Autonomous weapons - divided allies? Impact of the development of unmanned and autonomous military technologies on functioning of alliances - case of NATO

The project will be dedicated to study the impact on the functioning of alliances as a collective defense organizations of the use in military operations of unmanned and autonomous technologies, including weapons. North Atlantic Treaty Organization will serve as a case study. Dynamic progress in information technologies, automatization and robotics, and most recently in Artificial Intelligence (AI), is resulting in deep changes in functioning of states and societies. That is visible also in military realm, being additionally interconnected to other trends, like growing focus – particularly in most developed countries (incl. NATO members) – on developing ability to reach a rival in "safe" manner, on long distance and "over the horizon", that is without the need of direct deployment of substantial forces in the area of operation, what reduce the risk of losses and casualties. Unmanned (already in use) and autonomous technologies (currently intensively researched) seems to fit well into these tendencies. Their development and use by NATO countries should have impact – at least due to possibly uneven level of advancement of works on such technologies among them – on functioning of this organization. Taking into account NATO exceptional in the world history potential and its significance for European and global security, that will have profound consequences for military relations or global stability, but – above all – security of allies, including Poland, who perceive NATO as the fundament of its security. All that show the importance of studying the links between development of unmanned and autonomous technologies and NATO functioning both from scientific perspective (as an occasion to improve understanding of NATO modes of operations, as well as the alliances in general) and in context of Polish security policy. Importantly, despite current growth of interest in researching NATO or – even more – such technologies, links between these two issues are heavily understudied.

The project will have three strongly interrelated goals: 1) assessing current state of development of unmanned and autonomous military technologies and their use in combat operations, including establishing the status of such weapons and their employment in international law; 2) analyzing in comprehensive manner the implications of acquiring and use of these technologies by NATO members (or potential competitors) on functioning of the Alliance, ways of conducting military operations by NATO, intra-alliance relations and the Organization's international position; 3) assessment of the awareness of the challenges posed by the development of unmanned and autonomous technologies for NATO and global security among the Alliance's international staff and the authorities of selected members.

The research will be of primarily qualitative character, constituting comprehensive analysis of relevant legal and official documents and various academic and professional studies (desk research), supplemented by direct data collection in form of interviews with experts on military issues, NATO staff and representatives of governments or defense industry from the member states.

The main result of the project will be a series of publications, consisted of articles for respected international and Polish academic journals and "crowned" with the twin-monographs (in Polish and English) presenting key results of the research. That will include assessment of the current level of advancement of such technologies, ways of their use by NATO allies now and potentially in future, international legal status of such weapons and their employment and possible changes in this respect, but, above all, comprehensive picture of the implications of the development and use of unmanned and autonomous technologies on NATO functioning, cooperation between allies, frequency of undertaking by the Alliance of combat operations and the mode of their execution. Project's participants will also present the results of the research on scientific conferences in Poland and abroad. Special report for wider audience, in Polish and English and available on-line, will also be prepared. All that will help to broaden knowledge on unmanned and autonomous technologies and the possible future use of them or on the factors that determine functioning of alliances, NATO in particular, as well as to improve awareness of challenges that accompany development of these technologies.