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AI-DRIVEN TARGETING AND CIVILIAN HARM: EXAMINING ISRAELI MILITARY PRACTICES IN GAZA

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Abstract

Background: The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into modern warfare has transformed military decision-making, particularly in target identification. In the Gaza war, reports have highlighted the use of an AI system known as "Lavender," developed by Israeli intelligence, to generate lists of individuals for potential targeting. Investigations suggest that this system processed vast surveillance data to identify tens of thousands of Palestinians as suspected militants, often with limited human oversight . This raises serious concerns regarding compliance with international humanitarian law, especially the principles of distinction and proportionality.

Objectives: This study examines how AI-driven targeting systems, particularly Lavender, have contributed to patterns of civilian harm in Gaza. It aims to analyze the relationship between algorithmic decision-making, military practices, and potential violations of international legal frameworks, including the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute.

Methods: The research adopts a qualitative methodology based on investigative journalism sources, legal analysis, and secondary literature. It relies on documented testimonies from intelligence officers, reports by investigative platforms such as +972 Magazine, and academic discussions on AI ethics in warfare. The study applies a critical human rights framework to assess the legality and accountability of AI-assisted targeting practices.

Results: Findings indicate that Lavender significantly accelerated the targeting process by automating the identification of suspected individuals. Reports shows up to 37,000 individuals were flagged as targets, with decisions often made under time pressure and minimal verification . The system reportedly operated with a degree of statistical error and was used alongside permissive strike policies, increasing the likelihood of civilian casualties. In some cases, attacks targeted individuals in residential settings, contributing to the destruction of entire families. Evidence also suggests that AI prioritization emphasized speed over accuracy, fundamentally altering traditional safeguards in military targeting

Conclusion: The use of AI systems such as Lavender represents a significant shift toward automated warfare, where algorithmic outputs can influence life-and-death decisions. This study concludes that such

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practices risk undermining legal accountability by diffusing responsibility between human operators and technological systems. The findings highlight the urgent need for international regulation of AI in armed conflict, emphasizing human oversight, transparency, and adherence to humanitarian law. Without such safeguards, AI-driven warfare may contribute to systematic civilian harm and challenge existing mechanisms of justice and accountability.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Gaza, Lavender AI, Targeted Killing, Civilian Harm, International Humanitarian Law, Algorithmic Warfare, Human Rights, Military Ethics, Genocide

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