

FEATURE

# The military's 'magic plan' to make enemies hallucinate

*The Week Staff*



A Black Hawk helicopter lands in Afghanistan: The military is putting \$4 million behind a device mounted on to vehicles that will cause the enemy to see and hear things that aren't there. Defense.gov/Tech. Sgt. J.T. May III

February 21, 2012

**A**s the military's technology arm, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) is charged with ushering in the future of field combat, developing everything from hypersonic planes to robotic allies. But a new project hinted at in the Pentagon's defense budget is piquing outsider interest thanks to some seemingly bewitching connotations: The agency is being granted \$4 million for a project known simply as "Battlefield Illusion." Here's what we know about the military's "magic plan":

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enemy with "auditory and visual" hallucinations to lend our troops a "tactical advantage," says Noah Shachtman at *Wired*. The project aims to use new technologies similar to the misdirection techniques utilized by magicians.

### **The military is really mimicking magicians?**

Yep. "Magicians and generals have had a long-standing relationship," says Shachtman. "Harry Houdini snoopied on the German and Russian militaries for Scotland Yard. English illusionist Jasper Maskelyne is reported to have created dummy submarines and fake tanks to distract Rommel's army during World War II." And during the Cold War, the CIA paid magician John Mulholland \$3,000 to write a manual on "misdirection, concealment, and stagecraft."

### **Alright. But how will "Battlefield Illusion" trick enemies?**

It would likely use "optical technology" mounted onto vehicles to create on-field hallucinations, says Rob Waugh at Britain's *Daily Mail*. The technology is said to be similar to "current measures designed to confuse radar systems" — such as electromagnetic manipulation — "but applied to human beings."

### **What other types of technologies have**

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the past, both the U.K. and U.S. governments have looked into weaponizing hallucinogens like LSD for combat use. And early in the war on terror, defense technology experts "floated the idea of a 'Voice of God' weapon," says Shachtman, which would have used "directed sound waves to convince would-be jihadis that Allah was speaking in their ears — and ordering them to put down their suicide belts." Sounds like magic, doesn't it?

*Sources: Daily Mail, Global Post, Wired*

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