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INTERNATIONAL REGULATION OF ARMED CONFLICTS AND THE EFFECTS CAUSED BY THE FLIGHTS OF MILITARY UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLES: IN THE REGIONS OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND RUSSIA-UKRAINE

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Abstract

In this vast world, armed conflicts have kept being a part of human life. Tragic effects caused by armed conflicts of the contemporary times are highly being intensified by the production and innovation of the most dangerous military weapons to which powerful states feel proud and national glory in such production and innovation. This article examines international armed conflicts, their legal and institutional regulatory frameworks and finally their aftermaths. The work is mainly centred in the regions of the Middle East and Russia-Ukraine.

Keywords: *Unmanned aerial vehicles, armed conflicts, aerial attacks, military unmanned aerial vehicles*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Unmanned aerial vehicles are aircrafts that are flight into skies without having a pilot on board to exercise their control rather they go under the control of an individual who are remotely situated.[1] Unmanned aerial vehicles include airbuses, aeroplanes, drones, etc. in other words it is like to say that, unmanned aerial vehicles are diversified into different categories, in other words, unmanned aerial vehicles not exist in one particular form.

Military unmanned aerial vehicles are military aircrafts that are flight into airspace without human pilot on board to operate various military operations.[2] These aircrafts are mostly seen during armed conflicts where they are likely to be deployed by state armed forces to conduct reconnaissance, photograph taking, rescue, aerial attacks, etc. International conventions that regulate airspace categorise all military aerial vehicles irrespective of their form and tasks they operate as state aircrafts. Therefore, military unmanned aerial vehicles are state owned vehicles.

2.0 HISTORY OF MILITARY UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLES IN ARMED CONFLICTS

At first, unmanned aerial vehicles were manufactured in Austria in 1849 for being used by Austrian armed forces to attack the city of Venice when Austria claimed to retake Venice, a city that had soon been emancipated from Austria's control.[3] In the incidence, more

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[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Austria attacks Venice with balloons bombs | HISTORY, retrieved from https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/august-

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than 200 unmanned hot air balloons were deployed to attack towns and villages in Venice.[4] This phenomenon is historically marked as a first armed conflict in the global history to involve not only aerial attacks but also to use unmanned aerial vehicles to strike the enemy armed forces.

From then, military vehicles came to be seen in the World's wars into which European powers resorted. In previous times military aerial vehicles were made with low technology through which they could only be led by a pilot on board and be flown over a short distance and also having a capacity to carry ordinary and small weight weapons. Shifting from making aerial vehicles moved by the pilot who seated on board was influenced by some causes, such included military aerial vehicles that were flown with a pilot on board presented tragic effects especially to pilots due to the fact that pilots were more exposed enemy attacks and thus making them be prone to death.[5] Therefore, military forces especially such of the powerful states transformed military aerial vehicles making technology from such the primitive one to advanced technology where military aerial vehicles capable of moving in the air without having a pilot on board began to be crafted.

3.0 PROLONGED ARMED CONFLICTS AND UNREST IN THE MIDDLE EAST

3.1 Background of armed conflicts in the Middle East

Middle East has never been in long-lasting peace since a century ago, specifically in 1948 after the creation of the state of Israel.[6] The region has been a home of prolonged and endless armed conflicts presenting the large-scale human rights outrage. States' armed forces and military groups fight without ceasing and therefore putting human life in tragic moments throughout the time. In different times, Arabic nations either united or individually have kept been waging wars against Israel to defend the interests of Palestine in the Middle East region.[7] On the other hand, Arabic nations belonging to the Middle East have been waging wars against themselves for a number of interests.[8] This stirs confrontations and unrests in the region and therefore making the region restless throughout the time while presenting fear to human life. For instance, in 2026, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Yemen have intensified armed conflicts with other Arabic nations including Saudi Arabia, Oman and Bahrain claiming them to be enemy states and that they defend the interests of the United States of America in their territories.[9]

3.2 Involvement of military unmanned aerial vehicles in armed conflicts

Intensification of armed conflicts in the region under review subject to this part is majorly contributed by technological weapons such as military unmanned aerial vehicles that to the great extent has transformed military technology from physical presence in the battle field to distant or remote attacks.[10] States' armed forces have always been in the frontline to adopt new and easiest fighting technologies that presents casualties and tragic impacts to the mankind especially civilians who are highly protected as far as international humanitarian law is concerned.

Russian and Ukrainian armed forces have been deploying military unmanned aerial vehicles as a simplest way to attack one another. On the other hand, Israel and Palestine have been doing the same, the conflicts among Arabic states *inter se* is also highly characterised with aerial attacks. Despite of diplomatic resolutions, accords and agreements, cease fire agreements have been concluded and become freeze after passing of a little time.

4.0 LEGAL AND ISTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK ON ARMED CONFLICTS

Before delving into the analysis of legal and institutional framework on armed conflicts, we should at first comprehend that, armed conflicts are regulated by international humanitarian law. In other words, international humanitarian law is a solely branch of law that regulates armed conflicts by giving out rules of fighting in armed conflicts, offering humanitarian assistance to individual persons or civilians suffering the aftermaths of armed conflicts, etc. therefore, armed conflicts are internationally regulated.

4.1 Legal frameworks

There are various international legal frameworks regulating armed conflicts by giving out the rules of fighting to the effect of minimising detriment impacts that may if armed conflicts remain uncontrolled. The following are such legal frameworks and each of them is given detailed explanations as follows;

22/first-remote-aerial-bombing-austria-baloons-1849 on 5th June 2026

[4] Austria attacks Venice with balloons bombs | HISTORY, retrieved from https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/august-22/first-remote-aerial-bombing-austria-baloons-1849 on 5th June 2026

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The Charter of the United Nations

This can be referred as a world's constitution due to the significance roles it plays relative to the promotion and maintenance of the world's peace. For the purpose of this study, this international instrument is referred to as the "Charter." The Charter officially came into force on 24th day of October 1945, the time when the second world war was in its end. After an assessment of the impacts that had already been caused by the second world war, an international community sitting at San Francisco, the United States of America by delegations from each of then the world's states proposed to administer the world peace. Nations proposed to a specific international legal instrument that would commonly apply to states to manifest the world peace, such was the so-called the Charter of the United Nations.

Though the Charter does not regulate armed conflicts as this section is concerned, under Article 3 sovereignty among states. Nowhere in the Charter there is provided mechanism under which civilians should be protected in armed conflict, the rues of fighting among the belligerent states are not provided as well. Regarding to the truth that, the purpose for its creation was to monitor and promote the world's peace pursuant to Article 3 and other provisions pertinent to that one, the Charter acquires a status of being one of the international legal frameworks regulating armed conflicts.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

This is the first international instrument to hold a set of fundamental human rights and freedoms. It was formulated in 1948 following a long-term outrage of human rights in the world. Prior to this, humans were passing through sufferings and bitterest agony led by barbarians to whom humanity and sympathy did not well sound. Therefore, the Declaration was formed and be incorporated with all fundamental human rights and freedoms.

The Declaration is featured with only 30 provisions covering all category of persons irrespective of their status. Article 1 promotes brotherhood among all persons, Article 3 grants right to life, liberty and security, Article 2 discourages discrimination in relation to the enjoyment of rights granted by the Declaration. As observed in the Charter of the United Nations, regulation of armed conflicts is nowhere covered in the Declaration rather, it protects and uphold the rights of all persons in all times including in armed conflicts. Therefore, when armed forces act in opposite of what the Declaration provides, they automatically offend the Declaration.

Declaration Renouncing the Use, in Time of War, of Explosives Projectiles Under 400 Grammes Weight St. Petersburg Declaration, 29 November/ 11 December 1868

This was created at St. Petersburg, Russia in 1868. This instrument is commonly known as St. Petersburg Declaration. It is an instrument was enacted following an outrage of human life due to inhumane military weapons such as bullets, arms and all armed conflicts fighting materials that were causing extreme sufferings to human being. The declaration was enacted to discourage the use and production of such dreadful weapons among states. From this analysis, one can get a picture that this specific international instrument was specifically enacted to control armed conflicts due to the facts that, it contains rules the kinds of military weapons that had to be used in armed conflict. In the study at hand, unmanned military unmanned aerial vehicles should not be fed with dreadful weapons that when attack grossly affect human lives.

Convention (IV) respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its annex, 18 October 1907

This is also known as the Hague Convention, adopted in 1907 at The Hague, Netherlands. It was purposely designed to keep the mankind from the tragic effects of armed conflicts. Specifically, annexure II provides rules of armed conflicts among belligerent states. For instance, Article 23 (b) provides for protection of the lives of individual civilians. States armed forces are prohibited by this specific provision to direct armed attacks to the civilians, *combats de hors* and sick or wounded soldiers.

Therefore, it is a general observation that armed conflicts are controlled by the Hague Convention due to the fact the convention provides some basic rules that states' armed forces should abide with when battling armed conflicts. For the purpose of this study, military unmanned aerial vehicles should not be guided to fire or bomb areas inhabited by individual civilians.

Geneva Conventions of 1949

It is a series of conventions that were adopted in 1959 at Geneva, Switzerland to administer armed conflicts and provide protection to specific groups of persons in armed conflicts. Such conventions are as follows; Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of the Prisoners of War of August 12, 1949, Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in the Armed Forces in the Field of August 12, 1949 and the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of August 12, 1949.

In these conventions, there is the-called "common article 3" that protects individual civilians, *combats de hors*, wounded and sick persons from scourges of wars. In other words, in all circumstances, individual civilians, combats de hors, wounded and sick persons are illegitimate attacks in armed conflicts. Therefore, the conventions monitor armed fights.

4.2 International institutional frameworks

The United Nations

The United Nations is a global supreme authority under which all states are gathered.[11] This body was created in 1945 for among other things to administer the global peace. The United Nation is made up with several organs where one of them is the so called the "United Nations Security Council" (UNSC), an organ vested with the duty of ensuring the existence of the global peace throughout the time for the welfare of the mankind whatsoever their station.

[11] ZHU Lijang (2012), State Sovereignty and International Criminal Law: Universal Jurisdiction Before the United Nations General Assembly: Seeking Common Understanding under International Law

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International Criminal Court

This is an international judicial body, with its headquarters at The Hague, Netherlands. It is established by an international instrument known as the Rome Statute of an International Criminal Court. The Court is vested with the jurisdiction to prosecute the most serious international crimes including genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression as articulated under Article 5 of the Statute.[12] The Court works along with international criminal tribunals that have been from time established by the Security Council of the United Nations to prosecute doers of the most serious crimes in the regions where such international tribunals are established. Examples of international criminal tribunals include International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia established in 1993, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda established in 1994, Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone, Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia for the Prosecution of Crimes Committed during the period of Democratic Kampuchea, Panels with Exclusive Jurisdiction over serious criminal offences in East Timor, etc.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

This was formed following the battle of Solferino fought in 1859 between Sardian and Austrian armies through which a Swiss business man Henry Dunant who was passing along the battle field adjourned a journey he had and start to give humanitarian assistance to the wounded and dying soldiers.[13] In the subsequent years, specifically in 1863, an international community saw that there was a great need for there to be an impartial organ that would be responsible to offer humanitarian assistance to the victims of armed conflicts including wounded soldiers, individual civilians, etc.[14] This was the birth of ICRC.

5.0 EFFECTS CAUSED DEPLOYMENT OF MILITARY UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLES

The contemporary middle east armed conflicts have been intensified by the prolonged uses of military unmanned aerial vehicles. Deployment of these aerial vehicles is deemed as a measure of states' armed forces. The uses of unmanned aerial vehicles for execution of military attacks against the enemy state led to number of severe impacts to the mankind. The following are effects caused by deployment of military unarmed vehicles for attacking in armed conflicts.

Extreme deaths of people

In armed conflicts, a lot of people are likely to lose their life due to armed attacks that are likely to be pointed by enemy armed forces to areas inhabited by civilian population and other specific areas designed to accommodate people in wartimes. Massive deaths of people may also be caused by hitting energy stations that when attacked are likely to expose harmful gases that threat to people's health and may finally lead deaths. The records shows that more than 73,386 Palestinians have been killed by Israel forces since the 7th October 2023 attack initiated by Hamas' wing in support of Palestine.[15] On the other hand, in Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict, more than 17,200 people from both sides of the conflict had been died up to 31st August 2026 since Russia's invasion on Ukraine on 22nd February 2022.[16]

Severe injury and extreme sufferings to people

Armed conflicts are likely to cause severe injury and extreme sufferings to individual persons when enemy armed forces direct attacks to civilian populations. Severe injury and extreme sufferings are one of the driving factors for permanent disabilities to innocent civilians.

In the Middle East the records reveal that, more than 174,256 Palestinians have been injured since October 7 2023 attack by Hamas against Israel.[17] On the side of Russia and Ukraine, the number of injured persons amounts to more than 53,000 from both sides of the conflict.[18] The provided records from both Middle East and Russia-Ukraine are of not after the 31st day of August 2026.

Massive flow of refugees

Refugees are persons moving from one place to another especially for the reasons of trouble or distress associated with wars, hunger, etc. Refugees move by various factors to seek a resting place in a foreign country or place. In areas dominated with armed conflicts, there is always been experienced the massive flow of refugees fleeing war zones.

In the Middle East, despite of having experienced long-term armed conflicts, authorities have designed a specific area in Gaza strip to accommodate refugees who flee war zones. On the other hand, Northern Ireland has stretched its arms to receive thousands of

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refugees fleeing the war zones in armed fights between Russia and Ukraine. Statistics reveals that, among other European countries, by 2022 Northern Ireland hosted more than 2000 Ukrainian refugees.[19]

Massive devastation of infrastructures

States possess different categories of infrastructures that enables people to get services through which such infrastructures were designed for. The mere term "infrastructures" is a general term that among other things it includes energy centres, human settlements, transportation infrastructures and every kind of construction that enables the services to the public. Regarding to energy centres, armed forces of enemy states like to direct armed attacks to energy centres of the enemy states. Nuclear energy centres, oil and gas stations are centres where this grave breach of war customs always happen. In 2023 Russian armed attacked the Europe's biggest nuclear energy centre in Zaporizhian, Ukraine by directing armed attacks towards it.

On the other hand, there are infrastructures that holds or accommodate human settlement. These include storey buildings or large buildings that are mostly found in urban centres where a big number of people resides. As the general rule of laws of armed conflicts, civilians are illegitimate target of armed attacks unless they take active part to weaken or defeat the enemy armed forces.[20] Despite of having this international legal principle, armed forces of belligerent states have not yet willed to obey it. For instance, in 2023 Israel's armed force attacked a six-storey building in Gaza resided by Palestinians and it later collapsed two years later.

6.0 Conclusion

Contemporary military technology becomes a threat to human being. Innovation of new technological weapons such as military unmanned aerial vehicles accelerates to tragic effects to the mankind due to their efficiency in exercising armed attacks. As far as this study is concerned, prolonged armed conflicts in the Middle East are highly characterised by aerial attacks in which military drones are fed with bombs, projectiles and other kind of explosives to exercise bombardment for weakening and destroy enemy armed forces, civilian population, infrastructures, etc. Therefore, states' aircrafts including these military unmanned aerial vehicles poses a lot of difficulties to the mankind and therefore there should be a specific international legal framework to control the flights of state aircrafts similarly to how civil aircrafts are internationally controlled.

7.0 Recommendations

There are number of international institutions vested with powers to watch and regulate the conduct of armed conflicts. Some of the institutions directly exercise such powers while some exercise indirectly. Now, the following are recommendations given to international institutions that directly or indirectly control and regulate the conduct of armed conflicts; the United Nations through its general assembly (UNGA) should create a specific instrument to control the flights of all state aircrafts including military unmanned aerial vehicles.

On the other hand, an international criminal court and tribunals should keep exercising the powers vested on it to prosecute the perpetrators of the most serious international crimes to which the deployment of military unmanned aerial vehicles lead to criminal responsibility due to severe impacts to human being they leave behind. Also, membership to an international criminal court should be compulsory to all states so as to make it possible to bring before the court every perpetuator of the most serious international crimes from every corner of the world.

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