Directed Energy Using High-Power Microwave Technology

By Jacob Walker and Matthew McQuage

The Directed Energy Warfare Office (DEWO) and Directed Energy Division at the Naval Surface Warfare Center, Dahlgren Division (NSWCDD) merge past research and data with continuous innovation in the field of high-power microwave(s) (HPM) to address the critical need for nonlethal, nonkinetic weapons. HPM weapons can be described as nonkinetic devices that radiate electromagnetic energy in the radio frequency (RF) or microwave spectrum. They are designed to disrupt, deny, degrade, damage, or destroy targets. In essence, this is achieved when high-power electromagnetic waves propagate through air and interdict targets by traveling through the exterior layers of structures and coupling energy to critical electronic components. Since effectiveness against a wide range of targets is the goal, HPM has become a collective term for various technologies: wave shapes, source frequencies, and the distribution of varying signal bandwidths. It is the objective of HPM research and assessment, therefore, to address targets for which no engagement option currently exists. NSWCDD is working to identify optimal HPM mission platforms and move relevant technologies into the field.

HPM Initiatives

NSWCDD has actively pursued HPM research since the advent of the field in the 1970s. Since then, scientists and engineers have conducted HPM research and development in many areas, including hydrogen spark-gap switching, spiral generators, and related technologies. More currently, the Directed Energy Division developed a variety of high-power wideband RF systems based on pulsed power and Marx generators (Figure 1). In addition to the extensive work accomplished in HPM and RF source development, NSWCDD contributed substantially to the area of counter-HPM vulnerability assessments. Researchers developed site assessment guides and threat brochures, as well as a number of wideband RF sources, to determine the susceptibility of electronic equipment to high-power RF interference. This latter effort involved assessing and exploiting the weaknesses of specified electronic targets to various HPM and RF threats. Data gleaned from these efforts was then used to support optimized prototypes and system designs employing effects-based design methodology. NSWCDD utilized these wideband RF sources to determine the susceptibility of a multitude of military

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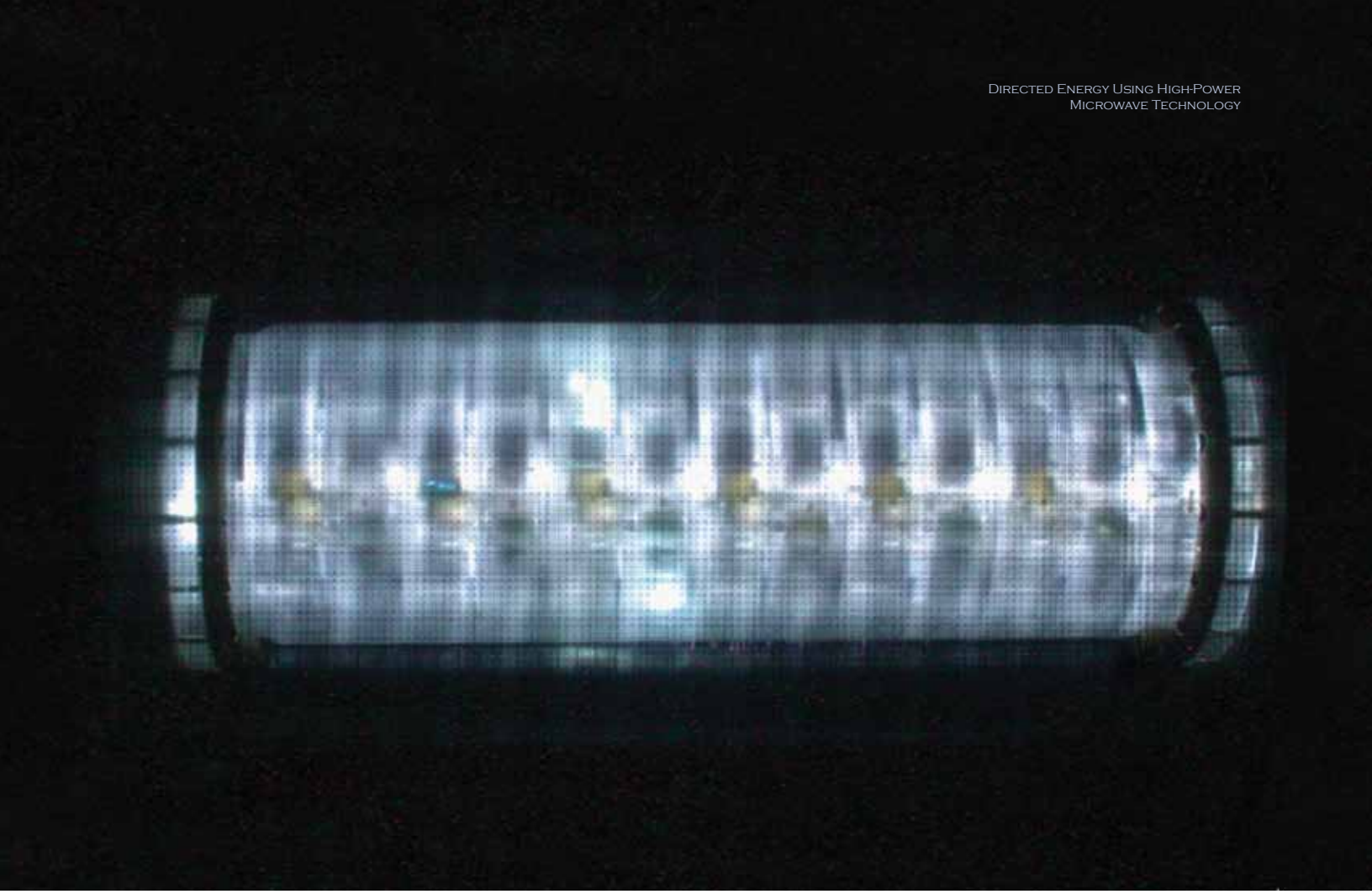


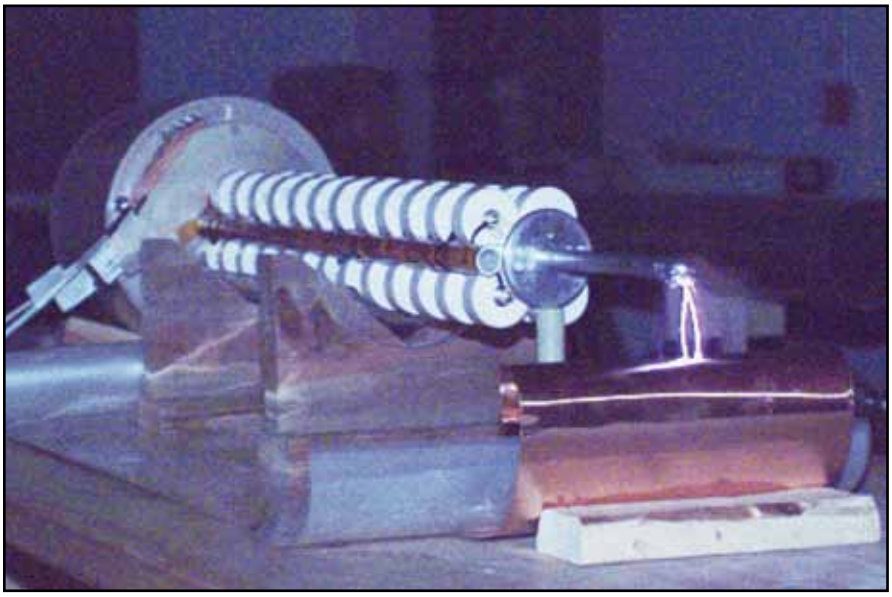


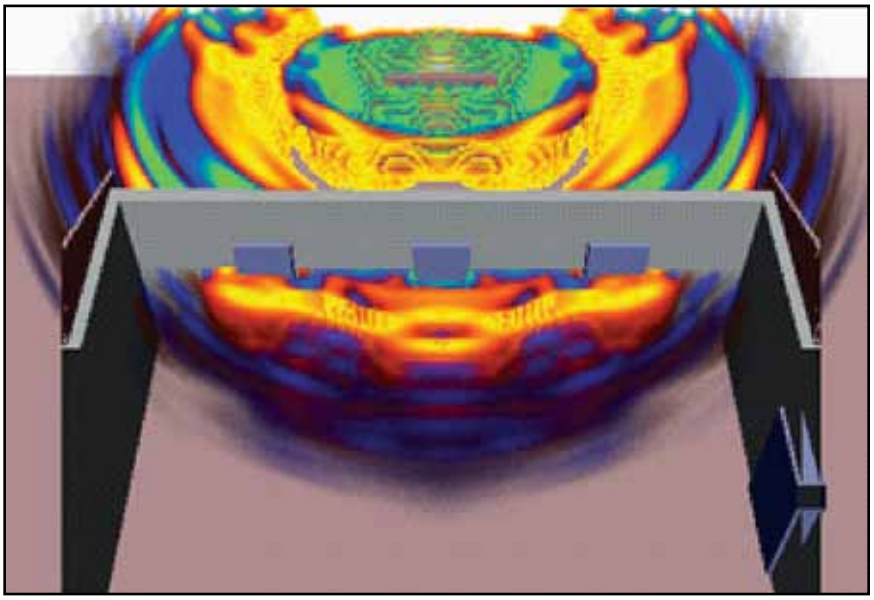
Figure 1. Examples of NSWCDD Marx Generators

and electronic infrastructure equipment to high-power RF interference.

HPM Counterattack Operational Overview

Research in support of HPM-driven electronic attack increased significantly as the demand for nontraditional warfare emerged. Traditional kinetic weapons often are of limited value in peace-keeping missions, for example, as today's enemies frequently are embedded within civilian populations and structures. This creates the need for novel HPM technologies that minimize the risk of collateral damage while effectively neutralizing threats. Dahlgren researchers conduct HPM system research and development—as well as lethality and weapon effectiveness assessments—to address this need while developing technologies against a wide variety of electronic targets. These projects leverage NSWCDD's assets, including the Maginot' Open Air Test Site (MOATS), state-of-the-art RF diagnostics, and modeling and simulation tools to identify applications and platforms in which HPM technologies can be employed. Figure 2 shows a computer model of the MOATS facility and a modeling and

(a)



(b)

Figure 2. Modeling and Simulation Depicting (a) NSWCDD Test Facility and (b) Simulation of Radiated RF

simulation graphic depicting the RF emitted by an HPM dipole antenna.

Potential platforms for HPM integration include: man-portable, aerial, vehicle, and vessel-mounted systems. These platforms all provide unique methods for delivery of HPM sources. For example, aerial delivery—which, in many ways, is the most challenging due to size and weight constraints—can increase the effective range of these systems and can engage multiple targets at close range without endangering personnel. Likewise, vehicles and vessel-mounted HPM systems provide a way for law enforcement and the military to stop vehicles in chase scenarios almost as soon as they begin. The goal of all of these projects is to provide military forces with the ability to employ nonkinetic, electronic strike technologies against an adversary's electronics.

The DEWO and Directed Energy Division are uniquely positioned to provide numerous capabilities for in-house development while engaging with the private sector to test and provide feedback on HPM systems developed externally. In the past decade, NSWCDD has evaluated several HPM systems at Dahlgren to determine their effectiveness against various electronic targets while maintaining the Office of the Secretary of Defense's Tri-Service RF Directed Energy Weapon (DEW) Database. This database contains all effects data collected from directed-energy tests performed within the U.S. Air Force, Army, and Navy.

Conclusion

NSWCDD continues to pioneer HPM source development and lethality and integration studies, leading to the demonstration and delivery of prototype capabilities. It also is committed to researching and developing critical subsystems for HPM delivery. By leveraging numerous target assets and sophisticated diagnostic equipment—in conjunction with MOATS—NSWCDD has positioned itself at the forefront of HPM electronic attack, leading the way in the development and delivery of these capabilities to the warfighter.

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