

POTENTIALLY **LETHAL** WEAPONS

Militarising the public space
and causing bodily trauma

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Several factors are changing and shaping the model of security in cities and making it evolve. This model has been dominated by the doctrine of public order and the use of State security forces to maintain a specific model of order and security. This model of order restricts and stifles defiance, mobilisations and social protests that have, however, been part of the roots, history and evolution of cities around the world. From Barcelona to Bogota, via Santiago de Chile, Paris, Gitega and Jakarta social demands have helped shape the public space, reclaiming it as a popular space of defiance. If there is something that cities all over the world share, it is that their streets are a collective space for social organisation.

Our current context is complex insofar as the so-called security of the public space or law enforcement is concerned. Cities are being unsettled by the changing scenarios of international politics. The clearest proof of this are the increasingly common assaults and attacks on civilians who live in cities around the world, in particular in the Global South. Many of these attacks are due to terrorism or violent extremism in response to global tensions that are translated into the local context. These attacks serve – especially to the Global North where the minority of them occur – to accelerate the implementation of security measures coming from the international sphere in cities: these are applied by introducing more surveillance cameras, biometric control systems, deploying more security forces, acquiring new types of weapons such as drones and deploying the army in cities under states of emergency, as happened in France following the Bataclan attacks in 2015.

At the same time, different political and social actors justify and legitimise the increase of these measures in the name of a particular model of security. The dynamics of securitisation, based on the control, surveillance and interception of persons who allegedly pose a threat to the status quo, are therefore strengthened. This is happening precisely at a time when the Global Peace Index 2022 has pointed out that violent protests around the world have increased by 49% since 2008 (Global Peace Index, 2022: 23). Strengthened securitisation and the increase in social protests around the world serve to allow governments to rearm as they seek to maintain a certain public order, as well as to bolster research and the manufacture of potentially lethal weapons whose use is growing exponentially, reinforcing and militarising police forces in cities around the world. This growth also benefits a market which, of course, is growing as a result of the social tensions that are being played out in cities, and in which an industrial network of its own is being generated.

These weapons have often brought about widespread controversy regarding their use and the harm they can potentially cause. It has also led to question the role of the security forces, and to ask ourselves, as a society, what it means to build security if going to a demonstration can result in serious bodily injuries for which, all too often, there is no subsequent restorative justice.

At a time when the city is also reclaiming itself as a space of proximity to ensure rights, sovereignty and provide basic needs, increased security measures and the introduction of potentially lethal weapons among the security forces appear to produce a contradictory effect.

This report seeks to be an initial introduction, from the perspective of other security models, and analyses these potentially lethal weapons and the debates that revolve around them in order to assess the impact they have on the construction of a relatively safer world for everyone.

From the analysis conducted in this report, we would like to highlight the following considerations and conclusions:

- The laboratory and experimentation for the use of non-lethal weapons were anti-colonial struggles and revolts. The armed forces of empires fostered the use, research and manufacture of these weapons, followed by a search for a way to contain workers' revolts at the beginning of the 20th century.
- The latest non-binding international regulatory document published on this type of weaponry is the United Nations Human Rights Guidance on the Use of Less Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement. The Guidance uses the term "less lethal" instead of "non-lethal" and explains that "*the use of any weapon can have fatal consequences*".
- Over the decades, the proliferation of this weaponry, intended primarily for law enforcement and classified as "non-lethal" and without adequate regulation, training, monitoring and lack of accountability, has led to a widespread and global misuse of these weapons, resulting in injury, disability and death. The category "non-lethal" is therefore considered to be a trivialisation of the social impact of these weapons.
- In the analysed case of the Yellow Vests and the protests against pension reforms in France, 24,300 people ($\pm 4,200$) were injured as a result of the tactics, weapons and violence of the security forces according to the report by the Observatoire des Street-Médics, one of the most thorough on this case. Cranioencephalic injuries, caused by weapons such as police batons (43%), kinetic impact projectiles (13.9%), kinetic impact grenades (17.6), explosive grenades (12.5%) and tear-gas canisters (36.4%), accounted for over one in six of the injuries.
- Police action during Chile's "Social Protests" resulted in at least 3,000 cases of human rights violations caused by firearms and potentially lethal weapons, 460 eye injuries and 34 deaths. During that time, 193,000 tear gas canisters and 45,000 chemical grenades were used. Furthermore, the potentially lethal arsenal acquired by the Chilean police force increased up to 23 times compared to what had been spent from 2018 to October 2019.

- Since the 80s, the deployment of potentially lethal weapons among the police forces in many States has continued to increase. This is clear by the fact that in 1978 only 13 companies in 5 countries manufacturing "non-lethal" weaponry were identified, yet today over 200 have been identified in more than 60 countries.
- Specifically, and with regard to kinetic impact projectiles, the growth in demand over the past 30 years has led manufacturers to diversify this type of weapon to such an extent that today there exists a range of over 75 different typologies of bullets and launchers.
- A progressive militarisation of the public space and the functions of the police have been detected all around the world. This is carried out in three ways: by mobilising the military for internal State security matters; via the specific creation of paramilitary forces that act on State territory with police functions; or by providing police units with the military's own armaments, strategies and resources.
- The market for potentially lethal weapons is estimated to reach \$9.38 billion by 2028, with the market valued at \$6.15 billion in 2021, an annual increase of 6.1% and over 52% in 7 years. This market is dominated by the United States and Europe, and mirrors the pattern of conventional weapons.
- Of the main companies that dominate the market for potentially lethal weapons, 10 out of 15 are in the United States (ALS, ASP, Combined Systems, PepperBall technologies, NonLethal Technologies, Axon Enterprise, Byrna Technologies, Raytheon Company, Safariland and Zarc International). The other leading companies in this market are in Israel (ISPRA), Brazil (Condor Non Lethal Technologies), Canada (Lamperd Less Lethal), Germany (Rheinmetall, another major military company), and Belgium (FN Herstal).
- Potentially lethal weapons manufactured by the companies analysed have been found in different contexts of police abuse and mala praxis in, for example, the following cases: ISPRA (Israel) in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, in protests in Burundi in 2015 and in Azerbaijan in 2013; Condor (Brazil) in Sudan in 2021 and in Bahrain in 2011; PepperBall (United States) during the National Strike in Colombia in 2011; Safariland (United States) at the U.S. border against migrants; Rheinmetall (Germany) and NonLethal Technologies (United States) in Bahrain in 2011; Combined Systems (United States) in the Israeli-occupied Territories and in Egypt in 2011.



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