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DHS Uses Wartime Mega-Camera to Watch Border

- By [Spencer Ackerman](#)
- [Email Author](#)
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The Department of Homeland Security wants to mount a powerful camera on a Raven Aerostar blimp like this to spy on miles of border at once. Photo: Raven

One legacy of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars has arrived on the southern border of the United States. The Department of Homeland Security recently completed tests of a powerful camera, one that cut its teeth in the war zones, that captures video of entire miles of border in a single frame. DHS thinks mega-cameras on blimps and aerostats might be the future of border security — if its analysts can only keep up with the glut of data they'll gather.

The system itself, a wide-area surveillance camera suite known as Kestrel, earned its stripes during the wars. That got DHS interested. "You had this imager flying that was able to archive and save imagery and reconstruct [bomb] emplacement so troops could go after [insurgents] later," John Applebee, who manages the border camera program for DHS, tells Danger Room. "It also was used for other things every day, like troop protection or perimeter protection, just as we imagine its uses along the continental borders of the United States."

So for a week of tests, the department mounted Logos Technologies' Kestrel imager on a 75-foot long Raven Aerostar aerostat tethered 2000 feet above the Arizona desert. DHS reports in a statement that Kestrel helped spot ["more than 100 illegal attempted entries and alleged illicit activities in progress."](#)

"We can see miles from this with a single image frame," Applebee enthuses. "Within every pixel, you have high-resolution, good, detailed resolution, like high-d-caliber imagery. In every frame, across the frame."

This is hardly the first time that wartime surveillance technology has made its way home from the battlefield. DHS [flies unarmed drones](#) above the northern and southern U.S. borders, snapping pictures. (They carry an "excellent camera system," Applebee allows, but unlike Kestrel, "you need to know where to point it.") [Police departments nationwide](#) have started using smaller spy drones as well. Earlier this year, DHS expressed interest in camera systems that can [spy on four square miles at once](#), well within the [range of the military's new mega-cameras](#). Kestrel's 360-degree camera suite is a step in that direction.

But the migration of those military tools comes the migration of some of the military's problems. Specifically: the "persistent" video taken by the powerful cameras creates a fire hose of data that analysts struggle to interpret.

And if the glut of video overwhelms the military, DHS — whose annual budget is under \$60 billion, an order of magnitude less than the Pentagon's — is in deep trouble. Applebee is up front about it. "They have the people," he says. "We do not."

The answer, he hopes, will come from software. "We're looking closely at the developments in the military and intelligence communities for ways the software and analysis can be automated, so can we use software tools as a tripwire to signal us and call agent to attention once [the camera observes] a movement has occurred in a given region," Applebee says. Darpa, the Pentagon's blue-sky researchers, for instance, are interested in [something akin to a "thinking camera"](#) that pre-sorts imagery according to an algorithm based on what an analyst hopes to find.

And perhaps after those pre-selecting imagery tools come online for the military, it won't take long before civilian law enforcement puts them to use. Applebee certainly hopes so. He sees the wide-eyed Kestrel as a huge help for "securing large areas from illegal intrusion." Imagine what the *next* generation of cameras will let him see.

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Oops! Air Force Drones Can Now (Accidentally) Spy on You



Homeland Security Wants to Spy on 4 Square Miles at Once



Beyond Surveillance: Darpa Wants a Thinking Camera



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Even DHS Is Freaked Out by Spy Drones Over America



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Danger Room senior reporter Spencer Ackerman recently won the [2012 National Magazine Award for Reporting in Digital Media](#).

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squidgod

"Within every pixel, you have high-resolution, good, detailed resolution, like high-d-caliber imagery. In every frame, across the frame."

Spoken like a man who has no clue what the words he's using actually mean or how to string them together into a coherent sentence. =)

1 month ago 27 Likes

Like

[Teame Zazzu](#)

The New system -ARGUS - capable of 10 gigapixel and 36 square mile Wide Area Surveillance depth coverage. The system makes people on the ground visible as well as tracks and records the "tracklets" of ALL vehicles in the area, then makes that data searchable for activity recognition (dead-drop, brush-pass, coordinated movement, u-turn etc.) These systems are unique in that they are WAR machines meant for persistent surveillance of all activity in major cities. If WASS are allowed over US cities it will be the equivalent of an occupying army in the USA. The software aggregation of this data, as well as the capability to store it, query it as well as its super invasive detail is what makes drone blimps with ARGUS, GORGON STARE, "Ketrel", etc. such a dangerous step towards a police state. These drones look over every fence and through every window, into every house and stalk every car.

Wide Area Persistent Surveillance is a WAR machine that has no place in domestic airspace!

1 month ago in reply to squidgod 4 Likes

Like



jujutsuka

Bet the British government can't wait to get their hands on these. Of course, it'd mean all that money they threw into installing cameras everywhere would go to waste.

1 month ago in reply to Teame Zazzu 2 Likes

Like



Apoctopus

Politicians love buzz words.

1 month ago in reply to squidgod 1 Like

Like



mklue

How long before you will see these over American cities...

1 month ago 12 Likes

Like



me21_2

Yeah, they're coming after ... YOU! lol! I'm more worried about terrorist coming to American cities, after all, they have stuff that can really hurt you, like ... bombs.

1 month ago in reply to mklue 2 Likes

Like



mklue

I'm not worried about it put them all on the border, just like a bad SF movie ;)

Smile when you look over your shoulder...

1 month ago in reply to me21_2

Like



erinsdad

It would be 800% more scary if it was the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man.

1 month ago 7 Likes

Like



rick baca

Who's going to work in your garden and clean your house when the United States finally succeeds in keeping the United States safe from us brown MEXICANS! How y'all going to get your son off the couch to dig a ditch

1 month ago 6 Likes

Like

Charles Edward Frith

A conversation to be soon overheard in the great pacific northwest of the continental "these united states" in north america. The conversation will take place between representatives of officialdom, sub set, 'department of homeland supression', and a local northwestern archetype, the 'woods man'. There are a lot of them around here so we cannot be specific as to which expression of the archetype will actually be involved in the incident, but we are certain it will occur.

The cause of the conversation is the (soon to be in the future) recent downing of a 'national suppresion predator drone' on its 'officially designated patrol'. Apparently, as the agents of the DHS are able to determine, 'suspect Able Baker', located in

somewhere in the heavily wooded southwest interior of Washington State brought down a predator drone by means unknown and it crashed into a very expensive pile of trash in woods so deep as to be unreceachable in our lifetimes....

Upon interviewing the primary suspect (last house prior to the last reported position of the predator), the agents of officialdom discovered that they had entered a place of deep dark shadows under old growth cedar trees dripping not only moss several yards long, but also a rich moist coating of woo-woo.

The following will be soon taken from the to-exist-in-the-future, past official records transcripts.

Agent Fred: "Sir, am i to understand you correctly? You are admitting that you shot down the very expensive government drone? Are you certain you understand what crime you are confessing to?".

Suspect Able Baker: "Yep, son, I know what I am saying....are you hard of hearing? But no way is this a crime."

Agent Fred: "No sir. I hear you just fine..but i just can't believe you admitted to a federal crime..."

Suspect Able Baker: "Oh, no son, I didn't commit a crime. Now I grant you that you have reason to see it that way, but was not the case. I have me a batch of that cancer you know."

Agent Fred: "ok?? so..."

Suspect Able Baker: "so, this being a dispensary state, I been smok'n some righteous weed. In fact, I had been smoking that whole day as the chemo had been the day before. (long wait as suspect exhales) That was the day I shot down the pterodactyl. And I want you, right now, to show me any damn law that says a man can't shoot down a pterodactyl if he has to."

Agent Fred: "Sir, you mean the drone, right? You shot down the drone, correct? That is what you are admitting to..."

Suspect Able Baker: "Well, sonny, if you want to call that big, white pterodactyl that flew over my house and was gonna shit on my property or worse, a drone, you go right ahead. But when I saw it, it was a pterodactyl. That is my story and I am sticking to it. (another long pause as suspect exhales) And I don't think that you boys will be prosecuting me, an old man living out his last days dying of cancer who happens to hallucinate pterodactyls from the damn chemo. So, in my way of thinking, as I send you boys on your way, is that you get back to drone central, and tell them to paint " I am not a pterodactyl, do not shoot me." on them drones...just to be safe. You never can tell what people may see out here in these woods. And the rain and constrant drip makes us all a bit mad, so don't be surprised when occassionally one of us takes out an annoying pterodactyl."

Agent Bob (as the agents are leaving): "Sir, just what was it that you used to take down the dro..., er, pterodactyl."

Suspect Able Baker (grinning): "Why this slingshot, a Mark 5 SuperSling with wrist protector, (extending the weapon) and these.....(suspect holds out a cluster of metal balls)...highly magnetized ball bearings. They work on cupracapras as well as pterodactyls. And you never can tell when I may be seeing a couple of them bastards so you boys better get along now, and don't forget to tell them...."

"I am not a pterodactyl..."

Status of investigation: Temporarily suspended....

1 month ago 4 Likes

Like



parallaxq

It's tethered, so if the tether is somehow cut or breaks does the whole thing just float away?

1 month ago 4 Likes

Like



J_JamesM

That's a good question. Aerostats in the past very rarely broke away because they were caught in freak storms, hurricanes, anything with winds over 90 mph that come on too quickly to be avoided. After it breaks away, it would basically get blown all over until by the storm until it sloooooowly sinks after being shot full of holes by fighter jets, or leaks by itself from damage breaking away and batters itself to pieces against the ground.



Now, obviously the military doesn't want that to happen no matter how uncommon it is. That's why modern aerostats are designed to be very, very strong using Kevlar, Vectran and other ultra-strong puncture- and tear-resistant materials. The tether and nose cone that connects them is also much stronger, capable of flying in 90 mph winds. But most importantly, they installed special valves so that if one does break away it can remotely land and deflate itself intact and get recovered and reinflated later.

1 month ago in reply to parallaxq 2 Likes

Like

Inspector_Clouseau

Not if you shoot it.

1 month ago in reply to parallxq 1 Like

Like



Someone's Granny

Can't shoot what you can't see, sonny.

1 month ago in reply to Inspector_Clouseau 1 Like

Like



Forensic_Scuba

I can see the headlines, "another Raven Aerostar drifted off when its tether was cut" or "authorities retrieved a Raven Aerostar with 275 bullet holes in it". Gee I thought it was a duck I was shooting at?

1 month ago 3 Likes

Like



Charles Edward Frith

More Snooping that will eventually spy on Americans going about their business. You can count on it. The DHS are socialist pig snouts in the trough of never ending reasons to snoop even more.

1 month ago 2 Likes

Like



Scott Ryan

Thu

1 month ago 1 Like

Like



Peter Eggert

I'm not much for compulsory antipsychotic drugging, but you're convincing my position to sway.

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan 19 Likes

Like



Scott Ryan

Its beyond clear.

1 month ago in reply to Peter Eggert

Like



Lance Cole

Unlike Australia, we have this little thing called a 2nd Amendment within our Constitution, that says you aren't going to legislate my rights away. Go worship at the altar of Obamination, or something, and stop with 'helping' us on how to run our nation. Maybe better-addressing all that domestic violence you guys have would be a great start.

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan 11 Likes

Like



jaxative

You Americans don't need outside help to ruin your nation, you're doing a damn good job all by yourselves. All this obsessing over a document written in the 18th century has strangled your country. You say that in Australia we have a domestic violence problem? What are you basing that on? The US clings to its 2nd amendment which gives it a murder rate far higher than most industrialised nations.

1 month ago in reply to Lance Cole 4 Likes

Like



Apoctopus

Domestic violence in Australia = Dingos and Crocodiles

1 month ago in reply to jaxative

Like



jaxative

The crocs are alot less prone to violence now that Steve Irwin has stopped jamming his thumb up their arses but those damn dropbears are everywhere!

1 month ago in reply to Apoctopus 3 Likes

Like



Scott Ryan

Yo

1 month ago in reply to Lance Cole 1 Like

Like

**r h**

Invalid Application ID: The

Two items about U.S., one, it is a constitutional republic and not a democracy, and two, ALL members of Congress, Senate and White House are bought and paid for by the special interests and really couldn't care less about the average citizen -- in other countries it is called bribes, but here in U.S. we call it campaign contributions...

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan 3 Likes

Like

**Someone's Granny**

I'm 100% positive this happens in no other country.

1 month ago in reply to r h 2 Likes

Like

**PeteEllis**

Oh come on now! You are just another member of the 50 cent party of China. You have plenty of problems at home to worry about, Like the brewing civil war that is about to happen between the communist leaders of your country. So, put down the key board and start prepping for your countries apocalypse.

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan 1 Like

Like

**Scott Ryan**

bbvvv

1 month ago in reply to Lance Cole

Like

jaxative

You say you're an Australian Scott? Don't try to drag us down to your level. What a rant without substance, must be a Tasmanian.

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan 2 Likes

Like



Scott Ryan

NA but

1 month ago in reply to jaxative

Like



Scott Ryan

Or

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan 1 Like

Like



Scott Ryan

Hav

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan

Like



Scott Ryan

It was

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan

Like



Scott Ryan

The

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan

Like



Scott Ryan

Get

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan

Like



freckles10

In fact, Australia loves guns.

In November of 2011, Obama and Australian government agreed to send and base 2,500 US Marines as a warning to China's growing list of territories it claims it owns and it's general military buildup relative to it's neighbors.

Those Marines presumably will have access to lots of big, scary guns otherwise they have zero credibility.

So Australia, does, in fact, love guns in the hands of US Marines, on their soil, when it suits Australia's and America's security purposes.

Unlike Australia, the US was blessed with brilliant Founding Fathers who installed a Second Amendment as a last-ditch, desperate measure to stop a future American Federal government from becoming a tyranny.

Dictators love for governments to have control of all firearms. That makes their tyranny much easier to enforce.

Cambodia had no similar Second Amendment. The ghosts of three million butchered civilians (i.e., the Killing Fields) probably wish they had something besides broomsticks to at least give them a chance to organize and keep from being slaughtered by their government--Pol Pot.

Apparently, you seem to think Australians are immune from the possibility of EVER having to face a tyrannical government.

Thousands of years of history informed our Founders that the possibility of dictatorship is always a very real danger no matter who you are--even in Australia.

You keep on thinking that Australia is totally immune from the chance of a future dictatorial government. Feel free to keep your head in the sand.

The rest of us read history books and know that dictatorships can happen at anytime, to any people and in any country--including America.

Our Second Amendment's purpose is to intimidate and therefore hopefully deter a future American government from suspending the Constitution and becoming another monstrous dictatorship.

But we all "know" nothing like that could EVER happen in Australia.

Sure.

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan 9 Likes

Like



r h

Democracy is two wolves and a sheep deciding what's for dinner. The 2nd amendment is a way to give the sheep an equal footing...

1 month ago in reply to freckles10 3 Likes

Like



jaxative

"Brilliant founding fathers"? the majority of them owned slaves and waged genocidal war on the native inhabitants(as well as stealing the country from the British). The vast majority of Australians DON'T want 2500 marines based in Townsville and polls suggest that most want to move away from ties with the US set up by our former Primeminister John Howard. The only way to own a gun in Australia is to be a farmer with a feral animal problem or a sporting shooter. As for Cambodia, US policy during the Vietnam war made Laos the most bombed country in history despite the fact that they weren't at war. Australia might end up with a tyrannical government but it is far less likely than it happening in the US as ALL Australians have to vote, not just the select few who are allowed to.

1 month ago in reply to freckles10

Like



Bill Graham

The vast majority of Americans don't want 2500 Marines in Australia either! Someone must have passed a joint to the Joint Chiefs because the premise of "we gotta protect Australia from 1.3 billion chinamen, so let's send 2500 marines over there. China might invade Australia any day now, but not with our Marines there.



The sad thing is that when China stops buying our junk bonds, the Marines will need to hold a bake sale to get airfare back home.

1 month ago in reply to jaxative

Like

jaxative

China isn't even close to being a threat to Australia. I doubt they have the ability to project military force more than a thousand kilometers from their own borders. Lacking any functional aircraft carriers, any form of strategic air-to-air refuelling or even large scale naval transportation. Sure they have a couple of small carriers due to enter service later this decade, however, being their first operational carriers it will take many years for them to become fully operational. At this point in time there is only one nation that can effectively invade us and that is the US. If the Chinese ever do decide to invade I doubt the fact that 2500 marines would be enough to even make them alter their plans.

1 month ago in reply to Bill Graham

Like

**Ronin**, "For I am a sinner in the hands of an angry God."

Maybe not, but unless they kill 'em all in their sleep, I'm pretty sure those marines will ruin someone's day on the way out.

And don't discount the Aussies. they're highly regarded by Americans and our troops. tough as nails and fun as hell.

1 month ago in reply to jaxative

Like

**Scott Ryan**

I r

1 month ago in reply to freckles10

Like

Seth101

Keep your regulations in Australia and don't bring it to the United States where guns are the tools that keep tyranny in the bowels of hell.



Zero regulations on firearm ownership. How will Americans stop the federal government when it starts the overt military assault on the populace. The U.S. Marines and National Guard need to keep in mind that their enemy is armed and won't go down easy.

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan 5 Likes

Like



Jimmy Cloak

Guns are *a* tool. The more important weapon against tyranny is your brain.

1 month ago in reply to Seth101 4 Likes

Like



Seth101

You're correct, but the the firearm is an extension of the intellectual faculties of the freeman.

1 month ago in reply to Jimmy Cloak 2 Likes

Like



Jimmy Cloak

I don't quite agree. The firearm may be used to protect the intellectual faculties of the freeman, but the extension of the intellectual faculties is its expression, in either writing or speech. There used to be a proverb about this back in the days of the sword.

1 month ago in reply to Seth101 2 Likes

Like



richard

are you crazy? think all you guys have been watching too many over the top jerry bruckheimer movies. this non-sense about keeping guns because of a goverment takeover is nut case talk.



1 month ago in reply to Seth101 1 Like

Like

MichaelG

Nut case talk?

I'm sure some German citizens thought the same thing back int the 1930's

1 month ago in reply to richard 1 Like

Like



richard

the cause Hitler's rise to power was based upon long-term factors - resentment in the German people, the weakness of the Weimar system - which he exploited through propaganda (paid for by his rich, Communist-fearing backers), the terror of his stormtroopers, and the brilliance of his speeches. the german people were rised as good lutherans that their duty is to follow the state., so your statement about 1930's germany does not follow.

1 month ago in reply to MichaelG

Like



Scott Ryan

HE

1 month ago in reply to Seth101

Like



Scott Ryan

Well y

1 month ago in reply to Seth101

Like



Ronin, "For I am a sinner in the hands of an angry God."

More likely those Marines and National guard will be on our side. They take their oath seriously.

1 month ago in reply to Seth101

Like



**Perry Kern**

Dude, I think you're either retarded or english isn't your first language.

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan 5 Likes

Like

**Scott Ryan**

not

1 month ago in reply to Perry Kern

Like

**jaxative**

Mate you are dragging all Australians down and it's called SPELLING fucknuts. "If" you are Australian then you know the word is ARSE not ass. Wars have always been won through strategy and logistics not hairy chests and hard-ons.

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan 3 Likes

Like

**Scott Ryan**

Tong my nuts B

1 month ago in reply to jaxative

Like

**jaxative**

I'm sure anyone going near your nuts would need tongs or possibly tweezers

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan 2 Likes

Like


**Apoctopus**

Sounds like you've got some roos loose in your top paddock...

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan

Like

**PeteEllis**

 The problem is criminals not guns!

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan

Like



3weight

thank you for that excellent report, scott

= 0

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan

Like



Kevin Simmons

Go back to your Fosters, you vegamite eating freak loser

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan

Like



jaxative

Australians don't drink Fosters thats the shit we send overseas cos its feral.

1 month ago in reply to Kevin Simmons 4 Likes

Like



Ronin, "For I am a sinner in the hands of an angry God."

I was too young at the time to try it, but the XXX signs everywhere made me laugh.

1 month ago in reply to jaxative

Like



jaxative

Actually it's XXXX although I\m a Victoria Bitter man myself.

1 month ago in reply to Ronin

Like



Scott Ryan

Your right 2.

1 month ago in reply to jaxative

Like



Scott Ryan

AT

1 month ago in reply to Kevin Simmons

Like



Scott Ryan

Do you

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan

Like



Apoctopus

I do smell shit. I think it's you.

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan 1 Like

Like



Scott Ryan

NAR

1 month ago in reply to Apoctopus

Like



jaxative

That must be the shit you dipped your wick in last night.

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan

Like



Scott Ryan

YOU

1 month ago in reply to Kevin Simmons

Like



Scott Ryan

don't

1 month ago in reply to Kevin Simmons

Like



Ronin, "For I am a sinner in the hands of an angry God."

Seriously? Shut up.

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan

Like



Rastus79

Go break into just some random house in say Texas at 3am.....better hope it aint my former one :)

1 month ago in reply to Scott Ryan

Like



Max Horowitz

...There's already one at Ft. Huachuca, AZ...

1 month ago

Like



jyatt7

Can it see tunnels? Oh yea this camera is for all those extremely dangerous illegal immigrants !!!!

Amazing - the US govt is out of control.

1 month ago

Like



Nrepeb Nrepeb

This is another joke - how to lost taxpayers money on that new "toys" for army. The USA economic success was made by immigrants(especially that illegal ones, from bandits, to university professors hiding from dictators), and now they think that stopping immigration is a magical medicine for all bad things...

1 month ago

Like



nrepeb

This another joke - how to lost taxpayers money on that new "toys" for army. The USA was made by immigrants(especially that illegal ones, from bandits, to university professors hiding from dictators), and now they think that stopping immigration is a cure for all bad things...

1 month ago

Like



reidh

at what point does this result in NO ILLEGAL ENTRY! ?

1 month ago

Like



Ronin, "For I am a sinner in the hands of an angry God."

Lots of shooting them down comments, and I'm all for it, trust me on this, but realistically, you're responsible for where that bullet ends up. Whether or not you can actually reach that high with the shot is another question, Perhaps we should start using rocket model kits with gps and gunpowder inside to take 'em down.

DIY SAMs.

1 month ago

Like

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