

Secretary Lloyd Austin  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301

Deputy Secretary Kathleen Hicks  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1010 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301

March 26, 2024

Dear Secretary Austin and Deputy Secretary Hicks,

We write to urge you to clarify that the Replicator Initiative will not involve the development and deployment of autonomous weapons systems.

In [remarks](#) made on September 6, 2023, Deputy Secretary Hicks asserted that the development of all-domain, attributable autonomy systems (ADA2) is an essential way for the Pentagon to maintain its comparative cutting-edge and keep up with the technological advancements of other states.

However, those comments failed to specify whether or not supporting autonomous weapons systems is one of the key focuses of this initiative. When addressing whether or not “ADA2 means weapons systems”, Secretary Hicks stated: “That’s a serious question to be sure. They are not synonymous. There are many applications for ADA2 systems beyond delivering weapons effects.”

This is no place for strategic ambiguity. Autonomous weapons are inherently dehumanizing and unethical, no matter whether a human is “ultimately” responsible for the use of force or not. Deploying lethal AI weapons in battlefield conditions necessarily means inserting them into novel conditions for which they have not been programmed, an invitation for disastrous outcomes. “Swarms” of the sort envisioned by Replicator pose even heightened risks, because of the unpredictability of how autonomous systems will function in a network. And the mere ambiguity of the U.S. position on autonomous weapons risks spurring a catastrophic arms race.

We believe the Department of Defense should declare its opposition to the development and deployment of autonomous weapons. However, even if you are not prepared to make that declaration, we strongly urge you to clarify that the Replicator Initiative will not employ autonomous weapons.

Sincerely,

Public Citizen  
American Friends Service Committee  
Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network  
Backbone Campaign  
Demand Progress Education Fund  
Fight for the Future  
Future of Life  
National Priorities Project at the Institute for Policy Studies  
RootsAction.org  
United Church of Christ  
The Value Alliance  
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, US  
Win Without War  
World BEYOND War