

Measures to restrict the use of lethal autonomous underwater vehicles (LAUVs) in modern naval warfare

Background

LAUVs (also sometimes referred to as UUVs, though that is a broader category) as a separately developed concept from other LAWS (lethal autonomous weapons systems) is a relatively new phenomenon, only really gaining relevance in spheres of politics and media in the last couple of years. This obviously doesn't mean that militaries across the world have not been utilising this concept.

Essentially being a combination of the drone and the torpedo, LAUVs have risen to prominence in 2024 during the war in Ukraine, when Ukraine managed to sink a fully equipped ship of war exclusively using naval drones for the first time in recorded human history (for further information, look up the sinking of the missile corvette Ivanovets). While these naval drones were surface dwelling, this event opened the doors to further research on the subject of LAUVs.

As opposed to homing torpedoes, LAUVs are meant for long-range missions, often more strategic than tactical in nature. They utilise navigation systems instead of guidance systems and are generally less sophisticated and expensive than said torpedoes (atleast in the current stage of their development).

Current regulation is basically nonexistent, but the UNCLOS provides a very basic framework.

Questions to ask yourself:

- 1) Is it in my country's interest to actually restrict such weapons?
- 2) Could my country be more proficient at development of LAUVs than others and thus gain a competitive edge or a valuable export?
- 3) Does your nations security guarantor or other major ally have a strong opinion on this matter?
- 4) Does your nation have valuable shore-based infrastructure that could be threatened by such LAUVs?
- 5) Does your nation generally take a strong moral stance on such topics and if so, what is the correct moral stance here?

Sources and interesting articles on the topic:

https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf

<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/12/20/the-emergence-of-weaponized-unmanned-under-water-vehicles-uuvs/>

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15027570.2018.1552512>