The Commonwealth of Australia

Positions for the General Assembly First Committee

1. **The Weaponization of Artificial Intelligence**

The Commonwealth of Australia believes that there should not be an international ban on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS). Australia considers the use of LAWS to be essential to our national security, and the prohibition of LAWS to provide an unfair advantage to potential adversaries. The geography of the Indo-Pacific is inherently different from that of Europe. In Europe, conventional warfare is usually fought between large land armies, and aerial warfare is generally in medium-to-short distances due to the geographical diversity of continental Europe and the smaller distances separating countries. In the indo-pacific, however, the geography is vastly different. Simply considering endurance, the direct distance from RAF Mildenhall to Moscow is around 1500 miles, while the distance from RAAF Tindal to Taipei is about 2800 miles. Furthermore, Australia is surrounded by seas, not mountains, hills, and countries. If a conflict were to break out with a certain competitor in East Asia, the aerial and naval aspects of warfare will likely happen over vast distances, in very far standoff range, with little landmass in between. Therefore, accomplishing the goal of national defense in Europe and the [Indo](https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/whitehall-papers/future-nato-airpower-how-are-future-capability-plans-within-alliance-diverging-and-how-can)-Pacific requires very different demands in engineering weapon systems as well as platforms. Our neer-peer adversaries are realizing the same, with their development of long-range standoff [munitions](https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/a-guide-to-chinas-increasingly-impressive-air-to-air-missile-inventory) targeting, offensive [hypersonic](https://www.csis.org/analysis/complex-air-defense-countering-hypersonic-missile-threat) weapons which give very limited response times, as well as their own [autonomous](https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3196513/drones-become-loyal-wingmen-chinas-advanced-j-20-stealth-fighter-jets-state-media-reports) weapon systems. The need to counter these threats means the demand for economically sustainable long-endurance vehicles with the ability to process huge amounts of data and quick reaction time. This points to unmanned vehicles as our most natural platform of choice, no matter for air-air refueling (AAR), targeting and intelligence support (C3ISR), as a standoff missile carrier, or in dangerous littoral operations.

Given Australia’s vital geographical location in maintaining a free and open indo-pacific, we have worked closely with the United States DoD, the British MoD, and private firms such as Boeing through [AUKUS](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/05/fact-sheet-implementation-of-the-australia-united-kingdom-united-states-partnership-aukus/) to bolster our defense capabilities. This not only involves nuclear submarines, but also critical enablers supported by artificial intelligence. The three countries will [share](https://eandt.theiet.org/content/articles/2021/09/view-from-washington-aukus-looms-over-ai-and-quantum/) the costs involved in developing such a platform, as it will be mutually beneficial to all. Australia has also recently worked with Boeing to develop a [‘loyal wingman’](https://www.boeing.com/defense/airpower-teaming-system/) system to supplement our aircrews in accomplishing their missions. In many circumstances, AIs do not pose a threat in themselves but are valuable defensively in maintaining deterrence. To take a recent example, Chinese hypersonic glide [vehicles](https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep29483.6.pdf) (HGVs) are designed to take advantage of both the radar horizon of traditional cruise missiles as well as the high speed of traditional ballistic missiles. The combination of the two has prompted considerations that it may be able to strike before one can react, thus offering the possibility of a first strike without retaliation. This is a dangerous conclusion, both for the victim and the international balance of power. Therefore, two systems must be developed to counter this threat: first, an air/space-borne platform capable of continuous surveillance of potential launches, and second, a targeting system that can successfully utilize a short intercept window. Both clearly require AI, as humans have neither the endurance nor the quick reaction time AIs have. Thus, implementing AI to counter the HGV threat is actually strengthening deterrence, promoting the balance of power, and maintaining peace around the world.

However, Australia does **recognize** the dangers AIs can pose when allowed to operate on themselves unchecked. Therefore, we have implemented regulations, such as the Defense aviation Safety [Regulations](https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/law-when-putting-autonomous-military-platforms-shopping-list) that require human intervention to be possible at all stages of flight. Australia, therefore, **proposes** a system similar to such regulation, to include provisions of the following:

1. All LAWS be available for human intervention at any time,
2. LAWS can only act autonomously in a support role (C3ISR) or fire a weapon in a defensive manner (missile intercept) but must be not allowed in any circumstances to release a weapon autonomously in an offensive manner (autonomous second-strike),
3. Commanders using AI as decision-aid must undertake a course administered for them to fully understand the processes and meanings of the information being provided by AIs.

Australia believes that such restrictions to the implementation of artificial intelligence in military decision-making can achieve the balance between reaping the most benefit out of these vital systems in the 21st century while implementing enough safeguards to not drag all down into a dystopian world like the one in the movie Terminator. In essence, Australia believes that artificial intelligence should be a tool to support human decision-making and action, but never be able to act autonomously, especially when the risks involved are so great.

**II. Combating the Global Illicit Arms Trade**

The Commonwealth of Australia recognizes the harmful effects of the global illicit arms trade and seeks retribution for those involved in the underground dealings of illegal weaponry. Furthermore, we must create boundaries to inhibit these illicit multinational trades and implement new international laws to instill a secure economy within the global arms trade. Australia is a firm supporter of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and understands the harm that comes from the distribution of illegal weapons. The Commonwealth of Australia has coordinated with the United Nations to impede the global illicit trade of arms. Gun trafficking is a centuries-old concept that started as a decentralized trade. Australia recognizes this back as early as the European settlement in the 1700s and the lack of governance Australia holds over the right to use firearms. This lack of authority over the distribution of lethal weapons has led to the rise of antagonistic powers that have disrupted order in global governments, including the Commonwealth during the Castle Hill Rebellion and the Eureka Rebellion during the 1800s. These rises in mutiny have continued globally during the Cold War and after the Cold War by arming antagonistic groups with the illicit weapons needed to revolt.

The National Firearms Agreement (NFA) was an agreement created in the past year to combat the overwhelming gun massacres that plagued Australia. The NFA placed tight restrictions on the use of dangerous firearms and saw a decrease in mass shootings. In the last year, the Criminal Code Amendment was implemented which increased penalties for the trafficking of 50 or more firearms. The implementation of these to reduce the illegal acts committed has helped the deconstruction of the illicit global arms trade. The Commonwealth of Australia sees to it that we remain transparent in our repugnance to gun trafficking and continue to cooperate with the United Nations on that front.

We acknowledge that people should have the right to use guns safely and responsibly and acknowledge that the illicit global arms trade is disruptive to a society where this is possible. The illegal distribution of firearms to those who are unfit is something we do not uphold in our government, and we condemn those who are part of the process. Creating stricter laws and regulations on gun-trafficking is something that can be done to combat this issue. Specifically, increasing the regulation of storing and securing firearms for weapons providers. Other avenues worth looking into include combatting the trading of arms in the black market. The deep web has become an avenue for trading illicit substances and its only a matter of time that the illicit global trade of arms takes advantage of this avenue. It is urgent that any sites used for the illicit global arms trade are shut down and stricter laws be put in place. Looking forward into the future at the potential of these dark web sites to enhance the illicit global arms trade will allow us to be ahead of this constantly changing market.