

Curbing Social Dissent: “Non-Lethal” Weapons to be Used in “Homeland Security”?

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Global Research, September 05, 2009

[Antifascist Calling](#) 6 September 2009

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

When the U.S. military planned to deploy Raytheon’s Active Denial System (ADS) in Iraq, it set off a political firestorm. How couldn’t it?

Known for its “goodbye effect,” the so-called “pain ray” is a “non-lethal” directed energy weapon that repels “rioters” and other disreputable citizens by heating the outer surface of the skin to 130 degrees F. in short, directed bursts. With a range of some 550 yards, the microwave beam can penetrate clothing and its effects have been described by test subjects as nothing less than “excruciating.”

The prospect that American “liberators” would soon be zapping “unruly mobs,” that is, Iraqi citizens objecting to the destruction of their country and the looting of their resource-rich nation by Western (corporate) invaders proved to be a public relations nightmare for the Pentagon.

The Defense Science Board concluded that an ADS deployment was “not politically tenable,” because of a “possible association with torture” if the system were used at detention centers to ensure “compliance” from recalcitrant prisoners.

Last year I [reported](#) (see: “‘Non-Lethal’ Weapons: Where Science and Technology Service Repression,” July 8, 2008), that the Pentagon’s Joint Non-Lethal Weapons Directorate ([JNLWD](#)) claimed that ADS “is helping to fill the gap between the ‘shout’ and ‘shoot’ alternatives faced by our troops.” But standing up ADS in the Iraqi “theatre” was not to be.

However, as readers of *Antifascist Calling* are well-aware, being an imperialist empire means never to have to say you’re sorry. Time for Plan B!

Coming Soon to the Homeland

According to a blurb on Raytheon’s [web site](#), the commercial version of ADS known as Silent Guardian “is a revolutionary less-than-lethal directed energy application that employs millimeter wave technology to repel individuals or crowds without causing injury.”

Touted as providing a “zone of protection that saves lives, protects assets and minimizes collateral damage” the system is marketed as the ideal tool to “establish intent and de-escalate aggression.” Commercial and military application envisaged for the system “include law enforcement, checkpoint security, facility protection, force protection and peacekeeping missions.” Some “peace,” eh?!

Capitalizing on the profit-rich “homeland security” market, *Wired* [reported](#) that Raytheon

has announced an “impending direct commercial sale” of a miniature version of ADS to law enforcement agencies.

This is Active Denial in a box, a 10,000-pound containerized system that can be mounted on a ship, a truck, or a fixed installation. It’s got an effective range of about 250 meters. The beam has a power of around 30 kilowatts. (David Hambling, “‘Pain Ray’ First Commercial Sale Looms,” *Wired*, August 5, 2009)

While Hambling may believe it “paradoxical” that “the controversial ‘pain beam’ may be more acceptable in the civilian market than in the military,” I’d beg to differ.

Given the empire’s utter contempt for its citizens (witness the despicable “debate” by various grifting congressional factions over what is ludicrously described as health care “reform”—a cynical display of bellying up to the corporatist bar if ever there were one!), why would any sane person not believe that *heimat* securocrats wouldn’t zap union malcontents during a strike, environmental activists protesting outside a polluting company’s headquarters or an unruly crowd of pensioners demanding their looted savings back from any number of dodgy banks grown fat on TARP funds?

“Tough luck, suckers! Have a ‘taste’ of Silent Guardian!”

No. 5 on *Washington Technology’s* 2009 “[Top 100 List](#),” of Prime Federal Contractors, Raytheon carries a lot of clout with Congress and the Pentagon. With some \$5,942,575,316 in revenue from its defense portfolio, the Waltham, Mass. firm’s major customers include the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security.

Not that being a behemoth isn’t without its pitfalls. According to the Project on Government Oversight’s [Federal Contractor Misconduct Database](#), Raytheon clocks in at No. 5 as a company with a history of “misconduct such as contract fraud and environmental, ethics, and labor violations.”

With some some 17 instances of what POGO characterizes as serious breeches ranging from overcharges, contractor kickbacks, False Claims Act Violations, to violations of SEC Rules, groundwater contamination and racial discrimination, Raytheon has been tagged for some \$475.8 million in what the government watchdog group calls it’s “total misconduct dollar amount.”

Not that any of this matters in Washington. According to the Center for Responsive Politics’ OpenSecrets.org [database](#), Raytheon’s Political Action Committee bestowed some \$2.4 million in campaign contributions on the best politicians money can buy, with some 55% of the total going to grifting Democrats. A perusal of the [recipients](#) of Raytheon largess during the last election cycle provides insight into how the well-greased wheels really spin.

“Liberal” or “conservative,” “dove” or “hawk” it doesn’t matter, just keep those contracts flowing! And when it comes to “homeland security” no expense will be spared!

According to *Wired*, while the firm believes that Silent Guardian “might have all sorts of applications in law enforcement, prisons and protecting installations,” the firm told the publication that although the system “has attracted widespread interest ... it would be premature for us to discuss any sales until contracts are signed.”

Although Raytheon isn't saying what the price tag for Silent Guardian will cost cash-strapped municipalities staggering under the hammer blows of the current capitalist economic meltdown, most analysts believe the system will cost several million dollars to purchase and maintain.

Not everyone is thrilled however, by the prospect of local SWAT teams zapping citizens with a microwave weapon. Neil Davison, a researcher at the University of Bradford's [Non-Lethal Weapons Research Project](#) in the UK, told *Wired* "as the costs and size drop, expect police forces to become more and more interested. This is where function creep will become a problem. With current controversies over the misuse of the Taser, the spread of new military weapons technologies to the civilian realm does not seem like a very sensible way to go."

But "go" it must and most assuredly will.

As I [reported](#) in June (see: "Look! Up in the Sky! It's a Bird... It's a Plane... It's a Raytheon Spy Blimp!"), the spread of military technology into the homeland security market isn't limited to non-lethal weapons.

The deployment of Raytheon's Rapid Aerostat Initial Deployment spy blimp known as RAID, is kitted-out with "electro-optic infrared, radar, flash and acoustic detectors."

Perfect for spying on antiwar demonstrators from a safe perch in the clouds, the firm's use of blimps "carrying high-tech sensors to detect threats" will "enable appropriate countermeasures" from law enforcement, according to a company [press release](#). Some 300 RAID airships have already been deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

More "Venom" from Our Capitalist Masters

Should Raytheon's "pain beam" not do the trick, Combined Systems Inc. ([CSI](#)), a subsidiary of The Carlyle Group, may have just the right product for enterprising homeland security bureaucrats and their corporate partners.

The firm, acquired by Carlyle in 2005, is described in a blurb on Carlyle's [web site](#) as a manufacturer of "branded less-lethal munitions, anti-riot products and other related products that serve the military and law enforcement markets in the United States and abroad."

Wired [reported](#) in late August that "the Marine Corps has issued an [urgent request](#) for a powerful non-lethal weapon that can fire volleys of 40mm grenades. And in parallel, the service is launching a push for a more futuristic version of the same weapon."

One might also add, such a monstrous "non-lethal" system will inevitably have homeland security applications after a bit of tweaking is done to create a scalable version useful to those who "protect and serve."

Dubbed the Venom Non-Lethal Tube Munition System ([NL/TMS](#)) by CSI, according to the firm Venom "is a modular launching system accepting three cassettes, each loaded with ten cartridges (V-30) or the scaled-down, lightweight and portable version accepting one cassette (V-10). Both versions can be integrated into a variety of fire control systems. Each cartridge is assigned an IP address allowing individual cartridge or desired sequence firing from a fire control panel, communicating via cable or wireless device."

Unsurprisingly, an assigned IP address can mean only one thing: that Venom is RFID-chipped for inventory control and, as part of the “internet of things” described by researchers Katherine Albrecht and Liz McIntyre in their essential book [Spychips](#) every commodity—from breakfast cereal to weapons—have their own web page. Convenient, isn’t it! According to *Wired*,

Venom is essentially a modern version of the old multi-barreled cannon used to fight off boarders in naval actions, but in non-lethal form. It’s designed for firing at crowds, and many of the munition options contain sub-projectiles to enhance the “shotgun” effect. These include a load of 24 .60 cal hard rubber stingballs, 160 smaller stingballs, foam batons, and “multi flash bang” projectiles. Venom can also fire CS gas projectiles, but these are strictly off-limits for military operations (unless you happen to work for Blackwater). It can also be used for smoke and marker rounds. (David Hambling, “Marines Seek Crowd-Blasting ‘Venom’ Launcher,” *Wired*, August 24, 2009)

Which just goes to show as I’ve pointed out many times, “what happens in Vegas” certainly doesn’t stay there! This bitter truth is all the more compelling when you consider the tens of billions of dollars at stake as the military market literally bleeds over into the homeland security bazaar; a marketing guru’s wet dream that possesses unlimited horizons.

But let’s understand one inescapable fact about life in the United States, a veritable open air asylum fronting as a democratic republic: we’re so much disposable chaff to be tossed aside by our masters, marginalized when the need arises or violently repressed when all other means have failed.

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