Transformation of Traditional Concepts of International Law in Light of Artificial Intelligence: The Role of the Security Council in Understanding Data-Driven Use of Force

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence technology and its application in the fields of security and defense have transformed the classical nature of the rule on the "use of force" in international law—particularly Article 2(4) of the Charter of the United Nations (1945). The present study focuses on how the use of artificial intelligence in security decision-making may redefine the traditional understanding of the "threat or use of force," and what role the United Nations Security Council plays in assessing the legality of such data-driven measures. The research method of this study is descriptive–analytical and is based on international instruments, Security Council resolutions, and recent reports concerning the military application of artificial intelligence. The findings indicate that artificial intelligence provides high-speed and high-precision capabilities in threat intelligence analysis, target identification, surveillance, and security assessment, and that decisions to resort to force may increasingly be shaped by data analytics and AI-based systems. However, from the perspective of international law, such "digital-cognitive force" remains subject to fundamental rules, including the prohibition of the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, unless it qualifies as an instance of "self-defense" under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations (1945) or is authorized collectively under Chapter VII of the Charter. The role of the Security Council entails two essential dimensions: (1) reaffirmation of the traditional legal framework governing the use of force, and (2) the necessity of establishing clear criteria and standards for "accountability," "transparency," "proportionality," and "meaningful human control" in AI-based decision-making, so that data-driven instruments do not result in an expansive interpretation of the prohibition on the use of force. The conclusion of this research emphasizes the need for both legal and institutional reconsideration regarding the acceptance of artificial intelligence applications in the security and military domains, in order to create an integrated framework combining traditional legal norms with data-oriented standards and to reinforce the role of the Security Council as the central authority for legitimizing recourse to force.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Security Council; Use of Force; Charter of the United Nations; Legitimacy of the Use of Force; International Law; Accountability; Transparency.

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1. Introduction

The profound transformation in emerging technologies and the rise of artificial intelligence as one of the most prominent achievements of the twenty-first century have confronted the foundational frameworks of international law with new questions and unprecedented challenges. Among the various domains affected by this technology, the sphere of international security—and in particular the rule on the "use of force"—occupies a distinctive position; a rule that has served as one of the pillars of the international legal order since the adoption of the Charter of the United Nations in 1945 and has played a central role in maintaining international peace and security (Nyangasi, 2021; United Nations, 2024). Article 2(4) of the Charter, by establishing a general prohibition on the use of force, laid the foundation for a legal order premised upon the control of military actions; however, in light of instruments such as machine learning algorithms, threat prediction systems, large-scale security data analytics, and autonomous decision-support systems, this rule is now subject to renewed interpretative reconsideration (Security Council Report, 2025; UNIDIR, 2025).

Artificial intelligence technology has transformed not only the manner in which military operations are conducted but also the decision-making processes of political and security institutions. The data-driven nature of decisions, the reliance of states on algorithmic analyses, and the role of intelligent systems in threat assessment pose a fundamental question for legal scholars: when the basis for identifying a threat or the necessity of military action is not human judgment but the outcome of machine-based analysis, how can the legitimacy of an armed action be assessed and traditional criteria of international law applied to it? This question becomes even more significant considering that a substantial portion of decisions related to international peace and security falls within the competence of the United Nations Security Council; an organ which, under Chapter VII of the Charter, is regarded as the principal authority for determining threats to peace and authorizing the use of force (Ecoma & Ota, 2023; United Nations, 2024).

With the entry of artificial intelligence into the security domain, the Security Council itself faces new interpretative challenges. On the one hand, the Council must take into account the positive capacities of artificial intelligence, including the acceleration of threat analysis, the improvement of informational accuracy, enhanced predictability of hostile conduct, and strengthened capacity to prevent conflicts before they occur (UNIDIR, 2025; United Nations, 2023). On the other hand, it must remain attentive to the legal and ethical risks associated with the use of automated intelligent systems, including algorithmic error, data bias, lack of transparency in decision-making processes, the possibility of manipulation or fabrication of security data, and the potential misuse by states of data-driven analyses to justify military actions beyond the framework of the Charter (Mosbah, 2025; Security Council Report, 2025).

In this context, the issue of the "redefinition of traditional concepts" acquires fundamental importance. Concepts such as "threat to the peace," "armed attack," "proportionality," "necessity," and "self-defense" may acquire broader meanings in a world where security intelligence is generated rapidly through complex algorithms. For example, can a threat predicted by artificial intelligence be equated with an actual threat? Can data identified by intelligent systems as an imminent danger constitute a legitimate basis for anticipatory recourse to force? And what is the role of the Security Council in regulating, limiting, or legitimizing such novel interpretations? These questions must be analyzed in light of the established legal understanding of the prohibition of force and its limited exceptions (Pobjie; Sharifi Tarazkouhi & Mehrani, 2012).

The present study, recognizing the delicacy of this conceptual transition, seeks to analyze the transformation of traditional concepts of international law in light of artificial intelligence, with particular emphasis on the role of the Security Council in understanding and interpreting data-driven recourse to force. Examining the relationship between the traditional rules enshrined in the Charter, technological developments, and emerging requirements of transparency, accountability, and meaningful human control is a necessity that is more pressing today than ever before (UNIDIR, 2025; United Nations, 2023). This research aims to demonstrate that the engagement of international law with artificial intelligence does not entail the replacement of existing rules, but rather their reinterpretation and adaptation to new security realities so that the international legal order may remain effective, legitimate, and proportionate in the face of technological transformation.

2. Main Concepts of the Research

The prohibition of the use of force constitutes one of the fundamental principles of international law and is explicitly articulated in Article 2(4) of the Charter of the United Nations. This principle provides that no state has the right to threaten or use force against the territorial integrity or political independence of another state. The primary objective of this rule is the preservation of international peace and security and the prevention of aggressive conduct. This prohibition encompasses any form of military action, threats of force, and occupation of the territory of other states. It is closely aligned with respect for state sovereignty and political independence and imposes legal constraints on state conduct in the international arena. A violation of this principle may entail the international responsibility of the offending state. More broadly, the rule reflects the commitment of the international community to the peaceful settlement of disputes through legal and diplomatic means (Antai et al., 2025; Nyangasi, 2021).

2.1. The Concept of the Prohibition of the Use of Force under Article 2(4) of the Charter

In contemporary international law, the most fundamental principle established after the Second World War is the prohibition of the threat or use of force in international relations, expressly enshrined in Article 2(4) of the Charter of the United Nations. According to this provision, "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations." The legal nature and primary objectives of this rule, despite its apparent simplicity, produced a fundamental transformation in the international order and were formulated with the purpose of safeguarding international peace and security (Summers, 2022). Consequently, the use of force as an instrument of foreign policy or as a means of dispute settlement has been replaced by the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes.

The concept of "force" and its scope in Article 2(4) employs the term "force" in a general sense, prohibiting not only overt military use but also the "threat" thereof (Antai et al., 2025). This underscores that even the threat of military force may constitute a violation of the rule.

"Territorial integrity" and "political independence" are central to this provision, emphasizing two key elements of statehood; any coercive action that undermines these elements falls within the scope of the Charter's prohibition (Ecoma & Ota, 2023; Summers, 2022). In other words, military aggression, occupation of territory, or attempts to overthrow an independent government constitute clear instances of violation. In addition to explicit threats or uses of force, Article 2(4) also encompasses broader conduct that is inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations, including actions that indirectly undermine peace and security—for example, covert support for armed groups in another state or conduct that effectively weakens political independence (Mosbah, 2025).

The rule in customary and peremptory international law is widely regarded not merely as a treaty obligation among United Nations members but as a norm of customary international law approaching the status of jus cogens and binding upon all states, including non-members of the Charter (Pobjie). The international community has effectively accepted the illegality of the use of force absent recognized exceptions. For instance, military action between states without Security Council authorization or a valid claim of self-defense has been widely analyzed as violating the prohibition of the use of force.

Thus, this rule functions as the connective link between the purposes of the Charter—preventing war, promoting peace, and encouraging the peaceful settlement of disputes—and its legal mechanisms. Article 2(4) clearly obliges states to refrain from force in their international relations and to resort instead to diplomacy, mediation, and recourse to international institutions as primary means of dispute resolution (Nyangasi, 2021; United Nations, 2024).

2.2. Concepts Related to the Threat or Use of Force

The concept of "armed attack" in international law is recognized as the principal precondition for the legitimacy of the right of self-defense. According to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the inherent right of self-defense is activated only when an armed attack has actually occurred or is underway against a state; that is, when a violent, military action of sufficient scale and intensity indicative of aggression takes place. In this framework, the International Court of Justice in the

case of United States v. Nicaragua emphasized that a real and demonstrable armed attack is a necessary condition for resorting to force in the form of self-defense, and that non-armed activities or merely political or economic threats cannot, in principle, justify it (Mosbah, 2025; Pobjie). For example, the occurrence of large-scale military attacks such as the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2014 or 2022 clearly constitutes an armed attack, as it involves the direct use of force and violation of the territorial integrity of another state, thereby triggering the rules of the Charter (Mosbah, 2025; Summers, 2022).

In contrast, "self-defense" is a legal concept recognized in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, allowing states to use force in response to an armed attack in order to preserve their security and territorial integrity. International law establishes specific conditions for the lawful exercise of self-defense: the occurrence of an actual armed attack against the victim state, not merely a claim or prediction; immediate reporting of defensive measures to the Security Council; and compliance with the principles of necessity and proportionality in the use of force (Pobjie; Sharifi Tarazkouhi & Mehrani, 2012). Legal scholarship emphasizes that self-defense must not become a pretext for justifying preemptive or aggressive actions, as the concept of self-defense in the Charter is narrowly defined and contingent upon an actual attack, and attempts to extend it to preventive operations lack formal recognition in international law (Sharifi Tarazkouhi & Mehrani, 2012).

Within this scope, the principle of "necessity" signifies that the use of force in self-defense is permissible only when no peaceful alternative exists to repel the aggression. The victim state must demonstrate that no option short of force—such as negotiation, sanctions, or recourse to the Security Council—was effective or available prior to military action. Necessity constitutes a strict criterion and is fulfilled only when the armed attack is continuous and imminent, compelling immediate action. In other words, the use of force should not be justified merely by concern over threats that have not yet materialized; otherwise, it would contradict the spirit of the prohibition of the use of force under the Charter (Antai et al., 2025; Sharifi Tarazkouhi & Mehrani, 2012).

Another foundational principle is "proportionality," which requires that the intensity and scale of force employed in self-defense must not exceed what is necessary to repel the aggressor's attack. This rule ensures that the military response is confined to achieving the legitimate objective of repelling the attack and that excessive or retaliatory measures lack legal justification. In international law, proportionality does not denote a mathematical equivalence between attack and defense, but rather a reasonable and equitable assessment of the force required to eliminate the threat, thereby preventing unnecessary or widespread harm (Pobjie; Summers, 2022).

Among related concepts is the term "threat to the peace," referred to in Article 39 of the Charter of the United Nations, which denotes a situation endangering international peace and security and requiring measures by the Security Council (Nyangasi, 2021). The Security Council is responsible for determining the existence of a threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and may adopt necessary measures to maintain or restore international peace and security. In practice, a "threat to the peace" may extend beyond direct military attacks and encompass political crises, regional instability, widespread human rights violations, or even non-military threats with serious consequences for international security. The interpretation of this concept in the practice of the Security Council has evolved in response to global developments (Ecoma & Ota, 2023; Nyangasi, 2021).

3. The Position and Responsibility of the Security Council in Controlling AI-Based Use of Force

Beyond its traditional duties in determining the existence of a "threat to the peace" and adopting necessary measures, the Security Council is now confronted with the challenge of analyzing artificial intelligence data and assessing complex threats, presenting both significant capacities and notable limitations. In this context, the necessity of developing international standards governing data-driven use of force becomes prominent, in order to ensure compliance with principles such as transparency, accountability, proportionality, and meaningful human control (UNIDIR, 2025; United Nations, 2023). The formulation of such criteria may prevent misuse or algorithmic error and enhance the legitimacy and legality of the Council's responses. International regulation through resolutions, interpretative principles, or soft law instruments may provide a coordinated framework for data-based use of force (Security Council Report, 2025; United Nations, 2024). Ultimately, the combination

of human oversight and artificial intelligence technology may safeguard both security and legitimacy in the actions of the Security Council in the digital age.

3.1. The Supervisory and Interpretative Role of the Security Council in Confronting Security Algorithms

Under Chapter VII of the Charter, the United Nations Security Council bears primary responsibility, upon determining the existence of a "threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression," to adopt measures necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security, including authorizing the use of force within the framework of international law (Nyangasi, 2021; United Nations, 2024). This inherent authority implies that the Council plays a key role not only in traditional military matters but also in emerging security challenges, including the application of artificial intelligence in the context of threats or the use of force. Artificial intelligence in the security and military domain may rely on big data analysis to predict crises, assess threat environments, and support strategic decision-making; however, it simultaneously poses potential risks to international peace and security, requiring the Security Council to evaluate and rely upon algorithmic and data-driven information (Security Council Report, 2025; UNIDIR, 2025).

On the one hand, the Council's capacity to analyze artificial intelligence data derives from its ability to convene expert reports, panels, and consultative meetings to examine emerging technologies, including AI. An example is the convening of high-level open debates on artificial intelligence and international peace and security, in which representatives of member states have discussed both the threats and opportunities associated with AI (Security Council Report, 2025).

In such meetings, the Secretary-General of the United Nations has emphasized that artificial intelligence may serve both as a tool for crisis prevention and, if misused, as a source of danger, warning that without appropriate regulatory frameworks, AI could become a weapon that undermines international security (United Nations, 2024). This position demonstrates that the Security Council has approached AI from a supervisory perspective and seeks to establish rule-based frameworks governing its use in matters of force and security.

Nevertheless, significant limitations constrain the Council's reliance on artificial intelligence data. First, the Security Council is a political body composed of permanent members possessing veto power, and this political character may hinder consensus regarding AI frameworks and legal standards related to data-driven use of force. Such divisions have been evident in discussions concerning artificial intelligence (Security Council Report, 2025). A second limitation concerns the nature of AI data and algorithms themselves; algorithms often operate as "black boxes," lacking transparency and interpretability, whereas the Council requires transparency, credibility, and scientific legitimacy in order to rely upon data in a legally defensible manner. Without standardized international mechanisms, algorithmic data may be difficult to validate within a legal framework (UNIDIR, 2025).

At the supervisory level, the Council may rely upon specialized analyses from independent institutions such as the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) to supplement its information and ensure that AI-based analyses conform to international principles and empirical evidence (UNIDIR, 2025). Such cooperation enhances the Council's capacity to engage responsibly with artificial intelligence data.

For example, AI-based threat analysis may assist the Council in determining whether particular AI applications within a region or conflict pose risks, and such analyses may serve as evidentiary support for identifying a "threat to the peace." However, absent shared interpretative standards and agreed criteria for AI evaluation, the Council may encounter ambiguity and fragmentation in its legal and political decision-making. This challenge has prompted both the General Assembly and the Security Council to move toward global frameworks and broader debates concerning AI, including resolutions emphasizing that international law, human rights law, and international humanitarian law must be respected in the military application of AI (United Nations, 2023, 2024).

Ultimately, as a supervisory and interpretative authority in the age of artificial intelligence, the Security Council stands at the intersection of technology and international law. It must not only exercise its traditional oversight powers but also develop new interpretative frameworks for assessing AI-generated data and its implications for the use of force and international security, while remaining aware of its political and technical constraints. Such an approach, though complex, appears essential for preserving the legitimacy of international law in the digital era.

3.2. The Necessity of Developing International Standards for Data-Driven Use of Force

Artificial intelligence and data-driven systems in the sphere of international security have transformed the manner in which decisions are made and force is applied. However, this transformation requires legal frameworks and international standards to ensure that the use of such technologies remains consistent with the principles of international law, including the prohibition of the use of force, necessity, proportionality, and human rights. In the absence of such frameworks, the risk of unlawful or destabilizing actions increases (UNIDIR, 2025; United Nations, 2024).

Existing international regulations, such as the Charter of the United Nations—particularly Articles 2(4) and 51—explicitly limit the use of force to defined circumstances, yet at the time of their drafting they did not anticipate the scope of digital technologies and artificial intelligence algorithms. This development underscores the necessity of revisiting and elaborating contemporary standards to ensure that data-driven decision-making retains its legal legitimacy within the framework of international law (Antai et al., 2025; Pobjie).

One of the foundational criteria in this regard is transparency of data and algorithms. While artificial intelligence technologies often function as "black boxes," the development of international standards should require that data sources, decision-making criteria, and analytical processes used in military and security contexts be subject to review and interpretation by other states and relevant international bodies. Such transparency aims to reduce both human and automated error and to prevent misuse (Security Council Report, 2025; UNIDIR, 2025).

At the international level, efforts toward establishing transparent principles are already observable. For example, resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly have repeatedly emphasized the necessity of examining and regulating artificial intelligence in the military domain, particularly in relation to lethal autonomous weapons systems. These discussions have stressed that human responsibility and accountability must be preserved in any decision that results in the use of force. Notably, during its seventy-eighth session, the General Assembly affirmed that "an algorithm must not be in full control of decisions involving killing" and that the principle of human responsibility and accountability for any use of lethal force must be maintained (United Nations, 2023). This principle is fully aligned with international humanitarian law and the requirement of meaningful human control.

Another essential criterion is accountability. It must be ensured that where data-driven decisions to use force lead to harmful consequences or violations of international law, a natural or legal person is identifiable and subject to responsibility. This issue concerns not only states but also technology companies that design and develop algorithms, and it should be incorporated into international standards governing the military application of artificial intelligence (Mosbah, 2025; UNIDIR, 2025).

As discussed earlier in this article, the principle of proportionality—one of the core principles of international humanitarian law—must also be integrated within data-driven frameworks. Artificial intelligence systems should be designed to calibrate their outputs according to measurable criteria concerning the scale and type of force employed, ensuring that responses do not exceed what is necessary to repel a threat. If inadequately regulated, such systems could facilitate unnecessary or disproportionate uses of force, thereby violating international law (Pobjie; Summers, 2022).

From the perspective of human control, international law emphasizes that even where artificial intelligence assists in data analysis and decision-support functions, final judgment and control over decisions involving the use of force must remain with human actors. This requirement seeks to prevent machine-generated decisions that lack legal and ethical evaluation. This approach has constituted a central theme in discussions within the Security Council and specialized committees (Security Council Report, 2025; United Nations, 2024). Such principles are also reflected in political declarations concerning the responsible military use of artificial intelligence, in which several states have committed to maintaining human control over autonomous weapons and preserving human decision-making authority supported by technological systems, even though many of these instruments lack full legal binding force (United Nations, 2023).

The necessity of developing binding international standards arises from the fact that non-binding resolutions and interpretative principles alone cannot guarantee universal compliance by all states and international actors. Consequently, certain institutions and scholars have proposed the drafting of multilateral treaties capable of establishing a clear legal framework for the development and deployment of artificial intelligence in the security domain (UNIDIR, 2025). Although

existing initiatives largely operate within soft law structures, they contribute to the progressive consolidation of norms governing AI in relation to peace and security.

Ultimately, international regulation through new resolutions, interpretative principles, and soft law instruments may serve as a preliminary phase toward the development of binding rules. This evolutionary process resembles patterns observed in international humanitarian law and arms control regimes, where gradual norm development preceded formal treaty codification (Ecoma & Ota, 2023; United Nations, 2024).

In light of the expanding trajectory of technological innovation and the growing complexity of data-driven recourse to force, both the Security Council and the General Assembly must cooperate in formulating globally accepted standards to ensure that artificial intelligence is employed in emergency and threat situations in full compliance with international law and human rights. Achieving this objective requires inclusive dialogue among states, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector to construct a coherent and legitimate governance framework for artificial intelligence in matters of peace and security (UNIDIR, 2025; United Nations, 2024).

4. Conclusion

The rapid transformation of emerging technologies and the expanding application of artificial intelligence in the fields of security and defense have confronted the international legal order with one of the most complex challenges in its modern history. The classical rules governing the prohibition of the use of force—developed over more than seven decades on the basis of traditional concepts such as threat, armed attack, necessity, and proportionality—now require interpretative reconsideration and structural adaptation in light of data-driven decision-making, predictive threat systems, and algorithmic analyses. The findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of artificial intelligence into the security domain is not merely a technical development; rather, it has generated a "new discourse of force," in which data, algorithms, and machine-generated analysis may serve as the foundation for risk perception, threat definition, and even legal justification for military action. As a result, the boundaries between an "actual threat" and a "predicted threat," between a "defensive response" and a "preemptive measure," and between "security analysis" and "military decision" have become increasingly blurred. In the absence of effective legal control, this evolution may undermine the very foundations of the prohibition of the use of force.

Within this evolving context, the role of the Security Council as the primary organ responsible for maintaining international peace and security acquires heightened significance. The research indicates that despite its broad authority under Chapter VII of the Charter, the Council currently lacks clearly articulated normative frameworks for assessing AI-based threats. On the one hand, it must recognize the positive capacities of artificial intelligence in enhancing informational accuracy, improving threat prediction, and preventing conflicts. On the other hand, it must remain vigilant regarding the risks inherent in these technologies and the potential misuse by states to justify unlawful military actions. Algorithmic error, data bias, lack of transparency, difficulties in attributing responsibility for automated decisions, and deficiencies in meaningful human control are among the challenges that may affect both the legitimacy of Security Council decisions and the effectiveness of international law. Accordingly, the Council should move toward the development of normative standards emphasizing transparency in data analysis processes, accountability of states relying on intelligent systems, proportionality in data-driven responses, and the guarantee of effective human oversight.

A key conclusion of this study is that artificial intelligence neither invalidates traditional rules of international law nor replaces them; rather, it subjects their meaning and application to new interpretative pressures. Data-driven recourse to force must continue to be evaluated within the narrow exceptions recognized by the Charter—namely self-defense or authorization by the Security Council. However, to ensure that these rules remain effective in the age of algorithms, more precise criteria are required for assessing security data, determining threat thresholds, evaluating necessity and proportionality, and defining standards for reliance on machine-generated analysis. The development of soft-law frameworks, interpretative guidelines, and potentially new resolutions addressing artificial intelligence and global security therefore appears unavoidable.

In sum, this study concludes that the connection between the traditional rules of international law and emerging technological realities can be sustained only through a more proactive normative and interpretative role by the Security Council. Without such engagement, there exists both the risk of weakening the prohibition of the use of force and the danger of legitimizing military actions based on incomplete or biased analytical systems. The future of international law in the face of artificial

intelligence does not lie in abandoning its foundational principles, but in its capacity to reinterpret and reinforce them through innovative, data-conscious normative responses.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

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