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Colloquium

RMA
Brussels
Royal Military Academy

Autonomous Weapon Systems (AWS): Operational, Ethical and Legal Perspectives

Colloquium, 23 & 24 March 2022, Brussels (campus Renaissance)

Dear Madam, Sir,

We are pleased to invite you to a **two-day colloquium** organised on **Wednesday and Thursday 23 and 24 March 2022** by the **Royal Higher Institute for Defence** (RHID) in collaboration with the Royal Military Academy (RMA).

In the past two decades, the autonomy of platforms and systems has progressed considerably among military organisations of industrialised countries. Autonomy refers to a system's ability to respond to uncertain situations by independently selecting from different courses of action and creating a new series of actions. It is characterised by degrees of self-directed behaviour, ranging from manual to fully autonomous. The status of autonomous weapon systems appears to raise numerous questions in the military realm and recent debates about the possible emergence of lethal versions of AWS have added many layers of confusion making it worthwhile to take stock of the technical and operational realities of these systems as well as of their strategic, operational, legal and ethical implications.

Implications of AWS in warfare are numerous and diverse. Geopolitically, the expansion of AWS will not entail equal access to this technology by the majority of state's defence organisations; on the contrary, these systems will engender a divide between countries that possess the required skills and those states or non-state actors that will be prevented access to these technologies. Such an evolution is likely to elevate the risk of asymmetrical warfare in the future. On the military operational side, autonomy also presents considerable challenges as the degree of technicity of these systems is expected to evolve at a hyperbolic pace due to AI integration. Moreover, depending on their precise degree of autonomy and the residual place left to human operators, these systems raise many questions and spark off complex debates about legal responsibility, ethics and moral challenges in warfare.

AWS encompass a wide variety of military technological systems and infrastructures that are hard to differentiate. The purpose of the colloquium is to clarify the debate by defining the numerous terms and expressions used within the discourse on AWS as well as to provide an impartial debate about AWS in modern warfare. Besides detailing the industrial and technological realities, the colloquium will also offer new perspectives on the political, legal and ethical implications linked to an increasing integration of autonomous systems into contemporary and future defence organisations.

The colloquium can be attended either in person in the conference room at Renaissance campus (entrance: **rue Hobbema 8, 1000 Brussels**) or remotely online. Except for the Panel Discussion, the colloquium will take place **in English**. A simultaneous interpretation in English, Dutch and French will be provided in the conference room only for the Panel Discussion. We thank you in advance for registering via the following link, where you will also be able to find the detailed programme: www.defence-institute.be. **Registration is compulsory and must be received by Monday 21 March 2022 at the latest**. You will then receive a registration confirmation and a link to connect to the colloquium should you have chosen to participate online.

(Signed)
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Director-General
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