

Robocops Come to Pittsburgh

...and bring the latest weaponry with them

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No longer the stuff of disturbing futuristic fantasies, an arsenal of “crowd control munitions,” including one that reportedly made its debut in the U.S., was deployed with a massive, overpowering police presence in Pittsburgh during last week’s G-20 protests.

Nearly 200 arrests were made and civil liberties groups charged the many thousands of police (most transported on Port Authority buses displaying “PITTSBURGH WELCOMES THE WORLD”), from as far away as Arizona and Florida with overreacting...and they had plenty of weaponry with which to do it.

Bean bags fired from shotguns, [CS \(tear\)](#) gas, [OC](#) (Oleoresin Capsicum) spray, flash-bang grenades, batons and, according to local news reports, for the first time on the streets of America, the [Long Range Acoustic Device](#) (LRAD).

Mounted in the turret of an Armored Personnel Carrier (APC), I saw the LRAD in action twice in the area of 25th, Penn and Liberty Streets of Lawrenceville, an old Pittsburgh neighborhood. Blasting a shrill, piercing noise like a high-pitched police siren on steroids, it quickly swept streets and sidewalks of pedestrians, merchants and journalists and drove residents into their homes, but in neither case were any demonstrators present. The APC, oversized and sinister for a city street, together with lines of police in full riot gear looking like darkly threatening Michelin Men, made for a scene out of a movie you didn’t want to be in.

As intimidating as this massive show of armed force and technology was, the good burghers of Pittsburgh and their fellow citizens in the Land of the Brave and Home of the Free ain’t seen nothin’ yet. Tear gas and pepper spray are nothing to sniff at and, indeed, [have proven fatal](#) a surprising number of times, but they have now become the old standbys compared to the list below that’s already at or coming soon to a police station or National Guard headquarters near you. Proving that “what goes around, comes around,” some of the new Property Protection Devices were developed by a network of federally-funded, university-based research institutes like one in Pittsburgh itself, Penn State’s [Institute for Non-Lethal Defense Technologies](#).

- Raytheon Corp.’s [Active Denial System](#), designed for crowd control in combat zones, uses an energy beam to induce an [intolerable heating sensation](#), like a hot iron placed on the skin. It is effective beyond the range of small arms, in excess of 400 meters. Company officials have been advised they could expand the market by selling a smaller, tripod-mounted version for police forces.

- M5 [Modular Crowd Control Munition](#), with a range of 30 meters “is similar in operation to

a claymore mine, but it delivers...a strong, nonpenetrating blow to the body with multiple sub-munitions (600 rubber balls)."

- [Long Range Acoustic Device](#) or "The Scream," is a powerful megaphone the size of a satellite dish that can emit sound "50 times greater than the human threshold for pain" at close range, causing permanent hearing damage. The [L.A. Times](#) wrote U.S. Marines in Iraq used it in 2004. It can deliver recorded warnings in Arabic and, on command, emit a piercing tone..."[For] most people, even if they plug their ears, [the device] will produce the equivalent of an instant migraine," says Woody Norris, chairman of American Technology Corp., the San Diego firm that produces the weapon. "It will knock [some people] on their knees." CBS News reported in 2005 that the [Israeli Army first used the device in the field](#) to break up a protest against Israel's separation wall. "Protesters covered their ears and grabbed their heads, overcome by dizziness and nausea, after the vehicle-mounted device began sending out bursts of audible, but not loud, sound at intervals of about 10 seconds...A military official said the device emits a special frequency that targets the inner ear."
- In "[Non-lethal Technologies: An Overview](#)," Lower and Davison describe a lengthy catalog of new weaponry including the "Directed Stick Radiator," a hand-held system based on the same technology as The Scream. "It fires high intensity 'sonic bullets' or pulses of sound between 125-150db for a second or two. Such a weapon could, when fully developed, have the capacity to knock people off their feet."
- The Penn State facility is testing a "[Distributed Sound and Light Array Debilitator](#)" a.k.a. the "[puke ray](#)." The colors and rhythm of light are absorbed by the retina and disorient the brain, blinding the victim for several seconds. In conjunction with disturbing sounds it can make the person stumble or feel nauseated. Foreign Policy in Focus reports that the Department of Homeland Security, with \$1 million invested for testing the device, hopes to see it "in the hands of thousands of policemen, border agents and National Guardsmen" by 2010.
- Spider silk is cited in the University of Bradford's [Non-Lethal Weapons Research Project, Report #4 \(pg. 20\)](#) as an up-and-comer. "A research collaboration between the University of New Hampshire and the U.S. Army Natick Research, Development and Engineering Center is looking into the use of spider silk as a non-lethal 'entanglement' material for disabling people. They have developed a method for producing recombinant spider silk protein using E. coli and are trying to develop methods to produce large quantities of these fibres."
- [New Scientist](#) reports that the (I'm not making this up) [Inertial Capacitive Incapacitator](#) (ICI), developed by the Physical Optics Corporation of Torrance, California, uses a thin-film storage device charged during manufacture that only discharges when it strikes the target. It can be incorporated into a ring-shaped aerofoil and fired from a standard grenade launcher at low velocity, while still maintaining a flat trajectory for maximum accuracy.
- Aiming beyond Tasers, the [Homeland Security Advanced Research Projects Agency](#), (FY [2009 budget: \\$1B](#)) the domestic equivalent of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency ([DARPA](#)), plans to develop wireless weapons effective over greater distances, such as in an auditorium or sports stadium, or on a city street. One such device, the [Piezer](#), uses piezoelectric crystals that produce voltage when they are compressed. A 12-gauge shotgun fires the crystals, stunning the target with an electric shock on impact. Lynntech of College Station, Texas, is developing a [projectile](#) Taser that can be fired from a shotgun or 40-mm

grenade launcher to increase greatly the weapon's current range of seven meters.

- [“Off the Rocker and On the Floor: Continued Development of Biochemical Incapacitating Weapons,”](#) a report by the Bradford Disarmament Research Centre revealed that in 1992, the National Institute of Justice contracted with Lawrence Livermore National Lab to review clinical anesthetics for use by special ops military forces and police. LLNL concluded the best option was an opioid, like fentanyl, effective at very low doses compared to morphine. Combined with a patch soaked in DMSO (dimethylsulfoxide, a solvent) and fired from an air rifle, fentanyl could be delivered to the skin even through light clothing. Another recommended application for the drug was mixed with fine powder and dispersed as smoke.
- After upgrades, the infamous “Puff the Magic Dragon” gunship from the Vietnam War is now the AC-130. [“Non-Lethal Weaponry: Applications to AC-130 Gunships,”](#) observes that “With the increasing involvement of US military in operations other than war...” the AC-130 “would provide commanders a full range of non-lethal weaponry from an airborne platform which was not previously available to them.” The paper concludes in part that “As the use of non-lethal weapons increases and it becomes valid and acceptable, more options will become available.”
- Prozac and Zoloft are two of over 100 pharmaceuticals identified by the Penn State College of Medicine and the university's Applied Research Lab for further study as “non-lethal calmatives.” These Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs), noted the [Penn State study](#), “...are found to be highly effective for numerous behavioral disturbances encountered in situations where a deployment of a non-lethal technique must be considered. This class of pharmaceutical agents also continues to be under intense development by the pharmaceutical industry...New compounds under development (WO 09500194) are being designed with a faster onset of action. Drug development is continuing at a rapid rate in this area due to the large market for the treatment of depression (15 million individuals in North America)...It is likely that an SSRI agent can be identified in the near future that will feature a rapid rate of onset.”

In Pittsburgh last week, an enormously expensive show of police and weaponry, intended for “security” of the G20 delegates, simultaneously shut workers out of downtown jobs for two days, forced gasping students and residents back into their dormitories and homes, and turned journalists’ press passes into quaint, obsolete reminders of a bygone time.

Most significant of all, however, was what Witold Walczak, legal director of the Pennsylvania ACLU, told the Associated Press: “It’s not just intimidation, it’s disruption and in some cases outright prevention of peaceful protesters being able to get their message out.”

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