

High-tech Barbarism:: Look! Up in the Sky! It's a Bird... It's a Plane... It's a Raytheon Spy Blimp!

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As the American republic's long death-spiral continues apace, newer and ever more insidious technologies usher us towards an age of high-tech barbarism. At first glance Newsweek [reveals](#), "there was nothing special about the blimp floating high above the cars and crowd at this year's Indy 500 on Memorial Day weekend."

"Nothing special" that is, until you took a closer look. What you then discovered was another quintessentially American innovation, all the more chilling for its bland ubiquity. A silent, hovering sentinel linking commerce and repression; a perfect trope for our ersatz democracy. "Like most airships" Newsweek continued, "it acted as an advertising vehicle."

But the real promo should have been for the blimp's creator, Raytheon, the security company best known for its weapons systems. Hidden inside the 55-foot-long white balloon was a powerful surveillance camera adapted from the technology Raytheon provides the U.S. military.

Essentially an unmanned drone, the blimp transmitted detailed images to the race's security officers and to Indiana police. "The airship is great because it doesn't have that Big Brother feel, or create feelings of invasiveness," says Lee Silvestre, vice president of mission innovation in Raytheon's Integrated Defense division. "But it's still a really powerful security tool." (Kurt Soller, "Are You Being Watched? The blimp flying above your head may be watching your every move," Newsweek, June 11, 2009)

"It doesn't have that Big Brother feel" and yet here, as elsewhere, the "feelings of invasiveness" are implicit, unseen, invisible, the securitized DNA giving form and structure to the Empire's "new normal."

Imported from America's aggressive wars of conquest in Iraq and Afghanistan and now deployed in the heimat, sprawling intelligence and security bureaucracies have teamed-up with corporate [scofflaws](#) to fill a market niche, inflating the bottom-line at the expense of a cherished freedom: the right to be left alone.

But as Antifascist Calling has noted many times, "what happens in Vegas" certainly doesn't stay there, a point driven home by Raytheon.

"Anticipating requirements for innovative and affordable ways to provide intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR)," according to a company [press release](#), "Raytheon is using aerostats—modern blimps or balloons—carrying high-tech sensors to detect threats on the ground and in the air at distances that enable appropriate countermeasures."

Known as RAID (Rapid Aerostat Initial Deployment) the system is kitted-out with “electro-optic infrared, radar, flash and acoustic detectors.” According to the firm, some 300 have been deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. The same military version, as Newsweek reported and Raytheon confirmed, “demonstrated to officials concerned with security and spectator safety its value by providing situational awareness in what is billed as one of the largest sporting events of the year.”

Indeed Charles Burns, the director of Corporate Security for the Indy Racing League said in the company’s press release: “Conducting this demo with Raytheon gives us the opportunity to evaluate new and innovative technology that keeps our venues safe and optimizes the racing experience for our fans.”

Along with a suite of sensors and high resolution video cameras, RAID’s digitized mapping tools are similar to those developed for the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency ([NGA](#)). In tandem with a preprogrammed mapping grid of the target location, the system can scan a wide area and relay video clips to a centralized command center.

Captured data known as GEOINT, or geospatial intelligence, is “tailored for customer-specific solutions” according to NGA. That agency along with its “sister” organization, the National Reconnaissance Office ([NRO](#)), the super-secret agency that develops and flies America’s fleet of spy satellites are also among the most heavily-outsourced departments in the so-called Intelligence Community.

As investigative journalist Tim Shorrock points out in his essential book, [Spies For Hire](#), giant defense firms such as Raytheon and Northrop Grumman “with assistance from Republican lawmakers from the House Intelligence Committee,” helped launch a lobby shop for the industry in 2004, the United States Geospatial Intelligence Foundation ([USGIF](#)).

Self-described as a “not-for-profit educational foundation,” USGIF “is the only organization dedicated to promoting the geospatial intelligence tradecraft and building a stronger community of interest across industry, academia, government, professional organizations and individual stakeholders.” Since its formation, USGIF has expanded to some 154 companies and state agencies and has an annual budget that exceeds \$1 million.

“[Strategic partners](#)” include the usual suspects, corporate heavy-hitters such as Northrop Grumman, Raytheon, Science Applications International Corporation, Boeing, Booz Allen Hamilton, Lockheed Martin, BAE Systems, IBM, Google, AT&T, Microsoft, The MITRE Corporation, and L3 Communications. Additionally, niche companies such as Analytical Graphics, Inc., DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Intergraph, PCI Geomatics, TechniGraphics, Inc., flesh-out USGIF’s roster.

In this context, the public roll-out of RAID is all the more pressing for securocrats and the companies they serve since Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano “plans to kill a program begun by the Bush administration that would use U.S. spy satellites for domestic security and law enforcement,” the Associated Press [reported](#) June 22.

That program, the National Applications Office (NAO) was first announced by the Bush regime in 2007 and was mired in controversy from the get-go. As Antifascist Calling [reported](#) last year, NAO would coordinate how domestic law enforcement and “disaster relief” agencies such as FEMA utilize GEOINT and imagery intelligence (IMINT) generated by U.S. spy satellites. But as with other heimat security schemes there was little in the way of

oversight and zero concern for the rights of the American people.

The intrusiveness of the program was so severe that even Rep. Jane Harman (D-CA), the author of the despicable “Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007” (H.R. 1955) vowed to pull the plug. Chairwoman of the Homeland Security Committee’s Intelligence, Information Sharing and Terrorism Risk Assessment subcommittee, Harman introduced legislation earlier this month that would have shut down NAO immediately while prohibiting the agency from spending money on NAO or similar programs.

When the bill was introduced, Harman told [Federal Computer Week](#): “Imagine, for a moment, what it would be like if one of these satellites were directed on your neighborhood or home, a school or place of worship—and without an adequate legal framework or operating procedures in place for regulating their use. I daresay the reaction might be that Big Brother has finally arrived and the black helicopters can’t be far behind. Yet this is precisely what the Department of Homeland Security has done in standing up the benign-sounding National Applications Office, or NAO.”

According to the [Los Angeles Times](#), Napolitano reached a decision to cut NAO off at the knees “after consulting with state and local law enforcement officials and learning that they had far more pressing priorities than using satellites to collect information and eavesdrop on people.”

Perhaps those “pressing priorities” could be better served by a low-key approach, say the deployment of a system such as RAID? After all, what’s so threatening about a blimp?

It comes as no surprise then, that the next target for Raytheon marketeers are precisely local police departments and sports facilities “that want to keep an eye on crowds that might easily morph into an unruly mob,” as Newsweek delicately put it.

Nathan Kennedy, Raytheon’s project manager for the spy blimp told the publication, “large municipalities could find many uses for this [technology] once we figure out how to get it in their hands.”

While the company refuses to divulge what this intrusive system might actually cost cash-strapped localities drastically cutting social services for their citizens as America morphs into a failed state, municipalities “without a Pentagon-size police budget” could look at the airship’s “potential to display ads [that] may assist with financing.”

Raytheon claims that local authorities fearful of succumbing to what I’d call a dreaded “surveillance airship gap,” could install “a built-in LED screen to attract sponsors, generate revenue and defer operating costs.”

How convenient!

However, Raytheon’s slimmed-down surveillance airship is a spin-off from a larger Pentagon project.

Among other high-tech, privacy-killing tools currently under development is the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency’s ([DARPA](#)) Integrated Sensor Is Structure ([ISIS](#)) program. As conceived by the agency, ISIS will be a high-altitude autonomous airship built for the U.S. Air Force that can operate at 70,000 feet and stay aloft for a decade.

Washington Technology [reported](#) April 29, that Lockheed Martin won a \$400 million deal to design the system. “Under the contract” the publication revealed, “Lockheed Martin will provide systems integration services, and Raytheon Co. will furnish a high-energy, low-power density radar, Lockheed Martin officials said.”

Operating six miles above the earth’s surface, well out of range of surface-to-air missiles, the airship will be some 450 feet long, powered by hydrogen fuel cells and packed with electronic surveillance gear and radar currently being field-tested by Raytheon.

Projects such as ISIS reflect a shift in Pentagon planning and spending priorities. Under Bush regime holdover, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, the military plans to leverage America’s technological advantage to improve intelligence and surveillance capabilities at the expense of over-inflated big ticket items such as the F-22 Raptor or new Navy destroyers.

Gates and others in the Pentagon believe a shift towards “robust ISR platforms” will better facilitate the Pentagon’s new paradigm: waging multiple, counterinsurgency wars of conquest to secure natural resources and strategic advantage vis-à-vis imperialism’s geopolitical rivals.

But military might and technological preeminence, however formidable, represented by the Pentagon’s quixotic quest for total “situational awareness” promised by platforms such as ISIS and RAID, will no more ameliorate the Empire’s extreme political weakness than putting a band-aid over a gangrenous lesion changes the outcome for a dying patient.

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