LSEMUN 2026

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Drafting a UN Strategy to Address the Emergence of Sixth-Generation Warfare

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Directors' Welcome

Welcome to the United Nations General Assembly at LSEMUN 2026!

As your chairs, we cannot wait to meet all of you and to witness what you are capable of in juggling diplomacy, policy, and international law. This is the first time LSEMUN has a General Assembly committee, and we are very excited to share this experiment with you, particularly as we are trying out a double-delegate committee, involving both formal and non-formal discussion.

We have chosen the topic "Drafting a UN Strategy to Address the Emergence of Sixth-Generation Warfare" as it indubitably is one of the defining issues of our time, shaped by unprecedentedly fast technological advances and more tense international relations than we have recently seen. We believe this will be an excellent exercise to engage in, and we trust the multitude of your perspectives will ensure debate remains fascinating for all of you.

Our committee is at a beginner-intermediate level and would be a great experience for those who have not tried double-delegate committees before. No matter your experience level, we will ensure your time at LSEMUN will be enjoyable, and we'll be here for you every step of the way. We will be going through the Rules of Procedure and how we are going to run the committee together, and we are always available to answer any Points of Inquiry if you have questions. Please approach us anytime you have a question!

Finally, we want you to know that we are conscious of the difficulty you might find in discussing the topic, given the highly-sensitive nature and how current events are unfolding. We are here if you need us.

We just ask for one thing besides having fun: please be respectful and mindful of your fellow delegates and what, ultimately, is a practice in diplomacy.

Your Chairs,
Carlotta, Adeline, Erika, Kamil & Megan

Introduction to the Dais

Director – Carlotta Queirazza

I'm Carlotta, and I can't wait to see you all at the UNGA, as your head Chair.
I am a third-year Politics and Philosophy student at LSE, which is what led me to London after living in Italy my entire life! I have been doing MUN since my first year of high school, and I always found it to be an incredible opportunity to get to know new, nice, and interesting friends as well as myself and my abilities better. In this spirit, I look forward to seeing you flourish and engage with the issues and each other's perspectives and solutions. I hope this LSEMUN will be a conference you remember fondly, having fun and coming to new perspectives. Along with the other chairs, we'll do everything we can to ensure you have the best possible experience here. See you soon :)

Co-Director – Erika Khov

Hi, my name's Erika Khov, and I look forward to being one of your directors for LSEMUN 2026! I am currently a second-year law student at Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, with International Public Law as one of my majors. Before this, I grew up in Cambodia, where I first discovered MUN in high school. Since then, I have served as chair, as a member of the secretariat, and as Secretary-General, both in high school and at university. I have always enjoyed MUN for the people you meet through conferences, which often develop into meaningful friendships with others who share the same interests and make each conference memorable. See you soon!

Co-Director – Adeline Shelton

Hello Delegates! My name is Adeline Shelton, and I am beyond excited to be your co-director for LSEMUN 2026. I am originally from Austin TX, USA, and am currently a 1st year studying International Relations and Chinese at LSE. I have been participating in Model UN in various capacities since 2021, but LSEMUN will be my first opportunity to co-direct a collegiate MUN! Model UN has been an incredibly integral part of my life, and as I know many of you may be beginner delegates, I hope you will find this committee to be one where you feel you can grow in your skills and explore the many reasons why, year after year, I keep returning to MUN. Looking forward to meeting everyone in the session and hearing your enlightening debate, solutions, and discussions!

Co-Director – Megan Kong

Hello fellow UNGA delegates! My name is Megan, and I am very happy to serve as one of the chairs for UNGA, especially when this is my first (and last) LSEMUN. I am a master's student at LSE, and I study Criminal Justice Policy. Before joining LSE, I studied Politics and International Relations at UCL and was the Vice President for UCLUNA. I have been doing MUN for way too long that I kind of lost count, but one thing that never changes is that I am sure, that you will meet friends for life along the way. With that being said, I cannot wait to see you all soon!

Co-Director – Kamil Szkudlarski

Hey everyone! My name's Kamil and I'm a second-year double degree student in English and French Law at Queen Mary University of London and Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. I also studied international economic law at East China University of Political Science and Law. My MUN journey began at the Lycée International Charles de Gaulle, where I first discovered my passion for debate and international dialogue. I'm fluent in six languages, I love theatre and travelling. In my free time, you could find me reading up on French poetry or practicing my Mandarin skills.

Introduction to the Committee

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) was established by the UN Charter in 1945 and first convened in 1946 (UN, 2026). In the wake of WWII, members founded the assembly on liberalist principals, intertwining the ideals of multilateralism, cooperation, and global progress with the committee itself (ibid.). Each member of the UN is allocated one seat and one equal vote in the UNGA (Butchard, 2026). As a result, UNGA membership has expanded alongside the UN, from 51 nations in 1946 to all 193 UN member states in 2025 (ibid.). Observer seats are additionally granted to non-recognized states, such as Palestine and the Holy See, and Inter Governmental Organizations (IGOs); observer states may participate in debate but are barred from voting (UN, 2026).

Annual meetings for high-level debate occur in September at the UN headquarters in New York City, with the weeklong event attracting Heads of State globally (UN, 2026). Informally, the assembly meets throughout the year to address relevant agenda items. In unique circumstances, the UNGA can convene special or emergency sessions, with 32 special and 11 emergency special sessions held to date (ibid.).

The UN Charter defines the structure, powers, and mandate of the UNGA in Chapter IV (UN, 1945). It is charged with "consider[ing] the general principles of co-operation in the maintenance of international peace and security," "discuss[ing] any questions relating to the maintenance of international peace and security," and "call[ing] the attention of the Security Council to situations which are likely to endanger international peace and security" (ibid.).

The explicit powers of the UNGA include drafting recommendations for states and the UNSC, initiating studies, considering and approving the UN budget, and weighing annual reports of the Secretary General (Butchard, 2026). All UNGA resolutions are non-binding, creating enforcement gaps; the text of the resolution rarely reflects its real-world application and adherence (ibid.). However, the powers of the UNGA go far beyond its procedural powers, with the Assembly exercising soft power through norm creation, specifically its ability to define global priorities/goals eg. SDGs (UN, 2026).

In contemporary international politics the latter power is magnified by technological advancement in media; social media and increased coverage of the annual UNGA meetings amplify its norm-shaping effects. However, concurrent challenges to multilateralism have given UNGA resolutions a new underlying goal: prove that global collaboration remains beneficial and effective.

Key Definitions

Fifth Generation Warfare (5GW): A form of warfare defined primarily by a lack of kinetic warfare. Both states and non-state actors engage in warfare primarily through tools such as social engineering, misinformation, and cyber attacks (Fatma, n.d.). AI and fully autonomous systems are often operated and deployed by humans in limited capacities (Fatma, n.d.).

Sixth Generation Warfare (6GW): An emerging fully non-contact paradigm of warfare defined by non-contact, AI network-centric operations (Fatma, n.d.). While involving many of the same tools as Fifth Generation Warfare (5GW), including information superiority, cognitive manipulation, and autonomous weapons systems, it differs in its complete integration of AI into decision-making, weapon deployment, and war-waging (Fatma, n.d.). Theoretical projections of 6GW manifestation predict an emphasis on space supremacy, 'systems of systems' that would integrate all weapons, platforms, and intelligence into a unified, networked system, as well as conflicts typically existing below the threshold of explicitly declared war (Fatma, n.d.).

AI and AI Tracking Systems: Systems that train machine-learning models on existing data collection to increase their ability to recognize unique entities, such as face recognition or object identification (Jijan, 2025). Often, these systems are then able to track and predict, and alert users based on complex behaviors of targets, increasing their potential capabilities in military applications (ibid.).

Hybrid Warfare: Warfare involving both state and non-state actors, blending conventional on-the-ground military tactics with digital, non-kinetic warfare (Lodhi et al, 2026). Kinetic warfare involves paramilitary actors, ground invasions, deployment of missiles, tanks, and additional military technologies. Disinformation and cyberwarfare are common traits of cyberwarfare (ICRC, 2024). Non-kinetic elements strictly exist in intangible spaces, involving digital, informational, psychological, and economic methods to reach military or strategic goals (Lodhi et al, 2026).

Autonomous Weapons Systems and Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS): AWS and LAWS integrate AI in military platforms to search for, identify, select, and engage targets without further human intervention after activation (UNODA, 2025). Unlike existing Automated Systems, LAWS operate on flexible AI-driven scripts, allowing them to adapt behavior to contextual changes (ibid.). LAWS are specifically designed to eliminate targets using lethal force (ibid.). Absent extended human control

mechanisms, systems may not be terminable once activated, raising legality and accountability questions in international law (ibid.).

Cyberwarfare/Cyber Operations: State-sponsored strategic digital attacks or operations, intended to aid a state in reaching a specific goal or outcome (ICRC, 2024). While Cyber Warfare refers specifically to conflict-driven employments of cyber weaponry to achieve military goals, Cyber operations are a much broader category (ibid.). Broadly, Cyber Operations fall into two categories: Defensive Cyberspace Operations (DCO) and Offensive Cyberspace Operations (OCO) (ibid.).

Directed-energy Weapons: Systems which primarily employ High-energy Lasers (HEL) or other forms of highly-focused energy to destroy targets (Dallas, 2023). Electromagnetic energy may be employed in destructive, non-lethal, or defensive capacities (Dallas, 2023). Directed-energy weapons are alternatives to kinetic projectiles but currently have limited capabilities, with only 18 nations having access (Dallas, 2023).

Space-based Warfare / Anti-satellite Weapons (ASAT): Systems with the capacity to disrupt an organization's capabilities in space by disabling, jamming, or destroying assets such as satellites (Dallas, 2023). Technologies may be kinetic physical entities launched from earth or non-kinetic electronic interventions meant to jam, spoof, or hack communication links (Dallas, 2023).

Information/Cognitive Warfare: Military strategies that employ tools such as propaganda, disinformation/misinformation, and social media campaigns to influence, protect, or disrupt individual and group cognition to gain an advantage (NATO Archives, 2023). Attacks aim to change the way people think, rather than just what they think, exploiting cognitive vulnerabilities to weaken adversaries' will and/or capacity to resist (NATO Archives, 2023).

Meaningful Human Control: Utilizing automated systems in a manner that contains checkpoints or other monitoring safety mechanisms to ensure that human judgment and input (Zamani, 2025). Nationally, states disagree on the subjective amount of judgment necessary to ensure MHC is reached.

Topic Introduction

Historical Background

Over time, military conflict has evolved alongside technological innovation, political organisation, and societal change. The concept of "generations of warfare" is often used to describe this evolution, tracing how methods of combat have shifted from traditional battlefield engagements to increasingly complex, multi-domain conflicts (Razma, 2026, p.3). While these categories are not universally agreed upon, they provide a useful framework for understanding how contemporary forms of warfare have emerged.

Early forms of modern warfare, often referred to as first- and second-generation warfare, were characterised by organised state armies engaging in structured, linear battles (Jordan et al., 2016, p.125). These conflicts, seen in the wars of the 18th and 19th centuries, relied heavily on discipline, mass formations, and firepower. By the early 20th century, the industrialisation of warfare, particularly during World War I, introduced trench warfare, mechanisation, and large-scale mobilisation, marking a shift toward attrition-based conflict (Davis, 2025, p.31).

The mid-20th century saw the development of third-generation warfare, particularly during World War II (Nair, 2025, p.98). This phase emphasised manoeuvre warfare, speed, and combined arms operations, allowing militaries to bypass enemy strongholds and disrupt command structures (House, 2001, p.91). However, the latter half of the century also witnessed the rise of fourth-generation warfare, where non-state actors, insurgencies, and asymmetric tactics became increasingly prominent. Conflicts such as the Vietnam War demonstrated that conventional military superiority did not guarantee victory against decentralised, ideologically motivated groups (Caverley, 2010, p.146).

With the advent of the digital age, warfare began to expand beyond physical battlefields. The late 20th and early 21st centuries saw the emergence of fifth-generation warfare, characterised by the increasing importance of information, cyber operations, and psychological influence (Qureshi, 2019, p.194). The growth of the internet, social media, and digital communication platforms enabled new forms of conflict, where actors could influence public opinion, disrupt critical infrastructure, and conduct operations remotely (Zeitzoff, 2017, p.1976). Events such as the 2016 United States election interference also highlighted the strategic use of information manipulation as a tool of statecraft (Whyte, 2020, p.12).

It is within this context that the idea of sixth-generation warfare has begun to take shape. While not yet formally defined in international law or widely standardised in academic literature, the term generally refers to the integration of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, quantum computing, and advanced cyber capabilities, into military and strategic operations (Gervais, 2021, p.13). Unlike previous generations, sixth-generation warfare is often described as fully multi-domain, blurring the boundaries between land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace, while also merging civilian and military spheres (Lodhi et al., 2026, p.45).

Recent conflicts have provided glimpses of these developments. The use of drones, AI-assisted targeting, cyberattacks on infrastructure, and information warfare in the Russia-Ukraine War has demonstrated how modern warfare increasingly relies on technological integration and real-time data (Razmetaeva, 2025, p.3). Similarly, growing concerns over autonomous weapons systems and their regulation have led to discussions within the United Nations and other international forums regarding the ethical and legal implications of such technologies (Wagner, 2014, p.1387).

Despite these developments, international governance frameworks have struggled to keep pace. Existing legal instruments, such as the UN Charter and international humanitarian law, were largely designed for earlier forms of conflict and may not fully address the challenges posed by rapidly evolving technologies (Shereshevsky, 2022, p.2146). As a result, there is increasing debate over whether new norms, regulations, or cooperative mechanisms are required to manage the risks associated with sixth-generation warfare.

Understanding this historical progression from conventional, state-centric warfare to technologically driven, multi-domain conflict is essential in framing current discussions. The emergence of sixth-generation warfare does not represent a complete break from the past, but rather the continuation of a long-term transformation in how conflict is conducted, perceived, and regulated on the global stage.

Recent Technological Improvements

Each new generation of warfare is characterised by the integration of new technologies and ideas; this technological overview finds the combination of artificial intelligence, autonomy and communication disruption as the defining characteristics (although, the term is not properly academically defined: this is a short introductory guide). Because these technologies are not being equally developed and the economic geography of their production is highly unbalanced, there are several vulnerabilities.

Autonomous Weapon Systems

The definition of Autonomous Weapon System is extremely contentious and political; diplomatic and academic efforts have been ongoing for years (CCW, 2023). Broadly, autonomy can be understood as the ability of the system to process data received by a trigger in order to determine the situation and, consequently, the outcome (Crootof, 2015). Autonomous weapon systems should be considered distinct from automated systems: while the latter independently react to triggers, the output to each input is pre-determined by programming and the system cannot process data (Crootof, 2015). If autonomous, there are two main implications: AWS may be more fine-grained and avoid targeting non-military targets, but they also make decisions more independently from humans. Various machine-learning tools can be used to power AWS.

AWS can be used both for defensive and offensive purposes. An example of a defensive AWS is Israel's Iron Dome missile defence system, which can both assess whether, when and where a missile will detonate and propose appropriate countermeasures (Boulanin and Verbruggen, 2017). Offensive AWS have started development and deployment more recently and there is little information on their integration; nonetheless, some countries have strategically released information on these weapons: for example, in 2025 President Vladimir Putin revealed that Russia had successfully tested Poseidon, an autonomous and completely unmanned nuclear-powered submarine (Vasilyeva, 2025).

Because of the disagreement over AWS, particularly LAWS, there are ambiguities in international humanitarian law that enable possible violations and ethical problems for countries deploying these systems. Further issues stem from the '*difficulty of exerting human control over autonomous (weapon) systems'* (ICRC, 2019) due to unpredictability, unreliability and the black-box nature of precise automation (ICRC, 2019).

Anti-Satellite Weapons

Satellites are critical and indispensable civilian and military infrastructure, continuously used across the world (most importantly, in telecommunication, geolocation, and all their related civilian and military applications); consequently, their loss would be an extreme disadvantage, and their targeting is considered a major escalation (Saalman, Dovgal and Su, 2023). ASATs can either destroy, damage or disable satellites; they can do this either kinetically (by colliding with the target at high velocities, e.g. a ballistic missile or explosive) or non-kinetically (Blatt, 2020).

Kinetic ASATs are well-documented and were first tested in the late 1950s and 1960s by the United States and the Soviet Union (Blatt, 2020). The countries that have confirmed tests of kinetic ASATs are China, India, Russia, and the United States (Roman, 2024); though, President Joe Biden adopted a unilateral test ban in 2022 (McCallum, 2022). Non-kinetic ASATs use various non-physical strategies through different mechanisms: for example, they can disable their communication through cyber-attacks and impeding frequencies, but they could also damage their components (for example, by blinding their sensors) or disable them electromagnetically (see below: directed energy weapons). There is significantly less information on non-kinetic ASATs, though they have been used increasingly more since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in which Russia used mostly non-kinetic ASATs to diminish the satellite-powered communication capabilities of the Ukrainian forces (Bingen, 2025). This phase of the conflict has sparked increased urgency for other countries to improve their space defensive and offensive systems: the United States is developing its counterspace operations in orbital, electromagnetic and cyberspace warfare (U.S. Space Force, 2025), while France has focused on bodyguard satellites with jamming systems (Bingen, 2025).

Use of ASATs, even if limited, can generate significant amounts of debris, pollute space and render sections of low-Earth orbit unusable for long periods of time; high amounts of debris would lead to a vicious cycle (Kessler syndrome), where objects increasingly collide and further fragment, leading to additional debris (BBC, 2012).

Cyber Weapons

Offensive cyber operations can be used to target both military and civilian infrastructure and networks. In particular, they can also attack physical industrial systems by affecting the supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) systems that govern the systems, as was the case with Stuxnet, the computer worm used to attack Iranian nuclear facilities (Langner, 2011).

Non-state actors are very relevant in the area: they employ extremely professional tactics, and they are very advanced, as well as there is less of a distinction between a criminal and state-sponsored group (Saalman, L., Su, F., Dovgal, L.S., 2023 B). For example, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a significant number of hacktivists have targeted European countries (Saalman, L., Su, F., Dovgal, L.S., 2023 B).

Some countries have significantly higher overall cyber-warfare capabilities: as of 2021, the United States was clearly the dominant force, while China, Israel, and Russia were also clearly advanced (IISS, 2021). Disparities among powers remain, but, partially

because of the agility and proliferation of non-state actors, barriers remain quite low (IISS, 2021).

Directed Energy Weapons

An extremely new type of weapon system involves the usage of highly focused and targeted energy to destroy a target. In 2025, the first Israeli Iron Beam became the first fully integrated and operational HEL weapon, used for defensive purposes (Szondy, 2026); several other countries are at various stages of development (including, among others, the USA, Russia, China, Japan, India, Turkey, and Germany) and, after the inauguration of the Iron Beam, some are fast-tracking the process, such as the UK (Szondy, 2026). These weapons remain subject to weather conditions and are costly and delicate (Congressional Research Service, 2024).

Electromagnetic pulses (EMP), which can be caused either by intensive, coordinated directed-energy strikes (as well as space nuclear explosions) can disable electronics in large areas; these would cause terrible consequences if used against Earth-based technologies, but would be civilisation-ending if used as ASATs (Smith, 2024). In the latter scenario, they would destroy communication and defence systems. In both applications, though, they are severely problematic, as it appears impossible to distinguish between civilian and military targets. Though there are few confirmations, the U.S. Congress Homeland Security Committee maintains that Russia and China had EMP capabilities, while other countries, particularly Iran and the DPRK, were developing them (U.S. Congress, 2014). United States contractor Boeing successfully tested a directed-energy EMP in 2012 (Reed, 2012).

Resources and Supply Chains

Integrated circuits (also commonly, yet imprecisely, referred to as 'semiconductors' or 'computer chips') are omnipresent and are used in a significant amount of modern human activities, including warfare: they are fundamental to all systems described above, as well as more traditional older weaponry (Thadani, Allen, 2023).

The Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) produces circa 90% of the world's most advanced chips (Hilton, 2024); most of the remaining advanced chips are also produced in East Asia, particularly South Korea (Thadani, Allen, 2023). The materials used by semiconductor producers are also scarce and geographically concentrated: 76% of cobalt (fundamental for electronics and batteries) is mined in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and most of it is refined in China and most rare-earth elements are also refined in China (for example, Yttrium, which is fundamental to

superconductors, was mostly produced there), despite deposits being more widespread (Mineral Commodities Summary 2025, 2025).

Access to these resources defines which actors have access to sixth-generation weapons: they are inherent barriers, but they also promote dependency and create vulnerabilities that can be exploited to disrupt a country's economy and defence. Consequently, ensuring the stability and resilience of these supply chains can be considered a matter of national security: for example, the US Congress page dedicated to the 2022 US CHIPS and Science Act (later strengthened in 2025) explicitly mentions defence capabilities as a motivation for the need to strengthen the domestic industry (Blevins, Kwon, Sutter, 2023). The 2023 European Chips Act similarly cites the importance of semiconductors for defence and security in the first recital (European Union, 2023).

Due to the dual-use (i.e. has both military and civilian applications) nature of chips and their primary commodities, protectionist restrictions in the sector are motivated by foreign policy necessities (such as national security and technological sovereignty) rather than economic considerations (Thadani, Allen, 2023). Because multiple industries are extremely relevant and there are several non-resilient supply chains, they are often used to weaken a perceived adversary or as a negotiating tool. For instance, in 2021 the U.S. Bureau of Industry and Security limited exports of electronic design automation (EDA) technologies to Chinese firms (Thadani, Allen, 2023): the main objective was to avoid the employment of U.S.-made technologies for military purposes by another country.

Cook (2025) claims that these concerns should justify a new industrial posture, prepared for the possibility of economic warfare, in which the production of necessary components for defence systems is controlled by adversaries and, therefore, withheld. Manufacturing countries also play a significant part as a third-party in conflicts in which they are not directly involved: for example, Chinese companies are the source of the semiconductors and microelectronics used by Russian forces in the invasion of Ukraine (Jones, 2025).

The Role of the Private Sector

Private defence contractors play a crucial role in the development and advancement of warfare, both producing systems and components and funding R&D. Given the new necessities and capabilities of warfare, more types of companies play an important part than just traditional defence contractors (though they remain extremely significant).

Several traditional dominant defence companies have integrated the newest technologies in their products: American Lockheed Martin has been contracted to develop AI for dynamic Airborne missions by the United States (Lockheed Martin, 2024), South Korean Hanwha Aerospace is an important AI-enabled weaponry exporter (Indo-Pacific Defense Forum, 2025) and state-owned Russian Rostec has recently begun a marketing campaign for its advanced loitering munitions targeted to foreign forces (Rostec, 2024).

Newer tech companies are also an important source of cutting-edge systems for military sources. Palantir has built an important relationship with the U.S. government: in 2025, it obtained an additional $10 billion contract with the U.S. Army that made it their main provider for software and data (U.S. Army, 2025). Similarly, the German defence technology company Helsing obtained a $316 million contract for loitering munitions, with options of up $1 billion, with the German government; the same contract was provided to Stark Defence, a start-up partially backed by Palantir's Peter Thiel (Sprenger, 2026).

The advances made in machine-learning have enabled non-traditionally defence companies to become a significant part of the modern defensive ecosystem. Commercial AI companies (particularly Google, OpenAI, Anthropic and xAI) have also obtained $200 million contracts to provide Generative AI tools designed for both administration and operations (Albon, 2025); cloud infrastructure, provided by giants such as Microsoft, is also employed by military forces in both areas. Similarly, DJI Technology Company is the world's largest commercial drone supplier, but some of those drones can be modified to be used in conflict, most notably the Russia-Ukraine war (Pusztaszeri, 2024). After the United States declared it a 'Chinese Military Company', its US business was severely restricted (Taylormoore, Brayton-Lewis, Lee, 2025): the dual-use nature of some technologies seems to be simultaneously inevitable and contradictory.

Private sector capabilities for sixth-generation warfare mostly encompass North America, China, and Europe, though with quite different approaches both to defence and private sector inclusion; work in the area is also being carried on in other countries, but to a lesser extent (Palayer, Bruun, 2025).

To conclude, we are observing the shift from theory to development and deployment of weapons that significantly challenge our ethics and our security; these, along with the highly concentrated and privatised nature of the research compel urgency in a coordinated governance strategy.

Regulation of Warfare

The regulation of warfare has evolved in parallel to how conflicts are conducted, but with one consistent objective: to limit the use of force and reduce humanitarian harm. This is most clearly reflected in the UN Charter, which establishes a general prohibition on the use of force under Article 2(4), while allowing self-defence under Article 51 (UN, 1945). Although redacted in 1945, the Charter continues to serve as the legal foundation for assessing the legality of both conventional and technologically enabled uses of force, including cyber operations and remote warfare (ibid.).

Once any armed conflict exists, international humanitarian law (IHL) should govern the conduct of hostilities (ICRC, 2020). For instance, there's the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols which adopts a technology-neutral approach, which means that their rules apply regardless of the weapons or methods used (ibid.). Core principles such as proportionality, responding time and legitimacy in attack therefore remain applicable to emerging technologies, including cyber tools, artificial intelligence, and autonomous systems (ibid.). This demonstrates a regulatory logic focused on the effects of warfare rather than the specific nature of the technology employed which in theory would make this logic relevant regardless of technological innovation.

A key mechanism in addressing technological innovation is the Article 36 of Additional Protocol I, which requires states to conduct legal reviews of new weapons, means, and methods of warfare before their use (ICRC, 2006). This obligation is particularly important in the context of sixth-generation warfare, as it provides a preventive framework for assessing the legality of emerging technologies such as autonomous weapon systems and advanced cyber capabilities (ibid.). This ensures that innovation remains constrained to existing legal restrictions rather than operating outside them.

Despite these frameworks, important regulatory gaps persist. Regarding the autonomous weapon systems, there is currently no comprehensive, legally binding international treaty. However, the issue has gained increasing attention within the UN, particularly through discussions under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) and General Assembly resolutions (UNODA, 2023). These debates have emphasised on the need to ensure sufficient human control and accountability due to concerns that existing IHL principles may not be sufficient on their own to regulate and to hold accountable the increasingly autonomous technologies (ibid.).

Similarly, in cyber warfare, there is no unified treaty regulating state actions. Instead, the prevailing position, reaffirmed by UN processes such as the Open-Ended Working

Group on information and communication technologies, is that existing international law, including the UN Charter and IHL, also applies to cyber operations (UNODA, 2023).

Overall, the regulation of sixth-generation warfare remains fragmented and adaptive, as such it lacks a unified regime. Currently, it consists of overlapping legal mechanisms, such as the UN Charter, IHL, weapons review mechanisms, and emerging normative processes, rather than a single comprehensive framework (UN, 1945). The underlying logic is that international law continues to try to adapt to technological evolutions, but struggles to provide sufficiently precise, enforceable, and coordinated rules for increasingly complex, multi-domain forms of conflict.

Timeline of Important Events

Circa 1918: Germany develops in World War I nonlinear tactics, relying on infiltration rather than close contact. Integrated with new technology, this leads to the emergence of blitzkrieg-style warfare in World War II. (Lind et al., 1989)

1989: Lind et al. (1989) develop the generations of war framework, theorising the appearance of fourth generation warfare. They claim generations of warfare are defined and brought upon by technology or ideas (though the tactics tend to rely on both, at least partially). Because of the then inability to translate into effective, 'smart' weapons new technologies, the authors believe that fourth generation warfare to be mostly characterised by ideas, undermining traditional war order and clear divisions between war and peace. Lind et al. (1989) claim fourth generation warfare will be defined by elements of terrorism (such as high dispersion), transnationality, cultural and psychological attacks, and more sophisticated technology.

May 2007: For 22 days, Estonia suffers a wave of cyber-attacks (mostly in the form of Distributed Denial-of-Service, wherein servers are overwhelmed by an abundance of redundant, malicious requests). (Ottis, 2008) This follows the removal of a Soviet war memorial and a series of riots, mostly involving ethnic Russians living in the country; the waves of the cyber targeting are timed with the riots and salient communications (Traynor, 2007). Despite no immediate vindication, other factors seem to point to a campaign by different individuals, encouraged but not organised by Russian authorities (Ottis, 2008). Among the targets are official State pages (including the presidency, the parliament, and the government), news organisations, parties, and banks (ibid.).

2009/10: Iranian uranium enrichment facilities are targeted by Stuxnet, a malicious computer worm that targeted integrated industrial control systems to physically destroy technology at the facilities (Langner, 2011). Being a computer worm, Stuxnet did not need, once installed, human interaction to propagate the attack nor Internet access (Collins and McCombie, 2012).

Stuxnet mostly targets vulnerabilities that are not defects, but rather inherent features of the software (mostly, lack of requests of a digital signature) (Langner, 2011). Stuxnet is widely considered the first cyber warfare weapon ever designed (Langner, 2011). While not confirmed by the authorities, the malware is generally attributed to US and Israeli officials and scientists (Nakashima and Warrick, 2012).

2013: The NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence publishes the *Tallinn Manual on the International Law Applicable to Cyber Warfare*, an academic study on the application of international law to cyber conflicts. (Schmitt, 2013) Legal analysis on cyber-attacks has become necessary, given the increased presence and higher capabilities.

2015: The UN Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security determines that international law applies to ICT activity and infrastructure (UNGA, 2015).

2020: The Nagorno-Karabakh is the first example of full integration of modern, intelligent technologies in conflict, where Azerbaijani forces were mostly network centric. (Wu, Zhu and Pang, 2022)

2022: The UNGA adopts a resolution to discourage the practice of direct-ascent testing anti-satellite missiles (UNGA, 2022); this is in response to new wave of anti-satellite weapons tests that started in 2007, i.e. when China became the third country to successfully launch an anti-satellite weapon and the first since 1985 (Zissis, 2007). The aim is to avoid an arms race focused on outer space and to prevent space pollution (UNGA, 2022).

2024: During the Gaza bombing campaign, the Israeli military uses a then-undisclosed in-house AI tool (Lavender) to create and operate a database of thousands of Palestinians allegedly linked to Hamas (McKernan and Davies, 2024). The database was used to identify targets and, according to operatives, played a much more central role than humans (McKernan and Davies, 2024).

February 2026: A.I. company Anthropic and the US Department of Defence [DoD] fail to agree on a deal over the usage of the technology by the DoD, particularly over insurances that Anthropic-made tools would not be used for domestic surveillance and autonomous lethal weapons (Metz, 2026). Anthropic is then labelled a supply-chain risk and its employees called by President Donald Trump '*Leftwing nut jobs [who try to] force [the Dod] to obey their Terms of Service instead of our Constitution*' (Bond and Brumfiel, 2026). The following week, Anthropic's rival company OpenAI announces that it had reached a deal with the DoD to use its technologies, which would include technical safeguards (Metz, 2026).

Topic Discussion

Lack of Definitions concerning Sixth-Generation Warfare

The concept of sixth-generation warfare does not yet have a universally accepted definition in international law (UNIDIR, 2025; UN General Assembly, 2024). However, the term is increasingly used to describe a form of conflict characterised by the integration of several advanced technologies and operational domains such as artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, cyber operations, information warfare, and space-based capabilities (UNIDIR, 2025). Unlike earlier and other forms of warfare that primarily focused on conventional military force, sixth-generation warfare involves the use of digital, informational, and technological tools simultaneously (ibid.). As a result, the conflict may take place across multiple domains at the same time, these include cyberspace and outer space (ibid.). This development creates difficulties for international institutions such as the United Nations because many existing legal frameworks or mechanisms were designed to regulate traditional weapons and clearly identifiable and defined military operations (UNIDIR 2025; UN General Assembly 2024). Without a commonly accepted definition, states interpret the concept differently, which makes it harder to develop shared rules, monitoring mechanisms, or cooperative strategies to manage these emerging threats.

The Question of Accountability

One of the most important challenges associated with sixth-generation warfare concerns the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in military decision-making and targeting processes. AI technologies can analyse large amounts of data and support or automate certain operational decisions, including identifying potential targets or guiding weapons systems (ICRC, 2025; OHCHR, 2025). While international humanitarian law continues to apply to all military operations, these technologies pose new questions about responsibility when mistakes or unlawful harm take place (ICRC, 2025). In traditional military operations, responsibility is usually attributable according to a clear chain of command (ibid.). However, AI-assisted systems often rely on complex algorithms, multiple data sources, and software developed by private companies which allow independent decisions without human input (OHCHR, 2025). This makes it difficult to determine who is responsible when such a system produces harmful outcomes. Concerns about accountability have therefore led many international organisations and humanitarian actors to emphasise the importance of maintaining meaningful human oversight in the use of force and ensuring that new technologies are subject to careful legal review before use (ICRC, 2025; OHCHR, 2025). Without these safeguards, the rapid development of military AI could create situations

in which harmful decisions happen without clear legal responsibility, allowing individuals to indirectly escape from responsibility.

The Risk of Escalation

Cyber operations represent another major challenge for international security. Unlike conventional military attacks, cyber activities are often difficult to keep track and attribute with certainty because they rely on digital networks that can make it harder to pinpoint the identity of the responsible actor (UNIDIR 2026). This uncertainty creates significant risks for international stability. When states experience cyber intrusions affecting critical infrastructure such as energy systems, financial networks, or communication platforms, they may struggle to determine who is responsible and how to respond (ibid.). As delayed attribution may allow hostile activities to continue, rapid retaliation based on uncertain evidence may increase the risk of escalation between states (ibid.). Within the United Nations system, cyber threats have increasingly been recognised as a serious concern for international peace and security, particularly because cyber operations can affect civilian infrastructure or spread across borders, and just as any transnational issue, become hard to contain and resolve (ibid.).

Information Warfare and Civilian Protection

Modern conflicts increasingly involve the manipulation of information environments. Information warfare can include disinformation campaigns, coordinated propaganda, manipulated information, and the use of digital platforms to influence public opinion or undermine trust in institutions (ICRC, 2024; Pauwels, 2024). These activities directly affect civilian populations by using them to fuel divisions, spreading false or misleading information about military operations, humanitarian aid, or international and political developments (ICRC, 2024). In conflict situations, such manipulation can increase social tensions, hinder humanitarian assistance, and create confusion about the reality of events (ibid.).

At the same time, digital technologies allow civilians themselves to participate more actively in information networks by sharing images, locations, or narratives related to conflict through social media and messaging platforms (Pauwels, 2024). Even when individuals do not intend to cause harm, the rapid circulation of unverified information can easily generate rumours or inaccurate interpretations of events (ibid.). Such rumours may intensify existing divisions within societies, contribute to mistrust between communities, and amplify political or ethnic tensions. In some cases, civilians may also unintentionally share sensitive information such as the location of troops, humanitarian workers, or civilians seeking protection, which places those individuals at risk (ICRC, 2024; Pauwels, 2024). The widespread sharing of real-time information

through digital platforms can therefore have unintended consequences by exposing vulnerable groups or revealing strategic positions to parties involved in the conflict.

For these reasons, the increasing involvement of civilians in digital information environments complicates the distinction between combatants and non-combatants and raises broader concerns about civilian protection in modern conflicts.

Dual-use technologies and the role of private companies

Another difficulty associated with emerging forms of warfare is the growing role of private technology companies misusing their resources and being involved through proxy mechanisms (OHCHR, 2025; UNIDIR, 2025). Many of the technologies used in modern military operations are developed primarily for civilian purposes, including satellite imagery, cloud computing services, artificial intelligence systems, and telecommunications infrastructure (UNIDIR, 2025). Because these technologies can serve both civilian and military purposes, they are often described as dual-use technologies (ibid.). This creates complex governance challenges because international humanitarian law traditionally regulates the conduct of states rather than private companies (OHCHR, 2025). When military operations rely on commercial technological infrastructure and privately developed software, the responsibilities of both governments and corporations become ambiguous (OHCHR, 2025; UNIDIR, 2025). Private actors become indirectly involved in military activities through supply chains, technological partnerships, or service provision (OCHR, 2025). As a result, regulating emerging forms of warfare increasingly requires cooperation between states, international organisations, and private companies in order to ensure that technological developments remain consistent with international law and human rights standards (OHCHR, 2025; UNIDIR, 2025).

Dependence on space infrastructure and multi-domain vulnerability

A further concern relates to the growing dependence of modern societies on satellite systems and other space-based infrastructure. Satellites support many essential services, including navigation, telecommunications, weather monitoring, financial transactions, and disaster response coordination (UNIDIR 2025; UN General Assembly 2024). These systems also play an important role in military operations by enabling communication, intelligence gathering, and navigation for armed forces (UNIDIR 2025). Because the same infrastructure often serves both civilian and military purposes, interference with satellite systems result in widespread consequences beyond the battlefield (ibid.). Concerns about the development of counter-space technologies capable of disrupting or damaging satellites creates a huge issue to which not only the military faces consequences to but civilians as well since such actions affect

global communication networks and other critical services relied upon by civilian populations (ibid.). Although international agreements such as the Outer Space Treaty establish important principles regarding the peaceful use of space, the rapid expansion of space-based technologies has raised questions about whether current legal frameworks are sufficient to address emerging risks but also the influence private companies possess on warfare by possessing satellites and information networks (UNIDIR 2025; UN General Assembly 2024).

Case Studies

Case Study 1: The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War

The 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Armenia marked a decisive turning point in the evolution of modern warfare (Sasty, 2026, p.115). While the territorial dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh dates back to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the six-week conflict from September to November 2020 was not merely another episode in a frozen conflict. It was widely regarded by military analysts as the first large-scale demonstration of integrated drone warfare, real-time battlefield digitisation, and network-centric operations against a conventionally structured army (Wu, 2023, p.233).

Unlike the 1990s phase of the conflict, which relied heavily on artillery duels and ground manoeuvres, the 2020 war was defined by Azerbaijan's systematic use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), loitering munitions, and precision-guided systems (Alizada, 2025, p.1602). Azerbaijan deployed Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 drones, alongside Israeli-produced loitering munitions such as the Harop system (Iddon, 2020). These platforms enabled long-duration surveillance, target acquisition, and precision strikes against Armenian armour, artillery, logistics convoys, and air defence systems. The integration of drone reconnaissance with real-time strike capabilities allowed Azerbaijani forces to neutralise high-value targets without committing significant ground troops in the early stages of the war (Sher, 2025, p.1453).

Armenia, by contrast, relied primarily on legacy Soviet-era equipment, including tanks, static artillery positions, and conventional surface-to-air missile systems (Gurbanov, 2025, p.244). These systems, designed for twentieth-century battlefield conditions, proved highly vulnerable to persistent aerial surveillance and precision targeting. Armenian forces struggled to adapt to an operational environment in which concealment was nearly impossible, and movement could be detected and destroyed within minutes (Čurčija & Pavič, 2022, p.68). The systematic destruction of air defence units created a cascading effect, further exposing ground forces and accelerating territorial losses.

Beyond the battlefield's kinetic dimension, the conflict also demonstrated the growing importance of psychological and information warfare. Azerbaijan released extensive drone footage of successful strikes, disseminated through social media and state-aligned media channels (Babayeva, 2025). The circulation of such footage exemplifies a core feature of sixth-generation warfare, which is the fusion of physical and cognitive

domains. The battlefield was not confined to territorial lines but extended into the digital information sphere, where narrative control influenced strategic outcomes.

The war concluded with a Russian-brokered ceasefire in November 2020, under which Armenia ceded significant territories to Azerbaijan (Neset et al., 2023, p.11). Yet the broader implications of the conflict extend far beyond the South Caucasus. Relatively low-cost UAVs, when integrated into a coherent doctrine, were able to dismantle traditional combined-arms defences (Jones et al., 2023, p.17). The conflict challenged long-standing assumptions about the survivability of heavy armour and static defensive fortifications in the absence of robust electronic warfare and counter-drone systems.

From a sixth-generation warfare perspective, the Nagorno-Karabakh war illustrates several defining characteristics. First, it highlights the shift toward network-centric warfare, in which data, sensors, and communication systems create a continuous feedback loop between surveillance and strike capability (Yermoldina et al., 2026, p.74). Second, it underscores the democratisation of advanced military technologies. Unlike fifth-generation fighter aircraft or large-scale missile defence systems, drones and loitering munitions are comparatively affordable and exportable, lowering the barrier to entry for technologically enabled warfare (Sanders et al., 2023, p.15). Third, it reveals the increasing role of private defence firms and transnational supply chains in shaping conflict dynamics, raising complex questions about accountability and regulation (Gustafsson et al., 2023, p.863).

This case presents pressing normative and regulatory challenges. Existing international humanitarian law was developed in an era dominated by manned platforms and clearly attributable chains of command. The proliferation of semi-autonomous systems complicates attribution, accountability, and proportionality assessments (Gunawan et al., 2022, p.7). Furthermore, the export of armed drones by states and private manufacturers occurs in a regulatory environment that remains fragmented and politically contested. The absence of binding global standards governing autonomous or semi-autonomous weapons systems leaves significant gaps in oversight (Bode & Huelss, 2022, p.183).

In addition, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict demonstrates how emerging military technologies can destabilise regional balances of power without triggering broader international intervention (Semercioğlu, 2021, p.57). Because the war remained geographically contained and did not directly involve major powers as combatants, it unfolded largely outside sustained multilateral scrutiny. This conflict should be understood not merely as a regional territorial dispute, but as an operational preview of future conflict. It revealed how unmanned systems, precision targeting, data

integration, and strategic communication can converge to produce decisive military outcomes.

Case Study 2: U.S.–China Cyber and Cognitive Warfare Escalation

The evolving strategic competition between the United States and China represents one of the most consequential manifestations of sixth-generation warfare in the 21st century. Unlike conventional armed conflicts, this rivalry has unfolded largely below the threshold of declared war (Mazarr, 2022). It is characterised by persistent cyber operations, technological competition, economic coercion, influence campaigns, and the strategic manipulation of legal and normative frameworks. Taken together, these developments illustrate the emergence of warfare conducted in the so-called "grey zone", where states pursue strategic advantage without triggering open hostilities (Azad et al., 2023, p.90).

Since the mid-2010s, bilateral tensions have increasingly extended into cyberspace. Both governments have accused each other of orchestrating cyber espionage campaigns targeting intellectual property, defence infrastructure, and critical technologies (Lindsay et al., 2015, p.21). The United States has publicly attributed multiple cyber intrusions to actors linked to Chinese state entities, while China has rejected these allegations and raised parallel accusations of American cyber surveillance (Lu & Zhang, 2022, p.62). What distinguishes this phase of competition is not merely the occurrence of cyber operations, but their scale, persistence, and integration into broader geopolitical strategy. Cyber activity is no longer an auxiliary instrument, but a central domain of strategic contestation.

The technological rivalry surrounding fifth generation (5G) telecommunications infrastructure further illustrates this transformation. The global expansion of Chinese telecommunications firms, particularly Huawei, became a focal point of strategic dispute (Wen, 2020). Washington argued that reliance on Chinese-built infrastructure posed national security risks, potentially enabling espionage or sabotage. In response, the United States implemented export controls and encouraged allies to restrict the integration of Chinese 5G systems into their networks (Ceci & Rubin, 2022, p.273). Beijing, in turn, framed such measures as protectionist and politically motivated. The 5G debate thus transcended commercial competition and entered the realm of security governance, demonstrating how digital infrastructure itself has become a contested battlespace (Slawotsky, 2025, p.186).

Simultaneously, the South China Sea has functioned as a physical extension of this grey-zone competition. China's construction and militarisation of artificial islands in

disputed waters have not resulted in direct armed confrontation with the United States, yet it has incrementally altered the strategic balance in the Indo-Pacific (Ghani, 2025, p.3813). The United States has responded through freedom of navigation operations, diplomatic coalitions, and strengthened security partnerships in the region (Erickson, 2016, p.8). While these manoeuvres remain below the threshold of war, they form part of a broader pattern of calibrated strategic signalling and deterrence, which are hallmarks of sixth-generation warfare's emphasis on continuous pressure rather than decisive battle.

A defining feature of this rivalry is the fusion of military, economic, technological, and cognitive instruments of power. Artificial intelligence has become a strategic priority for both states, with significant investments directed toward military applications, autonomous systems, data analytics, and quantum computing (Johnson, 2021, p.1973). The AI race is not confined to weapons development. It also encompasses supply chains, semiconductor manufacturing, cloud infrastructure, and standards-setting in international bodies (Sullivan, 2021, p.4). In this sense, technological ecosystems themselves have become arenas of competition, with long-term implications for global governance and security architectures.

Cognitive and informational dimensions further complicate this landscape. Allegations of disinformation campaigns, influence operations on social media platforms, and attempts to shape public opinion abroad highlight how narratives are weaponised in pursuit of strategic goals (Forest, 2021, p.25). These efforts are difficult to attribute definitively and often operate through proxies or deniable actors. The cumulative effect is an environment of persistent uncertainty, in which states engage in continuous contestation without clear demarcations between peace and conflict.

This rivalry exposes significant normative gaps. The United Nations Charter was drafted in an era in which armed attack was primarily understood in kinetic terms. Cyber operations that disrupt infrastructure, manipulate data, or compromise sensitive systems do not neatly fit within traditional definitions of aggression or self-defence (Chayes, 2015, p.481). Questions surrounding attribution, proportionality, and permissible countermeasures remain unresolved. Moreover, the dual-use nature of many emerging technologies complicates regulatory efforts. Semiconductor components, AI algorithms, and telecommunications systems serve civilian and military functions simultaneously, blurring the line between legitimate commerce and strategic threat (Mori, 2019, p.81).

The United States-China rivalry illustrates the systemic challenges posed by sixth-generation warfare. Unlike regionally contained conflicts, this competition affects global supply chains, digital governance, and multilateral institutions. Smaller and

developing states are often compelled to navigate competing technological ecosystems, balancing economic incentives against security considerations (Song & Zhao, 2024, p.5). These dynamics risk fragmenting the international system into rival digital blocs, undermining the universality of global norms.

The case, therefore, underscores the urgency of multilateral engagement on cyber norms, AI governance, and digital infrastructure protection. Efforts such as discussions within the UN Group of Governmental Experts and the Open-Ended Working Group on cybersecurity represent initial steps, yet they remain constrained by geopolitical mistrust (Levinson, 2021, p.2). The absence of binding agreements on state behaviour in cyberspace leaves room for escalation through miscalculation or misattribution.

This strategic rivalry between the United States and China exemplifies warfare without formal war demonstrates how sustained competition across technological, informational, economic, and legal domains can generate instability comparable to traditional conflict, while remaining below the threshold of armed confrontation. As sixth-generation warfare continues to evolve, this case highlights the necessity to consider comprehensive frameworks that address not only weapons systems but also the governance of digital ecosystems, critical infrastructure resilience, and mechanisms for transparency and confidence-building in cyberspace.

Guiding Questions

Technological evolution vs regulatory adaptability

To what extent should international regulation focus on specific technologies used in sixth-generation warfare, as opposed to developing adaptive, consequence-based legal frameworks capable of keeping up with the continuous technological evolution?

This question is fundamental as sixth-generation warfare is not defined by a single weapon or method, but by the constant acceleration of technological innovation. Advances in artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, digital capabilities, and data-driven operations are occurring at a pace that far exceeds the ability of traditional legal and diplomatic processes to respond (ICRC, 2019). As a result, regulatory approaches that target specific technologies risk becoming outdated, as new systems emerge or existing ones evolve beyond the limitations of its previously agreed rules. In this context, the issue is not only to regulate what exists today, but to anticipate what may exist tomorrow.

A consequence-based or technology-neutral approach creates an alternative by focusing on the effects of warfare rather than the tools themselves. This reflects the logic which already exists in international humanitarian law, where legality is assessed through principles such as proportionality or precautions in conflicts. Such an approach allows regulation to remain relevant despite technological change (Sharkey, 2012). However, it also introduces significant difficulties, particularly where emerging systems, such as autonomous weapons, mixes traditional notions of human control, responsibility, and intent. Applying abstract legal principles to complex, algorithm-driven decision-making processes raises questions about accountability and compliance that current frameworks cannot resolve (Sparrow, 2007).

This issue is especially important today because technological developments are no longer confined to traditional military actors. Private companies, dual-use technologies, and globally interconnected digital systems mean that innovation is decentralised and often outside direct state control. As a result, the risks associated with sixth-generation warfare, such as unintended escalation, autonomous decision-making, and large-scale disruption of civilian infrastructure, are increasing in both scale and unpredictability. In the context of UN debates and resolution, this question becomes decisive: it determines whether states prioritise flexibility and long-term adaptability, or precision and immediate control. The answer will shape the effectiveness of any regulatory strategy in addressing not only current threats but also those that are still emerging (Schmitt, 2017).

Lack of consensus on definitions

How will states coexist with a lack of consensus on many key definitions for terms in 6th Generation Warfare to accurately debate and/or address the topic at hand?

How can states substantively debate topics that have extremely contentious and possibly irreconcilable definitions to achieve real solutions?

There is no universal consensus on the definition of sixth-generation warfare in either international law or academia. Broadly, the term refers to the integration of a collection of emerging technologies and the behaviours they enable into military and strategic operations in various domains (Gervais, 2021). The emerging technologies can include fully autonomous systems, advanced cyber capabilities, and quantum computing, whereas the behaviours can include states sponsoring foreign-based criminal groups, contracting dual-use companies or economically targeting foreign ones, and intensive disinformation campaigning.

Providing strict definitional boundaries is particularly complicated: technologies and behaviours blur the lines between different physical spaces being targeted, between the material and cyber dimension and between civilian and military contexts (Lodhi, 2025). Similarly, sixth-generation capabilities also challenge the definition of warfare in itself: 6GW tactics can be employed to achieve strategic objectives without declared or open conflict (Lodhi, 2025); similarly, escalation is significantly unpredictable (Lodhi 2025). The situation is further complicated by the lack of definitions of several weapon systems and strategies. For example, in 2023, the Chairperson of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons requested the LAWS Group of Governmental Experts to produce a paper which summarised the various members' statements on definitions (as well as, if submitted, where they identified challenges and which regulations ot implement): multiple members directly contradict one another (CCW, 2023). These inconsistencies and their consequent misunderstandings render governance and enforcement extremely challenging.

The lack of definition can be strategically used by countries: including a feature can determine whether a technology or behaviour is regulated, through which mechanisms and with which intensity. Providing a definition, then, becomes extremely political and necessary for open communication and to conduct constructive debate. While it should not divert attention from more obviously practical issues, delegates should ensure that they are discussing the same issues and features.

Lack of a united international response

How can the international community overcome the fragmentation of existing legal frameworks and develop a coherent and unified regulatory response to sixth-generation warfare across multiple domains?

This question addresses an important structural weakness in the current governance of modern conflict: the absence of a unified and coherent regulatory framework. At present, different aspects of sixth-generation warfare are governed by separate regimes that have developed independently. The UN Charter regulates the use of force between states, international humanitarian law governs conduct during armed conflict, cyber operations are addressed through evolving norms and non-binding agreements, and outer space is subject to its own legal framework (Lewis, 2021). While each of these regimes remains relevant, their lack of integration creates gaps, overlaps, and inconsistencies that are becoming problematic in a multi-domain environment.

The importance of this issue has become particularly evident in contemporary conflicts, where operations often span across multiple domains simultaneously. For instance, cyberattacks targeting critical infrastructure, satellite disruptions affecting communication systems, and information warfare campaigns influencing public perception all happen alongside conventional military operations. In such contexts, it becomes difficult to determine which legal framework applies, how responsibility should be attributed, and how violations should be addressed (Finnemore & Hollis, 2016). This fragmentation not only undermines legal clarity but also weakens enforcement and accountability, allowing states and non-state actors to exploit grey areas within the international system.

Today, this lack of a unified response is further accentuated by geopolitical tensions and divergent state interests. Major powers often prioritise strategic advantage and technological leadership over regulatory constraints, making consensus on binding rules difficult to achieve. As a result, international efforts have tended to rely on incremental approaches, such as the development of norms, confidence-building measures, and non-binding guidelines (Schmitt, 2017). While these mechanisms contribute to stability, they may not be sufficient to address the scale and complexity of sixth-generation warfare (Payne, 2019).

More broadly, the question demands a deeper challenge of global governance: how to achieve cooperation and coherence in a domain characterised by rapid technological change, strategic competition, and interconnected risks. Without a more unified approach, the evolution of warfare risks outpacing the ability of international law to regulate it effectively, increasing the likelihood of instability and conflict escalation.

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