

AI & MILITARISATION:

A DEADLY COMBO

An explainer

Background

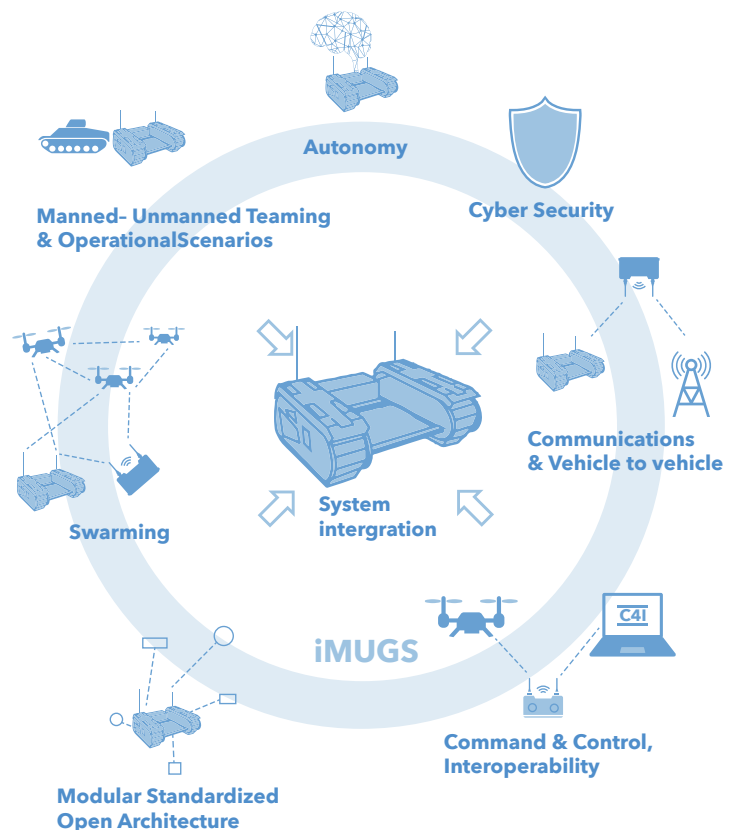
Since the turn of the century, there has been a significant rise in using artificial intelligence (AI) in the modernisation and upgrading of armed forces around the world. In Europe, the application of AI in militarisation is far-reaching. Over time, they have come in the form of increasingly autonomous systems, with an ever-greater consolidation of situation overviews, and the acceleration of warfare.

To understand the EU defence strategy, we need to go back to 2003 when, for the first time, the EU Council adopted a joint foreign policy strategy, 'A Secure Europe in a Better World'. It would help redefine the EU not only as a 'global player', but also a military power.

Defensive & Offensive

Under the Lisbon Treaty, the focus on AI and the use of its applications have accelerated as part of EU defence policy. The desire for more international, geopolitical competition has only intensified, as well a drive to represent European interests offensively.

Born out of this was the 2016 EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy which ultimately led to the establishment of a separate EU armament budget and forceful promotion of joint armament projects.



What our MEPs say



Özlem Alev Demirel
(Die Linke, Germany)

"The current spiral of rearmament does not only mean swarms of drones and killer robots, but also threatens to erase the difference between war and peace, civilians and combatants. The danger of a creeping loss of control is real. International law will then become meaningless."

In violation of EU law

Yet, amidst all this, Article 41 of the Lisbon Treaty explicitly prohibits EU funding for "operations that have military or defence implications". This hasn't stopped the EU from bending the rules from changing the legal basis of financing, creating off-budget instruments, such as the European Peace Facility, or working through extra-EU intergovernmental bodies such as PESCO - Permanent Structured Cooperation programmes - which is financed through member states' armament budgets.

In 2021, the European Defence Programme, the first EU programme explicitly dedicated to 'Defence and Security' will come into force. Some €13 billion have been set aside for that from the EU budget for 2021-2027: money that should and could have been spent on civilian projects and public services, which have been badly neglected after a decade of austerity and now the Covid-19 pandemic.

Fill your boots!

EU money has been filling the coffers of arms companies ever since the then-Commissioner President Jean-Claude Juncker launched the European Defence Programme in 2016. That same year, the European Defence Agency launched a €1.4 million pilot project that supported three activities, all of which were AI-related using extensive civil research, but conducted within explicitly military premises.

Following on from the pilot project, an additional €90 million was allocated for the 'Preparatory Action on Defence Research' project. One of the main pillars of this scheme was "the launch of one complex project" expected "to show the added value of unmanned systems in enhancing situational awareness".

Another strand was devoted to research related to force protection and soldier systems, including improved camouflage systems and "chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear protection". The PADR also invited tenders for five studies on "emerging game-changers", including artificial intelligence, quantum computing, augmented reality, artillery weapons, and satellite-independent navigation systems. It also invited proposals for further studies that would investigate "radically new future technologies of any kind with unexpected technological superiority over potential adversaries".

Stop this insanity!

The Left in the European Parliament demands that we stop this insane arms race and we call on all EU institutions to devote their full energy to regulate autonomous weapons systems and cyber warfare. Civil society campaigns against the use of AI in military and defence projects, such as "Cyberpeace" and "Stop Killer Robots" have provided important and feasible impulses in this regard, and their voices must be heard and accounted for as the EU moves dangerously and recklessly into a permanent war footing.

The view of the Left

The ongoing armament of the EU driven by digitalisation and artificial intelligence poses a threat to the citizens of Europe.

The EU's obsession with digitalisation and the motto "if you don't digitalise you lose" ensures that it is the large companies and corporations that win. Companies are promoting the political creation of an "ecosystem" in the field of AI, which will use the results of (publicly funded) research for military purposes, commercialising them with the help of venture capital. Accordingly, the public sector is required to invest in technology research and facilitate business start-ups through financial support and deregulation of labour and tax law.