

Governments to discuss possibility of ‘fully robotic diplomats.’

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A warm reception? Campaigners argue that robots will not fit in at diplomatic receptions. Supporters say NGOs are simply worried that the free booze will be replaced with oil.

Governments will meet in Geneva this week to discuss the controversial question of whether they can use robot diplomats instead of humans.

Proponents of the robot diplomats, called ‘robo-mats’ by detractors, argue that these systems offer a superior diplomatic capacity and will be vital to winning complex negotiations in the future. Campaigners argue that diplomacy has always been an important human activity, and handing it over to robots will make it boring.

“Diplomacy is a fundamentally human activity,” bleated a spokesperson from the Campaign to Save Human Diplomats. “We know they don’t always make the right decisions, but we actually enjoy working with them. It just won’t be the same if we are surrounded by humourless robots!”

Fully robotic diplomats have not yet been deployed, but many countries are suspected of fielding remotely-piloted diplomats that are controlled directly by a human back in capital. They argue that fully robotic diplomats are the logical next step.

“Diplomatic meetings provide a very structured environment, it is ideal for robots” argues one official. “If it is the first time you are speaking you say ‘Because this is the first time I am taking the floor...’ and then compliment the chairperson. If you hear NGOs want to ban something you say ‘Existing international humanitarian law is adequate’. If you don’t have a good answer to a direct question you simply throw out some verbal chaff. All of these things can be easily programmed into a robot.”

But it is not only because the job is so formulaic that many governments want to replace diplomats with robots. They argue these new systems will offer great advantages over current humans.

“Human diplomats have all sorts of vulnerabilities. Many will remember at a 2006 Review Conference when one human diplomat got

angry and ran amok. Robot diplomats will not have emotions. They will follow their instructions from capital to the letter. They will not feel embarrassed if they are the only thing blocking a proposal that everything else agrees with. They can negotiate into the night, and using Google translate they can carry on working even without the interpreters. Most importantly they can be programmed not to talk to civil society - which is the major weakness of human diplomats.”

Although some have argued that the existing rules of procedure for diplomatic conferences were written on the assumption that the participants were human, others think this is irrelevant. “There is absolutely nothing to say diplomats have to be human. After all, we have accepted robot lawyers for years. These robots will only be deciding how human beings are allowed to kill each other. We are not suggesting we let them make decisions about important matters like standardising communication-time offsets as we approach singularity!” joked C3PO.



Rust never sleeps. In the future there will be swarms of diplomats operating at lightning speeds across hundreds of issues. Has diplomacy simply outgrown the limits of the human body?