Forum: General Assembly 1 (DISEC II)

Issue: Developing guidelines regarding the use of autonomous weapons

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Introduction

In a world developing swift progress in artificial intelligence, the question of how autonomous weapons should be used is becoming more important. Autonomous weapons are increasingly prevalent in a world driven by war and military power, causing significant humanitarian concerns. Currently, there is a notable absence of international legal frameworks that specifically address the unique challenges autonomous weapons pose. Consequently, the world faces a pressing need to develop guidelines that prevent the misuse of these technologies, ensure accountability, and safeguard global security.

As technology advances, nation-states need to ensure that decisions made involving life and death are made with justified human oversight, and not by autonomous weapons, to prevent unintended consequences. Similarly, the deployment of autonomous weapons raises concerns about increased civilian casualties, as these systems may lack the ability to discriminate between combatants and non-combatants effectively. Clear rules and guidelines are essential to mitigate these risks, as they pose a significant threat to global security, and open the door to uncontrolled proliferation, and potential misuse of these automated technologies. The establishment of guidelines becomes a collective effort to fill the legal void and create a framework that regulates the development, deployment, and use of autonomous weapons, to contribute to international stability and prevent actions that could undermine global security.

Definition of Key Terms

Lethal autonomous weapons (LAWs)

Lethal autonomous weapons (LAWs) are a type of autonomous military system that can independently search and engage in target-based attacks based on programs and descriptions. These weapons may operate in the air, on water, underwater, or in space.

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV)

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), commonly known as drones, refer to autonomous piloted aircraft without humans onboard. Utilizing Artificial Intelligence (AI), UAVs serve various military purposes, including surveillance, reconnaissance, and warfare. UAVs offer instantaneous data on surveillance and allow for precise, targeted strikes in counterterrorism efforts, which minimizes risks to

conventional military forces. These vehicles are deployed to conduct operations in regions where it is dangerous for manned vehicles.

Autonomous Weapon System (AWS)

An Autonomous Weapon System (AWS) refers to a component within the military defense system that is capable of independently selecting and engaging targets without direct supervision from humans. Utilizing various forms of artificial intelligence (AI) to recognize and counter possible threats, AWS is built to operate independently without human interference.

The extent of autonomy in AWS can vary from systems that need human authorization to operate to fully autonomous weapon systems that require no human surveillance. As these systems can be used in diverse environments, including on land, at sea, in the air, and in cyberspace, it raises concern over the moral and legal consequences of using such methods.

Remote Warfare

Remote warfare is a form of military strategy in which weapons are operated remotely, allowing soldiers to perform operations from a distance. These weapons include drones, ground robots, and other armed devices. One benefit of the use of remote warfare is the reduction in casualties resulting from the war as soldiers are stationed far away from the actual battle.

Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity refers to the act of protecting computer systems, networks, and data from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, modification, or destruction. Cybersecurity is an essential aspect of securing modern societies and economies, given the widespread use of computers and networks in everything from communication and transportation to banking and healthcare.

With cyber attacks becoming more common, whether in malware, denial-of-service (DoS) attacks, and social engineering, the need to implement a variety of cybersecurity measures increases. This can include using encryption to protect data and installing firewalls to prevent unauthorized access. Ultimately, Cybersecurity is the organization and collection of resources, processes, and structures used to protect cyberspace from occurrences that misalign from property rights.

Strategic Stability

Strategic stability refers to maintaining a balance of power between rival states, designed to prevent the outbreak of armed conflict between them. Strategic stability allows power balance within nations and to maintain this, nations must adopt a proactive approach to prevent the risk of conflict from

escalating. This requires countries to willingly engage in negotiations with each other through ways such as security assurances, arms control, and disarmament agreements.

Background Information

Current state of autonomous weapons

The current state of autonomous weapons reflects rapid technological advancements and their integration into military strategies globally. As artificial intelligence and robotics progress, the development and deployment of autonomous systems have become a focal point in modern warfare, raising ethical, legal, and security concerns.

Technological Advancements

Recent breakthroughs in artificial intelligence, robotics, and sensor technologies have propelled the capabilities of autonomous weapons. Machine learning algorithms, improved sensors, and enhanced decision-making capabilities contribute to the evolving landscape of autonomous systems.

Military Applications

Nations are actively incorporating autonomous weapons into their military arsenals, leveraging these technologies for diverse applications. This includes unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), ground-based autonomous vehicles, and autonomous maritime systems, posing both challenges and opportunities for military strategies and global security considerations.

Current international agreements and legal landscapes

International agreements and legal landscapes regarding autonomous weapons are crucial components in shaping global norms and ensuring the responsible use of these advanced technologies.

Legal Framework

The current legal frameworks pertaining to autonomous weapons are characterized by a patchwork of international laws and treaties that indirectly address the ethical and security concerns associated with these technologies. Existing agreements, such as the Geneva Conventions and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), offer broad principles that apply to the use of all weapons, including autonomous systems.

International Agreements

While there is no specific international agreement or treaty exclusively dedicated to regulating autonomous weapons, discussions within the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) have been ongoing. The absence of a dedicated agreement however, underscores the evolving nature of international efforts to establish comprehensive norms for the responsible development and deployment of autonomous weapons.

Ethical considerations and humanitarian impacts

Weaponry incorporating high levels of autonomy has been proven to be a difficult issue for member states to navigate due to its long-term position in a controversial spotlight. Although some countries recognize the humanitarian, security, ethical, and legal concerns AWS may raise in the process of development or experimentation, other countries choose to focus on the benefits AWS may bring to humanity in future utilization.

Current effects

While autonomous weapons are not extensively deployed in active warfare, some semi-autonomous systems, such as drones, are being utilized for surveillance, reconnaissance, and targeted strikes in conflict zones. These systems often involve human operators making final decisions, although there are ongoing debates about the degree of autonomy granted to these weapons.

Potential impacts

The widespread deployment of autonomous weapons in the future could significantly impact humans by altering the dynamics of warfare, and potentially reducing direct human involvement in conflict zones. While this may reduce immediate risks to soldiers, concerns arise regarding the potential loss of control, ethical implications, and increased risk to civilians.

Multilateral collaboration and global security

Countries are currently cooperating on the issue of lethal autonomous weapons (LAWs) through international forums such as the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), where discussions are underway to establish norms and guidelines. Collaborative efforts involve sharing perspectives on the ethical, legal, and security implications of autonomous weapons. However, challenges arise due to differing national interests and interpretations of existing international laws. Some nations are taking advantage of and exploiting LAWs by investing heavily in the development of autonomous weapon systems for military purposes, seeking strategic advantages. This has sparked concerns about an arms race and potential destabilization, as countries vie for technological superiority without a comprehensive international framework in place. Striking a balance between cooperation and

addressing competitive dynamics is crucial for establishing ethical and secure guidelines for the development and use of autonomous weapons.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Organizations

United Nations (UN)

In 2010 the United Nations first discussed issues regarding Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWs). First appearing in a 2013 report to the Human Rights Council, LAWs soon adopted a controversial image within state-to-state conferences. In 2018, Antonio Guterres, the present UN secretary general, declared that LAWs have always been politically unacceptable and promoted the prohibition of LAWs under international regulations. This was further supported in the UN 2023 New Agenda for Peace, where Mr. Guterres recommended all states to sign a legally binding agreement to ban the utilization of LAWs and limit all other types of autonomous weapons, such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) by 2026. In addition, Fionnuala ni Aolain, a specialized UN rapporteur on human rights and counter-terrorism united with Mr. Guterres to further support an international prohibition of LAWs in a 2023 report to the Human Rights Council. Altogether, the UN has repeatedly declared that the production and utilization of LAWs raise humanitarian, legal, security, and moral concerns.

- #### International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC)

The International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) is known for operating on humanitarian issues globally including the welfare of citizens in a zone of active conflict. In Geneva on August 13, 2021, the ICRC presented its proposal on Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWs) to the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) at the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW). This proposal consisted of a recommendation that member states embrace a legally binding policy to limit Autonomous Weapon Systems (AWS) and guarantee that the utilization of physical force will incorporate sufficient human control. Although the ICRC has expressed disapproval of weaponry incorporating high-level autonomy, the organization recognized that only specific risky AWS should be fully banned. According to the ICRC's proposal, unpredictable AWS should be fully prohibited due to the development and utilization creating effects that cannot fully be exemplified by human standards.

Arms Control Association (ACA)

The Arms Control Association (ACA) has worked towards building public awareness of global arms control policies to incentivize support. Utilizing its various public programs, including its

primary journal, *Arms Control Today* (ACA), educates the community, media, and lawmakers on arms regulation proposals, agreements, and affiliated security issues. Recently, the ACA published a document summarizing the two-year project, Arms Control Tomorrow. This project, which lasted from March 2021 to December 2022, encompassed issues surrounding six different technologies aimed to be produced in the future and discussed the risks following these advanced technologies. These six technologies include drones, artificial intelligence capacities, hypersonic weapons, and lethal autonomous weapons, all of which incorporate some sort of autonomy in their systems.

Countries

Republic of Korea (South Korea)

In November 2013, South Korea (ROK) expressed their support in attending international discussions on topics related to Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWs). However, their contradictory stance on the development, production, and utilization of fully autonomous weapon systems (AWS) remains. On one hand, the ROK's suspicion of fully AWS due to the threat of malfunction, ethical worries, or accountability concerns was repeatedly suggested. This was apparent in a statement made to the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) in April 2015. On the other hand, in April 2018, the country's government voiced their disapproval of establishing a legally binding agreement to regulate LAWs due to how early the proposal was made. Fast forward to the present, the ROK is focused on researching, developing, and funding military components incorporating artificial intelligence and AWS. Nevertheless, the ROK continues to report how they do NOT possess any LAWs nor have intentions to produce such risky weapons.

Russian Federation

At the Human Rights Council in May 2013, the Russian Federation voiced its concerns about Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWs), suggesting they "could have serious implications for societal foundations, including the negating of human life.". However, the Russian Federation has constantly opposed proposals to discuss the creation of a legally binding multilateral agreement on AWS or other regulation methods, as it believes the current international law already suffices to limit these weapons.

Turkey

In November 2013, Turkey declared their support for a proposal to host international discussions on Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWs). From 2014 to 2019, Turkey participated in every Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) meeting on LAWs. However, in a statement

made in April 2016, Turkey declared their belief that LAWs do not truly exist in reality, and the discussions are purely surrounding a hypothetical issue. Although Turkey has repeatedly expressed their disapproval of weaponry incorporating autonomy, saying that human control and opinion are necessary for the utilization of physical force, it continues to develop, manufacture, and employ a variety of AWS.

Australia

In November 2013, Australia emphasized its support for the proposal to host international discussions on Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWs). It has constantly expressed interest in addressing affiliated military utilizations, definitions, and humanitarian factors or laws. However, Australia suggested that it is presently not necessary to establish a new international agreement surrounding LAWs, as in a statement made by Julia Bishop, the foreign minister of Australia, in March 2018, prohibiting fully AWS at that time would be "premature". While Australia maintains a neutral stance internationally, domestically, it has been developing and experimenting with various AWS.

China

At the Human Rights Council in May 2013, China expressed its interest in the proposal to host an international discussion on Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWs), an issue they described as "highly complex". Due to China noticing the problems fully AWS may cause to destabilize international tactical balance and arms control, in December 2016, China declared high-level autonomous weaponry as unpredictable when abiding by international law. However, after the 2016 call, China made no sign as to support other potential regulations surrounding AWS.

India

At the UN General Assembly in October 2013, India expressed their interest in a proposal to host an international discussion on Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWs). This was further supported in a statement made to the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW), where India mentioned that discussion on AWS should be run "in a manner that does not further widen the technology gap between states or encourage the use of lethal force to settle international disputes". While in September 2019, Rajnath Singh, the defense minister of India had supposedly said that "the final attack decisions should be made by humans in the military, not artificial intelligence", India has openly been investing in the production of various AWS.

Israel

While most states have expressed their support to attend an international discussion surrounding Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWs), in November 2013, Israel declared that it does not believe LAWs are a reality yet. Over time, the country has repeatedly prompted LAWs, telling all states to remain optimistic about the positive impacts future LAWs may cause, such as improved abiding with international laws on armed conflict. This promotion is further supported by Israel's rejection of all proposals to negotiate a new international agreement on regulating AWS.

Iran

At the Human Rights Council in May 2013, Iran expressed interest in attending an international discussion on Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWs). However, as of 2020, Iran had not expressed their opinion on fully AWS or signaled their support for a discussion to create a new international treaty to prohibit fully AWS.

United States

At the Human Rights Council in May 2013, the US declared that LAWs incorporate "important legal, policy, and ethical issues", and further promoted discussion in an international humanitarian policy forum. However, later on, the US's view on autonomous weaponry drastically changed. In 2018, the 2012 Department of Defense Policy on AWS was renewed without substantial reforms, thus granting the US military permission to develop LAWs. Moreover, they have further exhibited disagreement with proposals to discuss the creation of new international treaties on AWS, saying that the present humanitarian law is enough to regulate autonomous weaponry. In the present, the US continues to make substantial investments in military components incorporating AI, and further developing air, land, and sea-based AWS.

United Kingdom

At the Human Rights Council in May 2013, the United Kingdom declared their belief that the international humanitarian law at the time was "sufficient to regulate the use" of Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWs). Thus, the UK chose not to support the prohibition of AWS, even though in 2011, the UK Ministry of Defense expressed no interest in developing fully AWS. In contrast, although in November 2017, the UK stated that all utilizations of physical force should incorporate human authority, the country has been developing various high-level autonomy weaponry for experimentation.

Timeline of Events

Date   **Description of event**

October 1937	The US Navy initiated trials with radio-controlled aerial drones known as Curtiss N2C, which were operated remotely by other aircraft.
March 1971	The Vietnam War was the first war to deploy a substantial number of unmanned aircraft, which were used to observe enemy activities, drop leaflets, and perform a variety of other services.
October 1973	Israel began and advanced the development of unmanned aerial (UAVs), designed for surveillance and scouting, which helped the military increase their situation awareness
November 11, 2002	The first documented targeted drone strike, conducted by the US government, killed six targets who were suspected of being participants in Al Qaeda and poached U.S. security threats in the country of Yemen.
April 2013	Stop Killer Robots was launched. The purpose of this campaign was to urge nations and the United Nations to issue policies prohibiting the development and use of lethal autonomous weapons (LAWs). Several countries, including the United States, South Korea, Russia, and Israel, oppose the call for a preemptive ban with the belief that current humanitarian law is sufficient enough and provides adequate guidelines and regulations.
May 2020	The first killing with the use of autonomous weapons is believed to happen in Libya in March 2020 but what actually happened still remains unclear. According to a UN report, a Turkish Kargu-2 drone allegedly "hunted down" members of the Libyan National Army.
December 22, 2017	The first resolution was produced on the effect of autonomous weapons and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
May 12, 2021	Israel deployed the world's first artificial intelligence-controlled combat drones during its Gasa attack. During the operation, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) used large amounts of drones to locate, identify and target Hamas militants.

Relevant UN Resolutions and Treaties

- Resolution on autonomous weapon systems, 12 September 2018 (2018/2752(RSP)
- Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, 22 December 2017 (A/RES/72/242)
- Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, 25 July 2023 (A/RES/77/320)

- Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects, 06 May 2023 (CCW/GGE.1/2023/2)

Possible Solutions

Establish a treaty that outlines clear guidelines and restrictions on the development, deployment, and use of autonomous weapons.

Setting clear guidelines and restrictions on the development, deployment, and use of autonomous weapons ensures that there will not be uncontrolled proliferation, as this standardized set of rules will ensure that all nations are playing by the same rules. Additionally, it sets a precedent for who is responsible for what behavior within the community and how autonomous weapons will be allowed to contribute to global security. This could be done through international bodies, holding each nation accountable, or even regulation inspections done by the United Nations. While this will increase cooperation and transparency, remember that nations may also be hesitant to relinquish control over their technological advancements and many nations will have different views on ethical uses of autonomous weapons.

Develop a set of ethical guidelines and principles that prioritize human rights, accountability, and transparency in the design and use of autonomous weapons.

Similarly to the solution above, developing ethical guidelines that prioritize human rights and transparency will ensure that the use of autonomous weapons still respects the fundamental rights of individuals such as the right to life and protection from harm. Increasing transparency by forcing governments to disclose information about the algorithm and decision-making process of these systems will allow for security if there is misuse regarding LAWs (Lethal Autonomous Weapons). Transparency will also help mitigate the risk of unintended conflict and prevent the use of these weapons in ways that violate basic human rights. The hardest issue to solve will probably be the ethical principles in interpretation, as different cultures and legal systems have varied perspectives on what constitutes ethical use.

Establish a system for regularized international reviews and inspections of autonomous weapon systems to verify compliance with agreed-upon guidelines.

While regularizing international inspections is not uncommon, they also give a systematic approach to ensure that all countries are following the guidelines set. This ensures that all countries are following and maintaining accountability for the autonomous weapons developed within their region.

Furthermore, inspections have the potential to foster trust between nations and allow them to work together for other causes in the future. Two potential challenges of this law include enforcing compliance, particularly if some nations resist or obstruct inspection efforts. The second includes the rapid pace of technological advancement, which may outpace the development of inspection protocols, making it challenging to keep up with evolving autonomous weapon capabilities.

Encourage multilateral collaboration on research and development related to autonomous weapons.

Encouraging collaboration and research development related to autonomous weapons can allow participating nations to address the challenges associated with these technologies and increase knowledge and best practices for these weapons. By bringing together nations with diverse perspectives and interests, it ensures a more holistic understanding of the ethical, legal, and security implications. This approach also directly addresses the lack of a coordinated global response to the development of autonomous weapons. However, concerns over intellectual property, national security, and technological leadership could pose obstacles to full transparency and information sharing.

Questions for Further Research

1. How effective have current international treaties been in shaping global norms?
2. How do different nations define and approach the ethical considerations of autonomous weapons?
3. What technological advancements are driving the development of autonomous weapons, and how can regulatory frameworks adapt?
4. In what ways do autonomous weapons challenge existing international laws of war
5. What legal gaps need to be addressed to ensure the responsible use of autonomous weapons?
6. What are the potential socio-economic impacts of widespread adoption of autonomous weapons, and how can nations prepare for these changes?
7. To what extent do public perceptions and opinions on autonomous weapons influence government policies, and how can public engagement be enhanced?
8. What role can non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play in shaping international norms and guidelines for autonomous weapons?
9. How can international collaborations on research and development ensure inclusivity and fairness, especially for nations with varying levels of technological capabilities and resources?

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