

From the Bottom-Up: AI, Military Officers, & the Future of NATO*(Working group: Military Technology)*

For the past decade, scholars, practitioners, and policy makers have been focusing on the possible uses of AI and the automation of weapon systems. Largely drawing attention to applications of lethal AI, public discourse and scholarly work are endeavouring to answer questions of legality, ethicality, strategy, and politics when it comes to higher automation. These concerns focus on the possible commission of war crimes by lethal AI systems which cannot distinguish between combatants and civilians, the fear of escalation, and the real threat of technologically based vulnerabilities. Increased automation means lowered human control, more uncertainty and unpredictability, possible disrupted chains of command, and unnecessary risk. There is a distinct gap in examining what higher automation might mean for one's own forces (for example, automated systems going awry against their own structure) and most importantly, what it might mean in an alliance context, as lowered meaningful human control increases unpredictability and poses a tangible risk of endangering allied forces.

Military officers, especially in positions which are closely tied to the application of technological systems are viewing the possibility of increased automation with concern and suspicion. The way military officers feel about using/cooperating with autonomous technologies can impact decision making on a strategic/political level. The paper connects military innovation studies – which investigate change in military organizations vis-à-vis new technologies, warfighting concepts, and organizational configurations – and concepts such as strategic culture in order to investigate how policy choices by civilian leadership are informed by military officers and their viewpoints on AI technologies in their duties, and essentially what that means for the future of defence cooperation within alliances like NATO.