

Exposed: The Military's Freakiest 'Non-Lethal' Weapon Ideas

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Tasers that [elicit excruciating spasms in one person](#) at a time? Foam pellets that send an entire crowd fleeing in agony? Pfft. So 2011. Where non-lethal weapons are concerned, the future's all about sonic microwaves that can make swimmers puke mid-stroke, and aircraft with laser beams that can redirect an entire enemy plane mid-flight.

Or, at least, those are the deepest, darkest wishes of the Pentagon agency responsible for non-lethal weapons.

The military's Joint Non-Lethal Weapons Directorate's "Non-Lethal Weapons Reference Book," leaked online last week by [PublicIntelligence.org](#), is a terrifying treasure trove that describes dozens of ways — some already in-use, others in development or still mere fantasy — for military and law enforcement officials to make you *wish* they were using the real bullets.

A total of 14 weapons, according to the reference book, are currently being fielded. Some of 'em, you've heard of. Good old tasers, which the guide helpfully reminds us "can penetrate 2 inches of clothing" in order to "totally disable an individual," and guns that shoot 600 rubber pellets filled with pepper spray to keep rowdy crowds — [already used](#) by law enforcement officials, sometimes with very lethal results — subdued.

Most of the guide, however, offers a sneak peak at the military's dream non-lethal arms cache.



Dozens of the devices are currently in development. There's an "Impulse Swimmer Gun" that uses "pulsed sound waves" to cause "auditory impairment and/or nausea" among scuba divers engaged in "unauthorized underwater activities"; A system that relies on "high-power microwaves" to block oncoming cars and any (oops) "unintended targets within the target area"; A vehicle-mounted tube launcher that'll unleash "ocular and auditory impairment" combined with "thermal heating" to utterly devastate a horde of wrongdoers.

And then there are the fantasy projects. The agency want a new and improved taser that can “substantially increase the duration of disabling effects.” They’re also after a high-powered microwave system that can be hooked up to a drone or a ship, and then used to trigger “electrical system malfunction” on enemy boats. Danger Room’s personal favorite, though, is a system of “pulsed laser[s]” on the tip of an airplane, used to “externally control the steering forces” of a foe’s aircraft, in order to “divert [it] from restricted area.”



Of course, the directorate can’t spend all its time dreaming up torturous new toys. They’ve still gotta fix the busted up old ones.

Take their oft-derided “Active Denial System,” (ADS) a pain beam likened by [one Pentagon official](#) to “an intolerable heating sensation...like opening up an oven door.”

The system cost a whopping \$55 million to develop before being canceled in 2008, only to be hustled into Afghanistan two years later despite myriad technical problems that made the ADS “logistic[ally] too tough to bring to a warzone.”

Now, the directorate is after a next-gen model. Among their conceptual projects is an ADS that’d actually work, thanks to “drastically reduce[d] size, weight, cost...and ‘shoot-on-the-move’ capabilities.” But why stop there? The directorate also wants an aerial ADS, to beam out burning sensations from above.

There’s no question that folks at JNLWD have some freaky fantasies on the brain. But it’s unclear just how many of the systems being created or dreamed up will ever make it to widespread use.

After all, as a [GAO report noted](#) in 2008, the agency has yet to successfully, you know, “develop any new weapons.” Good thing, considering they’ve also failed to figure out what constitutes an “acceptable risk” for human targets of the non-lethal arms.

Images: U.S. Army; JNLWD

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