



Laser Radar: Progress and Opportunities in Active Electro-Optical Sensing

National Research Council, Division on Engineering and Physical Sciences, Committee on Review of Advancements in Active Electro-Optical Systems to Avoid Technological Surprise Adverse to U.S. National Security

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In today's world, the range of technologies with the potential to threaten the security of U.S. military forces is extremely broad. These include developments in explosive materials, sensors, control systems, robotics, satellite systems, and computing power, to name just a few. Such technologies have not only enhanced the capabilities of U.S. military forces, but also offer enhanced offensive capabilities to potential adversaries - either directly through the development of more sophisticated weapons, or more indirectly through opportunities for interrupting the function of defensive U.S. military systems. Passive and active electro-optical (EO) sensing technologies are prime examples.

Laser Radar considers the potential of active EO technologies to create surprise; i.e., systems that use a source of visible or infrared light to interrogate a target in combination with sensitive detectors and processors to analyze the returned light. The addition of an interrogating light source to the system adds rich new phenomenologies that enable new capabilities to be explored. This report evaluates the fundamental, physical limits to active EO sensor technologies with potential military utility; identifies key technologies that may help overcome the impediments within a 5-10 year timeframe; considers the pros and cons of implementing each existing or emerging technology; and evaluates the potential uses of active EO sensing technologies, including 3D mapping and multi-discriminate laser radar technologies.

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