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Not much gets by this omnipotent view

By Jon Boroshok / Correspondent

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Human eyes and ears can't detect everything in a high-security zone. Darkness, mental fatigue and limited vision leave openings for attack.

To remedy that, Vista Control Systems on Porter Road developed a technology so sensitive it detects vehicles and intruders on foot, 100 meters or more outside a fence. Even someone crawling on the ground would not escape notice.

Such a capability could be useful in Iraq or to protect foreign embassies - frequent targets of terrorist attacks.

U.S. Rep. Marty Meehan, D-Lowell, paid a visit to Vista Tuesday to get a look at the company's premiere product: QUPID - short for Quick-reaction Perimeter Intrusion Detection system, an ultra wide-band radar that detects intruders.

"Domestically, we're in a position where we need to secure the homeland," said Meehan, a ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities.

"We need to secure our airports, our water supply, our power facilities, and this is the best technology to help to do that."

QUPID is also useful in the global war on terrorism - including in Iraq and Afghanistan, Meehan said. In the war against terrorism, U.S. soldiers are targets. Perimeter security is important to protect them.

"The technology itself has enormous potential," Meehan said. "We are deploying Americans, men and women around the world, and we need to make sure they're going to be safe, and this is the best technology available to do that."

Having visited Iraq and Afghanistan, Meehan noted that terrorists are always improving their technology.

"They're watching and they're analyzing. There's no margin for error in protecting our soldiers," he said. "We have to make sure we're not vulnerable, 365 days a year."

Providing that protection Vista Systems' goal. Located in Littleton for about six years, the company formerly known as LAU Defense Systems, designs and develops a wide variety of high-tech defense electronics systems - including graphics, high-speed data fabrics, memory, and homeland security and sensor products.

Vista settled in Littleton primarily for its real estate. It is located in a former Digital Equipment Corporation building.

"The facility meets our manufacturing and office needs, and is easily accessible via Routes 2 and 495," said Gerald Byrnes, Vista's director of sales and marketing. "We

really like the area. Littleton is a nice town."

In addition to providing the town with tax revenues and restaurant patronage, Vista employs 130 people in manufacturing, a fact noted by Meehan.

"Obviously, to come into a plant in the center of my district and see manufacturing is a positive thing. This technology will mean a lot to the local economy because they are actually producing things," he said.

Byrnes said that over the past two years, the company has grown, with most hiring in the manufacturing plant. If QUPID takes off, more employees will be needed.

Meehan jumped on the potential to create more jobs.

"I'm a believer that our future requires us to remember that in order to live well, a country has to produce products, and they are producing right here at this facility. The more investment we make in the technology, the more jobs that can be created, so it's extremely important, not just to Littleton, but the whole surrounding area," Meehan said.

When asked if Vista would follow the trend of outsourcing jobs overseas to reduce costs, Byrnes said he doubted his company would follow suit.

"We would not trust tooling and testing out of house. You can't just give someone a set of plans and say go build it," he said. "QUPID started here, and stays here."

Meehan agreed.

"One of the biggest challenges we face is to find a way to prevent outsourcing of technology that we develop here in the United States. It's one of the things I've been looking at in terms of how to prevent outsourcing, how to make sure that we manufacture in the United States," he explained.

"We can beat the competition based on our brainpower and improvement of our manufacturing processes and technologies. We need to do everything we can to help companies like this do well, grow and expand."

Meehan believes American defense products should be built stateside.

"We need to buy American when it comes to national security. I don't think we can be outsourcing to other countries. When it comes to national security, price shouldn't be the only determinant. The protection of the technology should also be a factor," Meehan said.

As a subsidiary of the Curtiss-Wright Corporation, Vista Control Systems self-funded its research and development. To date, the company has secured a number of military contracts, and with the introduction of QUPID, hopes to do more, particularly with the Department of Homeland Security. "Look at the things that need to be protected," said Byrnes. "Dams, airports, etc. This is perfect."

From his position on the House Armed Services Committee, Meehan oversees legislation and budgeting for the types of products Vista sells, and said he was impressed with his demonstration of QUPID.

Meehan said he is pushing for more money for research and development in the defense budget. He hopes to help expand the federal government's investment in technology, similar to what is being developed at Vista.

"This is technology driven, and Massachusetts has long been a leader in technology, and we need to promote the technology," said Meehan. "I think the technology

represents the future. I think we need to make more of an investment, and see it develop," Meehan said.

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