

Ethical guidelines for the deployment of emerging autonomous weapons

Background

Presently, no unified definition of LAWS (Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems) exists (the most widely used definition is the definition of the red cross. In this definition, the weapon must be capable of selecting and attacking a target without human intervention).

The history of such technology dates back decades, as even a simple antipersonnel land mine can be considered an autonomous defence system when using a more liberal definition as it does not need a friendly human operator to trigger its explosive mechanisms. While systems such as homing missiles and loitering munition have been around for decades, recent rapid developments in AI technology have caused worry.

In 2018, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres declared that LAWS are “politically unacceptable and morally repugnant” and called for their borderline total ban by means of international law. The UN is however yet to pass any relevant agreements on this issue. The ICRC is a bit more lenient on the issue, but is still against any such systems that can be used against human targets.

The closest thing to actual regulations of LAWS currently in force is the European Parliament resolution which maintains that humans must have oversight over LAWS’s decision making process. As this is just a resolution and not a law, multiple nations in the EU are developing weapons which do not hold up to this standard.

Questions to ask yourself

- Does your nation utilise or plan to utilise LAWSs in its defence forces?
- Does your nations security guarantor have a strong opinion on this matter?
- Does your nation already have its own regulations in place?
- Is your nation threatened by a foreign power which wields such weapons?
- Does your nation stand to benefit economically from an AI arms race?
- How dangerous is the potential of creating artificial general intelligence, which could constitute an existential risk to humankind?

Sources

<https://disarmament.unoda.org/the-convention-on-certain-conventional-weapons/background-on-laws-in-the-ccw/>

<https://assembly.coe.int/LifeRay/JUR/Pdf/TextesProvisoires/2022/20221116-LawsApprehension-EN.pdf>

<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/autonomous-weapons-icrc-recommends-new-rules>