

GATED CONJUGATION LASER

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to designation of targets with the help of a laser
5 signal.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Designating targets using laser spots is a widely known technique due to the high precision of the pointing laser device and the relatively low cost of the homing head (seeker). For example, the seeker can be mounted on an
10 intercepting platform, such as a missile, and utilize the energy reflected from a target illuminated with a laser beam, for generating steering commands and homing the intercepting platform towards the target.

Using laser signals for designating an intercepting platform towards a single target is known to be very effective. However, in some cases multiple
15 intercepting platforms must be designated simultaneously towards multiple respective targets (for example in case of an incoming missile barrage). In such cases an area is protected by an air defense system comprising detection and tracking system operable to detect and track incoming threats (e.g. missiles) connected to a missile firing system which is operable to fire at least one
20 countering missile towards any one of the incoming threats. Generally, multiple laser designators are required, each operable to accurately designate a specific target and home a respective countering missile towards that target. The laser spot of each laser signal, used for designating a certain target, is accurately pointed to the body of a respective target in order to ensure that
25 sufficient energy is reflected back from the target towards the intercepting

platform to enable homing on the target. Such operations require a complex and expensive laser system which evidently suffer from a number of drawbacks. For example, the sights of the laser designator and the detection system (e.g. radar system and/or optical tracker) must be calibrated (e.g. in an accuracy of at least approximately 200 micro radians) and the required minimal size of the target projection is constrained by the pointing accuracy of the designation system and the divergence of the laser designator.

Thus, there is a need in the art for improved method and systems for designating targets.

10 GENERAL DESCRIPTION

According to one aspect of the presently disclosed subject matter there is provided a laser system, comprising: a laser illuminator, a phase conjugation laser receiver and transmitter (PCLRT) and at least one processing unit; the PCLRT comprising a laser amplifier and a phase conjugation mirror;

15 the at least one processing unit is configured to obtain information in respect of one or more targets; and responsive to obtaining said information, to enable the generation of a modified laser signal characterized by an average pulse repetition frequency (PRF) which equals to a basic average PRF of a given original laser signal multiplied by at least N , $N \geq$ the number of targets; the modified laser signal comprising at least N pulse series; and to
20 assign a respective pulse series to each of at least part of the N targets;

the laser illuminator is configured to transmit the modified signal towards the N targets; the PCLRT is configured to receive a reflection of said modified signal, reflected from at least the identified targets; said reflection
25 comprising a reflection set for each given pulse in the modified laser signal;

each reflection set comprising at least N pulse reflections, each reflected from a different target (or some other object in the illuminated area);

the PCLRT is further configured to perform gating for at least one reflection set, in order to allow, one pulse reflection, reflected from a given target, to be amplified by the amplifier, reflected by the phase conjugation mirror and returned in the direction of the given target.

The system according to the presently disclosed subject matter can optionally comprise one or more of the following features, in any desired combination or permutation:

- I. Wherein the modified laser signal comprises a pulse set in each PRI (pulse rate interval) of the original laser signal, the pulse set comprising at least N pulses and wherein each pulse series is associated with a different i^{th} pulse in each pulse set.
- II. Wherein each pulse series is characterized by a different group of alternating PRI values which enables to uniquely identify each pulse series.
- III. Wherein all pulse series are characterized by the same average PRI value.
- IV. Wherein the gating is controlled by the at least one processing unit configured to synchronize between the time of transmission of a given pulse and time of arrival of a respective reflection set, based on the distance to the given target.
- V. Wherein the gating is controlled by the at least one processing unit based on the order of arrival of the pulse reflections in each reflection set.

- VI. Wherein the laser system further comprises a target detection unit configured to identify the one or more targets.
- VII. Wherein the laser system is operatively connected to a counter attack system, the laser system being operable to communicate with the counter attack system for allocating at least one target to a respective intercepting platform, the information including a pulse series assigned to the at least one target; and to launch said intercepting platform towards said at least one target.
- VIII. Wherein the laser beam of the illuminator is a wide beam for illuminating all targets in the uncertainty area and with sufficient energy to be reflected and received by the PCLRT.
- IX. Wherein the laser system further comprising beam shaping optics enabling to generate a laser beam characterize by a beam profile, that ensures a substantially constant minimal received signal reflected from the illuminated target.
- X. Wherein the laser system does not make use of a stabilizing system for enabling accurate illumination of the target

According to another aspect of the presently disclosed subject matter there is provided a method of laser designation, comprising:

- obtaining information in respect of one or more identified targets; generating a modified laser signal characterized by an average PRF which equals to a basic average PRF of a given original laser signal multiplied by at least N , $N \geq$ the number of identified targets; the modified laser signal comprising at least N pulse series; assigning a respective pulse series to each of at least part of the N targets; transmitting the modified signal towards the N identified targets; receiving a reflection of said modified signal, reflected

from at least the identified targets; said reflection comprising a reflection set for each given pulse in the modified laser signal; each reflection set comprising at least N pulse reflections including N pulse reflections each reflected from a different target;

5 for at least one reflection set:

allowing one pulse reflection, reflected from a given target, to be reflected by the phase conjugation mirror; amplifying the one pulse reflection, and returning an amplified signal, reflected from the phase conjugation mirror, directed towards the given target; the amplified signal comprising
10 sufficient energy for the intercepting platform to track and home on to the given target.

According to another aspect of the presently disclosed subject matter there is provided a machine-readable memory tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine for executing the method of laser
15 designation, the method comprising:

obtaining information in respect of one or more identified targets; generating a modified laser signal characterized by an average PRF which equals to a basic average PRF of a given original laser signal multiplied by at least , $N \geq$ the number of identified targets; the modified laser signal
20 comprising at least N pulse series; assigning a respective pulse series to each of at least part of the N targets; transmitting the modified signal towards the N identified targets; receiving a reflection of said modified signal, reflected from at least the identified targets; said reflection comprising a reflection set for each given pulse in the modified laser signal; each reflection set
25 comprising at least N pulse reflections including N pulse reflections each reflected from a different target;

for at least one reflection set:

allowing one pulse reflection, reflected from a given target, to be reflected by the phase conjugation mirror; amplifying the one pulse reflection, and returning an amplified signal, reflected from the phase conjugation mirror, directed towards the given target.

The system, method and program storage device according to the different aspect of the presently disclosed subject matter mentioned above can optionally comprise one or more of the features (i-x) above, in any desired combination or permutation *mutatis mutandis*.

10 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In order to understand the invention and to see how it may be carried out in practice, a preferred embodiment will now be described, by way of non-limiting example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

15 **Fig. 1** is a functional block diagram schematically illustrating an example of a laser system, in accordance with the presently disclosed subject matter;

Fig. 2 is a flowchart illustrating an example of a sequence of operation performed during interception of a single target, in accordance with the presently disclosed subject matter;

20 **Figs. 3a** is a flowcharts illustrating an example of sequence of operations performed by system **200** during interception of a multiple targets, in accordance with the presently disclosed subject matter;

Fig. 3b is a flowchart illustrating an example of sequence of operations performed by an intercepting platform, in accordance with the presently disclosed subject matter.

Fig. 4 is a schematic illustration demonstrating an example of a modified laser signal, in accordance with the presently disclosed subject matter;

Fig. 5 is a schematic illustration exemplifying some operations of laser illuminating and designating system **200** when intercepting 3 targets, in accordance with the presently disclosed subject matter;

Fig. 6 is a flowchart illustrating an example of a sequence of operations performed, in accordance with the presently disclosed subject matter; and

Fig. 7 is a schematic illustration showing an example of a laser beam generated in accordance with the presently disclosed subject matter.

It is noted that the drawing are not drawn to scale.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

As used herein, the phrase "for example," "such as" and variants thereof describing exemplary implementations of the present invention are exemplary in nature and not limiting.

It is appreciated that certain features of the invention, which are, for clarity, described in the context of separate embodiments, may also be provided in combination in a single embodiment. Conversely, various features of the invention, which are, for brevity, described in the context of a single embodiment, may also be provided separately or in any suitable sub-combination. While the invention has been shown and described with respect to particular embodiments, it is not thus limited. Numerous modifications, changes and improvements within the scope of the invention will now occur to the reader. In embodiments of the invention, fewer, more and/or different stages than those shown in **Fig 2. Fig. 3a, Fig. 3b** and **Fig. 6** may be executed.

In embodiments of the invention one or more stages illustrated in **Fig. 2**, **Fig. 3a**, **Fig. 3b** and **Fig. 6** may be executed in a different order and/or one or more groups of stages may be executed simultaneously. **Fig. 1** illustrates a schematic of the system architecture in accordance with embodiments of the invention. Each module in **Fig. 1** can be made up of any combination of software, hardware and or firmware that performs the functions as defined and explained herein. The modules in **Fig. 1** may be centralized in one location or dispersed over more than one location. In other embodiments of the invention, the system may comprise fewer, more and or different modules than those shown in **Fig. 1**.

Bearing the above in mind, attention is now drawn to **Fig. 1** showing a functional block diagram schematically illustrating an example of a laser system **100**, in accordance with the presently disclosed subject matter. Unlike prior art laser intercepting systems, system **100** is operable to designate one or more targets while using a wide angle laser beam which does not accurately designates each target. The term "wide angle" as used herein is meant to include an angle which is wide enough to illuminate the entire area where targets are expected to be. Thus, the required angle is a function of the size of the uncertainty area where targets are expected to be detected. This is different than previously known laser designation systems which use a narrow laser beam which accurately illuminates a given target. According to one non-limiting example it is provided that the angle of laser beam as disclosed herein can be between 1 to 5 degrees wide.

Laser system **100** comprises laser illuminating and designating system **200** operatively connected to a counter attack system **206**. Counter attack system can be for example, a missile firing system comprising one or more

missile batteries or any other type of countering weapon system. Laser illuminating and designating system **200** comprises laser illuminator unit **204**, phase conjugation laser receiver/transmitter (PCLRT) **205**, controller unit **207**, one or more computer processors **220**, and line of sight (LOS) direction
5 assembly that can be implemented for example by a pan and tilt mechanism **230**. Unit **204** and unit **205** can be mounted either on one pan and tilt mechanism or on two separated pan and tilt mechanisms.

Laser system **100** is operable to obtain target information including the number and location (including distance) of one or more identified targets.
10 Optionally system **100** can also include a target detection system **202** (e.g. a radar system) operable to scan a predefined area and detect and track identified targets in the area. Alternatively or additionally, detection and tracking of targets can be performed autonomously by laser illuminating and designating system **200**.

15 Autonomous target acquisition can be performed with the help of illuminator unit **204** and controller unit **207**. To this end the system's LOS is moved (with the help of the pan and tilt mechanism **230**) in a predefined search pattern and illuminator **208** and range detector **215** can be used for generating target track files.

20 Laser illuminator unit **204** is configured to project a wide laser beam (generated for example by signal generating unit **224**) to illuminate with the laser beam a predefined area. By using a wide laser beam, rather than a narrow and accurate laser beam, the laser beam can illuminate a wider area and simultaneously hit multiple targets located within the illuminated area.
25 However, a wide laser beam is characterized by relatively lower fluence (energy on target in a given area) than narrow and accurate beams which are

typically used for designating targets. Accordingly, the energy which is reflected from an incoming target is insufficient for tacking and homing by an intercepting platform (e.g. intercepting missile) on to a respective target. Furthermore, since only one signal is being used, in case multiple targets are
5 detected, it does not allow guiding a specific intercepting platform to a specific target. A solution for these problems is disclosed herein.

Identified targets (e.g. missiles **250** or aircrafts) which enter the illuminated area are impinged by the wide laser beam, and part of the laser energy is reflected from the targets back towards the PCLRT **205** in laser
10 designating system **204**.

PCLRT **205** comprises laser optics **212** including for example a telescope, laser amplifier **214**, directed towards the phase conjugation mirror **216**. The energy reflected from a target which enters PCLRT **205** hits mirror **216** and reflected back towards the target through amplifier **214** and optics
15 **212**. PCLRT **205** also comprises a laser switching unit **222** which enables gating in order to control the reception and/or transmission of signals responsive to an appropriate command. The laser signal which is reflected from a given target and received by PCLRT **205** is amplified by laser applier **214** (e.g. once on the way in and once more on the way out after it is reflected from mirror
20 **216**) to increase the laser energy and is then reflected from phase conjugation mirror **216**.

As known in the art a phase conjugation mirror produces a phase conjugation effect in which the propagation direction and phase variation of a beam of light is exactly reversed. Thus, in accordance with the presently
25 disclosed subject matter, optical phase conjugation is harnessed in order to reflect the amplified laser signal-reflection back to its source target.

Once the number of identified targets is either known or expected signal generation unit **224** can derive a modified laser signal based on this information. The laser seeker of an intercepting platform is designed to respond to a signal (herein "original signal") characterized by a predefined
5 basic average PRF (having a unique pulse repetition interval (PRI) distribution over the signal). Responsive to reception of information indicative of the number of identified targets, signal generating unit **224** is configured to multiply the basic average PRF of the original signal by a number which is at least the number of identified targets and generate a modified signal with a
10 multiplied average PRF. Assuming for example a the original signal is characterized by a basic average PRF of 100 Hz and three targets are identified, the basic average PRF, used by illuminator unit **204**, can be multiplied by three to generate a modified laser signal with an average PRF of 300 Hz.

15 Thus, each pulse in the original signal is replaced by a pulse set of N pulses, where N is equal or greater than the number of identified targets. As explained in more details below the modified signal includes at least N identifiable pulse series, each series is associated with the i^{th} pulse in each pulse set of N pulses. While the PRF of the modified laser signal is multiplied,
20 the operating PRF of the seeker of the intercepting platforms is not changed. Thus, the modified laser signal now contains a pulse series for tracking and homing each of the identified targets, each pulse series characterized by the same average PRI ($\text{PRF} = 1/\text{average PRI}$) of the basic average working PRF of the intercepting platforms.

25 Target allocation unit **226** is configured to assign to each target a specific pulse series. Each intercepting platform is allocated to a respective

target and is provided with the identifying information of the pulse series assigned to the respective target.

As explained above, the reflected laser signal is received by PCLRT **205** which is configured to reflect an amplified and accurate signal towards the
5 source of the received reflection i.e. one of the identified targets.

The modified signal which is generated by signal generator **224** is projected by laser illuminator **208** and is reflected from all targets. Each pulse in each pulse set generates M pulse reflections, one pulse reflection returning from each target. Note that in some cases $M=N$, but this is not always the case
10 (for example in case bird enters the illuminated area and generates an additional reflection $M>N$). In the following discussion M or more reflections in a single pulse is referred as a "reflection set".

For each reflection set, comprising M pulse reflections, which is received by PCLRT **205**, laser illuminating and designating system **200** is
15 configured (e.g. with the help of laser switching unit **222**) to allow the reflection of only one pulse reflection back from PCLRT **205** to a respective source target. Thus, a pulse reflection from the M pulse reflections of a received reflection set is accurately returned from PCLRT **205** to the source target.

20 For each reflection set in N reflection sets, laser illuminating and designating system **200** is configured to allow PCLRT **205** to return a different i^{th} pulse reflection. Thus for N reflection sets (resulting from N respective pulses) one instance of each i^{th} pulse reflection is accurately returned to its source target. Laser illuminating and designating system **200** can be
25 configured to synchronize between the transmitted pulses and the signal reflection which is returned by PCLRT **205**.

The presently disclosed subject matter is based on the assumptions that each incoming target is located at a different distance from laser illuminating and designating system **200**. A laser pulse which is transmitted from laser illuminating and designating system **200** (with the help of laser illuminator unit **204**) hits the targets according to their distance, where the closest target is hit first and consequently the first to be received at PCLRT **205**, the second closest target is hit second and received second at PCLRT **205**, the third closest is hit third and received third at PCLRT **205** and so forth. Thus, based on the distance of the targets from laser illuminating and designating system **200** the pulse reflections in a reflection set can be associated with the respective target from which it was reflected.

In each reflection set, the pulse reflection which arrives first at PCLRT **205** is returned from the closest target, the pulse reflection which arrives second at PCLRT **205** is returned from the second target and so forth. Thus the order of arrival the pulse reflections can be associated with their corresponding target and pulse series.

According to one example, switching unit **222** in PCLRT **205** can be configured to open (e.g. and allow entrance of a pulse reflection) at a time which coincides with the arrival time of a given pulse reflection, in a reflection set, which is reflected from a given target. The given target can be identified based on the order of arrival of the pulse reflection.

According to another example, processing unit in laser illuminating and designating system **200** can be configured to record the time a pulse is transmitted, calculate the time of flight (TOF) of the pulse to the target and back to laser illuminating and designating system **200** and instruct switching unit **222** in PCLRT **205** to open at a time which coincides with the expected

arrival time of a given reflection, in a reflection set, which is reflected from a given target, which can be calculated based on the distance of the target from laser illuminating and designating system **200**.

The pulse reflection is accurately reflected from PCLRT **205** towards the source target and from the source target to the intercepting platform. As mentioned above, each pulse series is characterized by an average PRI and respective PRF which is equal to the basic working average PRI and respective PRF of the intercepting platforms. Furthermore, as explained in more details below, each pulse series is identifiable by a group of PRIs distinguishable by alternating temporal intervals. Thus, each intercepting platform can identify the pulse series which is reflected from its assigned target and use these signals for tracking and homing on its respective target. It should be noted that the irradiance ratio of PCLRT **205** and illuminator unit **204** should enable the intercepting platform to ignore reflections resulting from unit **204**.

One advantage of the presently disclosed laser system is that, unlike previously known laser systems, it does not necessitate a stabilization system. Prior art laser system requires an accurate and expensive stabilization system to enable accurate illumination of the target. The presently disclosed laser system on the other hand does not require such stabilization system as the phase conjugation effect directs the signals to the targets.

Fig. 2 is a flowchart illustrating an example of a sequence of operation performed during interception of a single target, in accordance with the presently disclosed subject matter. Operations described with reference to **Fig. 2** can be executed for example, by laser illuminating and designating system **200** described above with reference to **Fig. 1**.

At block **251**, information in respect of an incoming target is obtained. As explained above, this information can be obtained with the help of target detection system **202** or directly by laser illuminating and designating system **200**. **Fig. 2** refers to a scenario where a single target is identified.

5 A wide angle pulsed laser beam is projected by a laser illuminator (block **253**). The pulsed laser beam impinges on the incoming target and is reflected back towards system **200**. The pulse reflection is received by a phase conjugation laser receiver/transmitter (block **255**). The received pulse reflection is amplified at the entrance to the PCLRT and returned by a phase
10 conjugation mirror to the source target (block **257**). The retuned signal can be amplified once more at the exit from the PCLRT when it travels back from the phase conjugation mirror towards the source target.

Unlike the laser signal which is projected by the laser illuminator (**208**) the amplified retuned signal which is reflected by the phase conjugation laser
15 system is specifically directed to the incoming target. Furthermore, this signal is amplified and therefore is characterized by sufficient fluence (energy on target) for tracking and homing on the target.

An intercepting platform which is launched (e.g. from counter attack system **206**) towards the incoming target receives the laser energy of the
20 amplified beam, which is reflected from the incoming target (block **259**) and utilizes this reflection for tracking and homing on the target (block **261**). The laser beam which is transmitted by the laser illuminator can be identified by the intercepting platform e.g. based on predefined temporal PRI distances.

Note that in addition to the target other objects can be located
25 within the area which is being illuminated by the laser illuminator (e.g. a friendly aircraft or a bird). Thus, a reflection set comprising more than one

reflection can be returned towards system **200**. In order to discriminate between multiple reflections, the presently disclosed subject matter makes use of switching unit **222** in PCLRT **205** which is configured to enable gating and allow entrance of a pulse reflection at a time which coincides with the
5 arrival time of a given pulse reflection. Thereby only a desired pulse reflection enters PCLRT **205** and is amplified and returned towards the target.

Fig. 3 is a flowchart illustrating an example of a sequence of operation performed during interception of multiple targets, in accordance with the presently disclosed subject matter. Operations described with reference to
10 **Fig. 3** can be executed, for example, by laser illuminating and designating system **200** described above with reference to **Fig. 1**.

At block **310** information in respect of multiple identified targets is obtained at system **200**. As explained above, this information can be obtained with the help of target detection system **202** or directly by laser designating
15 and intercepting system **200**. Once the number of identified targets is known a modified laser signal is generated based on this information in intercepting system **200** (block **312**). The modified laser signal can be generated for example by signal generating unit **224** in intercepting system **200**.

According to one example, the modified laser signal is generated by
20 multiplying the average PRI of the original signal by the number of detected targets (or in some cases a greater number), thus the modified laser is characterized by multiplied average PRF. Accordingly, each pulse in the original signal is multiplied to create a set of N pulses, where N equals to at least the number of identified targets.

25 **Fig. 4** is a schematic illustration exemplifying the modification of the original laser signal, in accordance with the presently disclosed subject matter.

Fig. 4 illustrates a waveform (**OS**) representing the original laser signal which is used by laser illuminating and designating system **200** and a respective counter attack system (e.g. **206**). Assuming for example the basic average working PRF used in the original signal is 100 Hz and three targets are identified, the basic average PRF of the original signal is multiplied by three to generate a modified signal (**MS** in **Fig. 4**) with a PRF of 300 Hz. According to the example illustrated in **Fig. 4** each pulse (denoted P_1 - P_n) in the original signal **OS** has a corresponding pulse set in the modified signal **MS** (denoted as PS_1 - PS_n) each comprising N pulses. The modified laser signal includes N identifiable pulse series, each series comprising the i^{th} pulse in each pulse set of N respective pulses. Pulse series S_a , S_b and S_c are illustrated in **Fig. 4**. Each pulse series is associated with a corresponding i^{th} pulse in each pulse set. Series S_a comprises pulses a_1 - a_n ; Series S_b comprises pulses b_1 - b_n ; and Series S_c comprises pulses c_1 - c_n .

While the average PRF of the modified laser signal is multiplied, the average operating PRF of the seeker of each intercepting platform has not been changed. Thus, the modified laser signal now contains a pulse series for tracking and homing each of the incoming targets, each pulse series characterized by the same average operational PRF as the intercepting platform.

According to the presently disclosed subject matter, in order to enable to distinguish between the different pulse series the modified signal is generated such that each pulse series is assigned with a group of PRIs characterized by alternating temporal distances between each pair of i^{th} pulses in consecutive pulse sets.

Referring to series S_a a first PRI exists between pulse a_1 and pulse a_2 (e.g. 9.91 milliseconds) and a second PRI exists between pulse a_2 and pulse a_3 (e.g. 10.09 milliseconds). Then again the PRI between pulse a_3 and pulse a_4 is equal to the first PRI and the PRI between a_4 and a_n is equal to the second PRI
5 and so forth throughout the entire pulse series.

In order to enable to distinguish between pulses associated with different pulse series each pulse series is assigned with a group of different PRIs (e.g. by signal generator **224**).

Thus, in the current example, the PRIs assigned to pulse series S_a is 9.91
10 and 10.09 milliseconds; the PRIs assigned to pulse series S_b is 9.8 and 10.2 milliseconds; the PRIs assigned to pulse series S_c is 9.71 and 10.29 milliseconds.

Note that in order to avoid overlap between pulses associated with different pulse series the PRI values in each group of PRIs assigned to each
15 pulse series have the same average value and are approximately evenly distributed with the basic average PRI.

Returning to **Fig. 3**, each target of the multiple identified targets is assigned with a specific pulse series of the N pulse series (block **314**). Thus, in the example in **Fig 5**, pulse series S_a can be assigned to a first target, pulse
20 series S_b can be assigned to a second target and pulse series S_c can be assigned to a third target.

Each intercepting platform (e.g. missile) is assigned with a respective target (block **316**). In order to assign an intercepting platform to a respective target, the intercepting platform can be provided with information indicative
25 of the group of PRI values assigned to the pulse series of a respective target. This can be accomplished for example with the help of target allocation

module **226** which can be configured to communicate with counter attack system **206** and provide to each intercepting platform the PRI values assigned to its respective target.

The modified signal (**MS**) is transmitted towards the multiple identified
5 targets (block **318**). Similarly to the original laser signal the modified laser signal is projected by a laser illuminator (e.g. laser illuminator **208**) in a wide pulsed laser beam.

The modified signal impinges on all the identified targets and the signal energy is reflected back and received by PCLRT **205** (block **320**). As all pulses in
10 a given pulse set impinge on all the identified targets, a reflection set comprising M pulse reflections (M being the number of identified targets and any other object which may be located in the illuminated area) is received at PCLRT **205** for each pulse in a pulse set.

For each reflection set in N reflection sets, a different i^{th} pulse
15 reflection is returned by PCLRT **205**. Thus for N reflection sets (resulting from N respective pulses) one instance of each i^{th} pulse reflection is amplified and accurately returned to its source target (block **322**).

As explained above, processing unit in laser illuminating and designating system **200** can be configured to control switching unit **222** to
20 allow only one pulse reflection to enter PCLRT **205** and prevent the entry of other pulse reflections. Alternatively, instead of selectively blocking the incoming pulse reflections at the entrance to the PCLRT, control switching unit **222** can be configured to selectively block the reflection of the pulse reflection from the phase conjugation mirror at the exit from the PCLRT.

25 As mentioned above the original signal is not necessarily multiplied by exactly the number of identified targets and in some cases N can equal a

number which is greater than the number of identified targets. For example, laser illuminating and designating system **200** can be configured, responsive to receiving information in respect of the number of identified targets, to multiple the original signal by a number which is greater than the number of
5 identified targets. This provides one or more additional pulse series which are available in case additional targets are suddenly detected. The spare pulse series can be immediately assigned to the newly detected targets without additional processing of the signal. This is different than the option of reprocessing the signal each time a new target is identified. According to one
10 example, responsive to identification of one or more targets a modified signal is generated irrespective of the number of identified targets (e.g. the modified signal can be generated such that the maximal number of targets can be designated i.e. comprising the maximal number of pulse series) and each of the pulse series is assigned to a respective target as the targets are being
15 detected.

Furthermore, in case a target is no longer available (e.g. it was destroyed or otherwise lost) the modified signal can be either modified once more to comprise less pulse series or alternatively, the modified signal can remain as it is with one or more pulse series which are not assigned.
20 Additionally, it is noted that more than one pulse series can be assigned to the same target, e.g. in case it is desired to launch multiple intercepting platforms towards a single target. Similarly, more than one intercepting platform can be assigned with the same pulse series.

Fig. 5 is a schematic illustration exemplifying the operation of laser
25 illuminating and designating system **200**, in accordance with the presently

disclosed subject matter. It is noted that the details provided in **Fig. 5** are for the sake of example only and should not be construed as limiting in any way.

Fig. 5a to **Fig. 5c** all show a modified signal (**MS**) which is being transmitted by laser illuminating and designating system **200**, in this case, towards three identified targets. Pulses associated with pulse set **PS₁** are identified in the figure as a, b and c. Note, that the three targets are located at different distances from laser illuminating and designating system **200**.

In **Fig. 5a** the first pulse (pulse a) of the modified signal hits all three targets and a reflection set comprising 3 pulse reflections is returned towards laser illuminating and designating system **200**. In laser illuminating and designating system **200** only one of the 3 pulse reflections is reflected by PCLRT **205**. This pulse is amplified (twice) in PCLRT **205** and returned to the source target.

Assuming that that pulse series **PS₁** which comprises pulse a_1 , is assigned to the closest target, processing unit in laser illuminating and designating system **200** is configured to control the laser switch and thereby allow only the pulse reflection retuning from this target to enter PCLRT **205**. See in **Fig. 5a** only the pulse reflection returning from target 1 is reflected back to the target and the two other pulse reflections are not reflected by PCLRT (indicated by the two crosses).

In **Fig. 5b** pulse b_1 , assigned to target 2, is returned from the 3 targets towards the laser system. Processing unit in laser illuminating and designating system **200** is configured to control the laser switch to allow only the pulse reflection retuning from target 2 to be returned by PCLRT **205**. See in **Fig. 5a** only the pulse reflection returning from target 2 is reflected back to the target.

In Fig. **5c** pulse c_1 , assigned to target 3, is returned from the 3 targets towards the laser system. Processing unit in laser illuminating and designating system **200** is configured to control the laser switch allow only the pulse reflection retuning from target 3 to be returned by PCLRT **205**. See in Fig. **5a**
5 only the pulse reflection returning from target 3 is reflected back to the target.

This process is repeated for each pulse set thereby providing each intercepting platform with the respective pulse series assigned for tracking a respective target.

10 Turning to Fig. **3b**, the amplified energy of the singled out pulse is reflected to the source target and then reflected again from the source target to all the intercepting platforms (block **326**). Each intercepting platform comprises a signal processing unit which is configured to determine the PRIs between consecutive incoming pulses. In case the PRIs matches the PRIs
15 which characterize the pulse series assigned to the respective target (assigned to the intercepting platform) the intercepting platforms uses the reflected laser energy for tracking and homing on the target. The intercepting platform continues to receive the signal reflections from the targets and is configured to select those reflections which are characterized by a PRI which coincides
20 with the expected PRI of the assigned pulse series. This enables the intercepting platform to identify its assigned pulse series and use that part of the modified signal for homing onto its assigned target.

Fig. 6 is a flowchart illustrating an example of operation performed by laser illuminating and designating system **200** in accordance with the
25 presently disclosed subject matter. As mentioned above laser switch **222** is configured to control PCLRT **205** such that only one pulse reflection for a given

reflection set of N pulse reflections is transmitted back towards the targets. According to the non-limiting example illustrated in **Fig. 6** processing unit in laser illuminating and designating system **200** is configured to synchronize between a transmitted laser pulse and the received pulse reflection.

- 5 Processing unit (e.g. with the help of signal generator **224**) in laser illuminating and designating system **200** is configured to control the transmission of pulses.

At block **602** each one of at least part of the pulse series in a modified signal is associated with a respective target. Upon transmission of a given pulse, associated with a given pulse series, the processing unit is configured to calculate the expected time of arrival of the pulse reflection, reflected from the respective target assigned to the given pulse series (block **606**). As explained above, laser illuminating and designating system **200** is provided with information indicating the number of identified targets and the distance to each target. Processing unit can be configured to calculate the expected time of arrival of a pulse reflection, reflected from a respective target e.g. based on the distance of the target.

Processing unit is then configured to measure the time from the transmission of the given pulse, associated with a given pulse series, and control the switch to allow reflection of the pulse reflection by PCLRT **205** at a time that coincides with the expected time of arrival of the pulse reflection returning from the respective target (block **610**). Thus, only a pulse reflection returning from the respective target is reflected by PCLRT **205** and accurately returned to the respective targets. Other pulse reflections arrive at different times, and the switching does not permit them to be reflected by PCLRT **205**. The operations described with reference to blocks **606** and **610** are repeated

upon the transmission of each pulse which is associated with a pulse series which is associated with a respective target.

According to another example, processing unit does not synchronize the switching unit with an expected time of arrival of a respective pulse reflection. Targets are assigned with pulse series according to their distance. Responsive to transmission of the first pulse M pulse reflections (a reflection set) are received at laser system. However, since different targets are located at different distances from the laser system, different pulse reflections in a reflection set arrive at different times according to the respective distance of the respective targets from the laser system. Thus, processing unit can control the laser switch to open when a pulse reflection reflected from the respective target is received.

For example, assuming the first pulse (in a pulse set of N pulses) is associated with a pulse series assigned to the closest target, processing unit is configured to control the laser switch to open, after transmission of the first pulse, once the first pulse reflection arrives and close at the time of arrival of other pulse reflections. If the second pulse (in a pulse set of N pulses) is associated with a pulse series assigned to the second closest target, processing unit is configured to control the laser switch to open, after transmission of the second pulse, once the second pulse reflection arrives and so forth.

The presently disclosed subject matter is directed, inter alia, for detection tracking and interception of multiple targets. As explained above, a wide laser beam is used for illuminating a plurality of approaching targets. The energy of the wide laser beam must be sufficient for illuminating all targets

and generate pulse reflections with sufficient energy to be detected back at the laser system.

The farther the targets are from the laser system the greater is the energy of the laser beam which is required in order to enable detection and tracking. As the targets get closer the required energy is reduced. Furthermore, the farther are the targets the narrower is the illumination angle which is required in order to capture all targets. As the targets get closer the required illuminating angle is increased.

Therefore, according to the presently disclosed subject matter, laser illuminator **208** can be optionally configured with a beam shaping optics **228** which is configured to generate a laser beam characters by different energy regions, wherein the energy in each region is adapted to the expected distance of the targets.

Fig. 7 is a schematic illustration showing an example of a laser beam generated in accordance with the presently disclosed subject matter. **Fig. 7** illustrates a partial view of laser illuminating and designating system **200** showing laser illuminator **208** configured with beam shaping optics **228**, optimized for a scenario in which targets appear in a given uncertainty area independent of their distance from system **200**. An optimal energy saving beam profile, that ensures a constant minimum received signal reflected from the illuminated target, is a profile that provides an approximately constant energy density within the spatial angle of the uncertainty area at the maximal range and a constant/ α^4 (for small angles) dependency for greater angles. This profile can be further optimized to take into account range dependency of atmospheric transmittance.

The beam shaping principle for targets that are expected at a constant uncertainty area of radius $d/2$ is as follows:

For $\alpha < (d/2)/R_{\max}$: $I(\alpha) \cong \text{constant} = I_0$ (the requested minimum irradiation at the entrance to the PCLRT)

5 For $(d/2)/R_{\max} < \alpha < (d/2)/R_{\min}$: $I(\alpha)$ is proportional to $(d/2)^4 / (\alpha * R_{\max})^4$

where $I(\alpha)$ is the illuminator total radiance (energy/solid angle) in direction α .

The systems disclosed herein with reference to **Fig. 1** comprises or is
 10 otherwise associated with at least one computer. The term "computer" should be expansively construed to cover any kind of electronic device with data processing capabilities, including, by way of non-limiting example, a personal computer, a server computer, a computing system, a communication device, a processing device (e.g. digital signal processor (DSP), microcontroller,
 15 field programmable gate array (FPGA), application specific integrated circuit (ASIC), etc.) or any other electronic computing device and/or combination thereof.

It will also be understood that the system according to the presently disclosed subject matter may be a suitably programmed computer. Likewise,
 20 the presently disclosed subject matter contemplates a computer program being readable by a computer for executing the method of the presently disclosed subject matter. The presently disclosed subject matter further contemplates a machine-readable computer memory (including transitory and non-transitory) tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by
 25 the machine for executing the method of the presently disclosed subject matter.

It is to be understood that the presently disclosed subject matter is not limited in its application to the details set forth in the description contained herein or illustrated in the drawings. The presently disclosed subject matter is capable of other embodiments and of being practiced and carried out in
5 various ways. Hence, it is to be understood that the phraseology and terminology employed herein are for the purpose of description and should not be regarded as limiting. As such, those skilled in the art will appreciate that the conception upon which this disclosure is based may readily be utilized as basis for designing other structures, methods, and systems for carrying out
10 the several purposes of the presently disclosed subject matter.

The present invention has been described with a certain degree of particularity, but those versed in the art will readily appreciate that various alterations and modifications may be carried out without departing from the scope of the following claims.

CLAIMS:

1. A laser system, comprising:

a laser illuminator, a phase conjugation laser receiver and transmitter (PCLRT) and at least one processing unit; the PCLRT comprising a laser
5 amplifier and a phase conjugation mirror;

the at least one processing unit is configured to obtain information in respect of one or more targets; and responsive to obtaining said information, to enable the generation of a modified laser signal characterized by an average PRF which equals to a basic average pulse repetition frequency (PRF)
10 of a given original laser signal multiplied by at least N , $N \geq$ the number of targets; the modified laser signal comprising at least N pulse series; and to assign a respective pulse series to each of at least part of the N targets;

the laser illuminator is configured to transmit the modified signal towards the N targets;

15 the PCLRT is configured to receive a reflection of said modified signal, reflected from at least the targets; said reflection comprising a reflection set for each given pulse in the modified laser signal; each reflection set comprising at least N pulse reflections, each reflected from a different target;

the PCLRT is further configured to perform gating for at least one
20 reflection set, in order to allow, one pulse reflection, reflected from a given target, to be amplified by the amplifier, reflected by the phase conjugation mirror and returned in the direction of the given target.

2. The laser system according to claim 1 wherein the modified laser signal comprises a pulse set in each PRI (pulse rate interval) of the original

laser signal, the pulse set comprising at least N pulses and wherein each pulse series is associated with a different i^{th} pulse in each pulse set.

3. The laser system according to claim 2 wherein each pulse series is characterized by a different group of alternating PRI values which enables to
5 uniquely identify each pulse series and wherein all pulse series are characterized by the same average PRI value

4. The laser system according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the gating is controlled by the at least one processing unit configured to synchronize between the time of transmission of a given pulse and time of
10 arrival of a respective reflection set, based on the distance to the given target.

5. The laser system according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the gating is controlled by the at least one processing unit based on the order of arrival of the pulse reflections in each reflection set.

6. The laser system according to any one of the preceding claims
15 further comprising a target detection unit configured to identify and direct the laser system to the one or more targets.

7. The laser system according to any one of the preceding claims being operatively connected with a counter attack system, the laser system being operable to communicate with the counter attack system for allocating
20 at least one target to a respective intercepting platform, the information including a pulse series assigned to the at least one target; and to launch said intercepting platform towards said at least one target.

8. The laser system according to any one of the preceding claims wherein said signal reflection is amplified once upon entrance to the PCLRT
25 and once upon exit of the PCLRT.

9. The laser system according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the laser beam is a wide beam for illuminating all targets in the uncertainty area and with sufficient energy to be reflected and received by the PCLRT.

5 10. The laser system according to claim 10 wherein the laser beam is between 1 to 5 degrees wide.

11. The laser system according to any one of the preceding claims further comprising beam shaping optics enabling to generate a laser beam characterize by a beam profile, that ensures an approximately minimum
10 constant received signal reflected from the illuminated target.

12. The laser system according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the signal amplified by PCLRT is characterized by sufficient energy for enabling an intercepting platform to track and home on the given target.

13. A laser designation method, comprising:
15 obtaining information in respect of one or more targets;
generating a modified laser signal characterized by an average PRF which equals to a basic average PRF of a given original laser signal multiplied by at least N, $N \geq$ the number of targets; the modified laser signal comprising at least N pulse series;

20 assigning a respective pulse series to each of at least part of the N targets;

transmitting the modified signal towards the N targets;

receiving a reflection of said modified signal, reflected from at least the targets; said reflection comprising a reflection set for each given pulse in the

modified laser signal; each reflection set comprising at least N pulse reflections including N pulse reflections each reflected from a different target;

for at least one reflection set:

allowing one pulse reflection, reflected from a given target, to be
5 reflected by the phase conjugation mirror;

amplifying the one pulse reflection, and

returning an amplified signal, reflected from the phase conjugation mirror, directed towards the given target; the amplified signal comprising sufficient energy for an intercepting platform to track the given target.

10 14. The method according to claim 13 wherein the modified laser signal comprises a pulse set in each PRI (pulse rate interval) of the original laser signal, the pulse set comprising at least N pulses and wherein each pulse series is associated with a different i^{th} pulse in each pulse set.

15 15. The method according to claim 14 wherein each pulse series is characterized by a different group of alternating PRI values which enables to uniquely identify each pulse series and wherein all pulse series are characterized by the same average PRI value.

20 16. The method according to claim 15 further comprising controlling a switch in order to allow the one pulse reflection, reflected by the given target, to be reflected by the phase conjugation mirror.

17. The method according to claim 16 wherein the controlling is based on synchronization between the time of transmission of a given pulse and time of arrival of a respective reflection set, based on the distance of the given target.

18. The method according to claim 16 wherein the controlling is based on the order of arrival of the pulse reflections in each reflection set.

19. The method according to any one of claim 13 to 18 wherein the at least one reflection set is a reflection set of a pulse associated with a pulse series assigned to the given target.

20. The method according to any one of claim 13 to 19 further comprising identifying said N target.

21. The method according to any one of claim 13 to 20 further comprising:

10 allocating at least one target to a respective intercepting platform;
assigning to the intercepting platform a pulse series assigned to the at least one target; and
launching said intercepting platform towards said at least one target.

22. The method according to any one of claim 13 to 21 wherein the laser beam of the illuminator is a wide laser beam characterized by sufficient energy for tracking of targets in an uncertainty area where the targets are expected to be.

23. The laser system according to claim 22 wherein the laser beam is between 1 to 5 degrees wide.

20 24. The method according to any one of claim 13 to 23 further comprises: generating an illuminator laser beam characterized by a beam profile that ensures approximately constant minimum received signal reflected from the illuminated target.

25. A machine-readable memory tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine for executing the method of laser designation, the method comprising:

obtaining information in respect of one or more targets;

5 generating a modified laser signal characterized by an average PRF which equals to a basic average PRF of a given original laser signal multiplied by at least N, $N \geq$ the number of targets; the modified laser signal comprising at least N pulse series;

10 assigning a respective pulse series to each of at least part of the N targets;

transmitting the modified signal towards the N targets;

receiving a reflection of said modified signal, reflected from at least the targets; said reflection comprising a reflection set for each given pulse in the modified laser signal; each reflection set comprising at least N pulse
15 reflections including N pulse reflections each reflected from a different target;

for at least one reflection set:

allowing one pulse reflection, reflected from a given target, to be reflected by the phase conjugation mirror;

amplifying the one pulse reflection, and

20 returning an amplified signal, reflected from the phase conjugation mirror, directed towards the given target.