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NYPD robocops: Hulking, 400-lb robots will start patrolling New York City

Mayor says new surveillance bots are "only the beginning" of police force revamp.

RON AMADEO - 4/12/2023, 1:57 PM



Enlarge / NYC Mayor Eric Adams holds a press conference with members of the NYPD and Boston Dynamics' Spot.

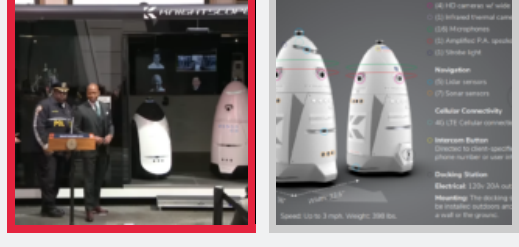
The New York Police Department is **bringing back** the idea of policing the city with robots. The department experimented with Boston Dynamics' Spot in 2021 and shut the project down after a **public outcry** from civil liberties groups. The idea is being brought back by NYC's new mayor, Eric Adams, who was elected in 2022 and described himself multiple times during the announcement as a "computer geek." Adams is a former NYPD captain and ran on a platform of reducing crime.

Most police departments already have an arsenal of robots, but they are usually for bomb disposal, not the day-to-day patrolling work that New York City envisions. Bomb disposal robots are usually just fancy remote-controlled cars—totally 'dumb' remote-control devices that have no automation and require one or several people to operate. NYC wants semi-autonomous robots patrolling the streets. Adams says, "If we were not willing to move forward and use technology on how to properly keep cities safe, then you will not keep up with those doing harmful things."

For active patrol work, the NYPD plans to deploy one Knightscope K5 robot. This is a 400-lb, 5-foot-tall wheeled robot that looks like a real-life giant R2-D2. The egg-shaped robot has no appendages and is mostly just a ball of sensors. It has a 360-degree camera system, a thermal camera, LiDAR, sonar, GPS, 16 microphones, and speakers to play back pre-recorded or live messages. It can autonomously patrol an area, detect people, and recognize license plates and has facial recognition, though the NYPD claims facial recognition will not be used. As a wheeled robot, it can only access ADA-compliant areas via ramps.



The police chief and mayor next to a Knightscope K3 and K5 robot.



The K5 is pitched as an "Autonomous Security Robot" and was unveiled in 2014. K5 units have made the news for various incidents like **driving into a pond** or **running over children**. NYC is renting the robot for six months at a cost of \$9 per hour. NYPD Chief Jeffrey Maddrey said the robot would be deployed in July as a "pilot" program and will patrol Times Square or the subway station. The robot will have a human partner.

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Another plan for a robocop is the same as last time: deploying Boston Dynamics' "Spot" robot dog, which the NYPD nicknamed "Digidog." Spot is a **\$75,000 robot** (not including attachments) that can autonomously patrol a mapped-out course, follow a person, and go up and down steps. The robot is meant for industrial remote monitoring and inspection, so there are tons of remote-control and recording capabilities, too. Spot has several optional payloads—in 2021 the NYPD outfitted it with the **Spot Cam+**, which features a pan-tilt-zoom camera with a 30x optical zoom, and a second 360-degree camera. In the photo-op at this latest announcement (pictured above), Spot is outfitted with the **'Spot Cam+IR'**, which adds a thermal camera and two-way audio into the mix, along with the **"Spot Arm" attachment**, which can open doors and manipulate other objects. So far, the NYPD plans to deploy two of the Spot robots.

Spot isn't doing autonomous patrol work yet. The NYPD says it will be used for "high-risk" incidents like hostage situations and hazardous material inspection, so basically a job similar to a bomb robot. The NYPD is buying two Spot robot dogs.

Various progressive groups are again calling this move a waste of money. One group, the **"Surveillance Technology Oversight Project (STOP)"**, said, "Wasting public dollars to invade New Yorkers' privacy is a dangerous police stunt," and added that New York should "be investing in actual human beings, not robots." Adams dismissed those as concerns from a vocal minority and says that "today is only the beginning" of the city's embrace of new policing technology.

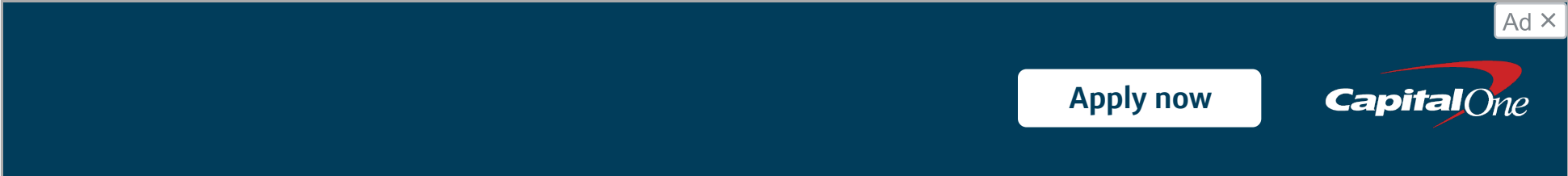
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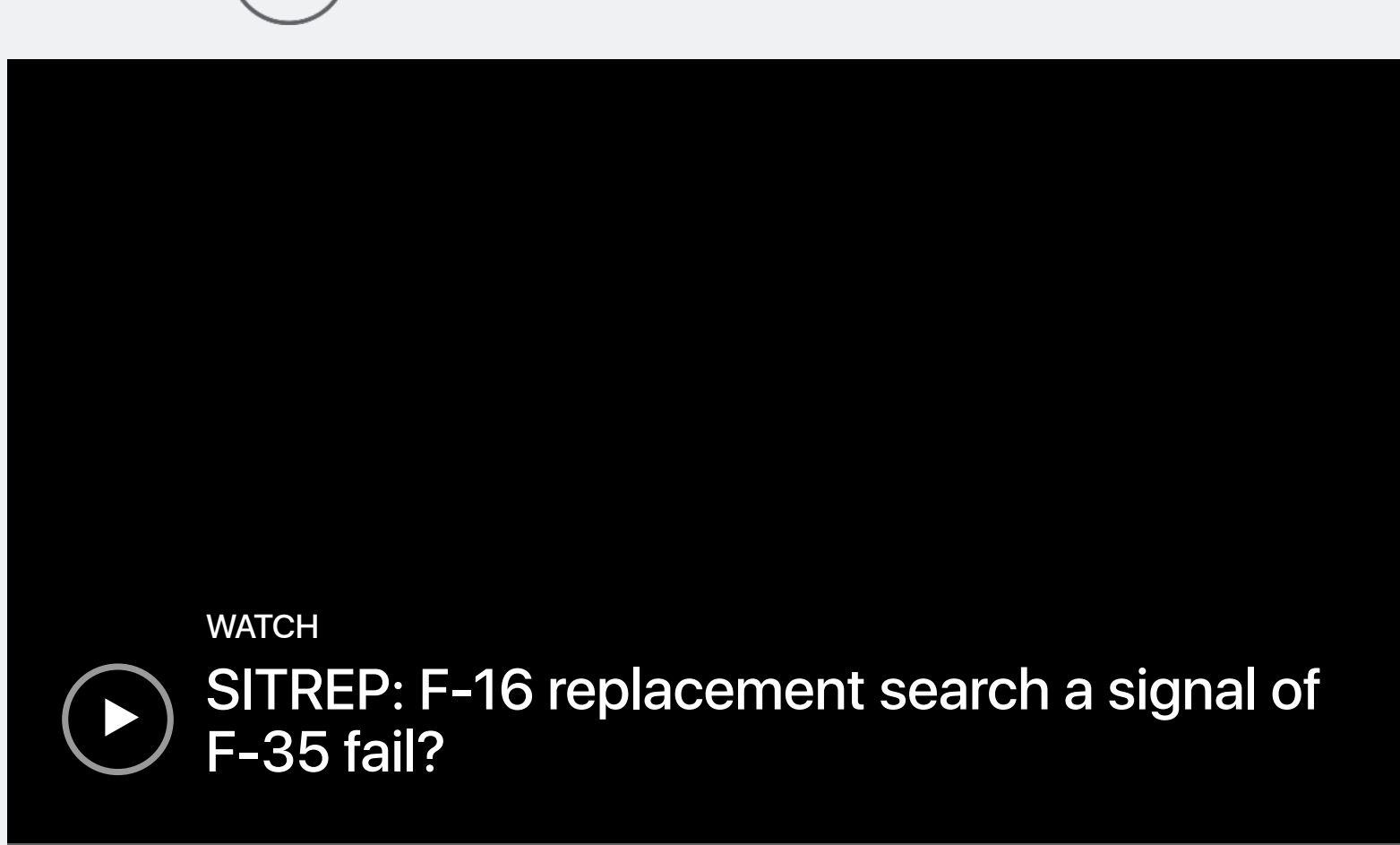
RON AMADEO

Ron is the Reviews Editor at Ars Technica, where he specializes in Android OS and Google products. He is always on the hunt for a new gadget and loves to rip things apart to see how they work. He loves to tinker and always seems to be working on a new project.

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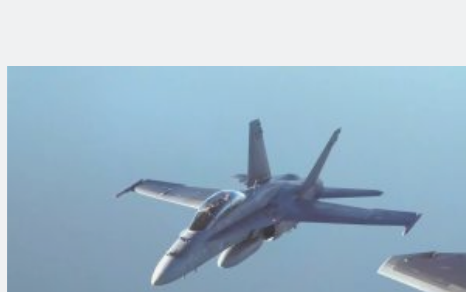


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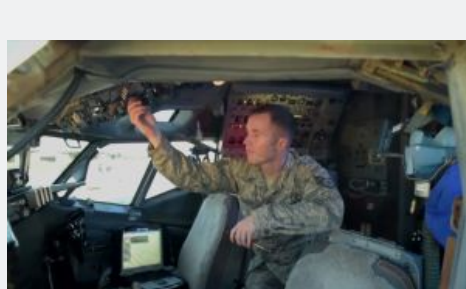


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Footage courtesy of Dvids, Boeing, and The United States Navy.



SITREP: F-16 replacement search a signal of F-35 fail?



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