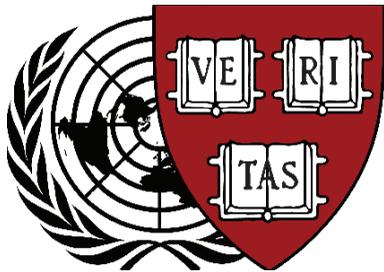


Background Guide in Brief
for the
Special Summit on Technology

Harvard Model United Nations China

March 21- 24, 2019



Harvard Model United Nations China

A LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON BACKGROUND GUIDES IN BRIEF

Dear Delegates,

Welcome once more to Harvard Model United Nations China 2019! The entire Staff and Secretariat of HMUN could not be more excited to see you in person in Beijing in a few short weeks.

By now, you have most likely begun preparing for HMUN China 2019. Preparing for a Model UN conference can be intimidating, but our team is committed to providing you with the support and resources that you will need to succeed. In keeping with that mission, this year at HMUN China we are piloting a new resource—the Background Guide in Brief.

Background Guides are intended to outline the major issues and ideas that delegates will have to confront in the committee room. However, reading the Guide can also be intimidating for delegates without prior experience in English-language Model UN, or MUN in general. To help all delegates succeed, we have asked your Director to create an abbreviated version of your committee's Guide, enclosed in the following pages.

We hope that this Background Guide in Brief provides a helpful overview of your topic. That being said, your preparation should not end with this document. We encourage you to also read the full Background Guide, which goes into much greater detail and includes the full bibliographical documentation of our Directors' work. Full Guides also contain useful information on committee expectations and procedure, and you should use it as a resource now and at conference. In short, consider what you learn from the Background Guide in Brief to be a launching point for further research—be sure to take advantage of the time you have to prepare for conference as best you can, and feel free to reach out to your committee Directors with additional questions.

Thank you once again for choosing to participate at HMUN China 2019! We are beyond excited for conference, and look forward to welcoming you in Beijing in a few weeks.

Sincerely,

Anthony Bogachev

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Secretary-General
Harvard Model United Nations 2019

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Introduction and History

The primary goal of this committee is to discuss the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies and implications on International Relations. Broadly, Artificial Intelligence is the buzzword used to describe technology that can learn and adapt based on experience. Recent developments in computer processing power, complicated algorithms, and massive stores of user data on the internet have made this tool more powerful than ever. The algorithms behind AI use immense amounts of data and processing power to predict outcomes and make decisions based on past results and current trends. AI is behind the suggested purchases bar on your Amazon screen, the ads on your social media feed, and the bots who can beat the top chess player or learn any language very quickly.

This topic is broad and complex, so I have narrowed it into four, more specific subtopics to focus research and debate. These include Interpretation and Sale of User Data, Predicting Outbreaks, Impact of AI on the Job Market, and Autonomous Weapons. Each of these subtopics holds immediate potential to impact the lives of billions across the globe and contain a lot of implications and potential complications. Whether the impact of AI in these sectors is positive or negative is largely dependent on the sorts of policies implemented to protect and regulate this increasingly valuable resource, a process we can begin in this session of the Special Summit on Technology.

Interpretation, Sale, and Usage of User Data

The success of Artificial Intelligence depends on data. In some cases, such as analyzing weather patterns or housing markets, this data is public and easily accessible by the programs which require it to run their computations and make their models. In other instances, the acquisition

of data is typically still fairly simple, but could be considered less morally dismissible.

As the capabilities of AI technologies continue to grow, the value and need for specific, private user data will as well. Recent developments regarding Facebook's internal experiments and the obvious impact that the Cambridge Analytica analysis and advertising had on millions of people throughout the 2016 presidential campaign are just the beginning of debates to be had on the ethics behind sale and usage of user data for the sake of research, scholarship, advertising and manipulation. It is unlikely that human use of the internet will slow anytime soon, and as a result virtual stores of personal information will continue to grow and be accessed largely unregulated until substantial legislation is passed. Part of the responsibility of this committee will be to create a reasonable means of regulating the impact AI can have on personal lives and deciding the extent to which individual privacy should be respected and protected.

Impact of AI on the Job Market

Science fiction novels and Forbes millennial-focused articles alike frequently warn against the potential impacts of artificial intelligence on the job market. These claims are often based on a confounding of Artificial Intelligence with Automation, two fundamentally separate technologies which fill different niches in the technological workforce. While automated machines can be artificial-intelligence based, utilizing AI learning systems within the code that they run, automation has "a single purpose: To let machines perform repetitive, monotonous tasks." This is ideal in workspaces where companies often need to perform an action multiple times, such as manufacturing or emailing customers on a set schedule. The fundamental governing aspect of automation is manual configuration, which essentially means that the machine has to be set up

to deal with a certain input and then will produce an output based on delivered specifications.

The end result is an efficient use of time and resources, which sounds similar to the purpose of AI, and it is, but AI works with slightly more autonomy. Artificial Intelligence systems are similarly created to perform very specific tasks, but their tasks often require more pattern matching and decision making on the part of the system. This is what makes AI a little scarier, and also far more powerful. It can apply knowledge gleaned from prior tasks to further optimize future ones, sustaining an environment of constant self-improvement.

This leaves potential implications of AI a little murky, but a 2015 report from McKinsey and Company references the fact that every industry contains some potential for automation to take jobs and increase efficiency in the workplace. However, they also point to an important distinction, that “Very few occupations will be automated in their entirety in the near or medium term. Rather, certain activities are more likely to be automated, requiring entire business processes to be transformed, and jobs performed by people to be redefined, much like the bank teller’s job was redefined with the advent of ATMs.” The report goes on to explain that nearly 45% of current business activities could be easily automated using currently available technologies, and that “in the United States, these activities represent about \$2 trillion in annual wages.” With this broad definition of AI’s potential, there is a bounty of potential action to be taken to maintain jobs while making way for some automation in the workforce.

Autonomous Weapons

Lethal Autonomous Weapons, weapons which do not require direct human input to act, are not a new concept. However, they have recently become much more technologically feasible. In recent years, there has been a dramatic shift away

from rapid development of autonomous weapons technology and towards an air of caution towards these technologies. Pushback against autonomous weapons has come from various sources such as the US Defense Department, private companies, scientists, and even the United Nations. This brings us to the present day – a crossroads for autonomous weapons.

There is intense debate currently on how Autonomous Weapons should be tested, funded, built, and used in warfare. Many delegations would argue that they shouldn’t be advanced at all, and all military funding in this area would only further stratify the differences between nations’ individual power. Country positions on the autonomous weapons debate will very likely be instrumental in deciding blocs and overall policy as conference progresses, so understanding of this area will be particularly important.

Conclusion

Each of these subtopics holds immediate potential to impact the lives of billions across the globe and contains numerous implications and potential complications. Whether the impact of AI in these sectors is positive or negative is largely dependent on the sorts of policies implemented to protect and regulate this increasingly valuable resource, a process we can begin in this session of the SST.

This Background Guide in Brief is not meant to provide an exhaustive introduction to the topic. Please consult the full Background Guide on the HMUN China website, which also includes citations for the material in this document.