Lethal autonomous weapons (military robots or ‘killer robots’) are a type of autonomous military robot that can independently search and destroy targets based on programmed descriptions. LAWs may operate in the air, on land, on water, under water, or in space. The autonomy of current systems is restricted in the sense that a human gives the final command to attack - though there are exceptions with certain "defensive" systems.

During World War I the US Army asked Charles Kettering to design an unmanned "flying bomb". Kettering's design known as the Kettering Bug, was built in 1918. Before takeoff, technicians determined the distance to the target. This was used to calculate the total number of engine revolutions needed for the Bug to reach its destination. When a total revolution counter reached, the engine was shut off and the wings fell of. The Bug began to fall into the target.

Unmanned systems improved after WW II. In 1948 U.S. Air Force request and contract to Ryan Aeronautical for a jet-powered gunnery target. Ryan designed Ryan Firebee a series of target drones. After that in 1962 Ryan Aeronautical manufactured an unmanned reconnaissance aircraft, jet-powered drone, the Model 147 Lightning Bug. Rayn Firebee and Model 147 saw extensive service by US Army in the Vietnam War. In 1971, Israel received AQM-34M. During the Yom Kippur War and used them against Egypt and Syria.

At present the most commonly used military robot is the unmanned aerial vehicle AAI RQ-2 Pioneer and RQ-1 Predator. The RQ-2 Pioneer was placed aboard Iowa-class battleships to provide gunnery spotting. They played a big role in the 1991 Gulf War, when a Pioneer launched by the Iowa-class battleship and observed Iraqi troops. They surrendered shortly after USS Missouri's attack on their trench lines. These robots can be armed with Air-to-ground missiles. We have also seen some research in the field of artillery with an experimental weapons system named ‘Dragon Fire II’. This weapon automates the loading and ballistics calculations required for accurate predicted fire.

By the start of the 21st century, the technology had matured, each year getting more effective and easier to use. Moreover, unmanned systems were garnering a portfolio of success stories that proved their value. Since the 2001 terrorist attacks on America, the amount spent on ground robots has roughly doubled each year, while the amount spent on aerial systems has grown by around 23 percent annually.

As U.S. forces deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq, they faced enemies that not only tried to hide among the civilian populace, but also used such indirect methods of attack as improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Such scenarios are tailor-made for UAVs, which can linger over a site to investigate potential threats, thus keeping soldiers from harm.

Science fiction writer Isaac Asimov wrote the three laws for robots, the first of which was: a robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.

The use of military robots is very common in our military today. Most of the military organizations used these robots to carry out different risky jobs. The use of autonomous fighters and bombers to destroy enemy targets is especially promising because of the lack of training required for robotic pilots. Autonomous planes are capable of performing maneuvers, which could not otherwise be done with human pilots. Loss of a plane does not mean a loss of a pilot. However, the largest drawback to robotics is their inability to accommodate for non-standard conditions. Advances in artificial intelligence in the near future may help to rectify this.

Some think that robots will never be able to fulfill their duties as soldiers, that they’ll never be able to truly deliberate and feel the weight of the decision to take a human life. Another popular argument is that if a robot should do something terrible, there will be no one to hold responsible. There would be no one to punish or court martial. This lack of accountability is disrespectful to our enemy and to the rules of war.