

Abstract: Acceptability of Non-Lethal Weapons: An International View

Submitted by:

Donald A. Lund, Ph.D.
Research Associate Professor
University of New Hampshire
Thompson Hall G-16
Durham, NH, USA 03824

In a paper entitled, Joint Concept for Non-Lethal Weapons, the Commandant of the US Marine Corps provides a "framework within which all research, development, acquisition and doctrine for non-lethal technologies will evolve"¹ and proceeds to identify requirements for three forms of acceptability: social, cultural, and policy.²

Within the domain of policy acceptability, the Joint Concept states that "some proposed non-lethal weapons may be forbidden by law or policy. Accordingly, it is essential that all developments of non-lethal weapons be evaluated by appropriate authorities to ensure that they comply with the law of war, U.S. law, and U.S. treaty obligations."³

In terms of social acceptability, "... the effects of non-lethal weapons must be of such a nature as to be found generally acceptable to our society"⁴ The definition of cultural acceptability extends this principle from domestic tolerability to "... the larger international community and perhaps the target community as well. Even though they are designed to minimize fatalities and serious injuries, some non-lethal weapons or their effects might, for religious or cultural reasons, prove so offensive to allies or important neutrals that their use would be counterproductive."⁵

Working collaboratively with the Department of Defense, the US Department of Justice has added a requirement for legal acceptability⁶ where domestic law enforcement operations are

¹ Joint Concept, p. 1.

² Joint Concept, p. 9.

³ Joint Concept, p.10.

⁴ Joint Concept, p.10.

⁵ Joint Concept, p.10

⁶ Department of Justice and Department of Defense Joint Technology Program: Second Anniversary Report, NIJ Research Report, February 1997.

concerned: “Any devices or ideas must improve on a present practice; must not overburden the officer; ... cannot require extensive training; and any liability issues must be manageable. A key consideration in each of these efforts is that the technology be legally and socially acceptable.”⁷

The University of New Hampshire has been systematically monitoring the NLW related content of foreign newspapers and periodicals in order to provide an ongoing international assessment of "acceptability" within these four domains. The author will present the results of this analysis to date.

⁷ Pilant, Lois, *Less-Than-Lethal Weapons: New Solutions for Law Enforcement—Final Report*, The NIJ Research Review - Volume 1, Issue 3 - September 2000