



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain: **Implications for Human Rights**

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2255 Rayburn House Office Building

As delivered

Good afternoon, and welcome to today’s hearing on “Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain.” Thank you to our witnesses for joining us.

This issue could not be more urgent.

You know, I recently read an article by U.S. Army veteran Nick Allison titled, “[On Deciding Not to Pull the Trigger](#).” Nick describes how, while doing a census patrol of Kirkuk (*keer-cook*), Iraq, he and his squad suddenly heard the sound of machine gun fire.

A car came around a corner and sped in their direction. Two young men were inside. One leaned out the window, firing his gun.

But Nick made eye contact with the gunman—and he looked panicked to see American soldiers. That was enough for a 24-year-old squad leader to direct his team to hold their fire.

As it turned out, the two young men in the car were the brothers of a newly married groom. The gun fire was celebratory—like fireworks.

Thanks to one moment of human intuition, their lives were spared, and the groom was saved the grief of losing his brothers on his wedding day.

That was in 2004.

The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission last held a hearing on the automation of weapons systems in 2018. At that time, algorithms and machine learning were already playing a greater

role in warfare. I said then that we had a “long way to go” to protect ourselves from the ethical and moral threats posed by the increasing automation of weapons technologies.

But since that hearing, more energy and resources have been put into building faster, more deadly AI-enabled military technologies than into reining them in.

The battlefields of Ukraine and Gaza have become testing grounds for artificial intelligence in warfare.

In Ukraine, where a U.N. Independent International Commission of Inquiry has concluded that Russia has committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, advancements in AI technologies have been part of Ukraine’s strategy to fend off Russian aggression. One of today’s witnesses will testify to this, and the importance of incorporating human rights and humanitarian legal concerns throughout the AI lifecycle.

In Gaza, where a U.N. Independent International Commission of Inquiry has concluded that Israel has committed genocide, advancements in AI technologies have contributed to outsized civilian harm.

According to [reporting](#) by the Israeli publication *+972 Magazine*, AI played a key role in the war in Gaza. Lavender, an AI-enabled decision support system, combed through data collected through mass surveillance and used it to identify alleged Hamas militants. Software then tracked targets to their homes, and the military, often without serious human review, bombed the location—often with civilians inside.

One Israeli military source described how he’d added thousands of A.I.-identified targets to the tracking system in just one day.

“In retrospect,” he said, “it seems like a serious decision I made.”

That man had no opportunity to look the human beings he targeted in the eyes and decide to spare their lives, as Nick Allison did in Kirkuk.

The technologies I just described force us to confront difficult questions.

We must ask these questions because U.S. servicemembers and civilians may be on the targeting end of AI-powered weapons.

Don’t Americans deserve to know whether their family members will be sent into conflict against fellow human beings or against algorithms with no moral or mortal calculus?

What does it mean that AI systems are made more accurate by feeding them more data, often at the cost of the right to privacy?

What does accountability look like when AI systems shape decisions that result in civilian deaths? Is responsibility borne by the junior officer who spends only seconds approving an AI-

generated recommendation? By the commander who sets a permissive standard for collateral damage? By the AI company that gets all profit and bears no risk?

What implications does this have for the dignity of the human beings who take lives, and the human beings who lose their lives?

I am encouraged to see that the international community is grappling with these questions. The U.N.'s Group of Governmental Experts for the Convention on Conventional Weapons recently agreed on principles that could be the basis of an instrument to regulate AI. In November, that conversation will continue with a Review Conference in Geneva. This Commission will pay close attention to the outcomes of that dialogue.

Vice President J.D. Vance recently emphasized that life-and-death decisions should be made by human beings, not machines. I agree with him. I hope he will also be attentive to the broader human rights and humanitarian concerns we will discuss here today.

I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses.