

Background Information

With recent innovations in artificial intelligence (AI) and facial recognition technology, governments have begun to incorporate these new advancements for police and military use. Although similar to fingerprint and DNA scanning technology, facial recognition is relatively instantaneous, because it identifies individuals entirely on facial features. Facial recognition technology typically relies on databases of individuals, usually from license or passport photos or mugshots. Across the world, governments have experimented with this technology, despite its infancy.

In recent times, facial recognition technology has seen use in the People's Republic of China during the Hong Kong protests. The PRC has installed "smart" lampposts across Hong Kong, which collect video surveillance and can also analyze weather and traffic patterns. In addition, Chinese companies have begun to install new facial recognition cameras across Africa to train their AI algorithms. Combined with the social credit score system, these new technologies allow the Chinese government to potentially fine or arrest citizens for misbehavior.

Although governments and companies have begun to institute facial recognition technology, the question of its use has become a controversial issue. In the US, local legislation in New Hampshire and Utah has banned the use of these new systems entirely. Critics of facial recognition technology argue that law enforcement agencies and private companies could potentially exploit surveillance footage and databases for malicious purposes. Additionally, facial recognition is a relatively new technology, and it is possible individuals could be

misidentified. As a result, organizations have appeared protesting the use of facial recognition technology, such as Big Brother Watch in the United Kingdom.

United Nations Involvement

The United Nations has currently imposed no concrete regulations on facial recognition technology. In June 2019, David Kaye, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, published a special report to the UN Human Rights Committee, calling for an immediate ban on surveillance technology. Kaye argued that states, as well as companies, should be subject to regulations on the surveillance industry. Furthermore, Kaye warns that facial recognition can potentially trespass upon human rights and discriminate against individuals. Moreover, the first Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy, Joseph Cannataci, has strongly condemned the use of security cameras in police forces in the United Kingdom. Cannataci comments that “I find it difficult to see how the deployment of a technology that would potentially allow the identification of each single participant in a peaceful demonstration could possibly pass the test of necessity and proportionality.”

Additionally, recent documents have shown that Chinese companies, such as ZTE and China Telecom, have begun to propose new standards for facial recognition to the UN’s International Telecommunication Union (ITU). Although most countries in Europe and North America have their own similar organizations, developing nations typically adopt standards set forth by the ITU. Although ITU standards are usually based on compromises from governments, it is typically uncommon for a company to push for standards.

Questions to Consider

When writing your resolutions and policy papers, consider the following questions:

- What, if any, regulations should be instituted with facial recognition technologies?
- At what point does facial recognition technology in police situations start trespassing on individual privacy and rights?
- Should these systems be instituted in everyday situations, or only under extreme circumstances?
- What are the potential dangers of data breaches on facial databases?
- Is there a limit to when automatic recognition systems become unnecessary (such as on CCTV cameras)?
- How should systems identify dangerous individuals without discriminating or profiling against groups of people?

Be prepared to debate these questions in your committee. Familiarize yourself with this topic and be prepared to defend your country's position. Additionally, start researching other countries' viewpoints.

Sources and Useful Links

Gemalto- Basic overview of facial recognition technology and its applications

<https://www.gemalto.com/govt/biometrics/facial-recognition>

Interpol- Application of facial recognition tech for police forces

<https://www.interpol.int/en/How-we-work/Forensics/Facial-Recognition>

New York Magazine- The Future of Facial Technology in America

<http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/11/the-future-of-facial-recognition-in-america.html>

Wired- Behind the Rise of China's Facial-Recognition Giants

<https://www.wired.com/story/behind-rise-chinas-facial-recognition-giants/>

Quartz- China's New Weapon of Choice is Your Face

<https://qz.com/1721321/chinas-new-weapon-of-choice-is-facial-recognition-technology/>

Financial Times- Chinese tech groups shaping UN facial recognition standards

<https://www.ft.com/content/c3555a3c-0d3e-11ea-b2d6-9bf4d1957a67>

International Telecommunication Union website

<https://www.itu.int/en/Pages/default.aspx>

UN News- Moratorium call on surveillance technology to end 'free-for-all' abuses: UN expert

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/06/1041231>

Malta Independent- Facial recognition: 'If you want to drive a nail into the wall, you do not use a sledgehammer' (interview with Special Rapporteur on privacy, Joseph Cannataci)

<https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2018-10-22/local-news/Facial-recognition-If-you-want-to-drive-a-nail-into-the-wall-you-do-not-use-a-sledgehammer-6736198189>

The Guardian- UN report criticises use of facial recognition by Welsh police

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/29/un-privacy-chief-criticises-use-of-facial-recognition-in-wales>

Organizations supporting privacy (mostly in the USA and UK, but still useful)

<https://bigbrotherwatch.org.uk/>

<https://www.eff.org/pages/face-recognition>

<https://www.aclu.org/issues/privacy-technology/surveillance-technologies/face-recognition-technology>