The use of AI in modern warfare

Artificial intelligence (AI) is now influencing every area of human life. The past decade has seen a drastic increase in the use of AI, including facial recognition software, self-driving vehicles, search engines, and translation software. These accepted uses of AI in modern society have also coincided with an increased presence of AI in modern warfare. The escalating weaponization of AI parallels the nuclear arms race of the Cold War, with nuclear weapons being replaced with automated weapons systems. Countries have recognised the potential of having AI weaponry and Russian President Putin has stated that the nation that leads in AI “will become the ruler of the world.” The advancement of AI in modern warfare will forever alter the relationships between great powers like the United States, China and Russia as well as the private technology industry. China has committed 150 billion dollars to become the world leader in AI technology, compared to Russian spending of 181 million dollars from 2021 to 2023 and U.S. spending 4.6 billion dollars. The UK operates missile-bearing drones and plans to spend 415 million pounds on Protector drones by 2024.

On 5 November 2024, the First Committee of the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on autonomous weapons systems for the second year running, mindful of the “serious challenges and concerns that new and emerging technological applications in the military domain, including those related to artificial intelligence and autonomy in weapons systems, [raise] from humanitarian, legal, security, technological and ethical perspectives.” This shows that regulating the use of AI in modern warfare is massively importance to ensuring that warfare doesn't become irresponsible or massively destructive. Member states should ensure that resolutions are signed that limit what can be done with AI and to ensure that it is regulated securely and thoroughly.

Using AI in modern warfare is also an ethical issue because AI is susceptible to biases such as racism and sexism depending on how it is trained. The integration of AI-enabled weapon systems has been proven to enable the objectification of human targets, leading to heightened tolerance for viewing people as collateral damage. The pursuit of AI weaponry driven by capital gains could be seen as highly unethical due to the fact that the industry would be shaping weapons that have the ability to kill without specific human authorisation.

For example in a UN report a drone strike in Libya in the spring of 2020 used Turkish-made STM Kargu-2 drones which are described as “lethal autonomous weapons systems were programmed to attack targets without requiring data connectivity between the operator and the munition." The STM Kargu-2 is a flying quadcopter that weighs a mere 7 kg, is being mass-produced, is capable of fully autonomous targeting, can form swarms, remains fully operational when GPS and radio links are jammed, and is equipped with facial recognition software to target humans.

Points to consider:

* Is it morally acceptable to create machines that kill automatically especially while knowing that the algorithms that control the killing machines can be biased?
* Does the creation and development of automated need to be overseen by a neutral body like the UN?
* Should the use of AI in weaponry be allowed at all?
* How can algorithms used in AI weaponry be trained and tested to ensure they don't have any biases?

Useful links:

<https://www.qmul.ac.uk/research/featured-research/the-ethical-implications-of-ai-in-warfare/>

<https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2024/07/12/war-artificial-intelligence-and-the-future-of-conflict/>

<https://www.stopkillerrobots.org/news/161-states-vote-against-the-machine-at-the-un-general-assembly/#:~:text=On%205%20November%202024%2C%20the,those%20related%20to%20artificial%20intelligence>

<https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/events/algorithms-war-use-ai-armed-conflict>

<https://futureoflife.org/aws/real-life-technologies-that-prove-autonomous-weapons-are-already-here/>