The Fallacy of Precision: Deconstructing the Narrative Supporting AI-Enhanced Military Weaponry

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1   Extended Abstract.

Recent pro-military arguments have attempted to morally justify the integration of AI into military systems, claiming it leads to more precise and sophisticated weaponry. However, this narrative obscures the reality of AI-based weaponry and is deeply flawed for several reasons. First, the use of AI in military contexts is morally reprehensible, as it perpetuates violence and dehumanization through biased training data and the unethical experimentation on human lives, undermining claims of ethical justification [21] [19] [3]. The development of AI-powered autonomous weapon systems often relies on datasets that reflect existing societal biases, potentially leading to discriminatory targeting and disproportionate impacts on marginalized communities [21] [4]. Furthermore, the refinement of these systems necessitates a troubling "trial and error" approach using real-world conflicts as testing grounds, effectively treating human lives as expendable data points for AI optimization [14] [15]. Second, contrary to the assertion that AI enhances precision and human control, military AI often leads to reduced oversight, human control, and accountability. In practice, AI military systems, such as autonomous weapon systems (AWS), fail to adequately distinguish between combatants and civilians [14]. Finally, the deployment of AI in warfare contradicts current international humanitarian law (IHL), rendering its use legally indefensible.

This paper aims to critically investigate the misleading philosophies driving the push for militaristic AI. This paper argues that militaristic AI is (1) morally indefensible because it necessitates extensive experimentation on human lives to develop sophisticated AI weaponry, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities in the Global South, (2) is associated with reduced human control and precision, evidenced by the high civilian toll inherent in currently deployed AI military systems, and (3) constitutes a violation of IHL. The paper presents case studies of AI systems like "Where's Daddy?", "Lavender", and "The Gospel," employed by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in Palestine, demonstrating how AI-driven "kill lists" disregard civilian casualties and facilitate the automation of violence [1] [2]. By unmasking the deceptive rhetoric surrounding military AI, this paper aims to elicit critical discourse on the practical ramifications of the use of AI in warfare.

1.1   How do you feed a biased killing machine? Through killing.

The development of sophisticated AI-integrated weaponry for military applications carries profound ethical implications, necessitating extensive experimentation on human lives, particularly in marginalized communities of the Global South [6] [17] in order to refine and improve such sophisticated technology [18]. This grim reality stands in stark contrast to the sanitized narratives often presented by proponents of military AI. The pursuit of "precise" and "intelligent" weapons systems is not a sterile laboratory exercise, but rather a process that inherently involves real-world testing with lethal and devastating and practical consequences. In conflict zones, particularly in the Global South, vulnerable populations are used as test subjects for these emerging technologies. The Israeli Defense Forces' deployment of AI systems like "Where's Daddy?", "Lavender", and "The Gospel" in Gaza serves

as a chilling example, where Palestinians on AI-generated "kill lists" become de facto experimental targets [1] [2] [24]. The pursuit of "precise" and "intelligent" weapons systems is marred by inherent biases in AI training data, potentially leading to disproportionate targeting of vulnerable populations [11] [3] [4]. This approach not only violates fundamental human rights but also perpetuates a cycle of violence and exploitation. Moreover, the current high error rates in AI systems mean that achieving the purported precision requires an unconscionable amount of "trial and error" with human lives at stake [17] [18]. This approach not only violates fundamental human rights but also challenges core principles of military ethics and IHL—including distinction, proportionality, and precaution in attack development [6] [18] [24].

1.2 AI military systems operate through algorithmic detachment, costing human oversight.

The integration of AI into military operations represents a profound and disturbing shift in the nature of warfare, associated with reduced human control and precision, contrary to claims of enhanced accuracy and precision. AI systems operate with algorithmic detachment, lacking the nuanced decision-making capabilities of human oversight, particularly in complex combat zones [16] [22]. This limitation is evidenced by the high civilian toll inherent in currently deployed AI military systems, such as the aforementioned systems being used against Gazans as of October 7th, 2023 [1] [2] [13]. The emotional and ethical detachment of AI systems, while touted as a feature by proponents, actually represents a critical flaw that can result in indiscriminate use of force [22] [25] [23] [9] [12]. Recent studies have shown that AI-driven targeting systems often struggle with contextual understanding and may fail to recognize situations where restraint is necessary, leading to potential violations of international humanitarian law [16] [25]. Furthermore, the reduced human oversight in AI-powered military operations creates a dangerous disconnect between the act of killing and its moral implications, potentially lowering the threshold for the use of lethal force [25] [23]. As AI continues to be integrated into military applications, there is a growing concern that the decision to end human lives may be increasingly delegated to machines, raising serious ethical questions about accountability and the fundamental nature of warfare [16] [22] [23].

1.3 AI military systems violate current IHL.

The deployment of AI in warfare raises significant legal concerns, particularly within the framework of IHL. IHL is grounded in the universally-ratified 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, which mandates that military actions adhere to principles of distinction, proportionality, and necessity—ensuring the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure during conflict [20]. However, AI systems lack the human judgment and contextual awareness necessary to fully comply with these principles, often making it difficult to ensure that attacks are both precise and proportionate [10] [5]. The use of autonomous weapons systems also erodes accountability, as it becomes unclear who is responsible for decisions made by AI; deep learning AWS, in particular, raises difficulties with meeting the mental element portion for individual criminal responsibility, per Article 30 of the ICC Statute [7] [8]. This lack of accountability, coupled with the potential for indiscriminate harm, renders the use of AI in military operations legally indefensible under existing IHL frameworks, highlighting the need for new legal models to restrict the integration of AI in military applications and address its ongoing risks [5].

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