



Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the UN Geneva

Statement

CCW Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, 21-25 September 2020

Agenda item 5(d): Review of potential military applications of related technologies in the context of the Group's work (23 September 2020)

Mr. Chairman,

Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) are being described as the next revolution in military affairs, similar to the introduction of gun powder and nuclear weapons in the past. LAWS would indeed fundamentally change the nature of war and have a strong bearing on regional and international peace, security and stability.

As has been stated by my delegation on numerous occasions, the introduction of LAWS does not only pose legal, ethical, moral and technical challenges, but also carries serious military and security dimensions with highly destabilizing effects.

States that are in possession of LAWS are bound to perceive a distinct military advantage, undeterred by the loss of its soldiers and citizens on the battlefield. This would lower the thresholds for going to war and armed conflicts. LAWS would also seem more attractive for use in anonymous and clandestine operations including targeted killings in the territory of other states.

The use of LAWS in the battlefield against a State fighting with human soldiers would amount to a situation of one-sided killing. Besides depriving the combatants of the targeted state the protection offered to them by the international law of armed conflict, LAWS would also risk the lives of civilians and non-combatants as the unavailability of a legitimate human target of the LAWS' user State on the ground could lead to reprisals on its civilians.

Mr. Chairman,

The introduction of LAWS would affect progress on general and complete disarmament, since States possessing WMD capabilities would be reluctant to give them up, while others would feel encouraged to acquire them.

The States that are currently developing LAWS cannot afford to be complacent that such capabilities will not proliferate over time and hence they too shall become vulnerable. Going by past experience, monopolies over such technologies do not last forever. Since the developing countries are not going to carry the burden of non-proliferation, new and costly arms races involving autonomous weapons could ensue. Besides, LAWS could also proliferate to non-State actors with unimaginable consequences.

AI and machine-learning software, specifically of the type developed for “automatic target recognition” by LAWS, would increase concerns about lack of explainability and data bias. The same type of software might also be used for “decision-support” or “automated decision-making” for targeting, thereby enhancing concerns about unpredictability. With growing autonomy of weapons based on machine learning algorithms, the speed of their actions during operations would increase, whereas the predictability of their behaviour would decrease. This would not augur well for regional and international stability, including possibilities of unintended levels of escalation, with consequent spiral of reprisals perpetuating or expanding the conflict.

Mr. Chairman,

Arms races among States competing, either to gain a technological or strategic advantage, could lead to destabilizing build-ups. A race in autonomy poses a particular danger because the consequences of fielding machines with increased intelligence and decision-making authority are largely unknown and could prove catastrophic. States might field robotic weapons whose abilities and limitations are unpredictable, resulting in unintended or uncontrolled escalation of the conflict in crisis situations.

Moreover, given the dual-use character of autonomous technologies, and lack of regulations or prohibitions on their weaponisation, there is a strong likelihood of strict trade restrictions and export controls being put in place, which in turn would hamper civilian applications especially in developing countries.

The CCW GGE has thus far not considered the military and strategic implications of LAWS adequately. They must be fully addressed in the GGE

and beyond. In this context, a guiding principle was discussed as part of GGE's work previously. As part of due consideration to these aspects of LAWS, we should discuss an appropriate guiding principle, once we examine the guiding principles in our work.

Mr. Chairman,

There is an urgent need to pursue a legally binding instrument stipulating adequate prohibitions and regulations on the development and use of LAWS covering all its aspects including the important international security dimensions in order to mitigate the risks.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.