



Disarmament and International Security Committee

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COMMITTEE GUIDE

DISEC

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1. Presidents' Letter

Dear Delegates,

First and foremost, we would like to express our deepest excitement to serve as your president for the 22nd version of CCBMUN and extend a warm welcome to each of you. We are Elena Bonilla and Mariana Núñez, currently 10th and 9th-grade students at Colegio Colombo Britanico in Cali, respectively. For this year, we were allowed to have the honour and responsibility to lead a principal branch of the United Nations General Assembly: DISEC.

The Disarmament and International Security Committee, often called DISEC, is the first committee of the UN General Assembly, thus making it a key actor within the United Nations and this model. As delegates of this committee, your responsibility will lie in dealing with disarmament issues, global challenges, and threats to peace that affect the international community, in order to find viable solutions. It is extremely important you all put in your best efforts, for what you may learn here ultimately serves as the foundation for a peaceful future, as we are the ones responsible for creating it.

Nonetheless, we understand just how intimidating it may be to participate in an activity like this, and how arduous the preparation process is. For this reason, we would like to let you know that you are not alone. With four years of experience in MUN, we know what it is like to be a frightened rookie, and, likewise, how frustrating it is to be confused if you are an experienced delegate. Therefore, whatever it is you are experiencing, we can relate immensely to and are always at your disposal to help, so never hesitate to ask.

As presidents, we want to make sure that you have a great time in the model, and, as such, we suggest you abide by the following recommendations. Firstly, this being a mixed school committee, there may be delegates at a wide variety of experience levels. Therefore, we invite you to always act with utmost respect with



one another and to learn from what each of you has to contribute. Also, independently of how contradicting your ideals may be to that of your country, it is important you are able to immerse yourself fully into the role. Thus, in order to accomplish this, we suggest you thoroughly research your country and our topics. If at some point in this process you find yourself in need of help, you can always reach out to us.

Finally, we want to invite you to use this model as an opportunity to challenge yourselves. To learn and grow, not only as delegates, but as individuals and leaders as well. We assure you the development of this committee will serve as an unforgettable experience, and are anxiously looking forward to seeing the flow of the debate alongside its respective solutions. All that is left from here on out is to eagerly wait for the model, and, hopefully, everything ahead of us will be nothing but positive. See you soon delegates!

Yours sincerely,

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2. Topic 1: *Power vacuuming in regional safety*

I. History/Context

The ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, developed a postulate commonly referred to as 'horror vacui', which directly translates as nature abhors a vacuum. What this means is that since a void is a mere nothingness, and nothingness cannot be rightly said to exist, it is against the laws of nature and physics for spaces to go unfilled, they must always have something. In society, the same idea applies. For centuries, philosophers have debated upon the idea of government; why it exists, and how it should function. Yet there always seems to be a trend regarding the necessity of having authority to have a functional society; for despite intrinsic human nature, whether it be positive or negative, in a state of anarchy, a conflict would not be correctly mediated, and the people would neither be protected nor secure. Thus, government and authority are necessary for human beings to coexist peacefully in society, as it acts as a mediator upon conflict. Therefore, a lack of authority or a void in power over a society could potentially lead to conflict and chaos, for it would invalidate the established order of things. Similarly, if the laws which bind the natural world were to be deterred and a void, for example, was created, everything would descend into chaos, for it is not natural. For this reason, societies must have a level of authority in order to remain stable. What happens then when a power vacuum arises?

Each respective society always functions under a set of social norms; the rules which establish the shared standards of acceptable behaviours. The reason these norms exist is the presence of a regulatory entity. When there is an established authority, when there are laws and rules, the people will be managed so that they behave themselves based on the standards set by these rules. They also become adjusted to acting in a way that is conceivably correct and proper, even if such a standard is not directly established as a law, for example by making a queue to line up. Anarchy, as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary, is "*a situation in which there*

is no organisation and control, especially in society, because there is no effective government.” In such a condition, there is an absolute rejection of the state and what it represents. Thus, society and individuals within that society cannot be subject to coercion, and they begin to act on natural impulse. When this happens, all preconceived notions of proper behaviours are eradicated, for the people begin to act on what they individually consider to be correct, and not under the standards set by society as a whole. Nonetheless, the absence of power does not always inherently mean anarchy, or the eradication of societal norms and order. Such a condition is called a power vacuum.

In political science, the term power vacuum, often referred to as a power void, serves as an analogy between a physical vacuum and a condition defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as: *“a condition that exists when someone has lost control of something and no one has replaced them.”* Typically, what this refers to, in regard to a country, is a situation where the dissolution of state institutions, which may include government, is triggered, and the nation enters into a period of interregnum, a period in which there is no normal government.

In this period there would be a fundamental absence of state authority, for without a state, how will authority and laws be exercised? This leads to the nation becoming a space free of governance. However, since such a dissolution is often very sudden, societal norms and order will not be eradicated; even if the nation’s laws cannot be enforced, as there is no authority to do so, the people are still subject to these laws. Therefore, since the nation never enters into a state of anarchy, and society is still collectivist (where the importance of the group has precedence over the individual) eventually, another entity will attempt to fill the void. As Arnold Wolfer, a prominent lawyer working in international relations stated, *“Nations, like nature, are said to abhor a vacuum.”*

Without authority, the people will naturally feel unsafe, for there is no mediator to rely on in the case of conflict. Thus, any entity which steps in to fill the void will be accepted by the people, at least initially, for there will at least be some regulation. So, when there is a power vacuum, eventually, an entity will inevitably attempt to

step in to impose some sort of regulation. Such an entity may be formed by the people themselves, but it may also be a foreign, opportunistic state or a criminal organisation that attempts to control the nation in order to ‘fill the void.’ This is more likely to happen in countries located in geographical territories of significant importance, as they will be of great interest for a foreign nation to control, or for an insurgent group to exploit. If there is no authority, what is to stop these entities from establishing themselves as the new government? What is to stop these entities from taking control over the country’s resources and exploiting them?

In order to understand the intricacies of establishing a new state and overcoming a power vacuum, it is first necessary to understand the triggers that incentivise such a condition in the first place. In a power vacuum there will inherently be an absence of centralised authority, and so each of the triggers merely serves as an actor to remove this authority. For example, a power vacuum can occur due to the sudden removal of the sovereign leader. When the leader of a government, be it a monarch, president, or dictator, is removed from power, there will be a void for leadership of the government. If there is no clear plan of succession, or if the institutions of the state are weak, this void cannot be successfully and automatically filled, which ultimately creates a power vacuum.

It is pertinent to note that the removal of such a leader is often through force, whether by assassination or a coup d’etat. Either way, such a removal will happen due to opposition. When the people feel unsatisfied with the government and, furthermore, when they have the backing of a foreign nation that opposes that government, it is quite likely that the people will revolt. The problem arises, however, when such a revolution or a coup d’etat is successful, and the leader or the government as a whole is overthrown, without establishing a stable new government. Often, the reason it becomes impossible to establish a new government is because of instability.

Instability can happen due to a variety of factors, including: civil war and conflict; withdrawal of colonial powers; external invasion or occupation; and severe economic collapse. Nonetheless, when analysed closely, each of these factors is

manageable and fixable if there are strong institutions. For it is the institutions of the state that truly maintain order and stability, as they are responsible for providing the necessary services to uphold the nation. If a nation's institutions are weak, these will fail to maintain order, and this can lead to the gradual erosion of authority. When authority cannot be correctly exercised, even if there is a government, there will be no plan of action to tackle a vacancy in government, an economic crisis, or conflict. Therefore, when the aforementioned factors arise, they are only exacerbated and lead to an unstable nation, which allows for power vacuums to be created.

Without strong institutions or stability, a government may easily be overthrown, and even if a new government is established, it will not be stable, for it will not be able to correctly exercise authority either. Due to this, when a power vacuum arises, it is easier for a foreign country or a terrorist organisation to take control of the nation; they have their own resources, institutions, and pre-established systems to be able to install authority without needing the backing of the nation's institutions, something which an emerging national government does require.

Power vacuums create the opportunity for any given entity to take control over a determined nation, for they represent an absolute void in authority. For an entity that, in itself, is independent of the political structure of the nation and is not merely a political entity, this objective is easier to achieve. This can be attributed to the fact they already function outside the nation's government. These entities can establish authority without the need of governmental institutions, whilst a newly formed government is likely to be based upon the already existing, and dysfunctional, foundations of government. The issue is when these entities represent, for example, a belligerent organisation, attempting to impose their values upon the people; allowing a belligerent organisation to control a nation is giving them unregulated power to perpetrate any sort of violence against anyone without repercussions, for they are the authority that exercises the law. This would pose an immense problem, for the people would live in a constant state of fear that drives them into submission in the face of any sort of violence, typical of these organisations.

Access to governmental institutions also means further power for these organisations, which only exacerbates their influence upon the region, and could serve as an incentive for conflict. In a power vacuum, the people are in a state of vulnerability, and it is unlikely for them to contradict whoever comes into power. Therefore, the only way to prevent the rise of a belligerent power is through regulation or intervention of the international community at the moment of a takeover, or the intervention of a singular state. For it is easier to prevent such a group from attaining power, rather than trying to remove it from power, once established. However these regulations can not be enforced by the international community. Also, the intervention of a single nation is not beneficial. This can be attributed to the following obstacles:

International law, which sets the standard for the behaviour of states and the international community, only recognises an intervention into a state's internal affairs if the state's behaviour can be construed as a threat to international peace and security. Nonetheless, the hostile behaviours of a terrorist organisation cannot be attributed to the state if they are not yet in power. Hence, under international law, the international community and the United Nations cannot intervene until such an organisation is in power and has demonstrated a clear threat to international security. Since there are no other legal frameworks for the international community to prevent such groups from rising to power, it must be managed through national policy, by each nation individually, if they encounter themselves in such a situation.

This proves to be extremely complicated, however, due to the faltering exercise of the law within a power vacuum. The enactment, imposition, and enforcing of the law is done nationally through government and its adjacent institutions. Therefore, when there is an absence of authority, individuals are not obliged to obey the law merely because it is the law. In the same sense, agents of the state are not entitled to coerce individuals into obliging with the law merely because they are agents of the state, for they would not be considered valid any longer. Under this logic, what is to stop opportunistic states or criminal organisations from taking over a territory if there is an absence of power? If there is no valid law

imposed within the territory, how can belligerent activities during such takeovers be punished?

Under the principle of *nulla poena sine lege* ("no punishment without law"), the Declaration of Human Rights cannot impose punishment if there is no legal basis. When there is no authority to enforce the law, the international community cannot legally condemn any entity that takes over a government, even if it is hostile. Without legal authority, the act of establishing a new, hostile government cannot be punished because, without law, there is no crime. This situation poses a risk to international and regional security, as it allows insurgent groups or militias to take control of territories by exploiting vulnerable populations without facing consequences.

Recognition of a new government by the international community serves only as a validation for diplomatic relations, but it does not affect that government's ability to exercise power over a territory.

The issue of power vacuums is also significant. For example, the U.S. maintains a military presence in unstable regions, such as the Middle East, to prevent power vacuums that could allow hostile groups or other powers to take over. However, such interventions can create dependency, and when the U.S. eventually leaves, it often leads to another power vacuum.

This can be evidenced through the exit of the U.S. from Afghanistan in August 2021, after almost 20 years. As soon as U.S. military forces left, the Taliban, which had been fought against for such a long time, immediately took control over the nation once again. Therefore, foreign intervention to try and solve a power vacuum is not truly effective.

Considering the information presented previously, how can power vacuums be solved or prevented from happening in the first place? A single nation in a region with a lack of authority would cause negative spillovers among neighbouring countries due to drastic shifts in diplomatic and economic relations, which signifies a massive setback. Unrest among nations would naturally lead to regional

instability and insecurity, alongside increased military outlays. Ultimately, power vacuums may be a key factor in the stability of different regions around the world, and the lack of control the international community has over them may be the obstacle preventing regional security.

II. Current Situation

Introduction

Nowadays, power vacuums represent significant challenges for global and regional safety. Power vacuums are generated when a governmental structure has been weakened or collapses, leaving the country or regions without a central authority that is capable of maintaining peace and order. This vacuum creates perfect and favourable conditions for the creation of non-state actors, such as insurgent groups, mafias and criminal organisations, whose main aim is to fill the void left by the official institution. Recent cases in countries such as Afghanistan, Yemen, or Gaza have shown that these vacuums generate instability, not only within the national borders but also with neighbouring countries and the international community. As seen in many cases, these internal conflicts can lead to humanitarian crises such as massive migrations, famine, lack of resources and more. Therefore, understanding the dynamics and effects of power vacuums is essential for developing effective strategies to prevent instability and promote durable governance structures in regions at risk.

Power Vacuum in the Arab Spring Egyptian Uprising

The Arab Spring was a series of pro-democracy protests that arose across several Arab countries in late 2010 and throughout 2011. The protests backed numerous wide-scale uprisings that were motivated by the enormous dissatisfaction with the authoritarian regimes typical of these countries, including economic struggles,

political dishonesty and lack of political freedom. The Arab Spring began in Tunisia, when a street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, stood in front of a government building and incinerated himself in protest, after his goods were wrongly confiscated by police officers. Bouazizi's self-immolation eventually became a symbol of public anger against governmental dishonesty and emerging economic difficulties in several protests across Tunisia. These eventually led to the exile of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January of 2011. This event was the beginning of a series of protests in different countries in the region.

Tunisia was fortunately able to transition to a relatively stable democracy, by drafting a new constitution, holding free and fair elections and establishing a democratic system. Despite ongoing economical challenges and political tensions, Tunisia's transition to democracy is considered the most successful outcome of the Arab Spring.

As mentioned above, the protests initiated in Tunisia sparked a series of protests throughout the countries of the region, as was the case in Egypt. After the successful ousting of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia, Egyptians followed in the footsteps of the Tunisians and began a series of protests on January 25, 2011, which were the beginning of the Egyptian Revolution. The Egyptian government, led by President Honsi Mubarak, attempted to control the protests by offering concessions and making cabinet changes, however the protests continued. Violent repression by military forces and the blocking of social media or internet access failed to pacify the protesters, who demanded Mubarak's resignation as president. At the end of January the military forces announced that they would not use force against the protesters and joined the movement. Finally, on February 11, 2011, President Mubarak stepped down after 30 years in control, leaving a trail of economic instability and political crisis in Egypt.

When Mubarak left power, there was no obvious successor. His departure was abrupt and since there was no political force powerful enough or capable of taking over immediately, the country faced an immediate power vacuum. This void continued for a long time with the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), the



only political force in the country that could take control of the country, acting as a power entity in order to try to prevent Egypt from entering a worse crisis. SCAF promised a peaceful and democratic transition in the country. To try to accomplish this, on February 13th of 2011, the 1971 Constitution was suspended. The aim of this decision was to open a space for drafting a new constitution that would reflect and fulfil the demands of the people and allow for significant political reforms. The suspension of the Constitution was necessary in order to have a “fresh start” and leave the rules of the old regime behind.



Figure 1: Celebrating after Mubarak's resignation on February 11th, 2011 in El Cairo, Egypt (Kamel Al-Sayyid, 2021)

Along with this, Egypt was facing even more crises, such as the dissolution of parliament. In late 2011 and early 2012, the first parliamentary elections after the revolution took place. These elections resulted in a parliament dominated mostly by the Islamist Freedom and Justice party, affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood. It is worth mentioning that these elections were full of scandals, allegations of irregularities, which would have long-term effects, such as the dissolution of the

parliament itself. On June 14th of 2012, Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court declared that the electoral law used for the parliamentary elections was unconstitutional. The law allowed political party candidates to compete for seats that were supposed to be reserved for independent candidates, which violated electoral fairness rules. As a result, the Court ordered the immediate dissolution of the House of Parliament (People's Assembly).

The sudden suspension of the Constitution and the dissolution of Parliament meant that Egypt was left without a stable legal framework, there was no longer a functioning legislative body and no longer a constitution in place to guide governance and necessary reforms. The SCAF assumed executive and legislative powers, which raised concerns about the concentration of power in military hands and the possible delay in the implementation of democratic reforms.

The dissolution of Parliament and the suspension of the Constitution in Egypt, underscore the difficulties of applying the legal principle of “nulla poena sine lege,” which says that there can be no punishment without a prior law. The suspension of the 1971 Constitution, along with the dissolution of Parliament, left the country without a clear regulatory framework, creating a power vacuum where existing rules could not be applied consistently. Without a legislative body or a constitution in place, political and legal decisions were made in an improvised manner by the SCAF, which complicated the possibility of establishing a fair and transparent process for the creation of new rules. This lack of legality and constitutionality generated an atmosphere of uncertainty, weakened the institutional system and favoured the accumulation of power in the hands of the military, which obstructed the transition to a democratic regime and left the country exposed to profound political instability.

Following the dissolution of Parliament and the suspension of the Constitution in 2012, Egypt descended into political chaos. Tension between secular and Islamist groups escalated, as Islamists felt marginalised and believed that the Supreme Court's decision, where associated with the SCAF's influence, limited their say in the country's future. In the midst of this atmosphere of uncertainty, SCAF pursued

to legitimise itself by organising a referendum to reform the constitution. However, this attempt was rejected by most of the people and by several political parties, which saw it as an effort by the military to maintain itself in “power”. Despite this, the process of drafting a new constitution continued, although not without complications. Disagreements were noticeable over crucial issues, such as the role of religion in the state, the separation of powers and the protection of citizens' rights. Finally, after months of disagreements, the new constitution was approved in a referendum in December 2012, following the inauguration of Mohamed Morsi as president in June of the same year.

The transition process in Egypt took much longer than expected due to several factors that delayed its progress. The political and social instability that followed the fall of Mubarak triggered an atmosphere of continuous protests, strikes and clashes, which complicated the holding of peaceful and secure elections. In addition, the electoral processes were conducted in phases to ensure transparency, which significantly elongated the electoral calendar. The situation was further complicated when the Supreme Constitutional Court dissolved Parliament in 2012, leading to conflict over the drafting of a new constitution and who should lead such a process. This was aggravated by divisions among the different political forces, which were unable to reach consensus on the role of religion in government, the structure of the state and the defence of civil rights. These problems not only delayed the elections, but also extended the mandate of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which took advantage of the absence of a defined legal framework and the delicate security situation to justify its stay in power beyond the six months initially promised.

Finally, in 2012, the first democratic presidential vote in Egypt elected Mohamed Morsi of the Freedom and Justice Party (formed by the Muslim Brotherhood organisation) as the new president. The beginning of Morsi's presidency was somewhat complex, as the dissolution of the General Assembly by the Egyptian Supreme Constitutional Court, and the constitutional declaration of the interim military government, left President Morsi with no further authority; this led to speculation about the SCAF interim government and whether they would cede



power to the elected president. However Mohamed Morsi was named president on June 30, 2012.

Morsi's government faced several difficulties, starting with the economic crisis, political polarisation and the lack of consensus on drafting a new constitution. His situation worsened when the people rejected his issuance of a decree in 2012, which gave him almost absolute powers. During that year, there was discussion about the real mandate of the country, and who was behind it, as it was speculated that the Muslim Brotherhood were the ones behind major decisions taken by Morsi. In the end these decisions were not put into action due to the various conflicts between the government and the military. After a rather tense year, following several protests and with opposition to Morsi growing, a coup d'état led by the general of the Egyptian armed forces, Abdelfatah El-Sisi, took place in 2013.

The coup succeeded in ousting Morsi, and General El-Sisi took power. In 2014, he took official office as president, ending Egypt's brief democratic experiment with the power vacuum being filled by the return to an authoritarian regime under military control, similar to the case of Mubarak's presidency. Under pressure to stabilise the country, El-Sisi, upon taking power, took a series of repressive measures. He ordered a great repression on the Muslim Brotherhood and other dissident groups. Many of Morsi's supporters were imprisoned or killed, and the Muslim Brotherhood was banned and declared a terrorist organisation.

This scenario illustrates how power vacuums occur when sudden regime changes deconstruct existing institutions without leaving a clear successor or legal framework. In Egypt, the result was a long period of uncertainty and conflicts of interest among political factions, with SCAF holding onto power amid rising tensions. Understanding Egypt's power vacuum demonstrates that sudden political changes without structured transitional plans often lead to a prolonged period of instability. This case shows how such vacuums not only hinder democratic progress, but also increase risks to regional security, as weakened states become more susceptible to internal strife and external influence.

Syrian civil war and the rise of ISIS

On other occasions where there are power vacuums in governments, terrorist groups and outlaws can take advantage of this vacuum to take power over a country or territory. A great example is the rise of ISIS in Syria due to the country's civil war, which is still going on today. Like the Egyptian Revolution, the civil war in Syria was one of the events of the Arab Spring; it was influenced by the protests in Tunisia, and other countries in the region. Pro-democratic protests were suddenly rising in the country as people sought an end to the authoritarian regime of President Bashar al-Assad, which began when his father, Hafiz al-Assad became president in 1971.

Bashar al-Assad's presidency began in 2000, when his father handed over power to him. For the people, Bashar was the “hope” as they saw him as a moderniser and reformer, who was thought to help the country. However, Bashar's government was disappointing. The new president quickly followed in the footsteps of his father and his authoritarian regime. The protests began in March 2011, after a group of children were arrested and tortured by the official for allegedly making graffiti against the al-Assad regime. Protests grew across the country, calling for political and economic reforms, but the regime's response was brutal repression, which led to an escalation of the conflict and the start of the Syrian civil war. Religious differences only aggravated the conflict, as in Syria the majority of the population are Sunni Muslim, while the Assad regime along with the armed forces, most of the government and paramilitary were part of the Alawite people, which was the minority in the country. As the conflict continued, Assad declared the opposition as Sunni Islamist extremists, who followed the Al Qaeda model and participated in conspiracies against Syria. The regime responded with increasing violence, turning protesting cities into war camps, filled with tanks, helicopters and heavy artillery to use against anyone who disagreed with the regime.

After this, Syria became a fragmented country, a failed state. The Assad regime was too focused on mitigating protests in the country's major cities, so conflicts intensified in Tikrit, Baniyas and Homs, as well as in Damascus. As all national and international attention was focused on these cities, rural areas, being outside the regime's focus, began to fall under the control of various armed groups, including rebels and extremist organisations. The lack of state presence in these areas created a power vacuum, which allowed the conflict to expand rapidly and territories to form under the control of different factions. This fragmentation of the country aggravated the situation, and created the right environment, facilitating the emergence of radical groups such as ISIS, which took advantage of the absence of authority to consolidate their power and expand their influence in the neglected areas. Assad also used the entry of ISIS into the country as a tool to divert international attention from the crises in his government and the civil war as such.

The fragmentation of Syria aggravated the situation and created a perfect chaotic environment, facilitating the apparition of radical groups such as ISIS. In regions where the government is fragile or nonexistent, power vacuums become a perfect spot for the entrance of criminal organisations. The absence or lack of effective state authority allows these groups to exploit local communities, recruiting members and establishing control over territories, thus exacerbating regional insecurity. This highlights the huge importance of addressing power vacuums in the context of regional safety and global security. As these groups gain strength, they not only threaten the stability of their surroundings, but also put international peace and security at risk. Therefore, it is imperative that policy makers recognise the complex relationship between governance and security; by fostering stable and effective governance structures, the international community can mitigate the emergence of such extremist groups, promoting a more secure and resistant global scenario.

The power vacuum that the Assad regime gradually left in rural areas was what fostered the Rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Originating from

Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), ISIS was the name adopted when this militant organisation expanded from Iraq into Syria, marking a transformation into a transnational extremist group. With the collapse of central authority in Syria and the regime's focus on controlling key cities, ISIS took advantage of this power vacuum to expand its influence by seizing territory and exploiting local grievances against the Assad regime. The group used effective strategies to seize power over cities such as Raqqa and Palmyra, using many military strategies, such as guerrilla warfare and coordinated attacks. ISIS quickly became self-sustaining; gaining territory, robbing banks, extorting roads and oil fields (and then selling the oil on the black market) made ISIS more powerful than it already was.



Figure 2: Site of two bombs in Homs, Syria. ISIS claimed responsibility (Gidda, 2016)

On July 29 2014, after gaining control over cities such as Mosul and Tikrit (Iraq) the ISIS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, announced the formation of a caliphate under his power stretching from the city of Aleppo in Syria to Diyala in Iraq. He proclaimed himself as caliph, and renamed the organisation the Islamic State (IS), claiming authority over Muslims worldwide. The Islamic State attempted to establish a government by implementing an interpretation of the Islamic Sharia law. It established administrative structures, collected taxes and promoted some services. However, its rule was marked by extreme brutality, including public executions, enslavement, and destruction of cultural heritage.

Between the years 2014 and 2017, the Islamic State was at its greatest power, controlling a large part of Syria and Iraq. During this period, they also expanded

their influence through propaganda by attracting foreign fighters and inspiring attacks throughout the Middle East and the rest of the world.

ISIS Recognized Terrorist Attacks

Paris Attacks (November 13, 2015)

Suicide Bombings in Beirut (November 12, 2015)

Brussels Attacks (March 22, 2016)

Nice Attacks (July 14, 2016)

Manchester Arena Bombing (May 22, 2017)

It is important to note that at the end of 2013 and through to mid-2014, the international community showed great interest and concern about chemical weapons being used in Syria. The United States and the United Kingdom were the most concerned about this situation, and on September 14, 2013 they managed to reach an agreement with Russia and Syria to put all chemical weapons in Syria under international control. This agreement was reached on June 30, 2014.

Russia began to get increasingly involved in the conflict in the summer of 2015, when it sent troops and military hardware to an air base near Latakia. Russia began striking targets in Syria with airstrikes in September. At first, Russian officials claimed that the airstrikes were directed against ISIS, but it soon became clear that their real aim was to support their allies by mainly targeting rebels fighting Assad.

The decline of ISIS began in 2017, as the group lost strategic territories such as Mosul and Raqqa in 2017, as their ability to maintain their self-imposed rule and fund their operations was drastically reduced. The loss of these cities, coupled with constant military and international pressure, weakened their leadership structure. By 2019, ISIS had lost almost all of its territory, thus marking the end of the self-proclaimed caliphate, yet the organisation remains a threat to the region and its presence in the area left serious repercussions.

Power Vacuum in Gaza

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict dates back to 1948, with the growing tension between the Jewish and Arab communities in the region. However, the key stage to understand the power vacuum in Gaza that allowed Hamas to take over the territory began in 2005, when Israeli forces left the territory after 38 years of power in Gaza. After Israel's departure, the administration of Gaza was left in the hands of the Palestinian Authority (PA) led by the Fatah party. However, the PA had difficulties establishing a stable and effective government in the territory.

The situation for the PA worsened when the Palestinian legislative elections of 2006, in which Hamas, a militant Islamist political organisation, won the majority of seats in the Palestinian legislative council. The Palestinian Authority's defeat



Figure 3: Hamas parade in Gaza (JERUSALEM POST STAFF, 2024)

against Hamas resulted in a power struggle. Tensions escalated in 2007 when Hamas violently seized control of Gaza, expelling Fatah forces and establishing itself as the ruling authority. Since then, thanks to government instability, Gaza has been under Hamas rule, while the West Bank continues to be governed by the Palestinian Authority.

The power structure in Gaza is somewhat complex, and is arguably characterised by a lack of centralised authority. This absence of a unified governing body can indeed be classified as a form of power vacuum. Hamas is the main form of power, serving as the government since 2007. This organisation maintains control of Gaza's internal security, as well as the economy and some basic services, such as health care and education, which helped them to gain some degree of popular support in Gaza despite their various authoritarian practices. Other militant

groups in Gaza, such as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) also wield power. These groups operate independently, often carrying out attacks against Israel. This fragmentation not only complicates the establishment of a stable political framework, but also facilitates the emergence of further power vacuums, as competing groups such as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) pursue their own agendas independently. The division between the West Bank and Gaza, along with the particular problems in Gaza, mean that no single entity is capable of fully governing the two Palestinian territories in their entirety. Finally, the lack of centralised authority enables instability, allowing for both the persistence of militant groups and the potential rise of other factions, undermining any efforts towards cohesive governance.

Beyond its borders, Gaza's lack of authority has a significant impact on regional security. The war between Hamas and Israel generated violent cycles of attacks and repression that reverberate in and around Gaza. The block imposed by Egypt and Israel since 2007 exacerbates the problem by increasing economic hardship and restricting the flow of goods, creating conditions that encourage radicalisation. Diplomacy and peace efforts have been hampered by other actors such as Qatar and Iran, which support the status quo with financial and military aid. The fragmentation of the power structure in Gaza makes ties weak and prone to break down, making it difficult to achieve stability.

Conclusion

Power vacuums often create significant challenges for regional safety and stability, as well for global security. When established authorities weaken or disappear, the uncertainty can lead to a huge competition or race among various groups - political, military organisations or non-state actors - for the power of the territory that has a void in its governance. The absence of strong and centralised authority can also impede an effective governance, leaving people vulnerable to exploitation and insecurity. Moreover, power vacuums may facilitate the rise of extremist groups, as seen in the examples above. These groups can exploit the instability to further agendas, becoming a threat not only to local populations, but

also to regional and global security. To address the challenges imposed by power vacuums, it is essential for the international community to engage in proactive measures.

Debating and Solutions

Addressing the issue of power vacuums requires a focus on transitional governance structures, legal continuity, and international support mechanisms. Some countries have attempted to mitigate power vacuums by implementing provisional governments, constitutional reforms, or transitional councils to maintain stability during leadership changes. For example, transitional councils in countries like Libya aimed to provide a temporary government structure that could handle immediate governance needs and open a way for elections, though challenges continued. A successful method often involves establishing interim legal frameworks or “transitional constitutions” that set guidelines for governance, protect rights, and highlight the processes for upcoming elections, which can prevent military or single-party rule from filling the vacuum indefinitely. Furthermore, the involvement of neutral international organisations such as the United Nations or regional organisations, can offer management support by mediating political dialogues, and ensuring that power is transferred transparently and equitably.

In debating solutions to power vacuums, delegates might want to consider: the role of international peacekeeping forces in maintaining order; the need for external mediation to prevent factional conflicts; and policies that prioritise the protection of democratic institutions even under interim rule. It’s essential to analyse the potential for precautionary frameworks in regions where instability is high, such as emergency succession plans or protocols that can be activated in the event of sudden leadership changes. Ensuring regional safety amid power vacuums may require countries to work collaboratively, fostering resilience through shared protocols and support systems that can help prevent abrupt transitions from spiralling into long-term instability.



III. Key points of the debate

- The causes of power vacuums, factors leading to the collapse of centralised authority
- The emergence of insurgent groups, criminal organisations and foreign powers in the absence of a centralised authority
- Consequences of power vacuums on instability, terrorism and internal relations
- The role of state and international institutions in preventing power vacuums
- International legal challenges in addressing power vacuums

IV. Guiding questions

1. Has your country ever faced a power vacuum? If so, how did it impact the immediate stability of the region it is in?
2. What specific strategies and policies have been implemented by your national government to prevent the emergence of power vacuums during periods of political transition?
3. What legal frameworks and ethical considerations should guide the intervention of foreign nations in the affairs of a state experiencing a power vacuum? Has your country participated in such an intervention?
4. How have power vacuums in a neighbouring country affected your country's geopolitical region in terms of security, economic stability, and social cohesion? If applicable.

5. What role should international bodies, like the United Nations, play in maintaining regional stability?
6. What are the best practices for the re-establishment of legitimate authority in a country that has experienced a power vacuum?

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3. Topic 2: *Regulating Lethal Autonomous Weapons*

I. History/Context

To understand this topic, it is important to be clear about what “lethal autonomous weapons” (LAWS) are. In general terms, lethal autonomous weapons are a special class of weapon system that uses sensor suits and computer algorithms to independently identify a target and employ an onboard weapon system to engage or destroy the target, without any manual human control of the system. These lethal autonomous weapons have generally been used against clear-cut military targets, weapons, munitions, Regulating Lethal Autonomous Weapons radars, and enemy tanks in areas where there are few civilians or civilian objects. They also tend to be under tight human supervision and can be switched off if the situation changes or something unexpected happens. Weapon technologies and practices are changing fast; national defence departments and weapon developers are interested in integrating the autonomous use of force in a wider variety of weapons. The debate over the regulation of lethal autonomous weapons systems has gained significant attention in recent years as advances in artificial intelligence and robotics have made the development of such systems more viable.

Lethal autonomous weapons (LAWS), also known colloquially as “killer robots”, have represented a transformation in military technology; these systems are capable of selecting and engaging a target without any human intervention. The evolution of LAWS is intertwined with technological advances such as the breakthroughs in artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, and sensor systems, which together consolidated and increased the number of lethal autonomous weapons and their sophisticated military capabilities.

Some early examples of LAWS include remotely controlled and automated weapon platforms such as landmines, anti-aircraft systems and cruise missiles.

However, the emergence of advanced AI technologies has raised concerns about developing and using weapons systems that can select and engage targets without any human intervention. In the early 2000s, the United States military began using armed drones such as the Predator and the Reaper, which were remotely operated but not fully autonomous. These drones played a significant role in conflicts in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, showcasing the potential of unmanned systems in modern warfare. As artificial intelligence was improved, the idea of a fully autonomous weapons system became more feasible. In 2007, South Korea deployed the semi-autonomous sentry gun (which was not fully autonomous), along its borders with North Korea; this marked one of the first instances of a semi-autonomous weapon system being deployed in a real-world conflict zone.

In 2009, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) expressed concerns about the development of fully autonomous weapons, marking a significant turning point that thrust these controversial weapons into the international spotlight. The ICRC is a highly respected humanitarian organisation that ensures humanitarian protection, assisting victims of armed conflicts. In its 2009 statement it expressed deep concerns about the development and potential use of fully autonomous weapons. It highlighted ethical and legal issues, particularly the difficulty of assigning blame for civilian casualties caused by machines making life-or-death decisions. This statement from such a respected organisation significantly elevated the debate about LAWS on the global stage. A turning point came in 2013 when the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, (a respected UN forum focused on disarmament) established a dedicated group of governmental experts on LAWS. This group became the central platform for discussing the challenges posed by these weapons.

Two years later, in 2015, a significant event took place in the debate surrounding lethal autonomous weapons. A group of leading figures in Artificial Intelligence research, including Elon Musk and Stephen Hawking, signed an open letter to address the issue. In this letter they explained their viewpoint about Artificial Intelligence (AI), in which they addressed the potential dangers of LAWS and

called for a ban on autonomous weapons that could select targets without any human intervention. This open letter gained significant media attention as it addressed the ethical concerns surrounding LAWs.

In 2020, the UN stated a possible case of a fully autonomous weapon, which was a Turkish-made drone, attacking and killing a human target in Libya. The report suggests a drone operating in the region attacked and killed a human target without any human involvement in selecting or engaging the target. However, the lack of concrete evidence and information leaves doubts about whether it was a true case of full autonomy, making the situation a reminder of the challenges surrounding laws.

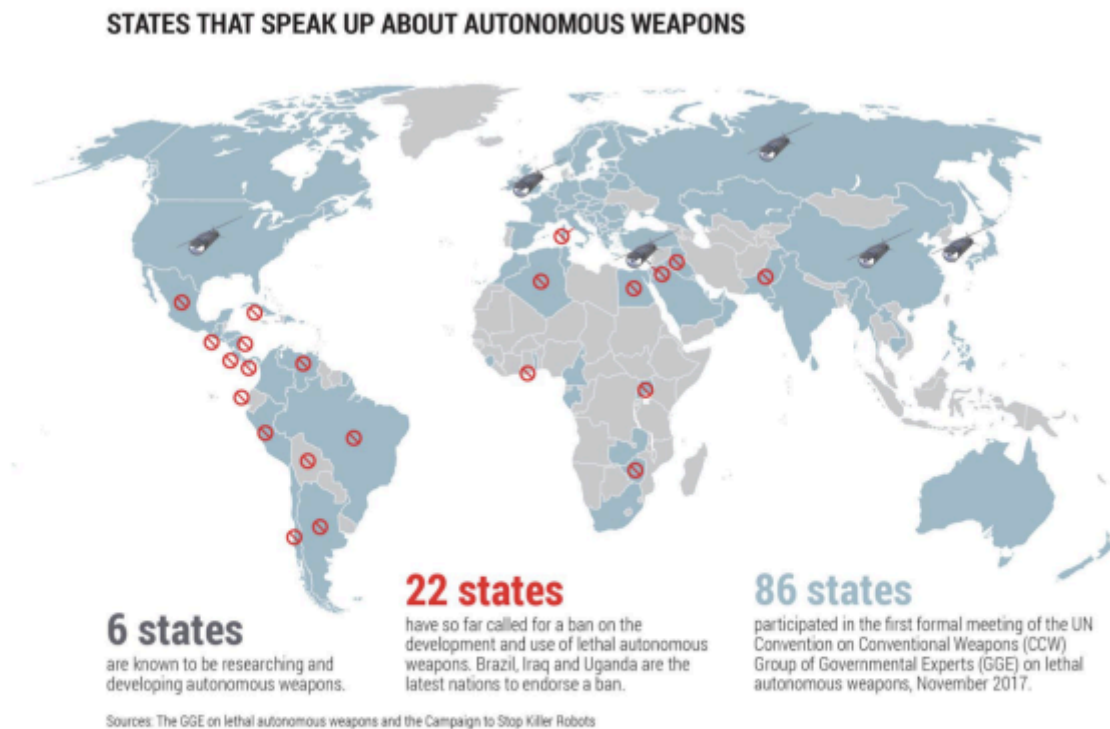


Figure 1: LAWS in the world (Lang et al., 2018)

Recent years have seen exponential growth in AI and machine learning with many advances that can be applied to LAWS. These advances include: the advances in

algorithms, which now enable different systems to process vast amounts of data rapidly and to make real-time decisions; improvements in sensor systems to detect and identify targets; and more agile robotics which can cope with different types of terrain.

The international community has been actively involved in addressing the application of LAWS, discussing these issues under the United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons which focuses on the ethical, legal, and security aspects of these lethal autonomous weapons. Various states, non-governmental organisations and advocacy groups have called for a pre-emptive ban or stringent regulations to ensure meaningful human control over these systems. Countries such as the United States, Russia, and China have heavily invested in the development of LAWS, viewing them as a strategic advantage in modern warfare. In contrast, other nations such as Germany and France have called for regulatory measurements to ensure that human oversight remains integral to the use of these technologies.

The future trajectory of LAWS is likely to be shaped by ongoing advances in AI technology and machine learning. Lethal autonomous weapons represent a pivotal development in military technology, offering unprecedented capabilities and profound challenges.

II. Current Situation

In 2023, the United Nations Secretary General reiterated the new agenda for peace, recommending that states conclude a legally binding instrument to prohibit lethal autonomous weapons systems that function without human control or oversight by 2026. He noted that, in the absence of specific multilateral regulations the design of LAWS, along with other lethal and ethical concerns, pose a direct threat to human rights and fundamentals of freedom.

Lethal Autonomous Weapons are currently revolutionising warfare, for they can independently search for, select, and engage targets with minimal or no human intervention. Lethal Autonomous Weapons have experienced remarkable growth, and the widespread adoption of AI has made LAWS an attractive tool for both state and non-state actors. While these advances may promise increased efficiency and reduced casualties among allied forces, the ethical, legal, and security implications have caused a lot of debate. The faster reaction times of LAWS can potentially mitigate human error in critical situations. LAWS have an autonomous weapon system that self-initiates or triggers a strike in response to information from the environment; the information collected from sensors is shared with a broad group of users, which means that they receive general data instead of specific details of every target. These users are not able to select or know the exact targets as they only get an overall summary of information.



Figure 2: LAWS have the power over life and death (ICRC, 2016)

The use of LAWS signifies a total loss of human control and judgement in using force and making humanitarian, legal, and ethical decisions. These military

developments have raised both interest and concerns about the application of LAWS. They raise multiple challenges for the ICRC, which has to comply with strict rules and specific processes. Lethal Autonomous Weapons have presented specific challenges for the Red Cross due to their potential to complicate compliance with the IHL and increase the risk to civilians and workers in times of conflict. Operating without human interventions, LAWS work with autonomy once they are activated, which means that the decisions are taken without any human judgement, potentially leading to unintended harm to civilian populations or to non-combat areas. This is a complex problem for humanitarian actors such as the Red Cross in rapidly changing conflicts. Questions have been raised about whether LAWS should be allowed to make life-or-death decisions on the battlefield, especially as technological advances continue.

These new technologies can take greater amounts of information and they can be deployed in areas humans can't reach or in regions that are not safe for humans. This dilemma of technological advances in warfare is not something new. At the beginning of 1920, tanks, air warfare, and long-range missiles also felt like science fiction but they became real and just as with LAWS today, their use became a challenge for applying the laws of armed conflict on society; they had to balance the military necessities with the interest and safety of humanity. However, these laws were created for humans in conflict, so the question today is whether it is possible for any machine to comply with the rules of armed conflicts. Will humans be able to keep enough control to make legal judgments?

Ethical Considerations

Ethics are the moral principles that guide our actions and how we conduct ourselves. In the context of Lethal Autonomous Weapons, ethics become one of the central focuses sparking a complex and multifaceted discussion. Recognising these ethical concerns, the UN General Assembly acknowledged their concerns in December 2023, and passed a resolution addressing the ethical challenges posed by this new technology. It was ethical concerns that first prompted discussion on the regulation of Lethal Autonomous Weapons.

The ethic-based arguments remain underdeveloped, and are being outpaced by other areas of the regulatory debate. As an autonomous weapon does not understand the sanctity of human life, it can not comprehend what it means to have a life. One stance is the prohibition position, which argues that autonomous weapons should be banned because they cannot make moral judgments. Prohibitionists face multiple challenges, such as defining human dignity and understanding our societal values. These LAWS often struggle to reflect the complexities of human decision-making and the ethical and social implications that are involved. Ethical values have been an important factor in the use of these weapons as it is the fear of the loss of human control over decisions to kill, injure, and destroy, as human supervision is not only crucial to ensure compliance with ethical and legal standards but it's also connected to the need of contextualization and moral understanding in any lethal decision.

As discussed earlier, ethical values frequently get overshadowed by legal and practical arguments as they are always seen as competition, but this highlights the historical failure to give ethics its proper attention. These ethical roads have been seen as an insignificant or irrelevant solution when talking about weapons, however ignoring ethical concerns can lead to arms races, instability, and unintended consequences. Ethics are key for ensuring responsible weapon development and striving for a peaceful world.

Lethal Autonomous Weapons raise ethical concerns, but some of the weapons systems offer advantages. For instance, the UK's Watchkeeper WK450 drone uses autonomous algorithms for improved surveillance and reconnaissance; these features provide detailed situational awareness, aiding human decision-making and potentially reducing the risk for soldiers in dangerous environments. The Watchkeeper exemplifies the complex relationship between technological advances and ethical considerations in warfare. It is crucial to acknowledge and identify the potential benefits of such systems, while simultaneously addressing the ethical challenges they pose. The Watchkeeper WK450 drone exemplifies the potential of such technology. Developed in part thanks to advances in



autonomous flight and sensor capabilities, the Watchkeeper WK450 drone played an important role for the British army in Afghanistan, as its autonomous features for real-time surveillance and reconnaissance aided human decision-making in identifying threats, tracking enemy movements and potentially planning safer operations.

Technological Considerations

These weapons have the ability to identify, select, and engage targets without any, or with minimal, human intervention. This autonomy, however, is fueled by a complex interplay of technological advances, raising both existing possibilities and unsettling questions about the development of warfare. Imagine a battlefield devoid of human soldiers but instead consisting of machines controlled by AI brains. Artificial Intelligence acts as a commander, processing a constant stream of data from cameras, radar, and sensors to search for targets that match pre-programmed criteria. However, as machine learning (ML) is evolving, ML algorithms can refine target recognition by having a weapons system that can evolve and improve over time. These mechanisms learn from experience with the difference that, unlike human soldiers, these algorithms don't tire from hesitation or get scared.

At the forefront of the AI revolution fueling LAWS development are the United States, China and Russia. These countries have made significant investment in research and development of AI algorithms and machine learning techniques. The US has programmes such as the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) actively funding projects on AI-powered target recognition and decision-making for an autonomous system. China, meanwhile, is conducting significant research in AI facial recognition and object detection algorithms, with the plan to have future potential application in LAWS. Russia has particular interest in the creation of autonomous decision-making drones and unmanned combat vehicles using AI technology.

In the race to equip Lethal Autonomous Weapons, the “eyes and ears” are crucial for the battlefield. Countries like Israel are developing advanced sensor suits that

seamlessly integrate high-definition cameras with a LiDAR system, which is like laser eyes for machines. This sensory information not only provides LAWS with detailed visuals, but also shows precise depth and spatial data that allows LAWS to navigate into complex environments and attempt the monumental task of differentiating between combatants and civilians. Meanwhile, Germany, another major player in the technological revolution, but also concerned about the ethical aspects, is focusing on sensor fusion technology. This fusion-making stream could improve decision-making capabilities, while also respecting the ethical concerns.

While some countries push the technological aspects, others voice strong opposition and advocate for alternative approaches. Several countries, such as Switzerland and South Korea, advocate for exploring different alternatives to ensure that all perspectives can be accepted and respected when talking about this topic, as they emphasise a different perspective of diplomacy, international cooperation, and investment in non-lethal technologies which can help reduce harm. A growing number of countries such as Brazil and New Zealand are calling for a complete ban on this type of weapon as they view these weapons as inherently dangerous and incompatible with international humanitarian law.

Legal Considerations

The integration of Lethal Autonomous Weapons in combat also raises multiple legal issues, particularly regarding international humanitarian law (IHL). One of the primary concerns is whether LAWS can comply with the IHL principles such as distinction, proportionality and necessity. These laws and principles are crucial in ensuring that combatants differentiate between military targets and civilians, a complex task that requires human judgement, which autonomous systems may lack.

In legal terms, accountability is another significant legal issue in the event of a malfunction or wrong act by a LAW; determining who is responsible for these violations and unlawful acts becomes problematic. Transparency and oversight are

also significant legal challenges; this lack of transparency can hinder effective oversight by international bodies and make it difficult to ensure that LAWS are used under international legal standards. The verification and enforcement mechanisms are critical to ensure compliance with any regulations governing LAWS. Effective measures could include international cooperation on transparency initiatives, regular inspections, and comprehensive verification processes.

The legal framework surrounding LAWS is another part of the debate, as the current framework, including cornerstone treaties, such as the Geneva Conventions, were established long before the advent of lethal autonomous weapons. The Geneva Conventions, for instance, were designed to govern human decision-making in warfare, but not the actions of autonomous weapons. This opens a debate over whether new international treaties are necessary or not, or whether existing laws can be adapted. Some experts believe that the principles of the existing laws can be extended to cover Lethal Autonomous Weapons. While the debate on LAWS continues, a crucial fact demands urgent action; the international community must come together to establish a robust set of international rules which will safeguard humanity in the future as the technology becomes more sophisticated.

III. Key points of the debate

- Currents advances in LAWS technology using AI
- The regulations and changes that should and should not be made concerning Lethal Autonomous Weapons
- The ethical implications of algorithms making life-or-death decisions
- Historical precedents for ethics in arms-control discussion
- Implications and liability for LAWS making wrong decisions
- The lack or absence of a legal international framework for LAWS



- The establishment of international rules on Lethal Autonomous Weapons

IV. Guiding questions

1. Does your country have LAWS and if so, when and where have they been utilised?
2. If your country does not have LAWS, what is the reason for this?
3. What are the potential advantages and disadvantages for your country of developing LAWS for different military operations?
4. What has your country done, if anything, to regulate the use of LAWS?
5. How might the deployment of LAWS by major powers affect global power dynamics and military strategies?
6. What are the ethical arguments for and against the use of LAWS in humanitarian interventions, peacekeeping operations and counterterrorism efforts? Are LAWS accepted by your country's society?
7. How can international bodies such as the United Nations effectively enforce regulations and ensure that state and non-state actors adhere to agreements upon norms for the use of LAWS?

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