Autonomous Weapons in Latin America: Organized Crime, Gendered Impacts and Activism for Regulation

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

◈ Risks of AWS proliferation and organized crime

◈ Gendered impacts of AWS

◈ Role of Latin American society in advancing regulation

Before starting:

Autonomous Weapons Systems (AWS)

- ICRC - Weapons systems capable of identifying and engaging targets independently, without human intervention.

- Rely on sensors and software to analyze the environment, comparing what they detect with a predefined "target profile."

- The application of force is based on data processed from sensor inputs rather than an immediate human order.

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Before starting:

AWS and IA

- While not all AWS depend on artificial intelligence, AI significantly enhances their capabilities, adding complexity to their operation.

- This escalation raises serious concerns about the predictability and transparency of these systems

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Risks of AWS proliferation and organized crime

Two categories of AWS:

- High-end systems: Advanced and expensive, requiring complex sensors and high-performance materials.

- Low-end systems: Simpler, more affordable, and often use civilian technologies like drones. Easier obtain, making them a greater risk for widespread proliferation.

Risks of AWS proliferation and organized crime

- Proliferation risk is higher with "low-end" systems, accessible to states unable to acquire advanced systems and to criminal organizations.

In Latin America, where organized crime is a major challenge, this risk is particularly critical.
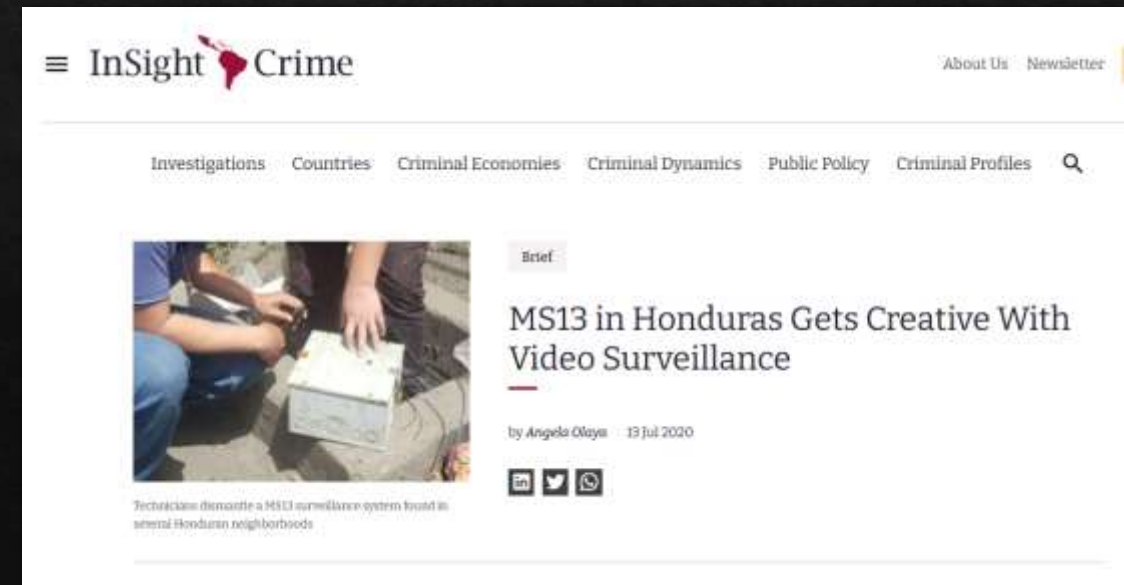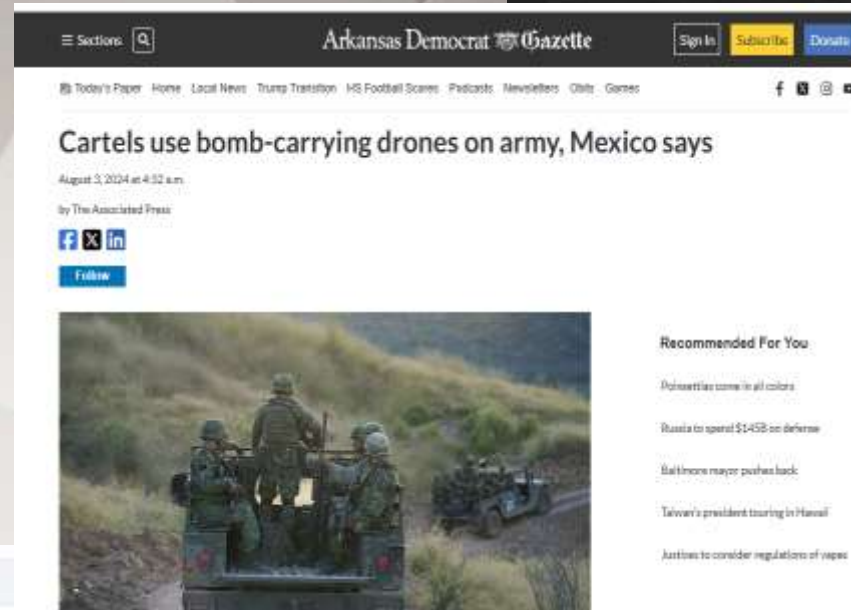
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Adaptable Hardware and Proliferation Risk

- Autonomous functions can be integrated into commercial drones, enabling military applications like explosive transport and surveillance.

- Non-state actors already leverage open platforms and smartphones to create simple autonomous weapons.

◇ Colombia: Dissident FARC factions use drones to drop explosives in rural areas (e.g., June 2024 incidents with homemade devices).

◇ Mexico: Cartels deploy drones for smuggling, surveillance, and attacks; the military reports casualties from bomb-dropping drones.

◇ Ecuador: Drones carry explosives into prisons, targeting infrastructure (e.g., La Roca facility incidents).

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Regional examples

Arkansas Democrat Gazette

Cartels use bomb-carrying drones on army, Mexico says

August 3, 2024 at 4:52 a.m.

by The Associated Press

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Drones: new terror tool for Colombian guerrillas

Bogotá (AFP) – Colombia's leftist guerrillas are increasingly relying on drones to drop explosives on rivals, sowing terror in rural areas and leaving the military scrambling.

Issued on: 21/06/2024 - 03:40

VOZ

WORLD

Ecuador: Drone bomb attack on maximum security prison foiled

The prison holds mafia bosses and politicians accused of corruption, as well as former Vice President Jorge Glas.

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Brief

MS13 in Honduras Gets Creative With Video Surveillance

by Angela Olaya   13 Jul 2020

Technicians dismantle a MS13 surveillance system found in several Honduran neighborhoods

Integration of Autonomy

- Autonomy in drones is enabled by commercially available tech: high-power chips, sensors, and software.

- Raises risks like surveillance, targeted attacks, or explosive delivery without direct human control.

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◈ Predictive algorithms: Could optimize smuggling routes by analyzing data in real-time to evade authorities.

◈ Dark web resources: Open-source platforms allow criminals to modify drones for narcotics delivery and surveillance.

◈ Extrajudicial use: Low-end AWS enable targeted killings with minimal risk of attribution, endangering dissidents, journalists, and activists.

Gendered Impacts of AWS and Organized Crime

Gender Biases in AI Systems

- Facial recognition systems exhibit high error rates for darker-skinned individuals, especially women in all their diversity.

- Risks: Misidentification, profiling as threats, and potential unjustified detentions or police violence.

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Women and people from marginalised groups at risk

- Racialised women (Afro-descendant, Indigenous). LGBTQ+, children, and individuals with disabilities.

- In regions with organized crime, AI can intensify surveillance, control, and violence against vulnerable groups.

◈ Unreliability of technology when applied to racialised women, as people from marginalised groups

◈ Acceleration of violence and intimidation, intensifying and amplifying the multiple forms of oppression and violence these groups already face.

◈ This impact would not be uniform.

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Gendered Impacts of AWS and Organized Crime

- Autonomos weapons – lethal in the hands of criminal groups seeking to intimidate, subdue, or eliminate human rights defenders, activists, or victims of trafficking trying to escape exploitation networks.

www.vocesdeconservacion.org

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Gendered Impacts of AWS and Organized Crime

- Autonomous weapons (AWS) in the context of organized crime could also reinforce a culture of impunity.

- AWS are not only a threat in terms of security but also in the perpetuation of systems of oppression that already affect women and people from marginalized groups.

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Activism for Regulation and Final Thoughts

- Civil society plays an indispensable role in highlighting the risks of AWS, especially in the hands of non-state actors and criminal organizations in Latin America.

- Since these systems can target and engage individuals autonomously, with little to no human oversight, they can become a tool for impunity in the hands of criminal organizations.

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Activism for Regulation and Final Thoughts

- The impact of their use on women, human rights defenders, and marginalised communities, already under threat of these criminal groups, could contribute on perpetuating cycles of abuse and exploitation.

- To underscore this disproportionate threat, it's crucial to ensure that these groups have a clear and prominent presence in those spaces where regulatory frameworks are being shaped.

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THANK YOU

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