

“Non-Lethal Weapons”: An Instrument of Social Control

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Although so-called non-lethal weapons (NLWs) have been around for decades and range from CS gas to pepper spray and from the low-tech water cannon to the Taser, their use by military and police agencies world-wide are designed to ensure compliance from hostile “natives.”

And with ever-more devilish torture tools being dreamed up by the likes of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency ([DARPA](#)) and the Joint Non-Lethal Weapons Program ([JNLWP](#)), it's a safe bet that migration from the military to civilian law enforcement agencies will continue at its current break-neck pace.

In this context, San Diego's *East County Magazine* and progressive [Liberty One Radio reported](#), ironically enough on September 11, that the San Diego Sheriff's Department stationed a Long-Range Acoustic Device (LRAD) during recent town hall forums.

Manufactured by American Technology Corporation ([ATC](#)), the firm's LRAD 500-x is a dual-purpose device: a powerful hailer and a non-lethal weapon capable of producing ear-shattering sounds highly-damaging to their human targets.

ATC's technology has been deployed in Iraq as an “anti-insurgent weapon” and off the coast of Somalia to fight off desperate “pirates,” that is, former Somali fishermen whose livelihood has been destroyed by over-fishing by foreign factory fleets and toxic dumping, including [nuclear waste](#), by Western polluters.

No matter, time to break out the sonic blasters!

Developed for the U.S. Navy in the wake of the 2000 attack on the U.S.S. Cole, cruise ship Captain Michael Groves “successfully repelled pirates off the Somali coast using non-lethal weapons including an LRAD. Groves has since filed suit against Carnival Cruise Line, claiming he suffered permanent hearing loss as a result,” *East County Magazine* reports.

The BBC [noted](#) in 2005 that the “shrill sound of an LRAD at its loudest sounds something like a domestic smoke alarm, ATC says, but at 150 decibels, it is the aural equivalent to standing 30m away from a roaring jet engine and can cause major hearing damage if misused.”

According to ATC's web site, “LRAD resolves uncertain situations and potentially saves lives on both sides of the device by combining powerful voice commands and deterrent tones with focused acoustic output to clearly transmit highly intelligible instructions and warnings well beyond 500 meters.”

While the defense establishment and their civilian counterparts dismiss concerns that acoustic weapons pose a danger to their targets, the Bradford Non-Lethal Weapons Research Project [noted](#) in 2006:

Juergen Altmann, who is conducting an independent scientific assessment of acoustic weapons, has warned that there is risk of hearing damage to people exposed to the beam at ranges of up to 100m. ... An added difficulty with ensuring no permanent damage is that some people are more susceptible to noise-induced hearing loss than others and hearing damage can occur at levels below the threshold for ear pain. A report from the US Army's 361st Psychological Operations Company gives an idea of the powerful effects of the LRAD: 'During distance tests at 100 meters, the sound was painful to listeners, even with hands held over the ears and ear plugs in'." (Neil Davison, Nick Lewer, Bradford Non-Lethal Weapons Research Project, Research Report No. 8, March 2006, pp. 33-34)

Far from being employed as a means to "reduce casualties," its actual use lends itself to the opposite effect. In Iraq, for example the U.S. Army's 361st Psychological Operations Company noted that "The LRAD has proven useful for clearing streets and rooftops during cordon and search, for disseminating command information, and for drawing out enemy snipers who are subsequently destroyed by our own snipers."

In a civilian setting, one can easily envisage groups of "rioters" being sonically blasted prior to street clearing operations by heavily-armed SWAT teams. Kevin Keenan, the executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union told *East County Magazine*:

"It's very concerning. It is fine for the Sheriff's Department to have new less-than-lethal weapons, but for their interactions with individuals these still-dangerous weapons need to be used only as substitutes for firearms. They can't be used as just another tool on the tool belt. As we've seen with tasers and pepper spray, these types of weapons are being used to subdue people even though they pose the risk of serious physical harm."

He added, "Even more concerning is having these weapons for public order policing. I can imagine no situation, or am not aware of any situation that's ever happened in San Diego County or is likely to happen that would justify using these weapons for public order policing to control a crowd. The main effect of having those weapons at public events is to chill people and chill free speech and free association." (Miriam Raftery, "Sonic Weapons Used in Iraq Positioned at Congressional Town Hall Meetings in San Diego County," *East County Magazine*, September 11, 2009)

I would add however, the purpose of these weapons is *precisely* to "chill free speech and free association," thus ensuring compliance to the whims of our capitalist masters.

Research into more "effective" low-cost acoustic NLWs are gathering steam. *Wired* [reported](#) September 1 that a "Tennessee lab primarily responsible for building components for nuclear weapons is branching off into the nonlethal weapons business."

Called the Banshee II, the weapon emits a piercing 144-decibel sound that is designed to be more than just annoying. "It also has a frequency-switching system that pumps your ear drums, so it sounds like there's a drum beating there," the inventor tells *Knoxnews.com*. "You physically feel it in your ear

drum.” (Sharon Weinberger, “Nuke Lab Builds ‘Beating Drum’ Sonic Blaster, Wired, September 1, 2009)

While such devices never caught on with the military its inventor, so-called nuke “gadget guru” Fariborz Bzorgi who works at the Y-12 nuclear plant in Tennessee “hopes the Banshee II could have broader applications for law enforcement.”

No doubt they will. As Neil Davison, the author of the recently published “*Non-Lethal Weapons* [points out](#), military and police moves towards “effects-based” NLWs are consistent with requirements “for weapons with greater range, more precise delivery, and rheostatic effects from ‘non-lethal’ to ‘lethal’.”

Davison cites the LRAD and other acoustic devices as “the only new technologies that have emerged” in the last several years and pointedly notes that “all these weapons have emerged from the private sector.”

That they have should hardly come as a surprise.

After all as *Homeland Security Weekly* [reported](#) in 2007, “homeland security spending is a massive and highly lucrative new market.” With an expected growth rate between “eight and ten percent annually over the next five years” the publication claims that “the addressable U.S. market over the next five years will be in the range of approximately \$140 billion, a 21 percent increase over our five-year estimate made in 2004.”

As the Center for Investigative Reporting [revealed](#), *heimat* grifting and massive waste go hand in hand:

- Cities and agencies bought things with grant money that would not make California a safer place. One county tried to use anti-terrorism funds for a lawnmower but it was blocked at the last minute. Another county succeeded in buying a big-screen television.
- Dozens of cities and agencies failed to keep adequate records on how they spent the money. In some cases, the poor record keeping resulted in thousands of dollars worth of overpayments to local agencies. In other cases, agencies were unable to find where they stored their own equipment.
- Communities repeatedly bought large and small-ticket items without seeking competitive bids. Federal procurement rules designed to protect the taxpayer weren’t used on millions of dollars in new communications systems, night-vision goggles and bomb-disposal robots. (G.W. Schulz, “Homeland Security Marked by Waste, Lack of Oversight,” Center for Investigative Reporting, September 11, 2009)

While schools go unfunded, infrastructure collapses and affordable health care for all is an unattainable pipe dream, police and intelligence agencies are having a field day—at our expense. Call it part of the “counterterrorism stimulus” package that our corporate security masters are hell-bent on shoving down our throats.

However you slice it, there’s a lot of boodle to be had by enterprising defense and security grifters. Alongside current multibillion dollar outlays for “biodefense” and counterterrorism initiatives by a multitude of state and federal agencies, the development of ever more

dubious “non-lethal” weapons, implements for compliance and control during the capitalist meltdown, will enjoy a steady growth curve long into the future.

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