IMSISS Dissertation Feedback & Mark Sheet

Student Matriculation No.	**Glasgow** 2676843 **DCU** 233478 **Charles** 6639818
Dissertation Title	International Humanitarian Law and Autonomy in Weapons: A Normative Analysis of the Notion of Human Control

INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTION GRADING

Word Count Penalty (1-15% over/under = 1gr point; 15-20% over/under = 2 gr points; 20-25% over/under = 3 gr points; more than 25% over/under = 0 fail)

Word Count: 21737 **Suggested Penalty:** *no penalty*

JOINT GRADING (subject to agreement of the external examiner and approval at Joint Exam Board)

Final Agreed Mark: A3 [20]

DISSERTATION FEEDBACK

Assessment Criteria	Rating
A. Structure and Development of Answer This refers to your organisational skills and ability to construct an argument in a coherent and original manner	
• Originality of topic	Very Good
• Coherent set of research questions and/or hypothesis identified	Excellent
• Appropriate methodology and evidence of effective organisation of work	Excellent
• Logically structured argument and flow of ideas reflecting research questions	Very Good
• Application of theory and/or concepts	Very Good
B. Use of Source Material This refers to your skills to select and use relevant information and data in a correct manner	
• Evidence of reading and review of published literature	Excellent
• Selection of relevant primary and/or secondary evidence to support argument	Excellent
• Critical analysis and evaluation of evidence	Excellent
• Accuracy of factual data	Excellent
C. Academic Style This refers to your ability to write in a formal academic manner	
• Appropriate formal and clear writing style	Very Good
• Accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation	Very Good
• Consistent and accurate referencing (including complete bibliography)	Excellent
• Is the dissertation free from plagiarism?	Yes
• Evidence of ethics approval included (if required based on methodology)	Yes

• *Appropriate word count*	Yes

ADDITIONAL WRITTEN COMMENTS

Reviewer 1

This work addresses a central issue in contemporary international humanitarian law, i.e. the development of autonomous weapons, their compatibility with the current legal framework, and the prospects for reform of the latter. The author demonstrates an excellent command of the academic debate from a legal perspective, correctly identifying, through a comprehensive literature review, the notion of 'human control' as central to understanding the compatibility of autonomous weapons with international law. The dissertation makes use of original primary sources by carrying out a text analysis study of the positions expressed by states within the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons systems constituted within the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. This text analysis study is absolutely innovative and original in the current academic landscape of international law. The research is well conducted from a methodological point of view and allows the author to outline in depth the positions of states on the notion of human control. The conclusions of the work are clear, concise and well supported by previous analysis. Perhaps, the reflection on the formation of customary law and on the difficulties arising from framing verbal practice within the framework of two-element theory could have been expanded. Also, the analysis of the principles of the law of targeting could have been more in depth, considering its crucial importance and the breadth of the academic debate on these issues. However, it is understandable, also in light of the work's word limit (which is respected), that all theoretical aspects could not be treated at length. Overall, I think this thesis work is truly excellent.

Reviewer 2

This thesis fulfills and even exceeds what is required of a Master's thesis. While there is a lot of debate around LAWS and the notion of meaningful human control, there lacks a solid understanding of what such meaningful human control actually means. The thesis contributes to narrowing this gap, clearly showing how the notion of human control fits in with the core related provisions of IHL and how it is understood in the first place, with the author's efforts to even inquire into the respective spectrum of possible human involvement. Besides this major strength, the thesis is structured logically and consistently, it sets a clear objective and follows it from the very beginning till the very end. It also relies on a careful and detailed research, including the author's work with primary sources, which constitutes yet another advantage. One issue that I have is with the third key finding where the author goes beyond the actual analysis and gives policy recommendations from a normative perspective, which is unusual for such a kind of academic work (e.g. "States need to and have the opportunity to act pre-emptively."). The final part of the concluding section is also structured similarly to a think tank report containing recommendations and calls for action (e.g. "the human must always remain in the loop"). I understand it is difficult to abstain from normative recommendations in this kind of a normative analysis, however. Questions remain also regarding the two core suggestions deriving from this whole analysis: (1) "On the one hand, human judgement should be a requisite during the selection of the target." Wouldn't it possibly work for the software to identify and suggest the target to the human operator, who would then just have to approve or reject it? The author's formulation is unclear in this respect. (2) "On the other hand, constant human monitoring should be required during the engagement phase, in order to ensure that the operator can abort or detain the weapon at any point of time." Would this work reliably though, as the author themselves indicate above in the text that intelligent software embedded in LAWS will take decisions much faster than humans

can process? Some other formulations are also imprecise, once again leading the thesis into the same traps it aims to address: for example, "the human must always remain in the loop" (does "in the loop" here mean the current mode of UAV operation, to which the term is usually applied?; elsewhere the author suggests, however, that "constant human monitoring should be required during the engagement phase, in order to ensure that the operator can abort or detain the weapon at any point of time", which sounds more like a "human on the loop" arrangement). Where the author arrives to a conclusion that "LAWS that do not allow for any kind of human intervention, and LAWS that select and engage a target without human control are not compatible with the existing IHL", a bit more elaboration on the possible spectrum of human involvement in relation the compliance with IHL (which the author did discuss earlier) would also make this point more robust. Except for these minor deficiencies, the thesis deserves the highest possible mark ("A").