Concept Note

International Conference on
Responsible Military Development, Deployment and Use of AI

Essential points

- Due to its wide applicability, artificial intelligence (AI) is a system technology that is influencing and changing our world fundamentally, including in the military domain. Military application of AI is essential for technologically advanced and operationally relevant armed forces.

- At the same time, military application of AI carries certain risks. For instance, there are international concerns about the potential predictability of systems, a lack of human control, lack of clarity with regard to liability and unintended consequences, and escalation within the spectrum of force.

- The development of AI is continuing at a rapid pace, so it is crucial for the international community to take responsibility for the potential applications of this technology, now and in the future. On the one hand the military advantages offered by AI should be put to good use, but on the other hand the potential risks must be adequately addressed in order to safeguard international security and the international legal order.

- The Netherlands strives to be a progressive *and* responsible high-tech country, which is why in early 2023 it will be hosting an international conference on the responsible development, deployment and use of AI in the military domain. The technological developments in the area of AI take place primarily in the civil domain. The conference will therefore bring together high-level representatives of government bodies, civil society organisations, knowledge institutions and the private sector in order to discuss the key opportunities, challenges and risks associated with military application of AI.

- The aim of the conference is to agree on a common international agenda that will ensure the responsible development, deployment and use of AI in the military domain, within the parameters set by existing international law.

Responsible development, deployment and use of AI in the military domain

- AI – the ability of machines, software and equipment to self-learn and make choices on the basis of algorithms – is seen internationally as the most decisive and disruptive technology for the coming years. This is apparent from the proposed EU regulation on civil AI, discussions within the UN and NATO's recently adopted AI strategy.

- AI is not a new technology and already has many civil applications. Research and technological developments in the area of AI take place primarily in the civil domain, but military organisations around the world are increasingly adopting AI as an enabling technology, both for the optimisation of existing processes and the development of new capabilities.

- The development, deployment and use of AI in the civil domain continues unabated, and by extension the scope for military application will increase over the coming years. As far as the Netherlands is concerned, all military systems that incorporate AI, and their deployment in conflict situations, must meet the requirements set by international law.

- The international community is now faced with the central question of how military application of AI can – and should – be dealt with responsibly. How does the extensive application of AI affect decision-making on the use of force, the protection of civilians, distinction and proportionality, and accountability? How reliable are results produced by an algorithm? How do we optimise human-machine interaction? How do we ensure that AI remains a tool that serves humans, and that it is always subject to human judgement, including in conflict situations?

- These are a few of the dilemmas that require balanced, international discussion. Some of them are already being addressed by existing forums, such as the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, which discusses the applicability of international law to autonomous weapon systems and the role of human control. The views within various multilateral institutions on responsible military use of AI are also relevant, as are the steps being taken by individual countries regarding the application of AI in the military domain. The conference on responsible military application of AI will build on these discussions.

Aim of the conference

- The Netherlands believes the development, deployment and use of AI in the military domain must be put higher on the international agenda, and is taking the initiative in this regard by organising this conference. The conference will focus on the application of AI in the military use of force and the related decision-making within military operations.

- The conference will launch an international political agenda that can be fleshed out in greater detail both at global level and within the various existing consultation structures, including those of the UN and various regional organisations. What precise form this agenda should take will be given further consideration over the coming period. The success of a sustainable agenda for the development, deployment and use of AI in the military domain, and the mitigation of the associated risks, depends on the support of all stakeholders.

- The Netherlands considers it of great importance that agreements be made not just between countries but also with other relevant actors. Sharing knowledge and experience and breaking down compartmentalisation in thinking on AI is essential in order to engage in constructive dialogue and ensure there is space for research, technological development and innovation. The conference and the preparatory process will therefore involve various target groups, including knowledge institutions, civil society organisations and the private sector as well as political actors.