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LIVERMORE LAB UNVEILS BIG GUN TO SCARE OFF TERRORISTS

AFTER YEARS OF HEARING CRITICS SAY NUCLEAR WEAPONS SECURITY FORCES LACKED ENOUGH FIREPOWER, FEDERAL OFFICIALS ARE ARMING THE NATION'S H-BOMB LABS AND FACTORIES WITH HIGHLY LETHAL GATLING GUNS THAT BELCH THOUSANDS OF BULLETS A MINUTE.

THE NATION'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS CHIEF, LINTON BROOKS, UNVEILED THE FIRST OF THE NEW MINIGUNS THURSDAY AT LAWRENCE LIVERMORE NATIONAL LABORATORY, WHERE ENOUGH PLUTONIUM AND URANIUM FOR DOZENS OF ATOMIC WEAPONS IS STORED CLOSE TO SUBURBAN HOUSES AND APARTMENTS.

LAB EXECUTIVES PLAN TO INSTALL A HALF-DOZEN OF THE MACHINEGUNS IN TRUCKS, VANS AND PILLHOUSES AS THEIR MOST POWERFUL ANSWER TO TERRORISTS ATTACKING TO STEAL OR DETONATE A NUCLEAR WEAPON.

"FIREPOWER IS PART OF ANY PROTECTIVE STRATEGY AGAINST PEOPLE WHO ARE WILLING TO DIE," BROOKS SAID.

MORE REMOTE PIECES OF THE NATION'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS COMPLEX SUCH AS THE NEVADA TEST SITE, PANTEX WEAPONS ASSEMBLY PLANT AND LOS ALAMOS LAB HAVE HAD HEAVY WEAPONS FOR YEARS, INCLUDING .30-CALIBER MACHINE GUNS, ROCKETS, EVEN SMALL TANKS. BUT LIVERMORE'S ARMY, THE EXACT SIZE OF WHICH IS CLASSIFIED, HAD LARGELY BEEN LIMITED TO SEMIAUTOMATIC RIFLES, SHOTGUNS AND FLASH-BANG GRENADES.

THAT HAS REQUIRED INCREASING MANPOWER AND MORE THAN \$100 MILLION A YEAR IN SECURITY COSTS, WITH SOME UNCERTAINTY WHETHER THE FORCE COULD DESTROY A BAND OF ATTACKERS AS NUMEROUS AS THE SEPT. 11 HIJACKERS ARMED WITH TRUCK BOMBS, ROCKET-PROPELLED GRENADES, INSIDER INFORMATION AND PERHAPS CHEMICAL OR BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS.

SEE A VIDEO OF THE NEW GATLING GUNS IN ACTION. [WMV, 19K]

THE NEW GATLING GUNS — ELECTRICALLY SPUN, SIX-BARRELED M134D MADE BY ARIZONA-BASED DILLON AERO — ARE THE LATEST AND LARGEST RATCHET UP IN THE ARMS RACE BETWEEN ATTACKERS AND DEFENDERS OF U.S. WEAPONS FACILITIES.

THEY SPEW DENSE WAVES OF STANDARD, NATO-ISSUE 7.62 MM BULLETS SO THAT EACH WEAPON EQUALS THE FIREPOWER OF 10 TO 12 SECURITY OFFICERS. THE GUNS COST ABOUT \$60,000 EACH, DEPENDING ON OPTIONS SUCH AS MANUAL OR POWERED ROTATING TURRETS. DEMONSTRATION VIDEOS

SHOW A CONSTANT BLOSSOM OF FLAME ERUPTING FROM THE SPINNING BARRELS AS THEY BURP RAPID FIRE OVER ARIZONA SAGEBRUSH AND DESERT. MINIGUN EXPERTS SAY THEY CAN SHRED UNARMORED ATTACKERS, VEHICLES AND AIRCRAFT IN SECONDS.

"IT'S A FORCE MULTIPLIER. THIS PROBABLY SAVES YOU 10 OFFICERS WITH ONE WEAPON," SAID RUSS MILLER, HEAD OF PHYSICAL SECURITY FOR THE WEAPONS LAB. "IT BASICALLY KEEPS ME FROM HIRING MORE."

THE GUNS WILL JOIN AN INNERMOST RING OF DEFENSES AROUND SUPERBLOCK, THE LAB'S FORTRESS-LIKE CLUSTER OF WEAPONS FACILITIES WHERE BOMB-QUANTITIES OF PLUTONIUM AND URANIUM ARE STORED AND HANDLED. LIVERMORE'S PROTECTIVE FORCE IS EXPECTED TO SACRIFICE ITSELF IF NECESSARY TO BLOCK ATTACKERS FROM GAINING ACCESS TO SUPERBLOCK AND, IF THAT FAILS, TO RETAKE THE FACILITY BEFORE TERRORISTS ACQUIRE A WEAPON'S WORTH OF PLUTONIUM OR URANIUM.

"YOU COULD DO IT WITH LESS PEOPLE WITH THIS GUN," SAID LIVERMORE'S PROTECTIVE-FORCE DEPUTY CHIEF AND OPERATIONS MANAGER, CHUCK JOHNSON. "IT PUTS OUT A LOT OF LEAD."

BROOKS SAID IT ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH FOR SECURITY OFFICERS TO KILL AN ENTIRE ATTACKING FORCE IF HALF THE OFFICERS DIE. EVEN NOW, HE SAID, "PLUTONIUM HERE IS PROTECTED SUFFICIENTLY WELL THAT ANYONE WHO COMES HERE TO STEAL IT IS NOT GOING TO BE HAPPY WITH THE OUTCOME."

FEDERAL OFFICIALS EXPECT THE NEW GUNS WILL BE A LARGE DETERRENT THAT WILL MAKE ANY SUCH ATTACK UNTHINKABLE. BROOKS SAID THE GUNS WILL BE ROLLED OUT IN MAJOR NUCLEAR WEAPONS FACILITIES NATIONWIDE. AT THE Y-12 PLANT IN TENNESSEE, WHERE TONS OF ENRICHED URANIUM ARE STORED, PROTECTIVE FORCES HAVE INSTALLED A REMOTE-CONTROLLED VERSION THAT CAN HANDLE HEAVIER AMMUNITION AND HURL GRENADES, GUIDED BY AN OFFICER WORKING A JOYSTICK AND WATCHING VIDEO SCREENS.

"WE'RE NOT TRYING TO HAVE A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD HERE," BROOKS SAID. "WHAT WE'RE TRYING TO HAVE HERE IS, WE NEVER FIND OUT WHETHER IT ALL WORKS OR NOT BECAUSE NO ONE WILL EVER COME HERE."

LAB OFFICIALS STILL ARE WORKING ON A SAFETY ANALYSIS FOR USE OF THE MACHINE GUNS, THEN WILL BEGIN INSTALLING THE WEAPONS AND TRAINING ITS SECURITY FORCE IN FIRING THEM.

THE GUNS HAVE A RANGE OF 1,500 METERS. THAT'S NEARLY DOUBLE THE DISTANCE TO THE NEAREST HOUSES.

CRITICS OF SECURITY AROUND THE NATION'S WEAPONS FACILITIES SAY THE BETTER SOLUTION REMAINS REMOVAL OF THE PLUTONIUM AND URANIUM FROM LIVERMORE TO MORE REMOTE LOCATIONS SUCH AS THE NEVADA TEST SITE THAT ARE EASIER TO DEFEND.

"IT MAKES OUR CASE THAT YOU'VE GOT TO GET THE SPECIAL NUCLEAR MATERIALS OUT OF THERE WHEN YOU'RE GOING TO THESE EXTREMES," SAID

PETER STOCKTON, A FORMER SECURITY ADVISER TO THE U.S. ENERGY DEPARTMENT AND SENIOR INVESTIGATOR FOR THE WASHINGTON-BASED PROJECT ON GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT.

RESIDENTS SAY THE NEIGHBORHOODS CLOSE TO THE LAB ARE FULL OF CHILDREN AT PLAY, JOGGERS AND FAMILIES WORKING IN THEIR YARDS.

"WE HAVE TO BE VERY CAREFUL," SAID DAVID LEARY, ASSOCIATE LAB DIRECTOR FOR SAFEGUARDS AND SECURITY. "WE'RE GOING TO USE THESE VERY JUDICIOUSLY AROUND OUR CRITICAL FACILITIES. WE'RE GOING TO BE VERY FAMILIAR WITH OUR FIELDS OF FIRE."

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