The realities of autonomous weapons

Call for contributions

Edited volume (under discussion with Bristol University Press)

Submission deadline: **10 January 2022**

The development of "Autonomous Weapon Systems" (AWS) has been subject to controversial discussions for years. Numerous political, academic or legal institutions and actors are debating the consequences and risks that arise with these technologies, in particular their ethical, social and political implications. Many are calling for strict regulation, even a global ban. Surprisingly, in these debates it is often unclear which technologies the term AWS primarily and precisely refers to. The associated meanings range from landmines to combat drones, from close-in weapon systems to humanoid robot soldiers or purely virtual cyber weapons. Besides this terminological ambiguity, it also remains inherently vague in what sense and to what degree these systems can be characterised as 'autonomous' at all.

It is this uncertainty, in which reality, imagination, possibility and fiction get conflated, that makes AWS highly momentous, in particular when political or military decision-making is being based on potential or virtual scenarios. Research publications on the topic of autonomous weapons usually focus on their legal, political or ethical ramifications. Necessarily, the foundation of these works is (at least in part) also based on those potential or virtual scenarios.

Against this background the publication project engages with the current social, political, cultural, ethical, security-related and military realities of autonomous weapons. The key proposition is that these can only be understood as a constant and complex dynamics between the actual technological developments and the potential futures that are associated with them. Only by reflecting and discussing fact, fiction and imagination, the real and the virtual, the full scope of this controversial technology becomes visible.

Submitted articles are expected to analyse the diverse meanings of AWS. The volume focuses especially on approaches which tackle the various practices, discourses and techniques by which AWS are imagined and created as a military and political reality.

Papers on the following larger themes are invited:

- **Fictions and imaginaries around AWS**, including both cultural texts that are marked as fiction (e.g. science-fiction films and novels etc.) and those marked as non-fiction in journalism, politics or research.
- **A reflection of technologies and materialities,** including specific human/machine entanglements of decision-making, technological agency or autonomy and 'meaningful human control'. This reflection extends to larger philosophical motifs such as legal or moral responsibility, free will or consciousness.
- the specific **understandings and interpretations of AWS that are applied in political and ethical contexts**, with a particular focus on the ways these meanings are translated into a political course of action, thus creating a reality in their own right.

Relevant issues, phenomena and perspectives include but are not limited to

- the anticipated futures of AWS and their implications for global military and security policies, regulatory and legal initiatives or military operations, in light of their use by states as well as non-state actors (e.g. terrorist groups or companies).
- the historical perspectives (on imaginations and technological developments), political and military contexts and discourses (including policies and political communication) and representations in popular culture (e.g. killer robots or drone wars).
- the potentials, risks, narratives and aesthetics that are associated with AWS, including cross-cultural and historical differences that expressly include those of and from the global South.

We welcome contributions from scholars of diverse disciplines, such as (but not limited to) media studies, cultural studies, literature and film studies, media and communication studies, political science, security studies, science and technology studies or sociology.

Submission process

- **Abstracts** of max. 500 words in length (excl. references) should be submitted no later than **10 January 2022** to autonomous-weapons@hiig.de
- Invitations for the submission of selected full manuscripts are sent out in **February 2022**.
- **Full manuscripts** between 6,000 and 8,000 words (excluding references) to be submitted by **June 2022**.
- Comprehensive review returned to authors in **September 2022**; **final papers due in December 2022.**
- It is anticipated that the peer-reviewed **edited volume** will be **published in 2023**.

If you have any questions, you can contact the editors via autonomous-weapons@hiig.de
See also: [Link]

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