Wars Without Soldiers and Casualties or Victories in Hearts and Minds?

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Abstract. The text deals with the psychological and ethical aspects of using autonomous weapons. It focuses on controversies associated with the contemporary use of robotic weapons, respectively unmanned weapon systems and the possible use of autonomous weapons in future armed conflicts led by state and non-state actors. These means can achieve significant success at the tactical level while minimizing their own human loss or even the complete absence of their own human element at the point of projection of military force. However, their use may, on the other hand, be in direct contradiction with the long-term strategic objectives of their user and partially delegitimize his intentions. War, as a complex phenomenon, is not limited to direct combat activity, and in relation to a number of non-military factors, the use of autonomous weapons can be problematic from both ethical and psychological points of view. Thus, the military and technological superiority of one party may be partially offset in some conflicts by the ideological superiority of the weaker adversary. The text tries to characterize the main controversies that the deployment of autonomous weapon systems can represent in this respect.

Keywords: Autonomous weapons · Conflict · Psychological aspects

1 Introduction

Although fully armed autonomous systems (AS) are the subject of reflection on the forms of future armed conflicts, rather than reality, the possibilities of the use against human adversaries are already controversial. The deployment of robotic unmanned systems (i.e. the direct predecessor of AS) in the current conflicts has not only demonstrated their effectiveness, but also the negative psychological aspects of their use. Apart from the episodic cases of simultaneous use of these systems by less sophisticated non-state actors, the main deployment is realized in counter-insurgency operations of technologically advanced state actors. A dynamic increase in the use of UAVs can thus be observed in the first two decades of this century in US counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan or counter-terrorist strikes in the Middle East. The positives that led to this boom are easy to identify. Low economic costs and logistical demands compared to traditional weapon systems with human crew, possibility of keeping human personnel in combat zones in significantly lower numbers, minimizing own human losses. These factors may

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lead to the idea of an almost ideal way of waging a war in which political elites and society will not be concerned about deploying their own troops in a hostile environment and confronting their potential losses.

2 Robotic Weapons in Counterinsurgency Operations

Already the current operational deployment of remote controlled/unmanned weapon systems represents a controversial and discussed topic. Fully autonomous weapons would undoubtedly increase the controversy associated with ethical or psychological aspects of their use. However, even the question of practical effectively usability, separate from consideration of the ethical dimension of their deployment, may not have a clear answer. While armed unmanned systems are a suitable means of eliminating the targets, their use may be ineffective in many ways. For example, it does not need to be implemented as part of an overall anti-insurgency strategy (COIN), and it often depends on the territory in which these funds are deployed. In this respect, there can be a great deal of discretion for UAV users in Yemen or Somalia, where there is no in-house power, and a comprehensive approach to stabilizing the region is not realized. However, the situation is different when used in Afghanistan or tribal areas in northern Pakistan. From the perspective that war is a complex phenomenon, which is not limited to direct combat activity but also includes a social dimension and many other non-military factors, the long-term deployment of weapons of this type in rebel regions may seem counterproductive. Here, the main goal is to achieve some regional stability and the sustained threat of a deadly blow from the sky by the unmanned machine, felt by the local population, may contradict the principles defined by current COIN experts such as Ralph Peters or David Kilcullen.

At present, population-centric approach is the predominant approach in counterinsurgency strategies. This approach considers decisive factor in gaining support from the local population as an absolutely key condition for achieving long-term stability and a de facto victory in the ongoing conflict. However, this support can be obtained primarily by persuading the local population. That is, not by lethal blows, however targeted, but by effective action in the information sphere. For this reason, the StratCom - Strategic Communication concept has been developed to play a key role in NATO's counter-insurgency strategy and its operations against the asymmetric adversary [1]. Victory in hearts and minds is thus perceived as a necessary condition for any successful counterinsurgency operation, but this is difficult to achieve in many cases, and the projection of deadly military force may be in direct opposition.

The current doctrinal approaches of the major powers thus increasingly accentuate the information dimension in contemporary conflicts, i.e. a dimension of primarily non-lethal character. Even in the context of considering or implementing the deployment of autonomous weapon systems in conflicts of lower intensity [2]. However, working in the information dimension is primarily a mother of the human element, while most of the existing considerations about the deployment of AS are focused outside of working in this dimension. The tactical benefits and achievements achieved by UAVs today may be in direct conflict with long-term strategic goals. Low costs, the absence of risk for own soldiers and the absence of own human losses can ultimately be a factor that will not lead to a successful end of the conflict, but rather to its prolongation. Not to mention the

resistance that armed UAV attacks can trigger not only in the conflict zone population, but also in its allies and partners. For example, the Pakistani government unofficially gave the US permission to use drones in its territory, but over time it began to criticize, in its view, excessive collateral losses between civilians and its own troops and security forces. The disputable number of these losses has been the subject of a sharp dispute between these partners, and in 2012 Pakistan initiated an investigation into these attacks through the UN, although acknowledging at a later date that its collateral loss figures did not correspond to reality and were overstated. The use of combat UAVs arouses strong emotions even in states that are not directly related to their deployment or are not their destination. Also in 2012, allegations have been made in the UK regarding the legality of UAV attacks and the UK's illegal cooperation with the US. This was to provide information by the British Intelligence Service, which was subsequently used in operations in Pakistan and Yemen. In Scotland, in 2013, the University of Edinburgh was forced to stop investment in Ultra Electronics and discontinue cooperation with it under the pressure of student activists and pressure left groups. The company in question also produced components for the US UAV, which was found to be a business that is not socially responsible. Unclear legal aspects of UAV use were highlighted in 2016 by the blockade of Rammstein air force base, where the USAF headquarters are located in Europe. US drones are a controversial topic in Germany due to the fact that the local satellite communication station is reportedly used to transfer information and data between US operators and drones in the deployment area, which, according to the organizers of the protests, contradicts the German constitution [3]. And in these cases, these are still human-driven systems; in the case of fully autonomous systems, social resistance would undoubtedly be significantly stronger. Partial cooperation between AS and human being should also be maintained in this respect in the future. However, this is very difficult to achieve under operating conditions [4]. The currently used technologies allow relatively reliable identification of individuals and will probably be able to realize this identification in the near future even in complicated conditions of the real battlefield. The autonomous system would theoretically already be able to adequately assess the situation, identify enemy activities, assess the risk of collateral damage and minimize it. But it is still a question of whether the human factor can be completely omitted in such an unpredictable environment as the battlefield represents. The fatal failure of artificial intelligence, similar to what has already occurred in attempts to implement AI in the civilian sector, but this time with far more devastating consequences, can not be completely ruled out. The battlefield or operating space in which fully autonomous robotic systems would move is undoubtedly very complex, and features such as trap, surprise friction and uncertainty can not be reliably predicted or programmed with flawless behavioral algorithms. Autonomous robotic systems are designated to be more efficient than humans and prevent emotionally tainted errors through calculations, but they are faster due to machine date analysis, but are still unable to respond adequately to unforeseen circumstances [5]. A potential AS user in combat operations could also be deprived of legal responsibility for their erroneous decision or, on the contrary, be used directly in a manner contrary to the war conventions while at the same time dissociating themselves from their consequences.

On the other hand, AS would not be subject to real psychological stress, prejudice or hatred of opponents and the resulting unwanted behavior or committing war crimes. However, even from an ethical and legal point of view, it is desirable in the future that the human element is not completely excluded from the decision-making process [6].

3 Cultural Dimension of AS Use

With the increasing use of UAVs and potentially Ass for combat operations, and reflections on the increasingly wider range of tasks that they will perform in the future, there are concerns about the implications this development may have for the military and society. There are visions of the gradual degradation of military personnel to operators whose activities will be comparable to those of civilian companies serving prospectively to deliver commercial products. The gradual robotization of military operations could lead to further weakening and de facto extinction of the existing military culture as such. This would, of course, be offset by a significant reduction in the physical and probably psychological demands placed on today´s soldiers and by facilitating the recruitment process. In its consequences, robotization of combat operations may lead to truly revolutionary changes here. Changes in the field of traditional military values not unlike the demise of European knightly culture in confrontation with the democratization of war at the end of the Middle Ages. However, in this context, there may be a sharp difference between opponents on future battlefields. If there is no truly widespread proliferation of AS among the warring parties, there will already be a significant cultural gap between the technologically advanced actors and their adversaries.

Leaving aside the already mentioned ethical dimension, which is not directly reflected in the effectiveness of military and special operations or the deployment of UAVs/ASs within them, there is a problematic cultural and social dimension. This is particularly evident in the conflicts that the West has in a culturally different environment. Although the armed drones currently in use are not autonomous robotic systems and in practical terms, there is little difference in whether the target object is hit by a remote-controlled drone, piloted aircraft or artillery, their perception is significantly different [7]. From the point of view of the adversary and the regional population in the insurgent regions, they are perceived very differently from human or direct manned weapon systems. Contemporary drones are often conceived as an almost robotic weapon, despite its technological advancement, a symbol of cowardice and the decline of the West. Especially because of the perceived unwillingness to risk or deploy the lives of its own soldiers for the values that the West is trying to import into the local environment. There arises an undesirable contradiction between sacrificing martyrs on the one hand and the murderous robotic weapons that these fighters resist and can only fight with unequal combat.

Technical superiority is no longer seen as an expression of the adversary's power and strength, as it may have been in the recent past, but rather a symptom of its weakness. The military inferiority of rebel or terrorist groups may turn into ideological superiority, and the imaginary struggle of values may not sound in favor of the West. The population in the drones' scope, also confronted with the collateral damage that these blows bring, is not becoming the appropriate material for winning hearts and minds. Thus, many critical expertise claims that, despite their effectiveness, UAVs produce more enemies than they

eliminate today. Consequently, the current conflicts between state and non-state actors, which is asymmetric in nature, are even more difficult for regular conventional forces to consider whether and how to use the deadly potential at their disposal [8].

However, the negative view is not limited to the population in the target areas, but also affects Western society. Here, drone attacks are often demonized and weaken social support for political efforts and engagement of own or allied forces in conflict regions. Today's controversies about the deployment of armed UAVs are probably not due solely to resistance to external action in conflict zones or the war itself, as was the case with the US anti-war movement during the Vietnam War. Opposition today is based on similar cultural patterns to regional populations. The West, living in post heroic society, is often confronted with images of the struggle between human heroes and murder machines, where the boundary between good and evil is clearly defined, thanks to Hollywood production largely determining the cultural paradigm. In this respect, a member of the Western Civilization Circle formed by this paradigm is no different from a population from other cultures. Man naturally identifies himself with human counterparts and not with artificial intelligence, whether serving his own party or posing a threat. Applying these images to the present reality gives the impression that the current deployment of armed drones or autonomous robotic weapons in the future is not an ideal solution and an ethical response to security threats. Even a post heroic Western society needs its human heroes, and the AS or drone operator killing insurgents from thousands of kilometers away without personally exposing themselves to minimal risk does not meet those needs. From this perspective, it seemed necessary for the specific task of destroying the living symbol of Osama bin Laden's terrorism to be carried out by a human commando. Thus, US soldiers took revenge on September 11, 2001 in a traditional manly manner, and not by an anonymous drone, which is now standard practice for similar US operations.

The aforementioned notional value deficit, which the present adversary does not experience, may become a reason for weakening social or national morality and, conversely, a trigger for the radicalization of religiously or ethnically related individuals in the western environment [9]. Consequently, these individuals may be identified in individual cases with rebel or terrorist group goals and reinforced a sense of moral superiority over Western values for which Western society is not willing to risk the lives of its soldiers despite all technical and military dominance.

Some experts see a greater possibility not to resign from the use of advanced technology while avoiding the consequences of the aforementioned cultural paradigm in a greater involvement of local troops in a counter-insurgency campaign in which their members would be able to complement the Western armies with a personal approach. This consideration, however, runs into the fact that the local units often do not possess the necessary qualities despite all the effort and cost and can be effectively infiltrated by the adversary. The question remains if armed ASs become the main means by which the powers will act against their irregular adversaries in the framework of a long-term or permanent low-intensity military operation and how the insurgents will counteract them [10]. Robert N. Gates has already warned against excessive fascination with modern weapon technologies that could lead to a false idea of a war deprived of the reality of his own losses and sparing the lives of innocent civilians. On the other hand, the emotional

debate over the use of armed AS can lead to the disobedience or rejection of these funds by political decision-makers if they are subject to strong social resistance [11].

4 Conclusion

Robotic weapons, the type of UAV (and potentially AS) are now used to target the destruction of enemy in a number of conflicting regions. Such use, however, meets not only with a positive evaluation of their effectiveness, but also with strong criticism. According to critical voices, unmanned lethal weapon systems significantly reduce the threshold of political sensitivity to the use of force. Flexible deployment, efficiency, human crew absenteeism and low cost operation of unmanned or fully autonomous robotic systems can reduce the barriers to political decision making on whether or not to use armed violence and facilitate authorization of problematic kinetic operations. From this point of view, ASs can allow political elites to conduct a near-constant war of low intensity without much cost, and thus without much interest or resistance from society. However, their real effectiveness in conflicts is also questionable, as their deployment may be in direct contradiction with the principles of parallel counter-insurgency strategy. The ethical dimension of deploying such resources is even more complex. The question of what degree of autonomy should be given to these systems, and whether an autonomous decision can be made from an ethical point of view to kill a human being by artificial intelligence, is unlikely to find an unequivocal answer even when ASs become a standard armament of advanced armed forces.

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