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HCR61

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Testimony for VMI on Apr 2, 2014 08:30AM in Conference Room 312

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Maluhia Wolford	Individual	Support	No

Comments: Chair Takai and Members of the Committee, I strongly support this Resolution. The United States, Britain, Israel and South Korea already use technologies that are seen as precursors to fully autonomous systems. Currently, little is known about Russian and Chinese progress in developing lethal autonomous robots. My concern is that we may find ourselves on the other side of a line, and then it is very difficult to go back. If there is ever going to be a time to regulate or stop these types of weapons, it is now. A major question that I have of this technology is whether or not these robots will make it easier for states to go to war. A decision to allow machines to be deployed to kill human beings worldwide-whatever weapons they use-deserves a collective pause. Therefore, I strongly support HCR61.

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Commentary of Mines Action Canada on House Concurrent Resolution 61
Submitted to: Veterans, Military Affairs, International Affairs and Culture and
the Arts Committee

April 1, 2014

Mines Action Canada (MAC) is a coalition of Canadian non-governmental organizations working in mine action, peace, development, labour, health and human rights that came together in 1994. MAC is an international leader working to eliminate the serious humanitarian, environmental and developmental consequences of landmines, cluster munitions, explosive remnants of war, autonomous weapons systems and other indiscriminate weapons. MAC is a co-founder and Steering Committee member of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots.

MAC appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony in support of Hawaii's House Concurrent Resolution 61 (HCR 61) regarding lethal autonomous robotics. The issue of lethal autonomous robotics or LARS is a new and pressing issue for law makers around the world. These future weapons that can target and fire without meaningful human control present a challenge to our current ethical and legal understandings of warfare. We urge the Veterans, Military Affairs, International Affairs and Culture and the Arts Committee to pass HCR 61 ensuring that Hawaii continues to be a leader in the promotion of human rights and humanitarian values.

Concerns with Lethal Autonomous Robotics

For many people, the idea of a robot making the decision to kill a person is abhorrent. Beneath the unease that many feel about lethal autonomous robots, there are serious underlying moral, ethical legal and practical military concerns. Morally there are serious issues with fully autonomous weapons. Recently, the idea of a machine making the decision to kill you was deemed the "ultimate human indignity" by a high ranking US military officer. Lethal autonomous robots will not have human emotion. While the lack of humanity has been considered by some to be useful because they will be less likely to act out of fear, anger or revenge, human emotion is at the core of protecting civilians in conflict. Even the most battle hardened soldier is capable of demonstrating mercy, an action impossible to robots. Without emotion, lethal autonomous robots will be unable to demonstrate compassion making them dangerous to civilians and the perfect weapon for oppressive regimes because they will never defect or disobey orders to attack their own people.

The creation of lethal autonomous robots will lessen the burden of going to war while most likely increasing the burden of conflict on civilians. The human cost of having "boots on the ground" is a major deterrent when countries consider entering into conflict. With lethal autonomous robots in the mix, the human cost for the belligerents will be dramatically reduced yet the human cost for the other side and for the civilians will remain or increase. LARS will not result in a machine versus machine style of warfare but rather a machines killing humans situation.

Additionally, fully autonomous robots will have difficulty conforming to principles of international humanitarian law designed to protect civilians during armed conflict. The principles of proportionality and distinction are immensely complex and require human judgment on intention and context in a quickly shifting situation. Determining if the harm to civilians caused by a particular course of action is proportional to the military advantage is not simply a matter of considering qualitative data. Likewise making the distinction between civilians and combatants in current conflicts is so incredibly difficult for soldiers who are capable of understanding intention through actions as well as through small gestures, facial cues and emotion that it would be next to impossible for a robot relying strictly on sensors. While a human can recognize an injured or surrendering combatant, a robot would not be able to make that distinction.

The legal issues with lethal autonomous robots go beyond the principles of proportionality and distinction. Who is to blame if a fully autonomous weapon was to malfunction and to make an error resulting in the deaths of protected persons or other illegal actions? Would the programmer, the commander, the technician or the robot be responsible? Lethal autonomous robots create large problems for legal accountability and practical use.

House Concurrent Resolution 61

HCR 61 urges the United States government “to place a moratorium on the development, production, and use of lethal autonomous robotics.” HCR 61 accurately views the prospect of LARS as highly disturbing. We strongly support the moratorium outlined in this resolution. It makes the most sense to stop the creation of these weapons now before it is too late. Once one country begins to carry this type of weapon in their arsenal, others will follow suit to avoid being ‘out-gunned’. To prevent a robot arms race, the world needs a pre-emptive ban on lethal autonomous robots and resolutions such as HCR61 help build the public and political support for such a ban.

The pre-emptive moratorium called for in HCR 61 is not out of the ordinary. As the resolution states, blinding lasers were pre-emptively banned in the mid 1990s. The 1995 ban on blinding lasers prevented their use and deployment while still allowing militaries to use laser technology for other purposes. A moratorium on LARS will not prevent the development and use of other military robotics such as those for explosive ordinance removal, scouting and disaster response. A moratorium on LARS may in fact benefit these other forms of military robotics by eliminating a research distraction.

While there is debate about how close we are to this technology, currently it is more of a matter of “when” rather than “if” these technologies will be created and deployed. Without pre-emptive action, lethal autonomous robots will be developed and then the international community will be unable to prevent them falling into the hands of non-state armed groups, terrorist organizations and rogue states.

Conclusion

Mines Action Canada strongly supports the passage of HCR 61 as soon as possible because it will contribute to the upcoming conversation about autonomous weapons systems at the United Nations Convention on Conventional Weapons. As the first jurisdiction in North America to seriously consider the issue of LARS, Hawaii has the opportunity to set a high standard for the protection of human rights and humanitarian values. By passing HCR 61, the State of Hawaii will make a clear statement that decisions over life and death on the battlefield should remain in the hands of humanity and that the potential benefits of robotics should never be overshadowed by the creation of killer robots.