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Autonomous weapon systems : the anatomy of autonomy and the legality of lethality / Bradan T. Thomas

Document type:	Article
Title:	Autonomous weapon systems : the anatomy of autonomy and the legality of lethality
Host item entries:	Houston journal of international law,
Author zone:	Bradan T. Thomas
General Note:	Photocopies
Language(s):	eng
Abstract:	<p>This comment explores the legal implications and predicted efficacy of autonomous weapon systems, as well as the effects that their use might have on both international humanitarian law and the conduct of hostilities. The defining feature of an autonomous weapon system is its capability of selecting and engaging targets independent of human intervention. While benefits can be realized from such functionality, they are tempered with unclear issues such as the proper identification of civilians, the efficaciousness of substituting robotic calculations for human judgements, command responsibility, and unintended effects on a deploying state's standing in the international community, among others. Because autonomous weapon systems serve essentially as platforms that are capable of supporting a variety of munitions, it is unlikely that they will be categorically considered unlawful per se. Instead, the prospect of legal difficulties emanates from the potential manners in which such systems operate and how design drives decisions on the battlefield. Polarized state views on the development of autonomous weapon systems have set the stage for worldwide forethought and prudence, and this comment aims to aid in the developing discussion.</p>
Keyword in French:	MOYEN DE COMBAT CONDUITE DES HOSTILITES ARME NOUVELLE DIH ARME AUTONOME DRONE
Keyword in English:	MEANS OF COMBAT CONDUCT OF HOSTILITIES NEW WEAPON IHL (INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW) AUTONOMOUS WEAPON DRONE
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Call number	Disposability / Due date
341.67/323 (Br.)	Available