

**Forum:** Disarmament and International Security Committee (GA1)

**Issue:** Examining the impact of drone proliferation on regional stability in the Middle East.

**Student Officer:** Effrosyni Christidou

**Position:** Co-Chair

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## Personal Introduction

Dear delegates,

I am Effrosyni Christidou, a student at the German School of Athens. I have been part of the MUN community for 3 years and I consider the ACGMUN conference to hold a special place in my heart. I hope that serving as a Co-Chair in this committee, I will be able to provide you with an extremely memorable and educational experience, similar to all the wonderful experiences I've had as a delegate. This study guide should only constitute the basis of your research. I advise that you conduct your own further research on the issue and try to contrive your own creative solutions.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at [effrosynichristidou@gmail.com](mailto:effrosynichristidou@gmail.com) or the Main Chair Rea at [rea.karvouni@gmail.com](mailto:rea.karvouni@gmail.com) if any questions regarding the topic or the conference in general arise.

I look forward to meeting you all.

Sincerely,

Effrosyni Christidou

## Topic Introduction

The Middle East is experiencing a seismic shift in its geopolitics: the dawn of the era of drones. The spread of unmanned aerial vehicles across the region has significantly increased as various countries across the region have acquired armed drones, either by importing them or by building them domestically.<sup>1</sup> These developments have had a material impact on regional power balances and military strategies, since Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) technology allows states to gather intelligence and conduct strikes with reduced political and human costs.<sup>2</sup> In particular, Middle Eastern powers such as Turkey and Iran have significantly expanded their drone programs, enabling

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<sup>1</sup> Mostafa Allam. "UAVs' Strategies: The Employment of Drones and Regional Power Conflict in the Middle East." Uniselinus Education, 2024, <https://www.uniselinus.education/sites/default/files/2025-09/Mostafa%20Allam.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). Armed Drones in the Middle East: Proliferation and Norms in the Region. RUSI, 2018, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/projects/proliferation-armed-drones-middle-east>.

them to project influence and support proxy partners beyond their borders.<sup>3</sup> In particular, Middle Eastern powers such as Turkey and Iran have significantly expanded their drone programs, enabling them to influence and support proxy partners beyond their borders. Iranian drones in particular, have been widely deployed by allied groups in Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria, contributing to conflict escalation and strategic competition. <sup>4</sup>The proliferation of these systems has transformed conflict dynamics and posed new challenges for regional stability, as the accessibility of armed drones lowers thresholds for offensive operations and complicates deterrence relationships among states and non-state actors. Drones are increasingly ubiquitous in counterinsurgency and low-intensity conflicts, especially in the Middle East. Their ability to gather covert intelligence and deliver strikes against hard targets relatively cheaply and with impressive endurance, allowing them to remain on station providing continuous support for many hours at a time, has made them the weapon of choice for many militaries. In the Middle East, a growing number of both state and non-state actors have rapidly moved from the development and acquisition of armed drones to regular employment of these weapons for lethal effects.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Asymmetric Warfare

Warfare in which belligerents, the actors involved in the conflict, are mismatched in their military capabilities or their accustomed methods of engagement, so basically their “strength” is not equal. Asymmetric conflict refers to wars between belligerents whose relative military power, strategies, or resources differ significantly.

### Deterrence

The process of discouraging an action or event through instilling doubt or fear of the consequences. Deterrence is the ability to alter an actor’s cost-benefit calculus so they decide against taking an undesired action.

### Drone Proliferation

Drone proliferation refers to the increasing spread and adoption of drones, formally called Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) across a large number of states and non-state actors, including both armed and unarmed systems, which expands their availability and use in military, surveillance, and civilian roles around the world.

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<sup>3</sup> Christophe Archambault. “Unmanned Aerial Vehicles on Display at a Military Exhibition.” AFP via Getty Images, <https://www.gettyimages.ae/detail/news-photo/this-photograph-shows-an-unmanned-aerial-vehicle-or-drone-news-photo/2240590868>.

<sup>4</sup> “Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Lebanon have used drones to target military and civilian infrastructure.” Mehr News Agency, 2022, <https://en.mehrnews.com/news/186888>.

## **Non-state Actors**

An individual or organization that has significant political influence but is not allied to any particular country or state.

## **Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV)**

Drones are more formally known as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) or Unmanned Aircraft Systems. Essentially, a drone is a flying robot that can be remotely controlled or fly autonomously using software-controlled flight plans in its embedded systems, which work in conjunction with onboard sensors and a Global Positioning System (GPS).

## **Background Information**

### **Technological advancements**

The decade from 2013 to 2023 witnessed a significant escalation in the phenomenon of military uses of drones in the Middle East. Both state and non-state actors leveraged these advancements to enhance their capabilities and conduct military operations more efficiently. Notably, there was a proliferation of armed drones, capable of carrying out precision strikes, reconnaissance, and surveillance. This technological leap allowed actors to project power without significant risks to their personnel. Moreover, in the Middle East, a growing number of actors, both state and non-state, have rapidly moved from the development and acquisition of armed drones to regular employment of these weapons for lethal effects. Non-state actors such as ISIS, Hizballah, Houthi are non-state actor groups that make use of drones in their operations. These and similar groups, all based in the broader Middle East region, have all employed drones to launch offensive operations. In addition, all demonstrate sustained engagement and innovation in drone use.

### **Geopolitical Tensions and Proxy conflicts**

The Middle East has been a hotbed of geopolitical tensions and proxy conflicts for decades. During the post 2011 period, these conflicts intensified, with major powers supporting rival factions. Nations like Iran, Israel, and Turkey, among others, increasingly relied on drones to gain an advantage over their adversaries, often operating in contested airspace. There is a fierce competition between those countries and battles are taking place in the field of the Middle East region, which has become the site of interactions for this indirect conflict. In the 2010s, UAVs emerged as cheap weapons with enormous destabilizing potential drone warfare and the concomitant arms race have resulted in changes to decades-old military power dynamics in the Middle East. UAVs exhibit the capability for flight management, target identification, and mission analysis, drawing on data collected from preloaded datasets, control centers, and real-time

environmental cues. Leveraging various Artificial Intelligence (AI) algorithms, UAVs autonomously process instantaneous data, incorporating methodologies such as artificial neural networks, image processing algorithms, learning algorithms, and optimization techniques.

### **Impact to regional stability**

The widespread adoption of drones in the Middle East has altered military balances, giving states and non-state actors new capabilities that were previously unavailable. The integration of UAVs into military strategies is shifting power dynamics in regional conflicts, allowing actors to project force and influence beyond traditional means. The presence of drones has introduced uncertainty in deterrence, as states and groups must now consider remote strikes and low-cost aerial threats. The use of drones has enhanced asymmetric warfare capabilities, allowing some actors to challenge others without direct confrontation. The increased use of targeted air strikes in the Middle East has fueled a cycle of violence, often provoking retaliatory attacks and escalating conflicts. Access to drones, even widely used and simple UAV types, can give state and non-state actors a strategic advantage in conflict situations. For instance, Myanmar's Peoples Defence Force (PDF) deploys civilian drones modified to drop explosives on the military junta forces. Although in a limited way, drones have reduced the gap between conventional and non-conventional air force capabilities. Besides their conventional uses, drones have also been used by the Islamic State of Iraq Syria (ISIS) and Hezbollah as propaganda tools, further inspiring other actors and drastically altering the regional security landscape. Additionally, the decreasing ability to discern between state and non-state entities makes tracking UAVs, their origins, potential uses, and consequences challenging. One must also bear in mind the ambiguity of drones, which makes it challenging to regulate via institutional and legal mechanisms, also factoring in the ease of manufacture of such devices by using off-the-shelf and ready-made components. Some non-state actors do not follow government regulations or official laws, which makes them harder to regulate. This diminishes the transparency surrounding UAV technology and increases the risk of collateral and civilian damage.

### **Accountability and adherence impact to international humanitarian law**

The use of armed drones in conflicts has raised significant concerns regarding accountability, particularly due to incidents of indiscriminate strikes affecting civilians. An example is an incident in 2016 in Aleppo, a major city in northern Syria, in a market where many unarmed, innocent civilians were injured. Such drone strikes complicate conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction by undermining trust and creating legal and ethical challenges.



Figure: Military drones prior to a training drill, in Iran in 2021<sup>5</sup>

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### Turkey

Turkey is the 7th country to independently design an offensive drone and use it in war. Its Bayraktar TB2 and Akıncı drones have been used by the Turkish military in various conflicts, including the ones in Syria, Libya, Iraq and against Kurdish forces, and are now being sold internationally. Baykar earned more than one billion in exports, selling drones to dozens of nations. The Turkish drones are adopted by military forces across many continents including Africa, Europe, and generally in the Middle East, contributing to Turkey's position as a major UAV exporter. It has used drones to protect its foreign policy interests in Syria and the eastern Mediterranean and to extend its influence beyond the region, such as through the support for Azerbaijan.

### Iran

On May 17, 2022, Iran announced the inauguration of a plant for manufacturing drones in Tajikistan. The factory is Iran's first drone production facility abroad and will manufacture and export the Ababil-2, which is a military drone developed by this country. It has sought to expand its influence in the Maghreb by supplying drones and military technology to allies in North Africa. Iran exports these drones to many countries and military organizations including Algeria and the Polisario Front, Saudi Arabia etc. Iran uses drones as a lever against regional adversaries, particularly Saudi Arabia, by expanding Houthi drone attacks on its oil sites. Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi group fired missiles and drones at Saudi energy and water desalination facilities, causing a temporary drop in output at a refinery but no casualties. Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Lebanon have used drones to target military and civilian infrastructure, aiming to deter adversaries and assert power. The deployment of

<sup>5</sup> WANA News Agency. Drones are seen during a large-scale drone combat exercise of Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in Semnan. Reuters, 4 Jan. 2021, via Reuters Connect, <https://www.reutersconnect.com/item/drones-are-seen-during-a-large-scale-drone-combat-exercise-of-army-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-in-semnan/dGFnOnJldXRlcnMuY29tLDlwMjE6bmV3c21sX1JDMk4xTDkxUFIJNA>.

drones by these groups in the alliance has contributed to destabilization in Yemen, Lebanon, and Iraq as part of Iran's strategic goals.

## Israel

Iran and Israel have been locked in a long-running shadow war that has increasingly featured drones and other unmanned systems. Guided by intelligence agents, Israel's Mossad and Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Israeli military unleashed in the night a big number of attacks of warplanes and armed drones smuggled into Iran.<sup>6</sup> Israel has had autonomous drone solutions since 2023. Throughout late 2024 and early 2025, Mossad covertly smuggled drone parts and munitions including hundreds of quadcopter drones into Iran using suitcases, trucks, and shipping containers. Israel has sought to strengthen its deterrent posture and retain a technological edge in the region, and analysts have noted that its military integrates advanced data-processing systems to help prioritize targets for air operations more rapidly than traditional methods would allow.

## The United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT)

The United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and Conflict Armament Research launched a Global Report on the Acquisition, Weaponization and Deployment of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) by non-State armed groups for terrorism-related purposes. UNOCT's Global Counter-Terrorism Programme on Autonomous and Remotely Operated Systems (AROS) was created to support Member States in addressing the threat posed by UASs and other autonomous systems.<sup>7</sup> The development of autonomous and remotely operated systems has accelerated rapidly over the past decade, and non-state armed groups have adapted them for terrorist purposes, including the use of widely available UAS to conduct reconnaissance and attacks. Member States have increasingly focused on how to collectively prevent and address the use of UAS for terrorist purposes by non-State armed groups.

## Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)

RUSI is a British security think tank that has published detailed research on the proliferation and use of armed drones (UAVs) in the Middle East. According to RUSI's Armed Drones in the Middle East: "proliferation and norms in the Region, the project's aim is to provide an in-depth inventory of armed UAVs possessed and used by Middle Eastern states and to assess how these

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<sup>6</sup> "Israel Conducts Covert Drone Strikes into Iran Using Mossad and AI Systems." Times of Israel, 2025, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-conducts-covert-drone-strikes-into-iran>.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism. Global Counter-Terrorism Programme on Autonomous and Remotely Operated Systems (AROS). United Nations, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/counter-terrorism/programme>.

countries acquire, deploy, and integrate the technology into military practices. <sup>8</sup>This research highlights that states such as Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Israel, Iran, and Turkey have moved toward either importing or domestically producing armed drones and explores what this means for military norms and regional security dynamics.”

## **The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute**

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), an independent global security research organization, has also documented the growing role of armed UAVs and missiles in conflicts including in the Middle East. SIPRI’s 2025 Yearbook notes that developments in armed uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs) continue to shape modern security and warfare, with the use of missiles and armed UAVs in Asia and the Middle East helping confirm their high-profile role in military strategies during ongoing conflicts. The report calls attention to the expanding demand for these systems and the need for transparency, oversight, and confidence-building mechanisms to manage proliferation. <sup>9</sup>

## **Blocs Expected**

### **Alliance 1**

The main goals of this alliance are to advance shared strategic across regions, and strengthen asymmetric warfare capabilities for emerging security threats. Some examples for the first alliance are Iran, Lebanon, Yemen, Russia and Iraq, which all want to export drones and project their power. Member states in this alliance such as Yemen and Iraq have exported unmanned aerial systems to extend their influence, a strategy observed throughout this alliance.

### **Alliance 2**

The main objective of this alliance is to maintain regional stability, strengthen allied security cooperation and counter the influence of key regions. The second alliance contains countries such as Israel, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Qatar. These states aim to counter Iran’s influence, maintain stability, and promote security cooperation in the Middle East.

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<sup>8</sup> Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). Armed Drones in the Middle East: Proliferation and Norms in the Region. RUSI, 2018, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/projects/proliferation-armed-drones-middle-east>.

<sup>9</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). SIPRI Yearbook 2025. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2025, <https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2025/07>.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
23 April 2012	The campaign to stop killer robots launches in London, United Kingdom, an international civil society coalition, as a coordinated effort by NGOs against fully autonomous lethal weapons systems.
2 June 2022	A truce between the Yemeni government and the country's Houthi rebels has been extended for two months according to an announcement by the UN. <sup>10</sup>
17 May 2022	Iran inaugurates a plant for manufacturing drones abroad to manufacture and export the Ababil-2.
13 June 2025	Israel launches a large-scale military and covert strike inside Iran, an operation codenamed Operation Rising Lion, which targets more than 100 strategic locations including nuclear facilities and air defence systems.
17 June 2025	Guided by spies and artificial intelligence, the Israeli military unleashes warplanes and armed drones smuggled into Iran, a significant escalation in their long-standing conflict.

<sup>10</sup> "Yemen Truce Extended for Two Months, but Warring Sides Far Apart." Al Jazeera, 2 June 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/2/yemen-truce-extended-for-two-months-but-warring-sides-far-apart>.

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

### International Arms Control Regimes and Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)

The Missile Technology Control Regime is a voluntary, multilateral export control regime that covers missiles and drones. The MTCR was established in 1987 to limit the proliferation of unmanned ballistic missile technology and delivery vehicles that could be used to deliver weapons of mass destruction (WMD) for chemical, biological, and nuclear attacks. In 2004, UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1540 endorsed the MTCR guidelines and list, designating the proliferation of WMD delivery systems as a threat to international peace and security and requiring all UN member states to establish proliferation-sensitive export controls.

### UN sanctions on Iran

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 called on Iran not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using such ballistic missile technology. The resolution also required states to obtain advance approval from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for transfers to or from Iran of certain missile and unmanned aerial vehicle technologies. Despite these restrictions, Iran has continued to transfer unmanned aerial vehicles to partners and allies, and debris recovered from attacks has been assessed by several governments as consistent with Iranian-manufactured drones.

### Yemen Truce

The UN-mediated truce in Yemen, which came into effect on 2 April 2022, led to a significant reduction in violence across the country. Air and drone strikes decreased by 78 percent during the first two months of the truce compared to the two months preceding it. However, political violence continued during the truce period, including clashes, shelling, and drone and missile attacks in frontline areas.

## Relevant UN Treaties and Events

### United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004)

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004) was adopted unanimously on 28 April 2004 under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, and it affirms that the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and their means of delivery constitute a threat to international peace and security. The resolution decides that all States shall refrain from providing any form of

support to non-State actors that seek to develop, acquire, manufacture, transport, transfer, or use nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons and their means of delivery. It also decides that all States shall adopt and enforce effective national legislation prohibiting non-State actors from engaging in such activities and that they shall take and enforce effective measures to establish domestic controls to prevent proliferation, including appropriate controls over related materials and export, transit, and law enforcement measures. Resolution 1540 establishes a Security Council Committee (the 1540 Committee) to monitor and report on implementation of the resolution and calls on states to submit initial reports on their implementation measures. By requiring states to enact and enforce laws and controls in this way, the resolution fills existing gaps in international law by obliging all Member States to prevent the illicit acquisition or use of weapons of mass destruction by non-State actors.

### **UN General Assembly Resolution on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (2024)**

The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on lethal autonomous weapons systems with overwhelming support: 166 votes in favor, 3 opposed (Belarus, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and the Russian Federation), and 15 abstentions. The resolution mentions the potential for a two-tiered approach to prohibit some lethal autonomous weapon systems while regulating others under international law.

### **The Wassenaar Arrangement**

The Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technologies was established to contribute to regional and international security and stability by promoting transparency and greater responsibility in transfers of conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies. Participating states exchange, on a voluntary basis, information that will enhance transparency and assist in developing common understandings of the risks associated with the transfers of these items. Member governments exchange information on deliveries of conventional arms and dual-use technology transfer information to help prevent destabilizing transfers of weapons and sensitive dual-use goods. The goal of these information exchanges within the Wassenaar Arrangement is to promote transparency, responsibility, and accountability among members with regard to sensitive materials so that members can avoid destabilizing accumulations of arms and dual-use goods and technologies.

## **Possible Solutions**

### **Integration of air-defense systems**

Integrated air defense systems facilitate rapid data sharing and coordinated response, allowing for quicker threat detection and faster interception.<sup>11</sup> These systems also enhance interoperability among allied forces, promoting joint operations and strategic cohesion. Integrated defense networks improve situational awareness by consolidating data from multiple sensors and units into a unified operational picture, which helps in decision-making and mission execution. However, deploying these systems presents significant challenges. One major difficulty is that ensuring interoperability among diverse components often involves extensive testing and validation to prevent system failures during operations, because systems from different manufacturers may be incompatible. Budget constraints also pose a significant challenge, limiting development, acquisition, and maintenance of advanced defense technologies. Integrated air defense systems also face technical vulnerabilities: they are increasingly reliant on digital networks and thus vulnerable to cyberattacks that could compromise their operation, and integration of multiple platforms can strain communication networks, complicating real-time coordination.

## **Anti-drone Systems**

Anti-drone Systems are a great solution to prevent the exportation of drones. Once a drone is detected, RF jamming systems can send targeted signals to disrupt the communication with the operator of the drone, forcing the drone into a failsafe mode such as hovering, landing, or returning to its point of origin. Some advanced RF systems also support direction finding, so basically locating the pilot and the drone, which is an especially valuable help in law enforcement and military teams. The detection phase uses sensors that scan known drone control frequencies, looking for control signals, telemetry data, or video transmission links. Then if a threat is confirmed, the system engages jammers to flood the communication frequency with noise, breaking the link between drone and pilot, initiating the UAV's automatic fail-safe response.

## **Implementation of legal frameworks**

Establishing legal frameworks that will provide smooth and safe drone technology use while still being able to revisit and revise the requirements for permissions and restrictions, which is necessary along with technology development and maturation. Despite the fact that the EU has issued a single policy on drone use, many countries have legislated different restrictions and piloting requirements, while the criteria to categorize the vehicle's size, weight, flight altitude, and use also

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<sup>11</sup> Mostafa Allam. "UAVs' Strategies: The Employment of Drones and Regional Power Conflict in the Middle East." Uniselinus Education, 2024, <https://www.uniselinus.education/sites/default/files/2025-09/Mostafa%20Allam.pdf>.

differ per country. Meanwhile, the intensive use of drones raises a lot of ethical dilemmas, such as privacy, personal data, and so on, that people in charge will have to face in the near future. A more detailed legislative framework is necessary, mainly regarding limitations and restrictions per use as well as the way in which security authorities will be able to effectively control drone flights.

## Resource pooling and Regional cooperation

Pooling resources and sharing intelligence across regional partners improves early detection of drone threats and reduces duplication of costly air-defense systems. Collaborative air defense exercises and joint procurement of counter-drone equipment allow countries to benefit from economies of scale and enhance interoperability during cross-border incidents.<sup>12</sup> However, differences in national priorities, political tensions, and concerns over sovereignty may limit the willingness of some states to fully participate in regional cooperation initiatives (SIPRI, *The Missile Technology Control Regime at a Crossroads*).

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