

RoboCop? No, RoboDog: Robotic dog rejoins New York police

April 11 2023, by Karen Matthews



This image taken from video provided by New York City Office of The Mayor, Digidog mobile robot walks during news conference in Times Square on Tuesday, April 11, 2023 in New York. New York City officials unveiled three new high-tech policing devices Tuesday, including Digidog, that critics called creepy when it first joined the police pack 2 1/2 years ago. Credit: New York City Office of The Mayor via AP

New York City officials unveiled three new high-tech policing devices Tuesday, including a robotic dog that critics called creepy when it first joined the police pack 2 1/2 years ago.

The new devices, which also include a GPS tracker for stolen cars and a cone-shaped security robot, will be rolled out in a manner that is "transparent, consistent and always done in close collaboration with the people we serve," said police Commissioner Keechant Sewell, who joined Mayor Eric Adams and other officials at a Times Square press conference where the security robot and the mechanical canine nicknamed Digidog were displayed.

"Digidog is out of the pound," said Adams, a Democrat and former police officer. "Digidog is now part of the toolkit that we are using."

The city's first robot police dog was leased in 2020 by Adams' predecessor, former Mayor Bill de Blasio, but the city's contract for the device was cut short after critics derided it as creepy and dystopian.

Adams said he won't bow to anti-robot dog pressure.

"A few loud people were opposed to it and we took a step back," the mayor said. "That is not how I operate. I operate on looking at what's best for the city."

Adams said the remote-controlled, 70-pound (32-kilogram) Digidog will be deployed in risky situations like hostage standoffs starting this summer.



Honolulu Police Acting Lt. Joseph O'Neal demonstrates a robotic dog in Honolulu, Friday May 14, 2021. New York City officials unveiled three new high-tech policing devices Tuesday, including a similar robotic dog that critics called creepy when it first joined the police pack 2 1/2 years ago. Credit: AP Photo/Jennifer Sinco Kelleher, File

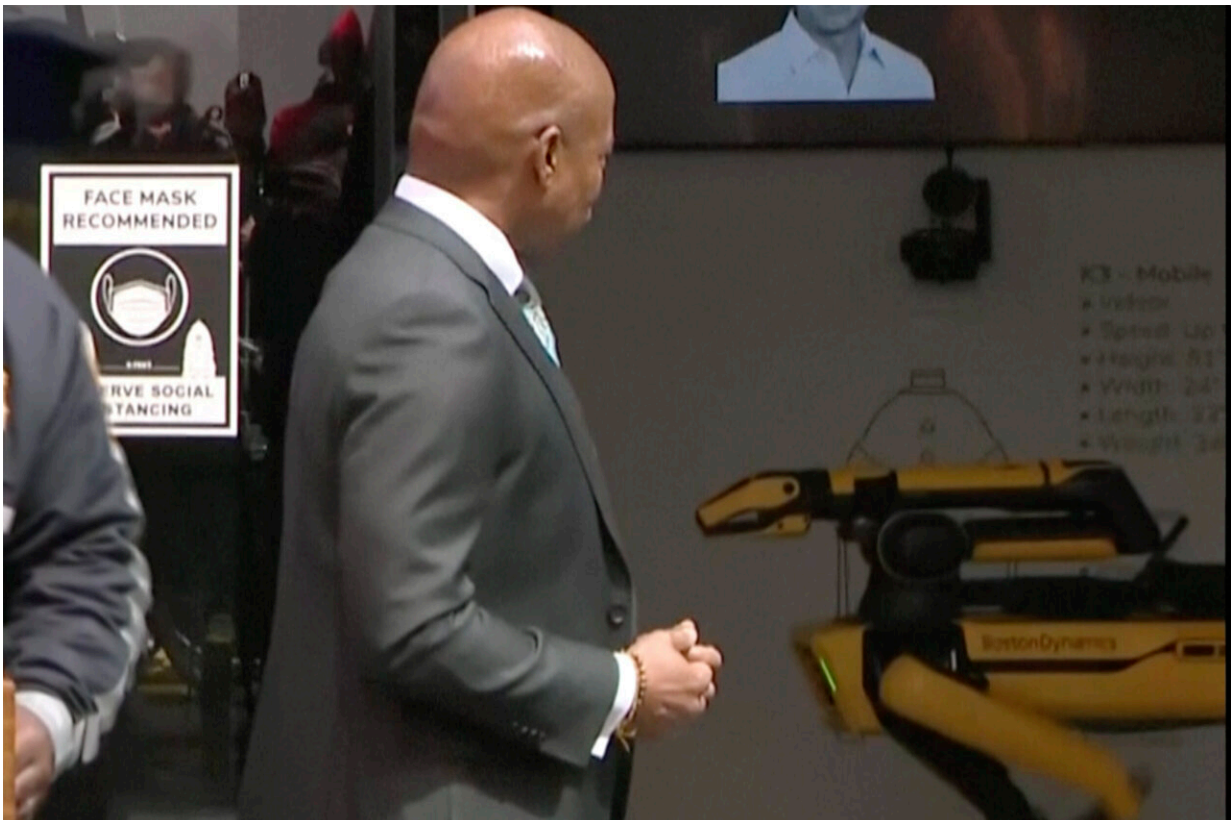
"If you have a barricaded suspect, if you have someone that's inside a building that is armed, instead of sending police in there, you send Digidog in there," he said. "So these are smart ways of using good technologies."

The tracking system called StarChase will allow police to launch a GPS

tag that will attach itself to a stolen car so that officers can track the vehicle's location. The New York Police Department's pilot program for using the system will last 90 days, officials said.

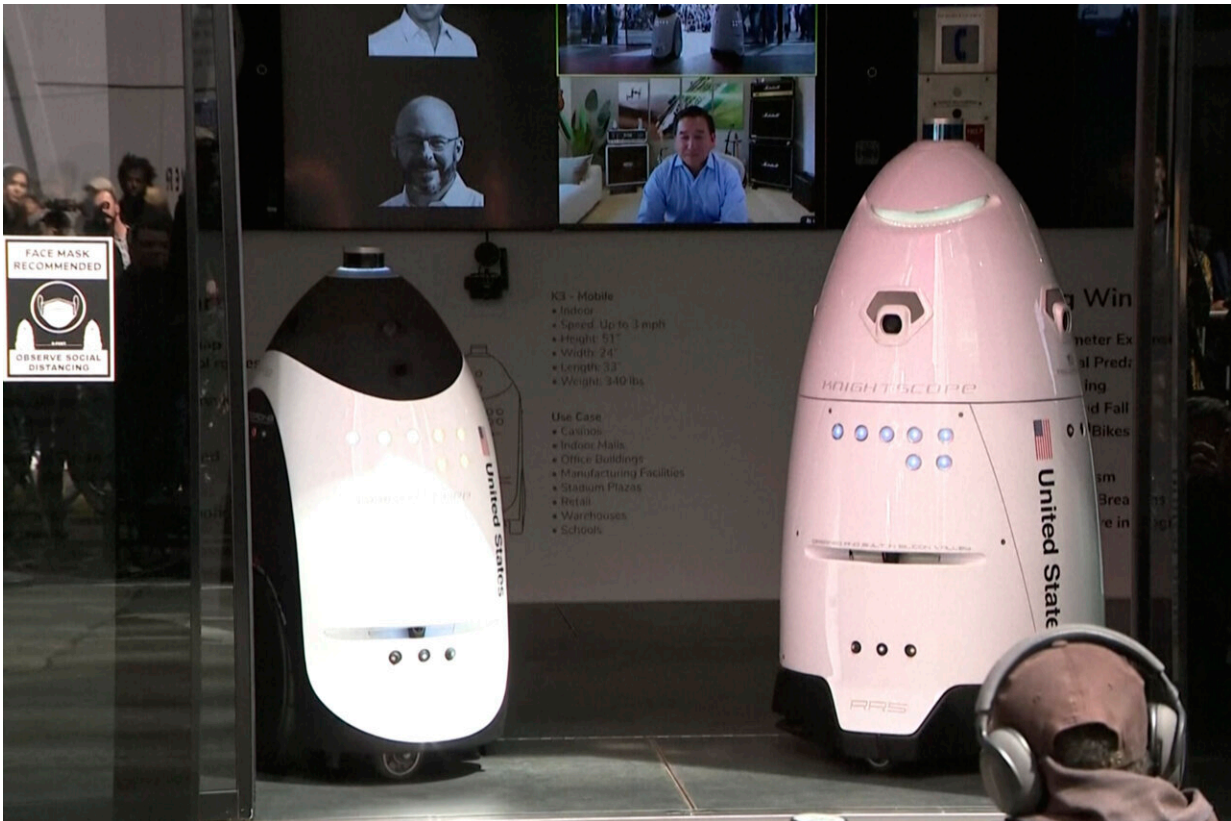
The Autonomous Security Robot, which Adams compared to a Roomba, will be deployed inside the Times Square subway station in a seven-month pilot program starting this summer, police officials said.

The device, used in shopping centers and other locations for several years, will at first be joined by a human partner, police said.



This image taken from video provided by New York City Office of The Mayor, New York Mayor Eric Adams looks back at Digidog mobile robot, during a news conference in Times Square on Tuesday, April 11, 2023 in New York. New York City officials unveiled three new high-tech policing devices Tuesday,

including Digidog, that critics called creepy when it first joined the police pack 2 1/2 years ago. Credit: New York City Office of The Mayor via AP



This image taken from video provided by New York City Office of The Mayor, K5 Autonomous Security Robot (ASR) departs news conference on Tuesday, April 11, 2023 in New York. New York City officials unveiled three new high-tech policing devices Tuesday, including Digidog, that critics called creepy when it first joined the police pack 2 1/2 years ago. Credit: New York City Office of The Mayor via AP

Civil libertarians and police reform advocates questioned the need for the high-tech devices.

"This latest announcement is just the most recent example of how Mayor Adams allows unmitigated overspending of the NYPD's massively bloated budget," said Ileana Mendez-Penate, program director of Communities United for Police Reform. "The NYPD is buying robot dogs and other fancy tech while New Yorkers can't access food stamps because city agencies are short-staffed, and New Yorkers are getting evicted because they can't access their right to counsel."

Albert Fox Cahn, executive director of the Surveillance Technology Oversight Project, said, "The NYPD is turning bad science fiction into terrible policing. New York deserves real safety, not a knockoff RoboCop."

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