

Taser – Just a Small Jolt?

The spread of the tasers can be seen as symptomatic for a deterioration of the respect for human life in the third millennium, rather than a technical improvement. A huge discrepancy is found between the aimed safe and harmless weapon on one side and the lacking safety and horrendous abuse on the other.

A safe remedy

The current taser depends on a current and thus a wired connection between weapon and victim. That limits its use to a few meters but a wireless improvement may soon be available [1]. Two small arrows ascertain the connection, not necessarily in the victims flesh – the high voltage, 5,000 V, suffices for the remaining transfer. The current delivers 1.6 mA over 1.5 sec, which is considered 'harmless' and generally does not create lasting marks. It does, however, suffice to create general muscular contraction and unconsciousness, whereby the victim falls to the ground and thereby possibly gains the marks, which the electric current primarily spared. The abuse of tasers against people who are already sitting or lying makes these marks less prone to occur in the general population of taser victims.

The firm wants to sell as many as possible (as most firms obviously do), and in rogue nations it can be obtained even by private persons for around 300 \$. It is therefore to be expected that all claims of danger and torture are challenged. The French Taser Chief Antoine di Zazzo claims that he has tried it 50 times [2] and also some security fanatics under the politicians occasionally claims they have tested it out (Le Pen in France, Christoph Blocher in Switzerland).

Tasers are widely used in USA, UK, France and Canada and are also present, but more cautious used, in Australia, New Zealand and Sweden. They are forbidden in Denmark and Norway, but Danish military police have obtained the device for use abroad – probably in Denmark's liberation fight at its South-Eastern border at Hindukush.

In November 2007, Amnesty International [3] stated that "Police use of Tasers to subdue suspects can rise to the level of torture" and simultaneously, United Nations [4] has declared "The Committee [against Torture] was worried that the use of TaserX26 weapons, provoking extreme pain, constituted a form of torture." The fine difference is that taser use is not necessarily equalized with torture but the abuse possibly is. That obliges the responsible to define the permissive use of tasers, understanding that abuse is beyond that definition. In New Zealand [5], Police may only use the taser to:

- Defend themselves, or others, if they fear physical injury to themselves, or others, and they cannot reasonably protect themselves, or others, less forcefully, or
- Arrest an offender if they believe on reasonable grounds that the offender poses a threat of physical injury and the arrest cannot be effected less forcefully, or
- Resolve an incident where a person is acting in a manner likely to physically injure themselves and the incident cannot be resolved less forcefully, or
- Prevent the escape of an offender if they believe on reasonable grounds that the offender poses a threat of physical injury to any person, and the escape cannot be prevented less forcefully, or
- Deter attacking animals.

This must be compared to the actual abuse in various countries.

1 <http://www.thestar.com/sciencetech/Technology/article/281670>

2 <http://www.taser.fr/>

3 http://rawstory.com/news/2007/Amnesty_International_Taser_victims_penalty_should_1126.html

4 http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B9C2E/%28httpNewsByYear_en%29/D3DD9DE87B278A87C125739C0054A81C?OpenDocument

5 <http://www.police.govt.nz/resources/2006/taser-trial/>

Taser Danger and Abuse

Probably more than 300 people have died after taser use – generally taser abuse – Worldwide [6]. Some policemen have tried it on themselves – and thereafter omitted them in their hunt against criminals. Their description raises doubt if also the before mentioned persons have received the full amplitude, if any at all.

The abuse relate to the desire of some help-sheriffs not to catch fugitives but to exert punishment here and now, e.g. for train travellers without valid ticket [7,8] or for minor traffic offences [9,10], sometimes fatally [11]. It has been used against pregnant women [12,13] and children [14]. It has also been used in arrests as an obvious mean of torture and on a sleeping man in his home [15]. In Florida, a student was tasered and arrested for asking John Kerry questions about the 2004 election [16]. Fatal use on non-fugitive and unarmed persons has been documented in Vancouver Airport [17]. Repeated use of the taser has been reported in many cases, including some of the fatal ones. Using it more than once can never be necessary for stopping a fugitive, indicating a desire for 'punishment' – which deserves to be called what it is: torture.

In Summary

If understood as an alternative to the use of gunshots, the taser is probably an enrichment of the police arsenal, not refuting that it is still associated with a certain vital danger. However, its use must be restricted to such cases where the suspected crime otherwise would justify the use of firearms. The massive abuse recorded is indicative of that the malice and dangers associated with this device are not recognized by its users, or these must otherwise be considered as psychopathic criminals themselves, employing torture. Therefore, each use of the taser demands reporting as generally demanded for use of firearms. Private purchase must be abandoned.

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- 6 <http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2007/10/18/18454575.php>
 - 7 <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/british-columbia/story/2008/04/15/bc-transit-police-taser.html>
 - 8 http://prisonplanet.com/articles/april2008/042108_translink_cops.htm
 - 9 <http://www.thenewspaper.com/news/20/2062.asp>
 - 10 <http://infowars.net/articles/november2007/211107Tased.htm>
 - 11 <http://www.startribune.com/local/north/13841301.html>
 - 12 <http://www.whiotv.com/news/14719706/detail.html>
 - 13 http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in_article_id=479341&in_page_id=1770
 - 14 <http://www.prisonplanet.com/articles/september2007/020907Taser.htm>
 - 15 <http://www.phillyburbs.com/pb-dyn/news/103-11032007-1434893.html>
 - 16 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/worldlatest/story/0,-6930305,00.html>
 - 17 <http://www.heise.de/tp/r4/artikel/26/26618/1.html>