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Radio Waves Studied for Arms Potential

Can the human mind be short-circuited or even destroyed by extremely low-frequency radio waves?

Preposterous as such an idea may seem, scientists on both sides of the Iron Curtain have been conducting secret studies on the subject. And though it bears the acronym ELF, there's nothing pixielike about the possible effects of extremely low frequency transmissions. Reputable scientists say they could be developed into another grisly weapon of mass destruction.

The Navy is installing more than 50 miles of underground antenna in Wisconsin and Michigan to beam extremely low frequency messages to our submarines deep under the oceans. Lacking such a system, the subs now have to come near the surface to receive long-distance communications from the Defense Department, thereby exposing themselves to enemy tracking devices.

The ELF transmissions, the Navy contends, are not at a level harmful to humans and animals.

For years ELF research suffered under the cloud of "parapsychology." Unfortunately for the human race, there's nothing silly about the potential effects of very low-level electromagnetic radiation on the nervous system.

The Soviets conducted pioneer research in electromagnetic radiation in the 1930s in hopes of giving scientific respectability to mental telepathy. But the lowest-frequency ranges were difficult to detect with the primitive instruments of that era, and Soviet scientists eventually abandoned the electromagnetic mechanism as a means of perfecting telepathy.

But brain researchers in this country and elsewhere acknowledge that those early Soviet scientists were the first to realize that very low-level radiation could have profound effects on the human organism—and frightening military uses.

American researchers have told us that within 15 years scientists on both sides may learn how to interfere with the electrical impulses of the human brain by means of long-distance transmission of electromagnetic radiation. This interference could extend to "switching off" the brain's vital functions—that is, killing the targeted victims.

In fact, the Navy once funded a project to determine whether ELF signals could upset human brain function to bring on hypertension or sudden death. The project was killed by a high Navy official when he found it in his budget—not because it was too horrifying, but because it smacked of psychic research, which he opposed.

The Soviets may already have tested some such device against American personnel. From 1959 until 1978, mysterious microwave radiation was beamed at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. Official reports concluded that the Soviets may have been trying "mind control" or "electronic induction of illness." As far as anyone can determine, the attempt failed.

Meanwhile, the Navy has contracted for preliminary ELF studies with several biomedical research firms in the Los Angeles area. Other highly classified and well-funded research in this spooky field continues in this country—and no doubt in the Soviet Union as well.