



Killer Robots: Still No International Laws To Govern Their Use

Technocrats in militaries around the world are in a pitched arms race to develop fully autonomous killer robots. Proponents claim that it will make warfare more efficient and yet more 'humane' because fewer people would be killed.

This is insane thinking. The risk of misuse by rogue and authoritarian government and terrorists is 100 percent. However, Technocrats invent because they can, not because there is a demonstrated need to do so. □

TN Editor

Countries are rapidly developing "killer robots" - machines with artificial intelligence (AI) that independently kill - but are moving at a snail's pace on agreeing global rules over their use in future wars, warn technology and human rights experts.

From drones and missiles to tanks and submarines, semi-autonomous weapons systems have been used for decades to eliminate targets in

modern day warfare - but they all have human supervision.

Dramatization/Simulation

Nations such as the United States, Russia and Israel are now investing in developing lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS) which can identify, target, and kill a person all on their own - but to date there are no international laws governing their use.

“Some kind of human control is necessary ... Only humans can make context-specific judgements of distinction, proportionality and precautions in combat,” said Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

“(Building consensus) is the big issue we are dealing with and unsurprisingly, those who have today invested a lot of capacities and do have certain skill which promise advantages to them, are more reluctant than those who don’t.”

The ICRC oversaw the adoption of the 1949 Geneva Conventions that define the laws of war and the rights of civilians to protection and assistance during conflicts and it engages with governments to adapt these rules to modern warfare.

AI researchers, defence analysts and roboticists say LAWS such as military robots are no longer confined to the realm of science fiction or video games, but are fast progressing from graphic design boards to defence engineering laboratories.

Within a few years, they could be deployed by state militaries to the battlefield, they add, painting dystopian scenarios of swarms of drones moving through a town or city, scanning and selectively killing their targets within seconds.

Death by Algorithm

This has raised ethical concerns from human rights groups and some tech experts who say giving machines the power of life and death violates the principles of human dignity.

Not only are LAWS vulnerable to interference and hacking which would result in increased civilian deaths, they add, but their deployment would raise questions over who would be held accountable in the event of misuse.

“Don’t be mistaken by the nonsense of how intelligent these weapons will be,” said Noel Sharkey, chairman of the International Committee for Robot Arms Control.

“You simply can’t trust an algorithm - no matter how smart - to seek out, identify and kill the correct target, especially in the complexity of war,” said Sharkey, who is also an AI and robotics expert at Britain’s University of Sheffield.

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