South and the Need for Inclusion', Wilson Center, 3 September 2024, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/rise-ai-global-south-and-need-inclusion>.

⁷ Wicker.

⁸ Okolo, 'AI in the Global South'.

⁹ Matt Sheehan, 'What DeepSeek Revealed About the Future of U.S.-China Competition', *Foreign Policy*, 3 February 2025, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/02/03/deepseek-china-ai-artificial-intelligence-united-states-tech-competition/>.

2. The Emergence of AI in the Military Landscape

The militarisation of AI has rapidly become a central component of 21st-century warfare.¹⁰ From autonomous drones used in precision strikes to machine learning algorithms that enhance cyber-defence systems, AI is already transforming conflict dynamics. For instance, autonomous systems like the Turkish Bayraktar TB2 have been deployed in Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh, while machine learning has bolstered cyber-defence initiatives against ransomware attacks targeting national infrastructures.¹¹ According to a 2022 report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), global defence spending surpassed \$2 trillion, with AI-driven technologies receiving a significant portion of research and development budgets.¹² The United States and China alone accounted for over 70% of global investments in military AI, underscoring a duopolistic competition with global ramifications.¹³

However, the implications of this technological revolution extend far beyond the great powers.¹⁴ The diffusion of AI technologies has empowered smaller states and non-state actors, enabling asymmetric warfare capabilities. At the same time, the risks associated with AI—including accidental escalations, algorithmic biases, and the erosion of traditional arms control frameworks—demand a multilateral approach to governance.¹⁵ Prominent recent examples include Ukraine and Russia deploying AI drones (e.g., Bayraktar TB2, Lancet)¹⁶ and Sudan's factions using deepfakes to fuel the civil war.¹⁷ Cyber threats escalate as groups like LockBit 3.0 and North Korean hackers weaponise AI for phishing and infiltration, while AI-generated disinformation targets elections and

¹⁰ Raluca Csernatoni, 'Governing Military AI Amid a Geopolitical Minefield', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 17 July 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/07/governing-military-ai-amid-a-geopolitical-minefield?lang=en>.

¹¹ Shaan Shaikh and Wes Rumbaugh, 'The Air and Missile War in Nagorno-Karabakh: Lessons for the Future of Strike and Defense', 12 August 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/air-and-missile-war-nagorno-karabakh-lessons-future-strike-and-defense>.

¹² 'World Military Expenditure Passes \$2 Trillion for First Time' (SIPRI for the media, 25 April 2022), <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2022/world-military-expenditure-passes-2-trillion-first-time>.

¹³ 'World Military Expenditure Passes \$2 Trillion for First Time'.

¹⁴ Justin Haner and Denise Garcia, 'The Artificial Intelligence Arms Race: Trends and World Leaders in Autonomous Weapons Development', *Global Policy* 10, no. 3 (2019): 331–37, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12713>.

¹⁵ Emma Klein and Patrick Stewart, 'Envisioning a Global Regime Complex to Govern Artificial Intelligence' (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1 March 2024), <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/03/envisioning-a-global-regime-complex-to-govern-artificial-intelligence?lang=en>.

¹⁶ Catherine Connolly, 'Weapons Systems with Autonomous Functions Used in Ukraine', Automated Decision Research, 28 June 2022, <https://automatedresearch.org/news/weapons-systems-with-autonomous-functions-used-in-ukraine/>.

¹⁷ Mohamed Suliman, 'The Deepfake Is a Powerful Weapon in the War in Sudan', *African Arguments*, 23 October 2024, <https://africanarguments.org/2024/10/the-deepfake-is-a-powerful-weapon-in-the-war-in-sudan/>.

conflicts. Despite calls from the Global South for inclusive governance, fragmented regulations (e.g., non-binding U.S. pledges, EU exemptions) fail to address accountability gaps, thus deepening instability. In this context, the perspectives of the Global South and middle powers are imperative.

3. Global South: The Overlooked Stakeholders

Countries in the Global South often find themselves at the periphery of global deliberations on military AI, yet their stakes are profound. Many of these nations are located in geopolitically volatile regions where the introduction of AI-driven weaponry could exacerbate existing tensions. For example, the Horn of Africa and the Sahel region have witnessed a proliferation of drone warfare, often facilitated by external powers.¹⁸ Without input from these nations, the regulatory frameworks governing AI risk are being disconnected from on-the-ground realities.

Moreover, the Global South faces unique vulnerabilities to AI-driven military technologies. Cybersecurity threats, for instance, disproportionately affect developing nations with weaker digital infrastructure.¹⁹ A 2021 report by the International Telecommunication Union revealed that over 80% of countries in Africa lacked comprehensive cybersecurity strategies, leaving them exposed to AI-enabled cyberattacks.²⁰ The absence of robust institutional safeguards amplifies the risk of these technologies being used for destabilisation.

Yet, the Global South also offers valuable insights. Many nations in this bloc have firsthand experience with the consequences of proxy wars, arms races, and the imposition of externally driven security architectures.²¹ Their participation in AI governance discussions could help pre-empt the replication of these patterns in the context of autonomous systems. Additionally, countries such as India, Brazil, and South Africa have burgeoning AI ecosystems that could contribute to the development of frameworks tailored to diverse geopolitical realities.

¹⁸ Ezenwa E. Olumba, 'The Case for a "Cognitive Turn" in Conflict Analysis: Lessons from Afghanistan and the Sahel', *Global Change, Peace & Security* 35, no. 3 (19 November 2024): 229–46.

¹⁹ Okolo, 'AI in the Global South'.

²⁰ 'Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures' (International Telecommunication Union, 2021), <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/facts-figures-2021/>.

²¹ Vincent Boulanin et al., 'Artificial Intelligence, Strategic Stability and Nuclear Risk' (SIPRI, June 2020), <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2020/policy-reports/artificial-intelligence-strategic-stability-and-nuclear-risk>.

4. Middle Powers: The Balancers

Middle powers hold a unique position in the global order.²² States such as Turkey, South Korea, India, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE possess advanced technological capabilities and are aligned or multi-aligned with major powers while maintaining independent foreign policies. Their involvement in military AI governance could serve as a bridge between the Global South and the great powers. Middle powers are emerging as a pivotal force in AI governance, bridging the Global South and major powers. With advanced technological capabilities and multi-aligned foreign policies—exemplified by India's "Global AI Partnership" proposal and Turkey's drone exports to conflict zones—they are uniquely positioned to shape global norms rather than simply deferring to U.S. or Chinese preferences on the dual-use applications of AI in both commercial and military domains. Middle powers also have a track record of leadership in multilateral initiatives. Canada's role in launching the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) demonstrates how these states can drive international cooperation on ethical AI development.²³

By championing inclusive governance models, middle powers can help mitigate the risks of a bifurcated global order dominated by the United States and China. While critics warn that multipolarity risks fragmentation, middle powers are proving that a diversified ecosystem of actors can reduce systemic instability by encouraging adaptive coalitions, balancing competing interests, and curbing unilateral excesses, turning polycentricity into a stabilizing force rather than a chaotic free-for-all.

4.1 Turkey

Notably, Turkey's deployment of AI-enabled drones in conflicts from Libya to Nagorno-Karabakh has highlighted the dual-use nature of these technologies and the importance of export controls.²⁴ The recent rise of the Turkish defence industry, with a record-high defence and security budget of \$47 billion, goes hand-in-hand with Ankara's increasingly turbulent tensions with neighbouring countries and its domestic production capacity.²⁵ The market and reputation of Turkish drone technologies alone, with Bayraktar TB2s exported to Bangladesh, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and Poland, have demonstrated exactly how the West's inability to meet market demands for defence in the Global South has

²² David Elliott, 'What Are Middle Powers and Why Do They Matter?', *World Economic Forum*, 26 January 2024, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/01/middle-powers-multilateralism-international-relations/>.

²³ 'Canada Artificial Intelligence Strategy and Opportunities', *International Trade Association*, 27 September 2024, <https://www.trade.gov/market-intelligence/canada-artificial-intelligence-strategy-and-opportunities>.

²⁴ Rimon Hossain, 'The Chances of a Third Nagorno-Karabakh War', *The SAIS Europe Journal of Global Affairs*, 14 April 2023, <https://www.saisjournal.eu/article/88-Rimon-Hossain-The-Chances-of-a-Third-Nagorno-Karabakh-War.cfm>.

²⁵ Agnes Helou, 'Turkish Defense Spending to Reach Record High amid Neighboring Conflict', *Breaking Defense*, 21 October 2024.

allowed Turkey's role as a middle power to fill the void.²⁶ Security scholars have also touched upon how Ankara's rapid deployment of AI-based military drones not only contributes to Turkey's strategic autonomy and regime resilience but also how as a middle power, expanding the market for lethal autonomous weapons (LAWS) alters the security environment due to its role in facilitating a "trickle-down" effect.²⁷ Ankara has benefited greatly from the popularity, cost-effectiveness, and battlefield success of the Bayraktar TB2 as Turkey's defence exports totalled \$7.1 billion in 2024, a substantial increase from 2023, where the defence exports totalled \$5.5 billion.²⁸ Of the \$7.1 billion, the Bayraktar TB2's manufacturer, Baykar, accounted for \$1.8 billion, with the runner-up, TUSAS Aviation, accounting for \$750 million.²⁹ With over 1 million flight hours recorded as of the end of 2024, the Bayraktar TB2 is operated by over a dozen countries with export agreements signed with a total of 35 countries, making Baykar the world's largest unmanned aerial vehicle company in the world and earning the Bayraktar TB2 the title of the world's most exported drone in 2024.³⁰

4.2 South Korea

South Korea has emerged as a leader in AI research, with government spending on AI surpassing \$3 billion annually as of 2023.³¹ Its experience navigating the complexities of U.S.-China competition while maintaining its own strategic autonomy offers lessons for other middle powers. In 2019, Seoul's commitment to turning South Korea into an AI powerhouse was demonstrated by its announcement of its first national AI strategy to commit heavy investments in AI infrastructures and greater use of AI technologies across all industries.³² South Korea began supporting the establishment of an AI-oriented startup incubator and designated five universities as AI Engineering Schools to meet their holistic goals. In the realm of defence, South Korea, alongside the Netherlands, took centre stage on September 9 and 10, 2024, when it held the second Responsible AI in the Military Domain Summit (REAM), following the first Summit held in The Hague the previous year. In Seoul, 61 countries endorsed a legally non-binding

²⁶ Nailia Bagiroya, 'Exclusive: After Ukraine, "whole World" Is a Customer for Turkish Drone', *Reuters*, 30 May 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/exclusive-after-ukraine-whole-world-is-customer-turkish-drone-maker-says-2022-05-30/>; Tayfun Ozberk, 'Poland Receives Final TB2 Drone Delivery from Turkey's Baykar', *Defense News*, BaykarTech, 17 May 2024, <https://baykartech.com/en/press/poland-receives-final-tb2-drone-delivery-from-turkeys-baykar/>; 'Bangladesh to Buy Turkey's Bayraktar TB2 Combat Drone', *Middle East Eye*, n.d., <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/bayraktar-bangladesh-buy-drones>.

²⁷ Kyle Hiebert, 'Are Lethal Autonomous Weapons Inevitable? It Appears So', *Centre for International Governance Innovation*, 27 January 2022, <https://www.cigionline.org/articles/are-lethal-autonomous-weapons-inevitable-it-appears-so/>.

²⁸ Cem Devrim Yaylali, 'Turkey's Defense Exports Hit Record High of \$7.1 Billion in 2024', *Defense News*, 4 February 2025, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2025/02/04/turkeys-defense-exports-hit-record-high-of-71-billion-in-2024/>.

²⁹ Yaylali.

³⁰ Yaylali.

³¹ Chung Min Lee, 'Building a New U.S.-Korea Technology Alliance: Strategies and Policies in an Entangled World' (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 13 February 2024), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep64869>.

³² 'National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence' (Republic of Korea: ROK Ministry of Science and ICT, 17 December 2019), <https://www.msit.go.kr/bbs/view.do?sCode=eng&nttSeqNo=9&bbsSeqNo=46&mId=10&mPid=9>.

document that acknowledged that “AI capabilities in the military domain must be applied in accordance with applicable national and international law.”³³ With over 2,000 experts and government representatives from over 90 countries in attendance, the summit released the REAIM Blueprint for Action that outlined 20 clauses in three sections — the impact of AI on international peace and security, implementing responsible AI in the military domain and envisioning future governance of AI in the military.³⁴

4.3 India

India has similarly made its first steps to bolster its AI capabilities with its first national strategy for AI, which was launched in June 2018, coinciding with an AI task force convened by the government to deliver defence-specific recommendations. In this 2018 strategy, New Delhi asserted how its role as the fastest-growing economy in the world, with the second-largest population in the world, meant it had a significant stake in AI.³⁵ By 2022, India’s government released a list of 75 priority projects related to AI’s use in defence ranging from cyber security, data analysis, simulation and autonomous systems, namely drones. The Indian Army, in particular, has deployed over 140 AI-based surveillance systems, including high-resolution cameras, UAVs, sensors, and radar feed, in order to police its borders with China and Pakistan in 2023.³⁶ International partnerships with the U.S. and Israel in the AI domain began in 2022 and 2021, respectively, with emphasis on defence and ongoing dialogue on bilateral AI cooperation and high-performance computing. DeepSeek’s recent disruption in the global AI landscape with its low-cost AI was met with praise by Ashwini Vaisha, India’s Minister for Information Technology, on January 30, 2025, where he compared it with New Delhi’s own investment approach.³⁷ However, this has also rattled the Indian technology and national security sectors similar to those in the U.S., raising concerns for New Delhi’s ability to compete given its large border with China. During the World Economic Forum in Davos on January 30, 2025, India revealed its AI for India 2030 Initiative, charting out a structured approach to integrating AI across India as a strategic enabler for solving pressing socio-economic challenges in education, health, agriculture and smart cities.³⁸

³³ ‘Full Statement: REAIM Blueprint for Action’, The Readable, 10 September 2024, <https://thereadable.co/ream-blueprint-for-responsible-ai-use-military/>.

³⁴ ‘Full Statement: REAIM Blueprint for Action’.

³⁵ Antoine Levesques, ‘Early Steps in India’s Use of AI for Defence’, *IJSS*, 18 January 2024, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2024/01/early-steps-in-indias-use-of-ai-for-defence/>.

³⁶ Murali Krishnan, ‘Indian Army Ramps up AI, but How Effective Will It Be? – DW – 10/18/2023’, *DW*, 18 October 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/indian-army-ramps-up-ai-but-how-effective-will-it-be/a-67134664>.

³⁷ Munsif Vengattil and Nandan Mandayam, ‘India IT Minister Praises DeepSeek’s Low-Cost AI, Compares It with Own Investment Approach’, *Reuters*, 30 January 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/technology/india-it-minister-praises-deepseeks-low-cost-ai-compares-it-with-own-investment-2025-01-30/>.

³⁸ Purushottam Kaushik, Harsh Sharma, and Ayushi Sarna, ‘Why AI for India 2030 Is a Blueprint for Inclusive Growth’, *World Economic Forum*, 22 January 2025, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/01/ai-for-india-2030-blueprint-inclusive-growth-global-leadership/>.

4.4 The Role of Saudi Arabia and the UAE

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have emerged as key players in the global AI landscape, leveraging their financial resources and strategic positions to shape the future of AI in military and civilian domains.³⁹ This dynamic highlights their unique role as middle powers adeptly balancing great power competition, particularly through hedging strategies that maintain strong ties with both the United States and China while securing investments and technology transfers to bolster their strategic autonomy. Saudi Arabia, for instance, announced a \$40 billion fund dedicated to AI development in 2023, alongside investments in Silicon Valley-inspired startup accelerators to attract global talent.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the UAE launched the world's first university dedicated to AI in 2019 and has quadrupled its AI workforce since 2021. More recently, on April 16, 2024, Microsoft announced it was investing \$1.5 billion in G42, a UAE-based government-backed AI firm, earning the American company a minority stake as well as a board seat in a move seen as cementing U.S. engagement with a key security partner in the ongoing battle for global tech dominance with Beijing.⁴¹ Abu Dhabi has prioritized alignment with Western AI leaders to secure its post-oil future, exemplified by UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed's 2024 Washington visit to the White House focusing on AI collaboration. Through entities like G42 and MGX, the UAE is courting global talent and infrastructure projects, positioning itself as a bridge between the Global South and advanced economies.⁴²

Both nations are also investing heavily in AI infrastructure. In 2024, Saudi Arabia partnered with Groq and Aramco to establish a massive AI data center, while the UAE secured a \$1.5 billion investment from Microsoft to enhance its AI capabilities.⁴³ These efforts reflect a broader strategy to diversify their economies and reduce reliance on oil revenues, aligning with Vision 2030 and the UAE Centennial Plan 2071. On January 24, 2025, a CSIS report titled "The United Arab Emirates AI Ambitions," outlined how the UAE emerged as a critical test case for how a technologically ambitious country seeks to balance relations with the U.S. and China through its own AI strategy.⁴⁴ In the report, Emirati officials are "decoupling" from China in AI, but acknowledging the need to sustain broader economic ties with both Beijing and Washington.⁴⁵ Additionally, the report poses two questions with regard to how Washington should better engage with "swing states"

³⁹ Uri Inspector, 'How AI Is Redefining Middle Eastern Warfare', *The National Interest*, 9 May 2024, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/techland/how-ai-redefining-middle-eastern-warfare-210960/>.

⁴⁰ Maureen Farrell and Rob Copeland, 'Saudi Arabia Plans \$40 Billion Push Into Artificial Intelligence', *The New York Times*, 19 March 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/19/business/saudi-arabia-investment-artificial-intelligence.html>.

⁴¹ Mohammed Soliman, 'China, the US, and the Battle for Middle Eastern Technology', *Middle East Institute*, 20 May 2024, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/china-us-and-battle-middle-eastern-technology>.

⁴² Federico Maccioni and Krystal Hu, 'OpenAI's Altman to Stop in Abu Dhabi for MGX Fundraising Talks, Sources Say | Reuters', *Reuters*, 5 February 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/openais-altman-stop-abu-dhabi-mgx-fundraising-talks-sources-say-2025-02-05/>.

⁴³ Stephen Nellis, 'AI Chip Startup Groq Secures \$1.5 Billion Commitment from Saudi Arabia', *Reuters*, 10 February 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/ai-chip-startup-groq-secures-15-billion-commitment-saudi-arabia-2025-02-10/>.

⁴⁴ Gregory C. Allen et al., 'The United Arab Emirates' AI Ambitions', 24 January 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/united-arab-emirates-ai-ambitions>.

⁴⁵ Allen et al.

in the U.S.-China technology competition, while also approaching the need to support the UAE's technology ambitions, particularly concerning AI chip exports to diffuse U.S. technology, from chips to cloud services, on a global scale.⁴⁶

Strategically, both countries are navigating a complex geopolitical environment. Their deepening economic ties with China, coupled with investments in U.S.-based AI firms, exemplify a hedging strategy aimed at maximizing technological benefits while maintaining geopolitical flexibility. The UAE's recent efforts to divest from Chinese technology firms under U.S. pressure, for example, underscore its balancing act between major powers.⁴⁷ This dual-track approach positions Saudi Arabia and the UAE as influential middle powers capable of shaping norms and standards for military AI, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa.

⁴⁶ Allen et al.

⁴⁷ 'The UAE's Technology Ambitions', *IISS Publication Strategic Comments*, n.d., <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2024/10/the-uaes-technology-ambitions/>.

5. The Geopolitical Stakes

The exclusion of Global South and middle power perspectives from AI governance deliberations risks entrenching a two-tiered global order. In such a scenario, the great powers would monopolize not only technological innovation but also the normative frameworks governing its use.⁴⁸ This asymmetry could exacerbate existing inequalities, fueling resentment and undermining the legitimacy of international institutions.

Furthermore, the absence of diverse voices increases the likelihood of regulatory blind spots. For instance, the ethical dilemmas posed by lethal autonomous weapons (LAWs) cannot be adequately addressed without considering the contexts in which they are most likely to be deployed—often in the Global South.⁴⁹ A 2021 United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) study found that nearly 60% of countries facing active conflicts expressed concerns about the indiscriminate use of LAWs, yet their voices remain marginalized in international forums.⁵⁰

The geopolitical stakes extend to arms control. Traditional mechanisms, such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), were shaped by a narrow group of actors and have struggled to adapt to emerging technologies.⁵¹ These challenges highlight the need for governance models that are more flexible, inclusive, and technology-specific. For instance, applying lessons from the NPT's verification mechanisms could inform new approaches to monitoring AI development, such as algorithm audits and international oversight bodies tailored to autonomous weapons systems. Such adaptive frameworks would ensure that governance keeps pace with technological advancements while addressing global security concerns. To avoid repeating these mistakes, the governance of military AI must prioritize inclusivity. Regional organizations such as the African Union (AU), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) could play pivotal roles in articulating the interests of the Global South.

⁴⁸ Audrey Kurth Cronin, 'How Private Tech Companies Are Reshaping Great Power Competition', *Johns Hopkins SAIS*, Kissinger Center for Global Affairs, August 2023, <https://sais.jhu.edu/kissinger/programs-and-projects/kissinger-center-papers/how-private-tech-companies-are-reshaping-great-power-competition>.

⁴⁹ Michael C. Horowitz, 'The Ethics & Morality of Robotic Warfare: Assessing the Debate over Autonomous Weapons', *Daedalus* 145, no. 4 (1 September 2016): 25–36, https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00409.

⁵⁰ Alice Spazian, Arthur Holland Michel, and Alisha Anand, 'UNIDIR on Lethal Autonomous Weapons', 30 July 2021, <https://unidir.org/publication/unidir-on-lethal-autonomous-weapons/>.

⁵¹ Sverre Lodgaard and Bremer Maerli, eds., *Nuclear Proliferation and International Security* (London: Routledge, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203089033>.

6. Recommendations for an Inclusive Framework

To integrate Global South and middle power perspectives into military AI governance, several steps are essential:

1. **Expanding Multilateral Forums:** The governance of military AI requires an inclusive and representative global framework. Existing platforms such as REAIM and The Global Commission On Responsible Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain (GC REAIM) and the United Nations Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) should be expanded to ensure greater participation from the Global South and middle powers.
 - a. **Increased Representation:** Establish dedicated working groups for middle powers and Global South nations within these forums, ensuring that their unique security concerns and technological perspectives shape global AI governance.
 - b. **Funding Mechanisms:** Provide financial and technical assistance to enable resource-constrained states to meaningfully participate in discussions on AI in military applications. This could take the form of UN-administered AI capacity-building grants, World Bank-backed digital transformation funds, and regional AI development banks.
 - c. **Legally Binding Commitments:** Move beyond non-binding agreements and create enforceable frameworks that align military AI governance with international humanitarian law and arms control agreements, ensuring accountability in AI-driven warfare.
 - d. **Interoperability Standards:** Encourage the development of common technical standards for AI systems used in military contexts to prevent unintended escalations and ensure alignment across national security doctrines.
2. **Regional Dialogues:** Regional organizations must take the lead in contextualizing AI security policies to reflect their unique geopolitical realities. A one-size-fits-all approach to military AI governance is insufficient; regional frameworks must account for the specific risks, threats, and opportunities that AI poses within their security environments.
 - a. **African Union (AU):** Facilitate discussions on AI's impact on peacekeeping missions and counterterrorism operations, ensuring AI deployment aligns with conflict de-escalation strategies.
 - b. **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN):** Address AI's role in naval and aerial surveillance in the South China Sea, ensuring transparency in AI-driven military operations to prevent miscalculations.

- c. **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC):** Given the region's increasing investment in AI and defense technology, the GCC should develop regional AI security protocols that balance strategic autonomy with broader international commitments.
 - d. **Latin America (CELAC/OAS):** Examine AI's role in transnational security challenges, including border surveillance, counter-narcotics operations, and cyber threats.
- 3. **Capacity Building:** The Global South's ability to engage in AI governance discussions is often limited by technological and regulatory gaps. Closing these gaps is essential for fostering inclusive participation and ensuring that AI is deployed responsibly across all military domains.
 - a. **Technical Training Programs:** Implement AI defense training programs in Global South military academies, modeled after NATO's AI-focused defense training courses.
 - b. **Regulatory Framework Development:** Provide legal expertise to assist governments in drafting national AI security laws, ensuring alignment with international human rights and humanitarian law.
 - c. **Public-Private AI Partnerships:** Encourage collaborations between governments, tech firms, and academic institutions in the Global South to accelerate AI research, focusing on ethical and transparent AI applications in defense.
 - d. **Digital Infrastructure Investments:** Increase international financing for AI infrastructure in Global South nations, including secure cloud computing facilities, AI testing laboratories, and semiconductor manufacturing partnerships.
- 4. **Ethical Standards:** Middle powers, with their history of supporting international arms control and humanitarian law, are uniquely positioned to mediate between competing global AI governance frameworks.
 - a. **Codifying AI Rules of Engagement:** Establish clear, legally binding international standards governing the deployment of AI-driven military technologies, particularly autonomous weapons systems.
 - b. **Preventing AI-Driven Escalations:** Define safeguards to prevent AI from autonomously triggering conflicts, including mechanisms for human oversight and intervention in AI-driven decision-making.
 - c. **Ensuring Algorithmic Transparency:** Mandate the auditing of military AI systems to identify and mitigate biases that could lead to unlawful targeting or disproportionate use of force.
 - d. **Ethical AI Design Principles:** Develop and enforce AI design principles that prioritize accountability, human dignity, and compliance with international law.

5. **Confidence-Building Measures:** AI-driven military systems introduce new risks, including accidental escalation and algorithmic misinterpretation of threats. Confidence-building measures (CBMs) can help prevent AI-driven conflicts by fostering transparency and collaboration.
 - a. **Joint AI Testing and Simulations:** Establish multinational AI testing environments where states can stress-test AI systems in controlled settings, reducing the risk of unintended escalation.
 - b. **AI Transparency Agreements:** Encourage states to share select AI training datasets and operational parameters for military AI systems to prevent adversarial misinterpretations.
 - c. **AI Non-Weaponization Pledges:** Develop agreements similar to the *Outer Space Treaty*, where states commit to restricting AI's use in certain high-risk military applications (e.g., nuclear command and control).
 - d. **AI Crisis Communication Mechanisms:** Establish dedicated hotlines between states with AI-powered military systems to ensure direct communication in the event of miscalculations or conflicts.

6. Conclusion

As artificial intelligence becomes an indispensable tool in military operations, the governance of AI must reflect the complexity of today's multipolar world. The exclusion of the Global South and middle powers from some AI security deliberations creates dangerous gaps in global policy, increasing the risks of conflict escalation, ethical oversights, and regulatory loopholes. A future where military AI remains the exclusive domain of great powers will only exacerbate existing geopolitical divides.


Instead, middle powers and Global South nations must assert their agency in shaping AI norms. Their role as technology adopters, innovators, and policymakers gives them a crucial stake in AI's trajectory. The rise of AI-enabled military strategies—from Turkey's drone warfare to India's AI-driven border security—illustrates that AI governance is not a question of if these states will influence global AI norms, but how. The AI military race is accelerating, and with it, the urgency of constructing an inclusive regulatory framework. If military AI remains the domain of a select few, the world risks replicating the arms control failures of the past, leading to unchecked technological proliferation. By integrating diverse perspectives, the international community can move toward a governance model that prioritizes stability, accountability, and shared security.

In this context, AI should not be viewed merely as an emerging battlefield tool but as a fundamental shift in warfare that demands an equally transformative approach to regulation. The inclusion of the Global South and middle powers in shaping military AI norms is not just beneficial—it is imperative.

About the Author

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