

Srđan T. Korać

## DEPERSONALISATION OF KILLING Towards A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Use Of Force “Beyond Good And Evil?”

### ABSTRACT

The article analyses how robotisation as the latest advance in military technology can depersonalise the methods of killing in the 21st century by turning enemy soldiers and civilians into mere objects devoid of moral value. The departing assumption is that robotisation of warfare transforms military operations into automated industrial processes with the aim of removing empathy as a redundant ‘cost’. The development of autonomous weapons systems raises a number of sharp ethical controversies related to the projected moral insensitivity of robots regarding the treatment of enemies and civilian population. The futurist vision of war as a foreign policy instrument entirely ‘purified’ of the risk of morally wrong actions is in opposition with the negative effects of the use of drones. The author concludes that the use of lethal robots in combat would eventually remove enemy soldiers and civilians from the realm of ethical reasoning and deprive them of human dignity. Decision to kill in military operations ought to be based on human conscience as the only proper framework of making decisions by reasoning whether an action is right or wrong.

### KEYWORDS

warfare, military interventions, depersonalisation, drones, lethal robots, autonomous weapons systems, ethics of war, international relations

### Robotic warfare: Towards removing prosocial behaviour as the ‘cost’ of military operations?

Many archaeological finds depicts scenes of – as much as epic poetry and prose are telling stories about – famous military endeavours that show an even spatio-temporal distribution of use of force as a means of resolving disputes between groups, communities and nations.<sup>1</sup> Aside from the mythological and poetic hyperbole woven into such scenes, warfare as one of humanity’s oldest social activities testifies to the ancient entwinement of tools, technology and creative thinking when it comes to the effective use of material and human resources made at moments of societal wealth available to the ruling elites. The main aim of military leaders has always

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been to discover means of fighting and conceive tactics that would carry the day against the hostile force, at minimum sacrifice. Certain 'leaps' in technological development – the bow and arrow, cannon, rifle, airplane, missile, etc. – enabled the conduct of military operations from an ever-greater distance, or at least to commence without 'hand-to-hand' combat, that is to say, when the opposing land units have not yet come into direct contact with one another (Creveld 2000; Howard 2009). For instance, the increased shot accuracy of cannons and rifles in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries opened a new chapter in military history, enabling an attack against the enemy from greater distance, keeping one's own men safe. Technological development has also rendered weapons more destructive, such that in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the cataclysmic potential of nuclear weapons pushed to the absurd its utility as a foreign policy tool within limits of common sense. The only possibility was to possess and pile up this type of weapon to deter potential adversaries from an attack in a strategic game of 'mutual assured destruction'.

From the point of view of the individual soldier, however, combat is no less violent – it remains 'slaughter', much as before. The difference is that the advanced military technologies renders the enemy less visible, that is, no longer 'in one's sights'. This means that killing has been displaced, made 'remote', and ever-more mediated. That being said, even today, it is not possible to achieve a permanent and strong land presence without occupation of territory and immediate conflict at short distance. This is especially true of the asymmetric wars of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where the most complex operations are conducted by foreign interventionist troops, mostly in urban environments against myriad of non-state armed groups cunningly intermixed with the local population (Münkler 2010: 190–194).

Historically, the politics of army discipline sums up a series of gestures and techniques directed at shaping man into an endurance and finely tuned 'killing machine', drawing on the masculinisation of men and inculcation of warrior attributes into an individual's value system, as well as a social division of war roles into 'typically' male and female. Still, the huge amount of energy necessary for extreme masculinisation, that is, successful socialisation that is military training, would be unnecessary if people were born naturally aggressive (Jindy Pettman 1996: 66). Overwhelming war experience testifies to the moral disquiet soldiers feel when, for example, they have to shoot at sleeping enemy soldiers or anyone who, however potentially dangerous in general, does not pose a threat at that moment. The strong malaise means that the soldier perceives the killing of a sleeping foe unnecessary and deeply wrong (Brigety II 2007: 17–19). In the constant debate about whether aggression as initiator of war is an innate character trait or not, we lean toward the position confirmed through a sufficient number of empirical studies in the field of evolutionary psychology and primatology, according to which man is not genetically predisposed to war, but does so through a process of socialisation; otherwise, men would happily go into battle and would not reluctantly kill other human beings (Waal 2013: xi; Ferguson 2013: 126). Our perception of violence/war as intrinsic to human nature is the result of cognitive bias caused by media portrayals of the 'dark' side of human nature driven by an ad revenue-heavy business model. This warped perspective of social reality overemphasises events of small probability, ascribes to them great emotional impact, and creates an image of life in times of

insurmountable dangers and security risks. After the construction of this image, we accept only those new facts that fit easily into such a worldview (Payne 2015: 24–25).

The findings of multiple scientific studies conducted in the field of evolutionary psychology since the 1980s suggest that morality is innate. Not in the sense that there is a specific gene for morality, but that we naturally act in a morally laudable direction. The long process of natural selection has crafted a psychological mechanism for prosocial behaviour, based on the recognition that survival is only possible with mutual help and cooperation (Joyce 2006: 13). Evolution has made people predominantly social, friendly, benevolent, honest, etc. Through trial and error, over the course of thousands of years, the brain has produced various responses to variable environmental stimuli, gradually developing prosocial emotions of love, empathy and altruism. From these prosocial emotions issued the tendency of people to reach for moral reasoning, even in the face of the most extreme situations on the edge of life and death. Natural selection has helped strengthen empathy with others, at the heart of man's capability to act morally. Cognitive functions and emotions are deeply bound systems, on a biological, psychological and phenomenological plane, meaning that normative judgments are not always rational or the result of conscience, but rather are strongly influenced by emotions and intuition. Emotions are evaluations of the world not as it is, but as it ought to be. They help us recognise that there is a moral problem in a given situation. Emotions are the foundation of self-consciousness comprising our subjectivity, meaning that they are part of our acceptance of responsibility for who we are and how we act towards others. Thus, pride and shame are the most important guides in the process of our self-expression and self-realisation. True personality achieves self-realisation through harmony with the personal character by striving to live according to the standards of a given value system: each successful attempt to behave in accordance with these standards makes us proud, and conversely, each deviation carries shame (Döring 2007: 385).

Emotions and empathy, as drivers of prosocial behaviour and moral sensitivity, are a major obstacle to killing in war. This makes them the undesirable personality characteristics in a soldier who is to fight in interventionist troops deployed far from her/his homeland, particularly in the context of contested democratic legitimacy of the intervention itself. In the period of late capitalism and the dominance of the instrumental mind as measure of all things, empathy for military planners is a disturbance factor to the efficiency of a military operation. Cristina Masters lucidly notes that the application of advanced technological solutions in the military has resulted in the desirable military attributes of a soldier being constituted according to criteria borrowed from a scientific-technological discourse (2010: 178–179). Military planners now view soldiers through the prism of their weaknesses, that is, as vulnerable beings, prone to stress and trauma, and therefore mistakes and inefficiency. They see their unreliability in contrast to the 'perfection' of personal computers and other sorts of brand new machines and devices. The human body, or *wetware* in contemporary military terminology, is the weakest element of the triad comprising *hardware*, embodied in the wide array of high technology, and *software*, embodied in information and communication technologies. Hence the onus on development of military technology that would supplant the biological and

emotional deficiencies of the body with the introduction of the superior, diversified interface, in time, entirely removing the soldier from the battlefield.

Burdened by earlier tragic experiences, the current century has also shed perspective regarding the threshold of social acceptance of war victims, illustrated in the chant *No Body Bags*. In the post-industrial poliarchies with global ambitions and capability, it has become increasingly difficult to politically justify the need for citizens to lose their lives in wars in distant regions across the planet, of which they have barely even heard. This is all the truer when these conflicts result in stalemates, from which strong public reactions demand the cessation of military operations to avoid further casualty, which undermines the possibility of achieving the given military, and ultimately, foreign policy goals (Sauer & Schörning 2012: 368–369). The politics of minimalising human victims of one's own troops has been operationalised in the form of 'warfare without risk', accomplished in the three previous decades by employing private military and security companies, drawing on a combination of air and guerrilla operations, and maximising the efficiency of weaponry by perfecting its precision (Sauer & Schörning 2012: 369). One direction of development of new military technology has been aimed at strengthening psychological and physical abilities through the human augmentation and performance enhancement (bionics, prosthetics, brain-computer interfaces, nootropics, gene editing, neurotechnology) as well as by connecting soldiers digitally via satellite communication with a command system based on real-time data-share on the battlefield (Lucas 2010: 290–291). These are plans to create a soldier-cyborg, that is, a hybrid of a human organism and technological (inorganic) implants, all based on a vision of transhumanism, the goal of which is surpassing man as he is now by completely integrating him into machine, advocated by innovators and scientists from Silicon Valley (Bricis, Internet).

The latest technological developments have also opened numerous opportunities for replacing the human fighting force on the battlefield with semi-autonomous and fully autonomous weapons systems, which cracks a door towards outsourcing the 'dirty work' of war to intelligent machines.<sup>2</sup> The best-known representative of semi-autonomous systems is the drone, that is, an unmanned aircraft that serves a variety of purposes, such as reconnaissance, patrolling, intelligence gathering and combat. Unmanned aircraft can be piloted remotely (Remotely Piloted Aircraft – RPA) from a land control station by a pilot and crew, connected to a command centre and communication infrastructure; or they can be autonomous (Unmanned Air Vehicle – UAV), following a pre-programmed set of action (USAF Headquarters 2014: 13–15). Seeing as they are not limited by the psychophysical abilities of the pilot or the fatal risk of being shot down, drones have a significant advantage compared to ordinary aircrafts. They fly longer, continuously, at higher altitudes and with no fatigue to a human body.<sup>3</sup> Still, remote control of unmanned aircraft is not literally

2 To be fair, the history of military experiments with unmanned aircrafts goes back to World War I, and several kinds were used in combat in the course of World War II. For a brief overview of development projects of semi-autonomous and autonomous weapons systems, see Singer 2009.

3 Due to limited scope of this analysis, I exclude the issue of vulnerability of semi-autonomous and autonomous weapons systems in the form of electromagnetic interference and cyber-attacks to satellite and information infrastructure.

‘without pilot’, since each drone is operated by a highly-trained ground-control crew that could number as many as 300 people (Joshi & Stein 2013: 56).

Ascribing characteristics of independence to a type of unmanned aircraft can somewhat confuse or mislead a reader. The aircraft in question is a semi-autonomous system, previously programed for execution of specific operational and tactical tasks within given parameters, in which the human presence is reduced mostly to oversight. Fully autonomous weapons systems would be only those capable to follow the three basic principles of robotics: perception, intelligence and execution. The task of the robot is to oversee and select relevant data from the environment, and then based on those data and using artificial intelligence, decide on its own how to react and how to execute its chosen course of action using the tools at its disposal (Serbin 2014: 57–60). A semi-autonomous system connects two separate functions – perception and execution – in between which still stands man equipped with a computer. By contrast, a fully autonomous weapons system would be capable of responding to information from the environment acquired through sensors, and use the acquired knowledge to decide on the optimal course of action adapted to current circumstances (the man-out-of-the loop model). An illustration of the use of a robot in combat would be one drone to observe the battlefield from its edge, revealing and indicating a relevant target, and then passing on the coordinates of the target’s position to another drone, which would then destroy the target. This would overcome the obstacles that issue from a human’s limit in information processing speed (Arkin 2010: 333–334).

Given the plans Washington has for the development of air, land and sea drones in the coming period, we should not underestimate the influence of the global corporate unmanned vehicle lobby. The Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International (AUVSI) numbers over 7,500 representatives of public institutions, companies and academic community across more than 60 countries.<sup>4</sup> Part of the defence market directed at the US military budget line items dedicated for improvement of sensory systems on drones is slowly recovering after the 2008 recession. In the coming years, the US government intends to spend several billion dollars on that sector alone (Rockwell 2017: 26). The decision of the US military to begin developing a new generation of unmanned land vehicles – having shown significant use value for seeking out and removing landmines, clearing land communication and identifying objects in Iraq and Afghanistan – yet another lucrative market has opened up for private sector (Tuttle 2017: 38–42).

The most important document of the US military is the recently adopted Strategy for Robotic and Autonomous Systems. In the long-term (2031–2040), this strategy foresees the construction and engagement of autonomous land and aircraft systems that would allow for the concentration of commanders exclusively on the overall process of execution of combat operations, instead of control of robots in executing individual tasks (U.S. Army 2017: 9–11). The Strategy places importance

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4 According to information available on its official web page, the basic goal of AUVSI is to represent the interests of producers of unmanned systems and robots to national governments, regulatory bodies, media and the public, as well as to see that the interests of its members are taken into consideration in the legislative procedure, above all in the US, but also globally ([www.auvsi.org/who-auvsi](http://www.auvsi.org/who-auvsi)).

on the development of mini-robots for scouting and intelligence gathering as vanguard for lethal robots, particularly in urban areas, as well as on the development of transporter-robots for delivery of supplies, allowing for a quick shift to combat action during the entering the field of engagement, an improvement of tactical possibilities of manoeuvring during combat actions, decentralisation of operation command, as well as taking far greater risks.

In addition to the strong corporate interest that stands behind the very profitable industrial niche on the rise, opening the futurist vision of war as a means of foreign policy, ‘purified’ from risk of unethical behaviour, would allegedly minimise the need for establishing legal and moral responsibility. Given that robots have been transformed from mere weapons into perfect warriors programmed to avoid typical human errors in combat engagement, the impact and efficiency of interventionist troops deployed across the planet would be far greater than now – or at least this is what we are led to believe by representatives of the robotic industry and some military planners. The goal of our analysis is to show how robotisation, as the next wave of a technological revolution in warfare, could, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, lead to entirely depersonalised acts of killing, as well as strengthen the structural violence of the US and other great powers towards poor countries on the global ‘periphery’. The starting premise is that depersonalisation of the enemy – a consequence of robotisation – will make easier internal legitimisation and execution of military interventions, thus making the use of force an instrument of choice for accomplishing imperial foreign policy objectives.

### **Industrialised warfare: The triumph of the practice of conducting ‘everywhere wars’**

Thinking about robotisation of warfare is intertwined with efforts to remove conscience as much as possible (if not entirely) from the practice of killing. In the late capitalism, warfare becomes a sort of industrial process devoid of meaningful value and social symbolism (having in the past accompanied war as a collective endeavour vital for the destiny of a political community). A good basis for understanding industrialised killing as a new social practice is the study on the nature of evil, by the Norwegian philosopher Lars. F. H. Svendsen, in which he analyses factors that could induce even psychologically healthy and benevolent individuals to agree to evil. Apart from representing the other in such a way that the committing of evil has for us a good rather than a bad meaning, a second factor relevant for our analysis is the distancing between our evil actions and others who are the objects of those actions (Svendsen 2010: 184–185). Distancing is most often achieved by depicting the enemy not only in a negative light, but also abstractly, in order to then create in the mind of the soldier a clear distinction between the act of killing justified by reasons of defence and the criminal act of killing that seeks merely to destroy a human being (Zimbardo 2004: 34–38). The ongoing specialisation of battle within the industrialised process of killing appears as a new form of distancing from the enemy in technologically advanced warfare. It creates the illusion that we are not directly participating in a morally wrong action, since military operation is broken down into numerous tasks and mediated by computers and sensors dedicated

to individual missions of gathering intelligence and recognition of targets. This seemingly value-neutral characteristic of discrete work assignments of technical nature obscures the moral dimension of the industrialised process of killing. New military technologies have created a paradox that Grégoire Chamayou ironically names ‘necroethics’ – an idea of careful killing of the enemy with surgically precise weapons that allegedly minimises unintended civilian victims and the suffering of soldiers (2015: 135–149).

Chamayou’s necroethics conceptualises the problematic trend of dronification of US foreign policy, which has marked the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the global fight against terrorism, defined as an increase of – albeit opaque – use of drones and drawing on the practice of so-called targeted killing in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen and Somalia (McCrisken 2013: 97–122; Shaw 2013: 536–559). I will not wade into international legal and political issues arising from the dronification of the US counter-terrorism policy, yet I do wish to emphasise the ethically controversial nature of 21<sup>st</sup> century warfare based on a morally disengaged and unempathic logic of video games and carrying that logic into future robotic warfare. The current legitimisation of increased use of drones boils down to the argument of strengthening the efficiency and capability of military operations. Terrorists hiding in remote and inaccessible areas are more easily removed from the air than captured by engaging land troops, since the latter would inevitably – as historical practice has patently shown – be more expensive and result in more human cost to the US and their allies. Instead of imprisoning, interrogating and placing on trial – a process potentially susceptible to sharp criticism in the media – the public and civil society organisations (as seen in the case of Guantanamo), the politics of quiet removal one by one alleged terrorist is conducted far from the eyes of a Western TV audience. Thus, for military planners and political actors, the dronification of military interventions in poor and failed states with insignificant military capabilities represents a convenient ‘shortcut’ on the road to reduction of financial and political costs of conducting imperialist politics.

The normalisation of the targeted killing as part of the so-called strategy of low-intensity conflict could be the cornerstone of future robotic warfare and step towards a more violent foreign policy of the United States and other great powers aimed at ‘uncooperative’ (rogue) states. Some authors claim that robotisation will spur politicians to make more common use of armed conflict as a means of resolving international disputes and achievement of foreign policy goals, since they could more easily justify military interventions to their voters (Altmann & Sauer 2017: 117–142). Indeed, the nature of the War on Terror has already opened Pandora’s Box of manipulation strategies regarding internal political legitimisation of military interventions in the form of punitive expeditions with unsustainable objectives and vague criteria of success. Derek Gregory thinks that the change in the way the United States has conducted wars since the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 has led to a new planetary militarisation. Due to the evenly distributed security risks and globalised threats, the use of armed forces has been expanded to areas far from current battlefields, inaugurating a practice of everywhere wars, characterised by asymmetry and paramilitarism (Gregory 2011: 238–250).

I consider the merging of everywhere wars with virtualised ‘joystick’ warfare a plausible policy option for the future, since it could viably replace a foreign policy

projection of force to ‘insurgency zones’ even in remote, border areas of the planet, in which prolonged engagement of interventionist land troops would for various reasons be complicated and unsustainable.<sup>5</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that the United States and other great powers have already redirected significant resources for the purpose of reorganising their national armed forces. By reducing the scope of standing troops they have strengthened special forces units and started developing fully autonomous weapons systems.

### **Would the robots be awakened by nightmares of crimes committed: A warfare without conscience?**

There has been lively futurological debate over the pros and cons of the application of artificial intelligence. Scholars and experts are sharply divided in envisioning possible social consequences, that is, how human’s interaction with fully autonomous robots might look like. As always, when there is talk of revolutionary changes impossible to clearly see from the present moment, predictions move in the range from sky-high optimism to utter pessimism, followed by references to literary and philosophical considerations of dystopias. Along those lines, Roy Amara, a scientist and the cofounder of the Institute for the Future, headquartered in Silicon Valley, notes the human tendency to overestimate the effects of new technology in the short run, and underestimate it in the long run (Amara’s Law) (Brooks, *Internet*). This thought seems to us a solid, if anecdotal, further guide in delving into the novelties brought by the robotisation of warfare and the use of force in the 21<sup>st</sup> century international politics.

The leading arguments supporting the relying on lethal robots in future wars could be summarised in the claim that robots can be programmed using the rules of the law of international armed conflict and systematic teachings on just war (Arkin 2010: 332–341). This would allegedly avoid situations in which due to an unsound information and due to chaos of battle, commanders and soldiers make poor decisions with fatal outcomes. Further, as machines devoid of emotion, robots would not take vengeance against civilians for killed fellow fighters. This assumption is not without basis. In asymmetric conflicts of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the greatest challenge from the ethical perspective of command and execution of military operations is proper distinction between combatants and civilians on the battlefield. The fog of war – the lack of perfect situational awareness – that occurs when hostile fighters wear civilian clothing and are mixed in with the local population clearly opens the question of sound decision-making in situations requiring quick reactions to specific, unpredictable and ambivalent risk threats, dramatically complicating complying with the rules of international armed conflict. Soldiers psychologically burdened by complex conditions of urban warfare can have a difficult time quickly and correctly assessing whether perceived unknown individuals are part of hostile troops or simply civilians (and thus incapable of fighting), or perhaps civilians who have a

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<sup>5</sup> This is confirmed by strategic defense guidelines published by the US military in 2012, which foresee problems with the USA’s capability to ensure military capacities necessary for large scale and long-term operations (US Department of Defense 2012).



certain role in the hostile combat action, that is, the extent of that role (e.g. are they only performing reconnaissance or are they directly engaged in the battle). This uncertainty is not an accidental characteristic of armed struggle; it often acquires endemic proportions. Mistakes that occur in split second decisions are common. And although hypothetically speaking killing in war can be just, in the chaotic reality of the battlefield, unsound assessments could lapse into war crimes or result in failure of the operation, which would eventually undermine foreign policy goals. For instance, an attack on innocent civilians as vulnerable and unarmed persons has always been considered an act morally egregious and alien to the ideals of military courage and honour (Lazar 2010: 211).

Not all scholars and experts agree with the claim that robotisation would contribute to a more humane military operations. On the contrary, after the United Nations began discussion about semi-autonomous and fully autonomous weapons systems, at a gathering in Melbourne in August 2017, more than a hundred leading robot manufacturers and artificial intelligence pioneers, publically called on the UN to ban the systems' development and application and thus prevent a new arms race with unforeseen consequences to civilian populations and humanity in general (Gibbs, Internet). The philosopher, Aleksandra Przegalinska warns of the possibility, often described in plots of novels and sci-fi films, of the robots at one point acquiring feelings of subjectivity and agency and beginning to follow entirely independently chosen aims, thus beginning to shape the world according to their own aims – much as humans have had throughout history (Bricis, Internet). Although this will not take place in the near future, Przegalinska notes that it is important for us now to properly understand how machines learn and acquire knowledge, in order to be able one day to have insight into what is happening within robots and prevent a dystopian situation of the machines' emancipation from people – however much it may at present appear a figment of imagination.

A proper understanding of how artificial intelligence works is of vital importance not least for solving the issue of speed of making decisions should the human being remain part of the decision-making loop. Robots are much faster at processing enormous amounts of data, meaning that man is the slowest link in the chain of command, and could thus come into collision with the preprogrammed dynamic of decision-making and giving orders to deployed units, jeopardising the combat task (Sloan 2015: 110). Equally important are potential dilemmas in decision-making of the commander in cases when, for example, due to being out of order, the robot reveals secret information to the enemy or must be excluded from combat or else communication with it must be cut off. A further problem is how to program a robot to act on the battlefield such as to apply principles of discrimination and proportionality as demanded by the law of international armed conflict. A robot ought not break any of Isaac Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics, according to which a robot may not injure a human being, nor, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm (Asimov 2004: 25–45). Still, lethal robots, should they acquire some kind of form of self-awareness, could decide that they 'no longer wish' to be instrumentalised as machines in human service or, in the worst-case scenario, declare us obsolete in the pursuit of their own goals. It is no surprise then that Heather M. Roff speaks of a strategic problem of robotisation, i.e., the possibility

of loss of human control over the conduct of military operations, even the entire war, should we equip robots with artificial intelligence to decide independently on strategic, operational and tactical levels (2014: 211–227). Robots would thus turn from a weapons system into soldiers and commanders who use a built-in computer algorithm to decide on the legitimacy of destruction of particular targets.

Increased reliance on intelligent machines in the greater part of combat could inevitably mutate warfare as social practice. It could cease to be a collective endeavour of a political community, worthy of sacrifice and grounded in a feeling of solidarity emanating from a sense of belonging together. Johnson and Axinn argue that killing with emotions is morally superior to killing without emotions, because military honour demands a clear will to assume a risk of sacrifice of health and life (2013: 136). This is the will that lies at the foundation of duties inherent to the military profession, the following of which indicates the presence of an intentionality with an emotional component overcoming selfish goals (*ibid.*). Thus, ethical decision-making as a basis of human action in relation to the hostile troops and civilians is unimaginable without the presence of conscience (Morkevicius 2014: 3–19). Without a conscience, it is not possible to apply the logic of just war doctrine, as it encompasses not only the question of human rights, but also the problem of devotion to virtue in severe situations inherent to war. These virtues – e.g. empathy, honour and fairness – although not explicitly listed in the law of international armed conflicts, are substantive for ethical decision-making in battle since they provide the guidelines for behaviour that supports the confirmation of the self-concept, which is a substantial human need, as well as constant dialogue of an individual with her/his social environment based on shared values. Robert Sparrow claims that it would be essentially morally wrong to send robots to fight against enemy soldiers because of the absence of interpersonal relationship between attackers and attacked; the value attached to human life demands this minimal level of interpersonal communication (2007).

In a future warfare where combat is the province of robots, the lives of hostile soldiers and civilian population will be denigrated as insufficiently worthy of sacrifice of one's own soldiers. This would violate Kant's categorical imperative that obliges us to always use humanity, as much in our own person as in the person of every other, as to act to other humans as ends and never merely as means (Kant 2002: 46–47). Rationality gives humans inherent dignity, independent of how they are valued by other people (Kant 1991: 255–256). We treat other people as mere means when, using force, manipulation or deception, we coerce them into serving goals they would otherwise not accept as their own, turning them into useful things devoid reason and free will. Treating another person as an end in itself means allowing her/him, as a rational being, to independently decide on her/his actions and goals she/he wish to achieve. The only means allowed in attempting to influence them is the strength of our argument. The introduction of lethal robots into military operations would be quite similar to setting high-tech 'mouse traps'. Being a machine, a robot would not be considerate of the dignity of hostile fighters as human beings, which means that – however successfully a robot might simulate human decisions – none of its decisions could be regarded ethical because they could not be ascribed to an autonomous person; that is, decisions would not be the acts

of free will, but rather would be driven by a built-in software algorithm (Johnson & Axinn 2013: 134–135). For instance, a decision to pardon an enemy soldier is associated with human emotions, meaning that we are more likely to surrender to a soldier than to a lethal robot.

In his seminal book *On Killing*, the American military historian and psychologist Lt. Col. (Ret.) Dave Grossman argues that the increase of distance between soldier and target on the battlefield lowers their empathic connection, which means that pulling the trigger becomes far easier than when we are face to face with the enemy soldier at short distance (1996: 97–133). Grossman brings to light well-hidden truth about the refusal of the majority men to kill in close combat situations – a common phenomenon throughout military history confirmed by massive empirical evidence. A soldier can convince himself that he is not killing human beings as long as he cannot see victims. Soldiers experience the greatest resistance when they see the enemy clearly or stare them in the eyes, when it becomes obvious that they are killing someone just like themselves. In fighting today's wars, the killing is done by software engineers, meaning that soldiers never have to face the hostile fighters through the gun sights; rather, this encounter takes place across a monitor and via the Global Positioning System (GPS). To the soldier's eyes, the death displays as a simple dot on a radar screen or a reading on a heat sensor screen (Masters 2005: 123). Therefore, the robotisation of killing would undermine the soldier's ability to demonstrate empathy towards the enemy and local civilians, that is, to identify, understand, and interpret correctly their emotions and needs.

The lack of ability to empathise with others sabotages our moral actions towards those in need. Martin Buber considered fundamental human activity in terms of two contrasting types of relations: 1) the relation I–Thou, constituted mutually between persons as equal and evenly worth, and 2) the relation I–It, which marks man's status as the only self-conscious subject in a static, lifeless world, a world of objects. As Buber puts it, "Through the Thou a man becomes I" (1937: 28). However, the widespread alienation in today's post-industrial poliarchies has gradually degraded the relation of I–Thou to relation I–It. On the global level, this degradation owes to the cultural distance between diverse societies across the planet and to a lack of sense of a common human destiny. Political decision-makers and military planners in the United States and its allies devalue the citizens of the world periphery through their objectivisation, transforming them into 'things' thrown out of the realm of good and evil and reducing them to 'targets' of a wide range of inhuman gestures – from indifference to target killing and 'collateral' victimisation. Treating human beings as objects or means for the achievement of one's own goals evidences of the lack of empathic bond and true compassion that characterise the relation I–Thou.

This is exactly what does emerge when the idea of warfare without risk is put into practice: now by using drones in military interventions and in the near future by deploying lethal robots. It indicates a normative 'Copernican Turn' with a view to the fundamental principles of military ethics. While its main purpose once was to protect life as efficiently as possible, the 21<sup>st</sup> century military technology is attempting to entirely discard individual responsibility of the soldier (Masters 2010: 184). The practice of warfare without risk has led to a profound downgrade in moral reasoning, relegating it to a dislocated reality of playing PC or PlayStation games.

The context of domestic comfort, the absence of societal condemnation and ensuing punishment, allows us to do in a war game things we would never do to people in a personal encounter. According to numerous testimonies of drone operators, the mental image of the target seen from the perspective of a moving guided missile does not foster the awareness that on the ground human beings are being killed. The operator only sees a radar reading and reacts to that signal (Power, Internet).

Following analogies of the dronification of military interventions coupled with the devoid of empathic ability of drone operators, the use of lethal robots would further depersonalise war by removing all human attributes from the human representation of the enemy – those traditional ‘trademarks’ of war and war strategies. The computer interface would switch a soldier into a warrior, except that now he would be completely displaced from the bloodbath of armed conflict. Fully autonomous weapons systems would make the border between fight simulation on a screen and its reality on the battlefield elusive, which could lead to a perverted transformation of a soldier into a kind of serviceman to the robot. The robots would, then, take on the warrior identity, that is, the role of defender and protector. Distance between attacker and attacked would no longer be largely physical, but now almost entirely only psychological.

The never-ending search for advancement in the routinised counter-insurgency industrial process of ‘search and destroy’ ignores the human dimension and turns humans into objects stripped of moral value. For instance, a large number of civilian victims in drone attacks have been caused by ‘double tap strikes’, a military tactic in which the same target (location) receives two consecutive strikes in a short time frame. Most common victims of the latter strike are civilians who have rushed to help. The result is that communities in Afghanistan and Pakistan are now wary of gathering and have curbed their movement, which makes not only the economy suffer, but has psychological effects caused by the insufferable expectation of sudden death. By introducing fully autonomous weapons systems, the devastating dronification policy against the civilian population of poor countries on the world periphery would last and intensify. Lethal robots would also choose potential human targets based on complex algorithms for recognition of patterns of suspicious behaviour of terrorists from a wanted list, which transfers control from that of space to following individuals and their activities that could indicate them being part of a terrorist network (Shaw 2013: 548). Robotisation would thus lead to the shift in managing security threats from the level of real behaviour of individuals to the domain of prediction of potential behaviour of the surveilled persons. As opposed to the soldier who can assess a situation on the ground visually, recognising that, for example, a local villager has lost his way in search of his flock, a lethal robot would, from the air, kill the unfortunate shepherd only based on indications that his movement coincides with an algorithm that notes suspicious insurgent activity.

## Conclusion

The history of warfare indicates the numerous examples of applied technologies not being only passive and agency-neutral foreign policy instruments, but that they to an extent also appear as kinds of non-human ‘agents’, capable of affecting social

change and instigating military and political decision-makers to choose a different, even opposite, course of action. If the development of cutting-edge military *technologies continues* at current pace and the financial obstacles regarding production, reliability and efficiency are removed, lethal robots are likely to become a weapon of choice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for the post-industrial democracies with global ambitions. To advocates of greater reliance on intelligent machines, fully autonomous weapons systems would indeed be an optimal policy tool for minimisation of human loss and the strategy of maintenance or even strengthening a global presence by ever-lasting low intensity wars conducted to discipline rebellious peripheral areas.

Robotisation emerges as a ‘logistical’ upgrade of military interventions if seen from the perspective of impact and efficiency, evaluated exclusively in quantitative indicators of cost-effectiveness so typical of the neoliberal model of running public affairs. A military intervention in that way only seemingly appears as a collective endeavour aimed at defending of common values embedded in strong moral symbolism – an illusion cunningly constructed through media manipulation. In fact, it is a question of organising war as a ‘production process’, more broadly contextualised in corporate paradigms and practices that supplant insubordinate contemporary citizens who refuse to sacrifice their lives without reserve for bare imperialist foreign policy interests. State budget investments in robotisation of warfare thus presents the logical – and perhaps even the only plausible – next step in softening negative reactions of the public to future everywhere wars, particularly when their democratic legitimisation becomes ever-more uncertain. The robotisation could facilitate further privatisation of violence on the global level by increasing the capacity of private military companies as strategic contractors of national defence departments. The merging of lethal robot technology and private entrepreneurship in meeting military demands, boosted by generous military budgets, might easily remove low intensity wars outside of the public eye. In this way, citizens of post-industrial polyarchies might remain entirely unaware of the destructive effects of national foreign policy in remote areas worldwide.

As Amara’s Law reminds us, humans are prone to overestimating the effects of new technology in the short and underestimating them in the long run, which means that the current hysteria fuelled by myriad predictions about the massive jobs loss due to the fast proliferation of robots is inflated. Still, the efforts of responsible political decision-makers and scientists must systematically be directed at timely design of effective ways of maintaining human control over social dynamics when robots as autonomous agents arrive one day. The question of whether we should delegate decisions about killing people to machines, declared in academic debates the vital moral dilemma of defence politics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is superfluous in my estimation. The planned upgrade of counter-insurgency interventionist troops with lethal robots would further depersonalise the practice of killing, cementing in the minds of both commanders and soldiers a distorted perception that combat takes place ‘beyond good and evil’ – in the realm of technological precision, purified of empathic ‘filth’ that arouses moral disquiet and bothers the conscience.

A soldier with a strong conscience, prone to stop and wonder about the moral dimension of an order he is required to execute, is not an efficient ‘worker’ from the perspective of successful imperial industrialised warfare. A morally compassionate

soldier disturbs the easy flow of the ‘production process’ (conduct of military intervention) and is replaced by robots. However, given that it is not likely that fully autonomous weapons systems will ever be capable to contextualise their action in the real environment in the way humans and animals do, the use of force in the 21<sup>st</sup> century international politics will inevitably be followed by a program ‘error’ built into robots: the lack of moral sensitivity and ethical reasoning in encounters with enemy and civilian population. This further opens a question regarding the possibility of identifying and sanctioning war crimes, something that could rub out the achievements in respecting the law of war reached during decades-long struggle for an effective international protection of human rights of those affected by armed conflicts.

Robotisation as the next phase in technological purification of warfare is likely to lead to the transformation of combat into unempathic automated industrial process that relieves human soldiers from the psychological burden of moral concerns. Industrialised warfare will degrade enemy soldiers and civilians to blips on a radar monitor, stripping them of human dignity along with any reason for it to be at the heart of ethical decision-making. For all these reasons, we think that machines – however much they might dispose of artificial intelligence one day – should not be given the capacity to decide on killing people. The decision to kill in the context of military operations must remain exclusively an act of human free will as the characteristic inherent to human conscience – the only possible basis for ethical reasoning about whether an action can be evaluated as right or wrong.

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Srdan T. Korac

## Depersonalizacija ubijanja

Ka upotrebi sile u 21. veku „s onu stranu dobra i zla?“

### Apstrakt

U članku se analizira kako robotizacija kao poslednji napredak u vojnoj tehnologiji može da depersonalizuje metode ubijanja u 21. veku pretvaranjem neprijateljskih vojnika i civila u puke objekte lišene moralne vrednosti. Polazna pretpostavka je da robotizacija ratovanja pretvara vojne operacije u automatizovane industrijske procese sa ciljem uklanjanja empatije kao suviše „cene“. Razvoj autonomnih oružanih sistema potiče brojne oštre etičke kontroverze vezane za projektovanu moralnu neosetljivost robota u pogledu postupanja sa neprijateljima i civilnim stanovništvom. Futuristička vizija rata kao instrumenta spoljne politike potpuno „pročišćenog“ od rizika moralno pogrešnih akcijama u suprotnosti je sa negativnim efektima korišćenja dronova. Autor zaključuje da bi upotreba smrtonosnih robota u borbi najzad uklonila neprijateljske vojnike i civile iz područja etičkog razmišljanja i lišila ih ljudskog dostojanstva. Odluka o ubistvu u vojnim operacijama trebalo bi da se temelji na ljudskoj savesti kao jedinom pravilnom okviru donošenja odluka promišljanjem da li je jedna akcija dobra ili loša.

**Ključne reči:** ratovanje, vojne intervencije, depersonalizacija, dronovi, smrtonosni roboti, autonomni oružani sistemi, etika rata, međunarodni odnosi