

New toys for the Pentagon

When the Berlin Wall fell in November of 1989, the Americans claimed victory over the longest battle in recent times; the Cold War. And Bush, followed by Clinton, started meeting with other leaders to reduce the worldwide nuclear arsenal that had kept Americans and Soviets in states of panic for forty years. All seemed to be going in favour of the peace process — minus the slight hic-cough that was the Persian Gulf War.

And while the American armed forces have been the not-too-proud recipients of harsh budget cuts handed down from the Clinton administration, military research and development continues to receive more than ample funding. With the threat of a full-scale Russian confrontation now doubtful, and there being no other country that could possibly challenge the American war machine, one would think that the US could spend some money elsewhere. Instead, they have stuck with making bigger and better weapons of mass destruction.

Always trying to stay ahead of the competition, the States have developed a destructive laser to be tested on an outdated Cold War-era satellite. In a few days, they will lock the laser beam on to the satellite and slowly increase the power, judging just how much juice is needed to destroy an object outside of the Earth's atmosphere. The implications of such a weapon are very dire indeed.

This is not the only thing engineers have been working on deep in the bowels of the Pentagon.

Recently, The Learning Channel ran a programme dealing with new developments in technology. It showcased a microwave transmitter with some interesting modifications. A smiling man holding what appeared to be a gun with a small satellite dish on the end, pointed the contraption at a toy helicopter and pulled the trigger. The chopper instantly stalled and crashed to the earth. The microwave signal the gun produced had scrambled all of the electronics and computers on board, rendering it useless.

These two developments will no doubt change warfare as much as the tank did during the First World War. Having the capability to fire a laser beam anywhere in the world, and to destroy a target with the precision of a surgeon removing a brain tumour, is excessive. With no definite enemies over the horizon, why does the US military maintain such Cold War paranoia?

Combined with microwave technology, the new laser is the ultimate fighting machine. An entire country could be seized at the push of a button, without one soldier being shipped overseas.

Military personnel is only one of the groups that would be drastically affected by the implementation of this new technology. As it stands 3,167,200 men and women are enlisted in the American military (including reserves). That's roughly

1.5% of their entire population. Put half of them out on the street, not to mention all the factory workers who churn out tanks, planes and ships for the war machine, and you are left with some sore folks with chips on their shoulders. The defense department supports a large share of the US economy. A jump in unemployment, coupled with sharp economic decline in the industrial sector, means huge problems.

All this doomsday talk needs to be balanced with something positive. If warfare is to change, then hopefully ballistic missiles will become obsolete. Nuclear power, heralded as the future of energy in the 1950s, has proven to be something of a Pandora's Box. The nuclear disasters of Chernobyl, Three Mile Island and Bikini Island have attested to this. Why would you bother nuking a country if the fall-out will eventually hurt you? Now you can hit them with some lasers and microwaves and send them back to pre industrial revolution days for a decade or two.

Creating new weapons of mass destruction is pointless if you already have enough of them. It is also pointless if it means a large portion of military personnel will go unemployed.

America should focus on some of their abundant internal problems instead of pursuing dreams of dominating a world they already control.

JOHN CULLEN

THE DALHOUSIE GAZETTE PUBLISHING SOCIETY

WILL HOLD ITS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
THURSDAY OCTOBER 30TH, 1997.

THE AGENDA INCLUDES:

- ELECTION OF BOARD MEMBERS
- PASSING OF THE 1997-1998 BUDGET

EVERY STUDENT IS A MEMBER OF THE DALHOUSIE GAZETTE PUBLISHING SOCIETY AS STATED IN OUR BY-LAWS. PLEASE COME AND GET INVOLVED WITH YOUR PAPER.

REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED.

THE GAZETTE WILL NOT BE PUBLISHING FOR THE WEEK OF OCTOBER 16TH DUE TO THE HOLIDAY MONDAY, WELL ... NOT SO MUCH DUE TO THE HOLIDAY, BUT BECAUSE WE ARE GOING TO BE STUFFED WITH GOOD FOOD AND CHEAP WINE JUST LIKE THE REST OF YOU.

HAVE A DECADENT WEEKEND, AND REMEMBER TO CHEW.

THE DALHOUSIE GAZETTE editorial board

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All submissions must be typed double-spaced on paper, e-mailed, or on a Mac or IBM 3 1/2 inch disk, in a WP version not greater than Word 6.0 or equivalent. The deadline is Mondays at 4:30 p.m.

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Dalhousie Arts Society AGM

November 3

DSU Counsel Members

5:00 p.m.

Open to all students
Positions available:

2 Members at large

1 Science Rep

1 ERO