Autonomy and Uncertainty: Liability for Ultra-hazardous activity and the regulation of the development of autonomous weapons

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Chairperson: Professor Simon Chesterman, Dean (NUS Faculty of Law)

29 April 2015, Wednesday, 4:00 PM to 6:00 PM
Executive Seminar Room, Level 3, BLK B
Faculty of Law, NUS, Bukit Timah Campus

Synopsis
The debate concerning the international legality of Autonomous Weapons Systems is at any early stage, but has already generated considerable polemical position-taking, pro and contra. This paper argues that the existing debate does not take uncertainty seriously enough, and moves too quickly to embrace untested empirical claims about the expected nature of weapons system autonomy and its virtues or vices. Uncertainty can be discerned at two levels: first, in the very concept of autonomy in weapons systems; and second, uncertainty of behavior as a parameter of the functioning of the autonomous weapons system itself. Both of these dimensions of uncertainty pose problems for legal regulation: the first generates difficulties for categorical prohibitions, and requires us to think carefully about what kinds of functioning are of particular legal concern once they are delegated to a machine. The second kind of uncertainty generates a problem of foreseeability in functioning that may well complicate how we evaluate the legality of autonomous weapons systems under existing primary norms of international humanitarian law.

About the Speaker
Nehal Bhuta is Professor of Public International Law at the EUI. He is also co-director of the Academy of European Law, and of the Global Governance Program’s Global Governance by Indicators project. He is a member of the editorial boards of the European Journal of International Law, the Journal of International Criminal Justice, Constellations, and Humanity. He is also a series editor (with Anthony Pagden and Benjamin Straumann) of the new Oxford University Press series in the History and Theory of International Law. He came to the EUI from the New School for Social Research, and before that taught at the University Of Toronto Faculty Of Law. Before entering academia, he worked with Human Rights Watch and the International Center for Transitional Justice. He is currently working on a book on the concept and theory of the state in Grotius, Pufendorf and Vattel.

Registration
There is no registration fee for this seminar but seats are limited. To register, please click here and you will receive an automated message upon submission. For enquiries, please contact Alexandria at Tel: 6601 2693 or email us at clemail@nus.edu.sg

Closing date: 24 April 2015, Friday
Directions to the law school may be found at http://law.nus.edu.sg/about_us/location.html