

Review Of Directed Energy Technology For Countering Rockets, Artillery, And Mortars (RAM)

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REVIEW OF DIRECTED ENERGY TECHNOLOGY FOR COUNTERING RAM

OVERARCHING FINDINGS AND A RECOMMENDATION

The Army's development program is aimed at demonstrating a mobile 100 kilowatt (kW) solid-state laser weapon system concept that has the potential of performing usefully against RAM attacks. It is clear that the various pieces required to demonstrate a mobile 100 kW solid-state laser weapon system have relatively low technological maturity and relatively high risk and involve challenging engineering and integration issues. For this reason a transportable, rather than mobile, system was also considered. For a technology-paced program of this type, it is likely that substantially more money than the Army currently has programmed will be required to realize the demonstration. Indeed, the committee estimates that over the period of the program \$100 million more than the amount currently planned will be needed.

The rudimentary effectiveness assessments made during this study reveal the clear benefits of higher laser power than is provided by the 100 kW demonstrator to counter more stressing raids and hedge the need to destroy future hardened RAM projectiles.¹ Accordingly, the committee endorses the Army's longer-term goal to eventually develop and field a multi-hundred kW solid-state laser (e.g., a 400 kW laser weapon system).

In addition to assessing the Army's current technology-paced program to demonstrate a 100 kW system, the committee examined a three-element sequential program of the committee's own design that could proceed as follows:

1. Early on, ruggedize and integrate into a transportable or mobile test-bed a previously developed, good-beam-quality 25 kW solid-state laser to demonstrate the ability to use laser technology of this type under realistic field conditions rather than in the laboratory. This test-bed would primarily reduce the development, engineering, and integration risks in spiraling to the 100 kW and 400 kW demonstrations and very likely pay for itself.
2. Proceed with a 100 kW demonstrator, only at reduced risk and cost compared to the current Army program because of lessons learned and data gathered with the 25 kW test-bed; the 100 kW demonstrator would also likely give the Army some useful military capability.
3. Fully fund the continuing longer-term 400 kW effort to follow the 100 kW demonstration; the 400 kW laser, which could be tested by 2018 under this sequential program, would offer much greater military effectiveness.

The committee's coarse estimate of the cost of the above sequential program is approximately \$470 million. This kind of program would provide early and frequent opportunities for testing and evaluation as well as clear decision points

¹Although the ultimate goal of the Army is a multikilowatt system, that does not mean that a 100 kW demonstrator will have no credible weapons capability or that it is not useful militarily. The 100 kW lasers could do some useful things, and 400 kW lasers could do even more.

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