

Robobugs to swarm over enemy lines



An artist's impression of the spider.

Photo: *Bae Systems*

Dylan Welch
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A British defence company is creating an army of robotic bugs for use in wars.

In a \$41 million deal with the US Army, the British defence behemoth BAE Systems has embarked on an ambitious program to create "miniature robots" modelled after spiders, dragonflies, snakes and butterflies to go over enemy lines

"[BAE] will create an autonomous, multifunctional collection of miniature intelligence-gathering robots that can operate in places too inaccessible or dangerous for humans," the company said in a statement.

While some of the robobugs still only exist on the drawing board, the company said plans for the spider-like bug were "well advanced" and they had hopes they may hit the battlefields as early as this year.

A soldier would carry the robots into the field via a small tracked vehicle they deploy from. Once deployed, they would swarm into their target and relay images back to their soldier-operator via a hand-held or wrist-mounted computer.

Some of the bugs would be fitted with tiny cameras, while others would be equipped with sensors that would be able to detect chemical, biological or radioactive weapons.

"What we are doing is providing an enhanced awareness for soldiers, basically an extension to their eyes and ears," programme manager Steve Scalera told British newspaper the *Daily Mail*.

"The creatures have external sensors [so] they can be tossed out into a building or a cave, or even a pile of rubble, and then send images back to the troops.

"The idea is to get a number of these working together - some tiny, some maybe up to a foot in length, and all going into a building together carrying out different tasks. Eventually we hope to have animals flying and slithering.

"The five-year programme has just started but we could have them with soldiers within six months, and then continue to develop the concept as the project goes along."