



Forum: 1st Committee to the General Assembly

Issue: Preventing the use of lethal autonomous weapon systems

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Introduction

Lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS), also known as killer robots was first introduced in the form of a land mine in 1600's. Since then there has been significant progression, LAWS are now able to identify a target and potentially attack the target without any human intervention. The Human Rights Watch were the first to bring this issue to the UN's attention in their report called "*Losing Humanity: The Case Against Killer Robots*". According to their report, military robotics experts estimate that within 20-30 years fully autonomous weapons could be developed¹.

In 2013 at the United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Meeting of States Parties the first mandate within the CCW on LAWS were negotiated². Through the next three years meetings were held with experts but did not reach any conclusion regarding the involvement of LAWS. In 2016 it was decided at the fifth CCW Review conference that a group of Governmental Experts on LAWS are to assemble in November 2017 which is to be chaired by the Ambassador of India.

The Progression of Autonomous Weapons

Lethal autonomous weapon systems are programmed to:

- Identify possible threats
- Determined the action after the target has been identified
- And finally aim, fire the target, and reload with no human interaction³

LAWS has naturally gain the attraction of the military as it can aid and spare lives on the battlefield by replacing human risking their lives for high-technology fighting for them. This benefits the military as they would have LAWS fighting which would eliminate the risk of fear, stress and overreactions and other human reactions and emotions that can be considered distracting and misleading. As well as, ensuring the release of hostages without any human lives lost and serving as a positive moral

¹ SUMMARY OF REPORT:<https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/11/19/losing-humanity/case-against-killer-robots>

²

WEBSITE:[https://www.unog.ch/80256EE600585943/\(httpPages\)/8FA3C2562A60FF81C1257CE600393DF6?OpenDocument](https://www.unog.ch/80256EE600585943/(httpPages)/8FA3C2562A60FF81C1257CE600393DF6?OpenDocument)

³ WEBSITE:<https://cs.stanford.edu/people/eroberts/cs181/projects/1995-96/autonomous-weapons/html/history.html>



purpose. According to Article 36, fully autonomous weapons are currently not being used, however the UK, China, Israel, Russia and the United States are currently preparing for combat machines with better autonomy⁴.

Concerns

Due to the rapid development of LAWS ethical and philosophical concerns have developed. It is considered unclear as to who would be held responsible if there were to be unintentional casualties caused by LAWS, as the body of international law is based on the premise of human agency⁵. This concerns stems from the uncertainty that LAWS would be able to differentiate an enemy and civilians.

From an ethical perspective, presenting LAWS with the power and opportunity to determine on the use of attack on humans is not ethical and to most people asked abhorrent⁶. From a report of the CCW Expert Meeting, it has been emphasised that LAWS could potentially undermine human dignity, as a machine does not comprehend, respect and value human life but still would be holding the power to damage it or even fully terminate it.

The International Agenda

At the informal CCW Expert Meeting in December 2016 Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, Pakistan and the Holy See called for a ban on LAWS, and although Czech Republic, Israel and the USA pointed out that LAWS may have benefits, there were no countries that firmly argued on the behalf of developing and progression of LAWS. As many states have embraced the idea of “meaningful human control” it has resulted that countries like Germany, Austria, France, Norway, Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom have called for guarantees of what the definition of “meaningful human control” over the use of armed forces, indicates exactly, as the idea is vague.

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

In London April 2013, a campaign by non-governmental organisations (NGO) was launched. The campaign “Campaign to Stop Killer Robots” is an international affiliation aiming at banning fully autonomous weapons⁷, a coalition of 52 NGOs and over 25 countries. The steering committee is made out of five international NGOs, one regional NGO and four NGOs that do international work:

- International non-governmental organisations
 - Human Rights Watch (coordinator)

⁴ WEBSITE:<http://www.article36.org/autonomous-weapons/introduction-autonomous-weapons/>

⁵ ARTICLE:<https://icrac.net/2014/06/banning-lethal-autonomous-weapon-systems-laws-the-way-forward/>

⁶ WEBSITE:<https://icrac.net/2012/11/the-principle-of-humanity-in-conflict/>

⁷ OFFICIAL CAMPAIGN WEBSITE:<https://www.stopkillerrobots.org/about-us/>



- Amnesty International
- Handicap International
- International Committee of Robot Arms Control
- International Peace Bureau
- Nobel Women's Initiative
- Nonviolence International
- Pax Christi International
- Pugwash Conferences on Science & World Affairs
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
- World Federalist Movement-Institute for Global Policy
- Regional non-governmental organisations
 - Seguridad Humana En América Latina y el Caribe
 - Quaker Council for European Affairs

Countries Involved:

- Afghanistan
- Austria
- Belgium
- Brazil
- Cameroon
- Canada
- Egypt
- Finland
- Georgia
- Germany
- Iceland
- India
- Ireland
- Italy
- Japan
- Libya
- The Netherlands
- New Zealand
- Nigeria
- Norway
- Pakistan
- Spain
- South Africa
- Sweden
- Tajikistan
- United Kingdom
- United States

Future Discussion



According to the original plan a week of formal discussions about LAWS was to take place in Geneva in April 2017 and then rescheduled to August 2017, which has since then been canceled due to several states failed to pay their dues for the conventions meeting. Therefore, the CCW meeting has been moved to November 2017.

Useful links

Møller, Michael. "UN Meeting Targets 'Killer Robots'." *UN News Center*, United Nations, 14 May 2014,

www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=47794#.WYXqptB95AY.

UNIDIR. *The Weaponization of Increasingly Autonomous Technologies: Considering Ethics and Social Values*. pp. 1–14, *The Weaponization of Increasingly Autonomous Technologies: Considering Ethics and Social Values*,

www.unidir.ch/files/publications/pdfs/considering-ethics-and-social-values-en-624.pdf.

"Diplomatic Efforts Falter." *Campaign to Stop Killer Robots*, © 2017 Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, 30 May 2017,

www.stopkillerrobots.org/2017/05/diplomatsfalter/.

"Chronology." *Campaign to Stop Killer Robots*, © 2017 Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, www.stopkillerrobots.org/chronology/.

"The Solution." *Campaign to Stop Killer Robots*, 2017 Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, www.stopkillerrobots.org/the-solution/.

"Concern from the United Nations." *Campaign to Stop Killer Robots*, 2017 Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, 1 July 2017,

www.stopkillerrobots.org/2017/07/unitednations/.