



Keystone Model United Nations

*Rebuilding Trust in
A Fragmented world*

Committee I: DISEC—Addressing the Proliferation of Armed Drones in the Middle East

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Introduction to DISEC

The Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC), the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, founded in 1945, addresses and focuses upon threats to global peace and stability. DISEC works closely with the Security Council to set principles of worldwide cooperation in the maintenance of international peace.

DISEC serves an important role in discussing the issue of lethal autonomous weapons, especially armed drones. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has set the goal for nations to agree upon rules for lethal autonomous weapons by 2026.

DISEC has held several discussions with member states for lethal autonomous weapons in the past; yet programs to enforce international norms have yet to be established. With the proliferation of the usage of Armed Drones in conflict areas like the Middle East, the committee has noted its concerns about the threats of such weapons, and has expressed interest in further discussion. In this committee, delegates would discuss international norms and guidelines for the usage of armed drones in the Middle East, focusing on the trend of increasing military use of armed drones and the impact this may bring upon both conflict in the Middle East itself and civilians affected by conflict.

Problem statement

The Houthis in Yemen launched an armed drone attack on Israel in September 2025, injuring 20 civilians. This recent attack was one of the many that drew global attention to the use of armed drones and its effect on militaries, governments, and civilians. As drone technologies evolve and adapt to defense strategies, the proliferation of armed drones now stand an important role in conflict, especially in the Middle East.

Proliferation of armed drones in the Middle East have reshaped global understanding and usage of airpower, exposed multiple ethical implications about the projection of power through drone strikes, and further increased the impact of conflict on civilians. The Royal United Services Institute has seen rapid increase in both domestic production as well as reliance on external suppliers of armed drones. However, on this issue, international discussion has remained

extremely limited; global norms have yet to be determined fully. International meetings have not produced a result on addressing the proliferation of armed drones in the Middle East yet, and opinions of major powers differ.

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Status quo

Significance:

The issue of armed drones matters uniquely in the status quo, as the frequency and lethality of drone strikes have increased dramatically in past years. The September Houthi Drone strike was just one in a growing pattern of drone warfare that blurs the line between state conflict and terrorism. It is important to note, that drones are no longer confined to state militaries. Non-state actors, like the Houthis, are able to deploy and even manufacture armed drones for their agendas. With the escalation of armed conflict in the Middle East, it is important to discuss and establish a binding international framework, that ensures transparency and safety in emerging warfare technologies.

Controversy:

Some argue that armed drones are a matter of security necessity; they are precise, cost-effective, and generally risk-free: an efficient method of defending borders and targeting terrorists. On the other hand, recent debate has pushed forward the issues of sovereignty and humanitarian protection. Drones place civilians at risk, and structurally lowers the threshold for military engagement. While regional rivals view drones as assets in warfare, frontline states often bear the consequences of cross-border attacks and illegal smuggling. The result is international consensus, though urgently needed to form guidelines, has not been reached.

Legal implications

Under existing international law, no framework or treaty explicitly prohibits development, transfer, or deployment of armed drones. International humanitarian law (IHL) assesses the legality of armed drones under criteria such as distinction and military necessity; but the uniqueness of armed drones has proven this form of assessment to be problematic.

Firstly, the issue of accountability—to whom should the impact of a remote drone strike be assigned to—creates a legal gray zone that states and non-state actors exploit to avoid responsibility.

Secondly, there are no binding regulations, that obligates any actor to restrict exports and delivery of “weapons of mass destruction”. The voluntary nature of many arrangements, including those from the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), results in states escaping responsibility.

Finally, the use of drones for targeted assassinations outside of battlefields are not accurately documented and brought to attention. Human rights organizations have published accounts of armed drones killing civilians, but with no legal binding in place, states are not brought to face accountability.

Security and Political implications

The widespread availability of armed drones have resulted in the lowering of threshold for conflict, arguably one of the biggest issues regarding security. As drones eliminate the risk of soldier casualty, actors are more willing to launch strikes as opposed to manned aircrafts. In this case, conflict often escalates rapidly, especially in the Middle East region.

The proliferation of armed drones have also escalated the ongoing regional arms race—as one state acquires drone capabilities, it’s neighbors will feel compelled to develop or import their own offense or defense drone systems. Mutual suspicion, in this scenario, often leads to more instability.

Furthermore, with world powers supplying armed drones to their key allies under the framing of supporting regional stability, drones are now a tool of strategic alignment. Great powers seek to strengthen regional ties and increase influence against humanitarian criticism, in this way.

Ethical implications

Questions about accountability, moral responsibilities of states, and the nature of warfare arise surrounding ethical discussion of armed drones. Firstly, as drones are deployed long-distance, some argue that they lower the psychological barrier to killing, and makes the use of “mass destruction weapons” less consequential. “Does remote warfare make it too easy to go to war?” is a possible question for discussion.

Notably, concerns surrounding civilian harm has exacerbated global debate on accountability of armed drones. While drone operators bear no risk, civilians face real harm of technology malfunction or unclear battlefield conditions. As drone programs are mostly classified, victims often have no means to seek compensation, creating a system that is inherently flawed where civilians have little voice and states face little responsibility.

Recent events

Over the past few years more and more countries across the Middle East have acquired armed drones, either by importing them (Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the UAE) or by building them

domestically (Israel, Iran and Turkey). China, a no-questions-asked exporter of drones, has played and is likely to continue playing a key role as a supplier of armed UAVs to the Middle East.

International drone summit:

On Tuesday, 17 December, the Cabinet of Ministers supported a proposal by the Ministry of Defence to organize an international drone summit in Riga in May 2025.

The summit in Riga will bring together defence ministers, leading experts and defence industry companies from the member states of the international drone coalition to form a common platform for countries to agree on future drone deliveries to Ukraine, while also developing the drone capabilities of coalition member states.

States in the Middle East obtain armed drones, uniquely, to engage for several reasons.

Firstly, armed drones offer significant military advantages. They track movements, monitor borders, and engage in surveillance. Their precision allows for highly accurate strikes, something that traditional strategies cannot surpass. The factor of remote operation further completely eliminates the risk of danger to pilots or soldiers.

Secondly, as one of the central security tools in the region, drones in militaries are able to project power and achieve state objectives without having to commit troops; this creates **plausible deniability**, a main ethical concern surrounding drones. A common question revolving around this is: who should be held responsible for the humanitarian impact caused by drones—operators, commanders, sponsors, or the government?

Armed drones

Armed drones, otherwise unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), is a type of *military* aircraft that can be guided either autonomously or remotely. UAVs were first regarded as an important military system in the early 1980s, when they were used by the Israeli Defense Forces for battlefield surveillance and target identification.

The many stakeholders involved in the issue of armed drones hold mixed views and are likely to be affected in different ways.

Possible Stances

United States of America

The US views armed drones in general a lawful and precise tool for counter-terrorism operations—they offer lethality and reduced risk to US forces. It is supportive of armed drones in the Middle East, and even argues drone strikes are necessary to target terrorists. The US is a primary actor in directing drone strikes in the region (previously in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, as well as Yemen and Somalia). It asserts its actions under the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) passed by Congress in 2001, which grants the President authority to use force against those responsible for 9/11 and associated forces. When it comes to the proliferation of drones in the Middle East, the US is largely supportive in developing of technology and investment in drone-integrated air defense; assistance in regulation is unlikely.

Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Israel

As a bloc aiming to contain Iranian influence, promote regional stability, and maintain strong ties with Western powers (the US and Europe), these states have not explicitly stated negative stances towards armed drones—but Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Israel have been the main targets of extensive drone attacks from Syria. Therefore, when it comes to the proliferation of drones in the Middle East, the above states would reinforce the assistance in regulating the drones, as well as investing in development of defense technology such as sensors and interception systems.

Iran, Syria, Russia

Iran, as a military power in the Middle East resisting US and Israeli influence, has become a primary proliferator of armed drones, mainly against powerful adversaries. It's cooperation with Syria and Russia in a resistance bloc against (primarily) the US and Israel share the same positive stance towards armed drones—it is a cost-effective and decisive weapon in warfare. When it comes to the proliferation of armed drones in the Middle East, the above states are in favor of developing drone technology for protecting state and alliance interests.

Jordan

Jordan is the main opposer of armed drones in the Middle East. It sees armed drones as a tool that increases regional instability and undermines state sovereignty—primarily due to previous incidents of aerial smuggling of weapons and drugs. Geopolitically, Jordan's borders with Syria and Iraq means it bears the frontline for Iran-backed militias and drug trafficking operations—extremely dangerous to it's security. In 2022, the Jordanian army shot down a drone from Syria carrying thousands of Captagon pills—this was one of the first major documented cases of drones being used for drug smuggling. Since then, drones have been modified to be harder to detect, more equipped with high-end technology to survey Jordanian borders, and eventually armed with weapons. Several Jordanian officials have expressed explicit concerns on the proliferation of armed drones, and Jordan has been increasing cooperation with the US on

enhancing border surveillance and anti-drone capabilities. When it comes to the proliferation of armed drones in the Middle East, Jordan holds an explicit stance in increased regulation of the drones and investment in air defense technologies.



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