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## Article

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# The Shifting Face of the Enemy: ‘Less than Lethal’ Weaponry and the Criminalised Protestor

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## ABSTRACT

From checkpoints in Palestine and cities in other war-torn places to Istanbul, Ferguson and Paris: anti-riot and other so called ‘non-lethal’ weaponry is used worldwide against civilians by government forces. The use of such violence (even if framed as ‘non- or less-than-lethal’) against protestors in major cities, often turning the city streets into scenes from battle fields, is worrying as it shows an increasing disrespect for human and civil rights by states with an obsession with ‘keeping the order’. What is less visible, however, is how technologies and weapons that are used against protestors, and the ways they are marketed, (re)produce the image of the protestor as a legitimate target. Studying this process in more detail can help understand the criminalisation of protests and protestors along with other democratic tools.

In this article I will investigate the global sale and marketing of ‘anti-riot’ or so-called ‘non-lethal’ or ‘less-than-lethal’ weaponry and technology that are used against protestors on a global security market. I will argue that this industry constructs a new enemy and by doing so criminalises our cities’ populations and the democratic tools they have at their disposal to voice their concerns. Instead of looking at police actions of repression of protest, I will thus approach this issue through the weaponry that is used against protestors and what that tells us about repression of their civil rights. I will do this by focussing on the Israeli security industry.

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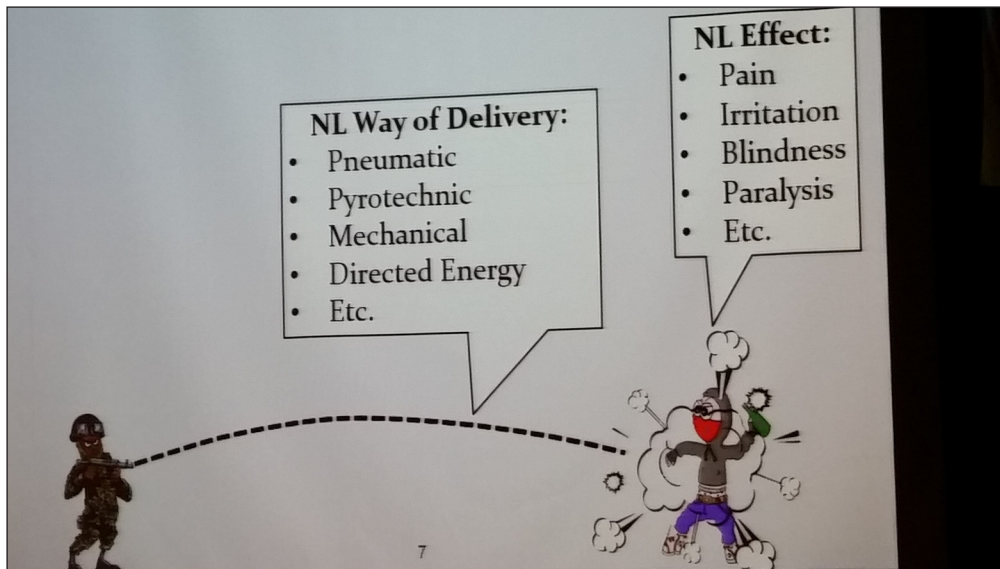
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I'm sitting in a dark, airconditioned conference room in Rishon LeZion, a sleepy city located south of Tel Aviv, Israel. I'm attending the Future Forces for HLS conference and exhibition 2015, an event in which representatives of security companies and members of the public security sector, such as the police and military, present and discuss new Israeli technological developments and current issues that security forces face. At the conference, the speakers—both from the private and public sectors—explain their vision for 'Future Forces'. During their talks and presentations, one thing becomes clear; there is a realisation that those forces need to apply methods that are 'cleaner', or at least less lethal in their outcomes than so called 'regular' weaponry. This realisation is spurred by growing critique of police brutality worldwide. The industry understands that it needs to keep its image clean in order to continue operations.

I'm drawn to a figure on the screen during one of the presentations where a non-lethal weapon that produces an itch and burning sensation when sprayed on someone's skin is presented. It is a cartoonish drawing of a human who is portrayed as the 'enemy' against whom (non-lethal) weapon can be used. The figure is wearing purple pants and a green hoody, while its face is covered with a bandana. It is hurling a bottle, which might be a Molotov cocktail. What is interesting about this figure is that it is not used to portray the sort of enemy I'm used to seeing in these kinds of presentations. Usually, this enemy is the stereotypical and orientalist figure of the keffiyeh<sup>1</sup> wearing 'Arab terrorist', who figures as an image taped to a target that is shot at when a weapon manufacturer gives a demonstration, or as a 'real life' person when impersonated by security personnel in a mock operation. From what I saw in this presentation, however, there seemed to be a shift in the imagery of the face and dress of the enemy, from a terrorist who needs to be 'neutralised' to an Other against whom 'softer' weapons should be used. This Other does not need to be killed, but needs to be 'suppressed', 'denied access', 'removed from the area' or even 'disabled', and this is exactly what the presented weapon claims to do.



<sup>1</sup> A keffiyeh is a Middle Eastern headdress, traditionally worn by men. The black and white version has become a symbol of the struggle for Palestinian independence and nationhood.



I interpret this figure as representing the civilian protestor who goes into the city streets to demonstrate against inequality, state violence or any other issue that warrants the use of her democratic right to protest. As I will argue here, this figure is an example of the way the security industry constructs new populations to be targeted by their weapons and technologies, such as water cannons or tear gas. In a way we could say then that the face of the enemy to be targeted is shifting and becoming more multi-faceted. This shift can be analysed as a reaction to what is happening in the world outside of the industry (more protests worldwide, for example), but it also points to how the industry perceives and influences that world. When looking at the latter, one can see how the industry and its marketing impacts the legitimisation of the use of force against different populations, thereby criminalising them and their dissent.

In the last decades, since 9/11 in particular, we have seen a clear increase in the surveillance and policing of citizens worldwide (Lyon 2003, 2015; Mills and Sarakakis 2016; Bauman et al. 2014). Activists, politicians and also migrants find themselves under increased subjection to the watching eye of state or non-state actors, such as private security organisations (e.g., Diphooorn 2016; Kyed 2019). Both state and other policing entities have an increasing arsenal of tools at their disposal to keep an eye on 'threatening' civilians, including elaborate software, such as the much publicised spyware Pegasus,<sup>2</sup> AI technologies, facial recognition and drones equipped with cameras.<sup>3</sup>

Activists and others taking to the streets are not only controlled through surveillance technologies, however. Both state and non-state security actors, including urban police departments, for example, also use anti-riot and different types of 'non-lethal' weaponry to police civilians. Undeniably, this has a material effect on the urban and political environment. In spite of the democratic right to protest in most countries, city streets are often drenched in clouds of tear gas behind which we can discern heavily armed police forces trying to stave off protestors. Concerning this increased control over civilians, be they protestors, activists or migrants at the borders, scholars have been mostly concerned with policing *strategies* (e.g., Della Porta and Reiter 1998; Gilmore, Jackson, Monk and Short 2020), with the *experiences* of those subjected to policing (e.g., Cobbina et al. 2019; Lee 2021; Savell 2021) or the *politics* behind it (e.g., Soss and Waever 2017; Zureik and Salter 2005). Here I will contribute to this debate 'the story' of the development, sale and marketing of the very *tools* used to police and control civilians worldwide. In particular, I focus on 'anti-riot' or so-called 'non-lethal' weaponry and technology.

I will investigate these by looking at their marketing on the global security market and by exploring the ways in which these weapons can strengthen the criminalisation of urban populations and delegitimise the use of the democratic tools citizens have at their disposal

<sup>2</sup> <https://forbiddenstories.org/case/the-pegasus-project/> Accessed 28-03-2022.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/19/us/politics/george-floyd-protests-surveillance.html> Accessed 28-03-2022.

to voice their concerns. I argue that the ways in which this weaponry is marketed and framed when being sold globally is instrumental to the way it will be used and against whom. Through this marketing, I pose, the security sector produces a new, particularly urban enemy that needs to be dealt with, neutralised or even killed. Weaponry is then customised to be used against different types of enemies: moving away from targeting a so called non-western other, who is characterised in orientalist terms, non-lethal weapons are framed to target an internal other, who is more part of the 'national' self. This internal other, often portrayed as an urban citizen protesting the government, is produced as an enemy in need of subduing. In anthropological, but also sociological and criminological literature, much has been written about the construction of the 'other' as enemy (e.g., Besteman 1996; Fabian 1990; Bauman 1995; Baumann 2004). These works show how such 'othering' happens through media, state narratives and, for example, educational practices that produce an enemy who is recognised as such by a wider public. The new enemy I recognise here is such a constructed other, in this case a product of the marketing skills of the security industry.

Interestingly, these weapons and technologies are developed in one place and find their way across a global market that is searching for security solutions (e.g., Halper 2015; Grassiani 2017, 2019b; Grassiani and Müller 2019; Feigenbaum 2012; Feigenbaum and Weissman 2019). When looking at the Israeli/Palestinian context in particular, scholars have analysed Gaza in particular as a 'lab' of sorts for this industry, where manufacturers test their weaponry to later sell globally (Graham and Baker 2016; Khalili 2010; see also Machold 2016). From these debates, we have learned that weapons travel from one place to the other and find their way to wars, conflicts and clashes of different kinds, often in urban settings (see also Hönke and Müller 2016). This was further confirmed by the accounts of activists finding the same kinds of tear gas canisters thrown at them in different places around the world, who then could give each other advice on how to deal with the sting.<sup>4</sup> Thus, war-making, security strategies, weaponry and good profits are shared among state leaders and urban politicians who are inclined to quash citizens' criticism and protests.

I focus here on the Israeli case and trace weapons and technologies from their development through their marketing and sale by the Israeli security industry. I look both at the ideas that accompany these weapons, the language used and the very materiality of the products to understand how the democratic tools of resisting urban populations are de-legitimised and criminalised.

The material on which I base this work was collected during ethnographic fieldwork (2015–2019) at approximately 15 security fairs, exhibitions and conferences in Israel, sometimes state led, sometimes privately organised. Examples of such fairs are HLS/Cyber 2016, ISDEF 2015, 2017 and 2019, Intelligence Conference 2015 and 2016, Future Forces 2015 and the Israeli security week of 2015. I visited those fairs and conferences and engaged in (participant) observations there. I also participated in two multi-day security seminars organised in Israel by an Israeli/US company for foreign customers. I further conducted approximately fifty interviews with employees (mostly directors and CEOs) of private security companies and training facilities in Israel. They were all male, and this is related to the fact that for these men it is easier to capitalise on their military experience in the private sphere within the Israeli context.<sup>5</sup> I further visited and interviewed Israeli security actors abroad (in Los Angeles and Nairobi). In general, I focused on the ways that Israeli security products were sold and promoted; I studied the ways speakers at events were introduced and looked at the relationships between private/public actors at events. I also analysed online material of the security events and brochures produced by the Israeli security industry for an international audience.

I first briefly discuss the existing debates concerning policing and non-lethal weaponry, after which I introduce the Israeli security industry and its 'non-lethal' technologies that are sold and used globally, where they are used against protestors. I continue to discuss the production

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/15/world/middleeast/advice-for-fergusons-protesters-from-the-middle-east.html> Accessed 15-09-2021.

<sup>5</sup> Both men and women serve in the Israeli military, however, only men can achieve the highest military ranks. Importantly, the (combat) service of men can be exchanged for a much greater symbolic capital in society than that of women, whose service is seen as less important and who often serve in more supportive military roles.



of a 'new' enemy that emerged in the marketing strategies of this industry, arguing how such strategies can work to criminalise city dwellers and their democratic tools, influencing the city's political reality and ultimately legitimising the use of violence against its inhabitants.

## POLICING PROTEST

The literature on police and policing in the social sciences is extensive (e.g., Bittner 1967; Fassin 2017; Jones and Newburn 2006; Sausdal 2018; Garriott 2013; Manning 2018). When looking in particular to anthropological work, it ranges from analyses of the work of (national) police actors (e.g., Karpiak and Garriott 2018; Jauregui 2013; Hornberger 2013) to the way policing is globalised (e.g., Hönke and Müller 2016). While discussing these debates in detail goes beyond the goals of this article, I will mention the relevant works within this body of literature that are useful for my argument. In the work of Hönke and Müller (2016) about the global making of policing, the authors explore the 'circulation of both policing techniques and practices' (2016: Chapter 1 The global making of policing) to see how historical processes in one place affect others elsewhere in the world. They substantiate their argument using orientalism and ideas about post coloniality as a framework to show how policing practices often produce a binary of a 'We' and a non-western 'Other'. While I agree with their analysis and emphasis on orientalist notions of 'the enemy', which I have also found in my research (Grassiani 2022, 2019b), here I will show how there are also other processes at work. Such processes produce an *internal* other who is part of the 'national' self, but who is still produced as a threat and Other, albeit not necessarily in orientalist terms. Importantly, the colonialist discourse that Hönke and Müller (2016) use is crucial to consider here when looking at the power relations between police and policed and the context of the development of weaponry.

Other important work on policing, which has not been given much attention over the years, is that done on protest policing. The work of Donatella Della Porta and her collaborators changed this in the late 1990s with their influential work on the topic (e.g., Della Porta and Reiter 1998; Della Porta and Fillieule 2004; Della Porta, Peterson and Reiter 2016). Besides mapping out the history of protest policing in different areas around the world, this work shows what the styles or methods used in the policing of protests say about the state of the democratic order in a specific country (Della Porta and Reiter 1998). Della Porta and Reiter (2013) furthermore show how earlier research about policing in the 1960s showed the escalation of force, which was reversed in the 1980s when there was a shift from hard to soft forms of power, influenced by an increasing recognition of the right to demonstrate (ibid.). In their work on the international global justice movement and the way it is policed, they finally show the increasing militarisation of such policing in recent times (Della Porta and Reiter 2016).

This work also demonstrates the importance of the ways in which states *frame* policing. Sometimes policing is framed in terms of keeping 'law and order' or risk management, while other times it is framed in terms of protecting civilians. Oftentimes these framings coexist or follow on one another, depending on the subject of policing at hand—who/what is to be protected against whom/what, and who/what is considered a risk. Della Porta and Reiter (2013: 5) show how harsher styles of policing are used against groups that are seen as threats to elites and against poor or marginalised populations. Prevention tactics by police are furthermore often based on the idea of isolation from danger through reduction of rights of those seen as potential threats (ibid.). Thus, when the 'face' of this potential threat or enemy shifts, repressive methods used will shift towards this new enemy as well.

Other works on the policing of protests have been based on police actions against protest movements against environmental pollution, such as fracking in the UK (Jackson 2020; Gilmore, Jackson, Monk and Short 2020) or on the impact of (social) media on the ways in which protests are policed (Wisler and Giugni 2006; Rosie and Gorringer 2009). Importantly, in all these works the actions of policing are at the centre of the analysis. While it is crucial to understand these, in this article I complement this debate by investigating the weapons used to police and their marketing for use against a new kind of 'enemy'.

What weapons are considered lethal or non-lethal is not clear-cut and very much dependent on framing, marketing, context and use. This is why it is so important to look at the way the security industry and manufacturers frame their products through language and images. Here I will use the *emic* concepts as they are used by the manufacturers and users of the weapons and technologies. These weapons are at times called 'non-lethal', 'less lethal' or 'less-than-lethal', and while the actual term of 'non-lethal' only started to be used in the 1990s, such weapons were already used in ancient China in the form of pepper and oil to incapacitate enemies (Anais 2015: 11; Rappert 2003).

Especially in reaction to calls for accountability from the public concerning violence used against (urban) citizens by police officers, police forces everywhere began to use 'softer' kinds of weapons (Wozniak and Uggen 2009; Rappert 2004). This was also triggered by a growing attention to the rights of citizens to protest and to issues such as the right to the city. As such, from different perspectives (humanitarian, ethical or political), both state and non-state actors have recognised a need for different kinds of weapons, those which would be less harmful to the people they are supposed to hit or disperse, and minimise the risk of lethally injuring someone. Both police and military forces started to use such weapons more and more, even though it was clear that 'non-lethal' did not mean that people did not die from the impact of gas canisters or that the chemicals used did not cause death indirectly. As Rappert (2004, p. 37) writes: '...much depends on how weapons are used in practice'. The lethality of wrongly used non-lethal weapons was also reported on extensively by the Israeli organisation Who Profits, which wrote in its 2014 report: 'The validity of the term "non-lethal" has been undermined by many fatal incidents that resulted, directly or indirectly, from the use of these weapons in OPT [Occupied Palestinian Territories] and other places around the world.' (Who Profits 2014: 33; see also Btselem 2012).

Making this shift from lethal 'regular' weapons to weapons that are perceived by many policing actors as 'softer' means that marketing strategies for the sale of such weapons needed to be adjusted. Wozniak and Uggen, for example, show that manufacturers of non-lethal technologies tend to frame non-lethality as 'manly', tough and aggressive in order to persuade police officers to use the technologies, in a context in which their gun was very central to their masculine police identity (2009). On the other hand, the presentation of such weapons needs to convince diverse audiences that they are indeed 'more humane' than those that are supposedly more lethal.

That the production and sale of non- or less-than-lethal weapons is also fed by political concern becomes clear from the following examples from my fieldwork on the Israeli security industry. In their brochure on 'law enforcement', TAR Ideal, a one-stop shop for security solutions, acknowledges not only that weapons need to be less lethal, but also that such weapons are needed to avoid critique as political entity: 'In order to prevent a riot escalating, Law Enforcement agencies need to be equipped and trained with the latest equipment and methods that enable them to disperse riots quickly and effectively, using non-lethal methods that minimise loss of life or political repercussions' (sic).<sup>6</sup> Beside this text a photo is shown of what appears to be a protest in Istanbul where police officers throw tear gas at protestors. The message is clearly directed at governments who know that their acts against protestors in their cities can raise criticism and can hurt them politically, giving the shift to non- or less-lethal weaponry a more cynical character. An Israeli researcher was quoted in a newspaper article confirming this as he said: 'Beyond the humanitarian consideration, there is also weight to the strategic consideration, which says that wars today are mainly about the image portrayed in the media'.<sup>7</sup> Another example confirming this political concern comes from an article in an Israeli newspaper that writes concerning IDF (Israeli Defence Forces) investments in 'training regimens and a special crowd-dispersion systems that should effectively contain

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<sup>6</sup> Spelling errors in original.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.mako.co.il/pzm-magazine/Article-c4b5b1a6475a531006.htm> accessed 18-11-2021.

expected demonstrations with minimum casualties and as little diplomatic fallout as possible'.<sup>8</sup>

Anna Feigenbaum (2012), in her insightful study on the marketing of counter terror technologies, shows that not only military (or police) and other state actors shape the discourses around security or, in her case, counterterrorism. The manufacturers of the very technologies that are sold as answers to such security issues play a big role, too. This is something that also becomes apparent in the Israeli industry under analysis here. As I show, the companies developing and selling non-lethal technologies and weapons are very influential as to what narrative is told about the product concerning how to use it and especially against whom. One way in which such a narrative works is to normalise the weapons and technologies. This begins with the use of the terms 'non-lethal' or 'less-than-lethal'. Marketing products this way is already a big step towards normalising their use and legitimising the use of force at protests or assemblies. In her critical history of non-lethality, Anais confirms this when she writes: 'Not only has non-lethality been accepted as a legitimate alternative to existing logics of intervention, but it also serves a legitimating function in and of itself' (2015: 5). In her work, she discusses three important discourses around non-lethality: ethics, distinction and humanitarianism, which she describes as reinforcing the quest for legitimising non-lethality in different contexts. Analysing these discourses is then important in order to understand what non-lethality 'does'. Here I will do this by studying the Israeli case and the relation between discourses or narratives (words, visual and other kinds) and the legitimisation of weaponry and its use against civilians protesting globally.

## ISRAELI SECURITY INDUSTRY AND ITS WEAPONS TO SUPPRESS PROTEST

Over the years, Israel has developed a large range of weapons and technologies, of which many are used against Palestinians, in what it calls 'the conflict' and the 'fight against terrorism'. These include regular guns, tanks, border control devices and cyber technologies, to give just a few examples. Israeli soldiers have been often sent into dense refugee camps (de facto cities) in the West Bank and Gaza Strip over the last decades. As such, Israel has become an expert of sorts in technologies of 'urban combat'. Israel's security and defence export is considerable: Every year, it organises a multitude of exhibitions, fairs and conferences for an (inter)national public where products, such as cyber technology, anti-riot gear, weapons and training packages are sold. Additionally, international guests come to Israel in order to learn about 'Israeli security' as a concept or system. In 2020 Israel's security and military export came to an all-time high of 8.3 billion US dollars and consisted of the sale of things such as radar and early warning systems, aviation equipment and intelligence systems, but also technology to track the movement of citizens.<sup>9</sup>

Non- or less-than-lethal weaponry is one example of weapons that have been developed and used against Palestinians. Over the years, Israel has proven to be extremely 'creative' in inventing substances that could disperse crowds such as protestors (or 'rioters' in the industry's language). From versions of the well-known tear gas, which has been used globally since colonial times (Feigenbaum 2017), to newer technologies such as 'Skunk', a foul-smelling substance sprayed on crowds. This technology receives a special place in the TAR ideal catalogue and is described as 'non-lethal, providing a non-violent method to disperse demonstrators'. The photos accompanying this explanation are of people in the streets of a city being sprayed by large tank-like vehicles with police forces behind plastic shields in the background. Then there is the Scream, which creates a sound that is said to provoke nausea and dizziness (Volcler 2013) to disperse groups of people. It has been used by the Israeli military against Palestinian protestors since the early 2000s. When introduced it was called the 'Shofar', which alludes to the ceremonial horn used by religious Jews.

The first non-lethal weapon I will discuss here is the so-called BAT vehicle. Sold by the Israeli security industry, it is developed in Beit Alpha, a kibbutz located in the northeast of Israel.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.jpost.com/features/front-lines/security-and-defense-challenging-times> accessed 17-11-2021.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israeli-arms-exports-spiked-by-15-percent-in-2020-state-data-shows-1.9864916> accessed 31-08-2021.



Polish migrants who were members of the socialist youth movement HaShomer HaZair (the Young Guard) founded the kibbutz close to Mount Gilboa in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Besides raising poultry, selling milk and managing a 'kibbutz resort', the most important industry that the kibbutz owns is Beit Alfa Technologies, a company that produces these BAT vehicles. These armoured vehicles are advertised as 'your best and most effective tool for riot control',<sup>10</sup> making clear at once what they are used for. The vehicles look a lot like an armoured water tank carrier, and are bulletproof. At most security fairs I visited over the years, a BAT vehicle was prominently displayed in the exhibition hall. The vehicle can also be equipped with a 'non-lethal Water Restrain System' (WRS), which is 'designed specifically to control dangerous inmate situations in correctional facilities'.<sup>11</sup> One of the important clients of BAT is the Israeli police and the Border Police. The organisation Who Profits has reported that this system has been used by the latter to suppress demonstrations in the West Bank.<sup>12</sup> The same report conveys that other vehicles by BAT technologies were also used by the Israeli police to 'attack demonstrations'. In his insightful piece, Human Rights lawyer Eitay Mack furthermore shows how the production and sale of these violent technologies is completely normalised, as such sales proudly feature the kibbutz homepage next to personal stories of birthday parties of kibbutz members.<sup>13</sup>

Besides having been used by Israeli defence and police, the BAT vehicle has found its way to many places around the world. The abovementioned report found out it was sold to Chile, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia and Spain, to name but a few of the many clients.<sup>14</sup> In Chile, BAT vehicles were used in the 1980s against protestors who went to the streets to protest the violent dictatorial regime of Pinochet,<sup>15</sup> and in South Africa BAT vehicles were used against those protesting the Apartheid regime,<sup>16</sup> but also more recently during the #Feesmustfall protests in 2015 when students went to the streets to demand more university funding and a reduction in tuition fees.<sup>17</sup>

A second example is the 'Cyclone Riot System', which are drones that can be armed with tear gas to be thrown at protestors. This system is developed by the company Ispra, which according to its website is a 'global leader in developing, manufacturing and marketing of non-lethal devices for riot control, crowd management, anti-terror equipment and police gear'.<sup>18</sup> On its website, the company even emphasises that the system makes it possible to 'react against rioters and demonstrators at an early stage of the event'.<sup>19</sup> Below I will analyse such marketing phrases in more detail, but what already becomes clear is the way 'rioters' and 'demonstrators' are categorised as a similar group that should be reacted against in an unreflective, uncritical manner, normalising such weapons and their use completely.

The company has also developed tear gas canisters that are 'made of softer plastic to reduce the risk of injury if the projectiles hit demonstrators',<sup>20</sup> improving them based on the experience of using these weapons against Palestinians who were badly injured by the canisters. Reports have shown that Ispra's riot control weaponry has been used abroad against protestors, for example, in Azerbaijan<sup>21</sup> and against anti-graft protestors in Kenya.<sup>22</sup> Below I will continue to

10 <http://www.sibat.mod.gov.il/Industries/SMEs/Pages/BEIT-ALFA.aspx> accessed 01-09-2021.

11 See note 7.

12 <https://www.whoprofits.org/company/beit-alpha-technologies-b-a-t/> accessed 01-09-2021.

13 <https://wri-irg.org/en/story/2017/kibbutz-sells-riot-control-weapons-war-criminals> accessed 01-09-2021.

14 See comment 9.

15 See comment 10.

16 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/feb/07/southafrica.israel> accessed 01-09-2021.

17 <https://www.vocfm.co.za/saps-under-fire-over-israeli-water-cannons/> and <https://www.news24.com/citypress/News/israeli-firm-supplies-saps-with-cannons-20151221> accessed 01-09-2021.

18 <http://www.ispraltd.com/> accessed 01-09-2021.

19 <http://www.ispraltd.com/Riot-Control-Drone-System.html> accessed 01-09-2021.

20 <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2010-nov-27-la-fg-israel-homeland-security-20101128-story.html> accessed 01-09-2021.

21 <https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan-brutal-crackdown-western-weapons-lrad/24927720.html> accessed 01-09-2021.

22 <https://wri-irg.org/en/story/2019/war-profiteer-month-ispra> accessed 01-09-2021.

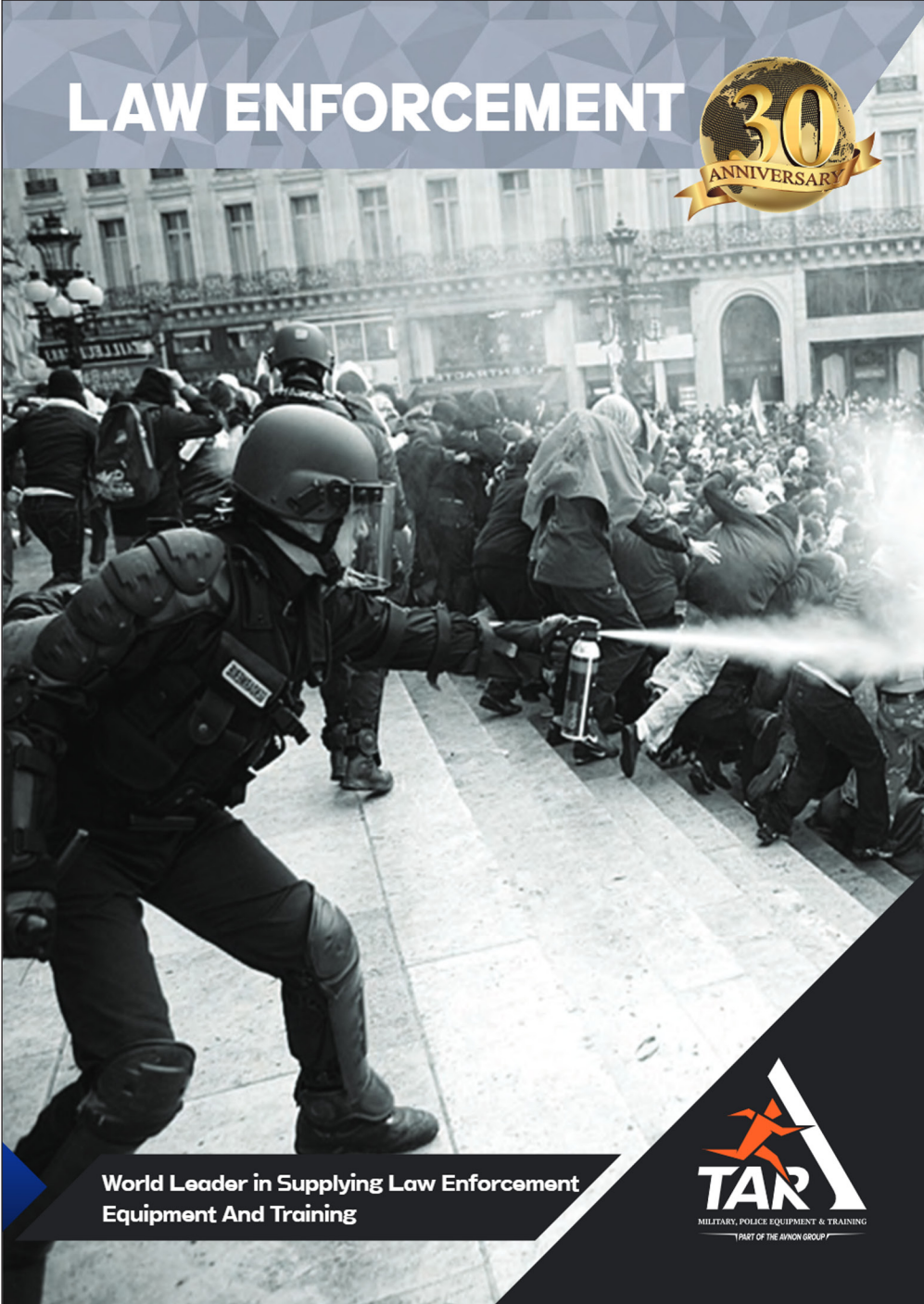
discuss the Israeli security industry in more depth by analysing its marketing strategies. These strategies, I argue, can work to legitimise the violence used in the examples described above and criminalise the urban populations it is used against.

## NORMALISING AND LEGITIMISING WEAPONS NOT TO KILL

In theory, most, if not all, of the abovementioned weapons have been developed for military use to fight ‘terrorist threats’ and engage in combat situations. The Israeli military has since long carried out mostly constabulary activities in the Occupied Territories (Grassiani 2013) and the narrative that goes along with these activities is that of counterinsurgency and anti-terrorist combat. For many years this has been the language used to sell weaponry and security systems, developed by Israel, globally and ready for use by any other nation facing such threats. Israel, in these narratives is framed as un-championed expert in anti-terrorism and urban warfare. By arguing that ‘we are all in the same boat’, meaning, we all face the same (Muslim/Arab) terrorist threat, foreign customers are encouraged to buy these goods from Israeli manufacturers during the many security fairs that the private and public security industry organizes in Israel. Following this framing, Israel’s good relationship with controversial national leaders, such as Bolsonaro, Duterte and Modi resulted in many weapon deals and exchanges of training and expertise.

Israel’s security products and services are then accompanied by politically coloured stories of their historical and potential future use, based on the importance they have for defending Israel. I have called such stories and histories ‘security narratives’ (Grassiani 2019a) and explored the ways in which private security and public security (military) actors (re)produce and perform such narratives to sell Israeli made products internationally. The marketing I discuss here is part of such narratives. It is a way in which manufacturers and other companies help customers to ‘make sense’ of the weapons they are interested in and to help them see how they can use them and against whom. Part of this narrative was the already discussed prototypical ‘enemy’, based on the orientalist idea of the ‘Muslim terrorist’. This included images of men with Keffiyehs and guns. As long as such weapons are used against such ‘obvious (terrorist) threats’ they tend to be accepted and their marketing is fairly easy. However, as said, something changed in the last few years with the ‘arrival’ of a new kind of ‘urban enemy’. What happens when one wants to sell weapons that can also be used in non-combat, civilian settings? Israeli companies have recognised the commercial opportunity in these times when more and more ‘democratic’ states feel the need to repress and control their own citizens without getting them killed. The ‘enemy’ to be ‘combatted’ or defeated thus needs to be reframed. Those that need to be repressed are citizens, inhabitants of cities in both the Global South and North, who take to the streets to critique their (local) government.

Israeli companies proudly market such technologies as necessities for any state or police force. Normalising the weapons is one way of doing so. One important way in which this is done is by showing their use against citizens in urban spaces, either through photos featured on PR material or through demonstrations at security fairs making use of civilian protestors as the threat that needs to be subdued. Such strategies imply that this is a ‘normality’ and does not need to be questioned. TAR ideal, already mentioned above, promotes such weaponry in its glossy catalogue with the title ‘Law Enforcement’. On its cover we see a scene similar to the one I described above; policemen in full gear standing opposite of citizens in what looks like a city square. The policeman in the front sprays a substance on the crowd that stands below him. Close to the policeman we see people trying to flee and guard themselves against the substance that is sprayed on them. It does not become clear where this photo was taken or what the context is; the policeman, who is clearly visible, stands for all police forces, it seems, and the crowd, faceless and anonymous, for any group of people that needs to be repressed. Inside the catalogue we find a host of means to do so: different liquids, gasses, launchers (to shoot canisters of gas), vehicles, protective body gear, riot helmets, riot shields, batons and sound systems that can aid governments to disperse ‘riots’. Such a photo portraying the use of weaponry in urban space, against what are obviously protesting citizens, is a strong way to normalise not only these weapons, but also their use against civilians.



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What notably comes along with the product as part of its marketing is that its presentation is very sanitised (Grassiani 2022). Manufacturers and other companies selling these products appear to deliberately de-contextualise the photos they use to accompany anti-riot gear. The crowd is faceless. The weapons are non-lethal and ‘clean’. The actors using them, either policemen or soldiers, are portrayed as heroic and humane. The use of one technology, a robot, is described in a review of one of the ISDEF security fairs, as desirable ‘where neutralisation of specific elements is required by law enforcement agents, avoiding direct contact with the crowd. By operating with effective non-lethal means to suppress, or deactivate a target without the presence of personnel’.<sup>23</sup> In this description, no actual people seem to be involved at all, only non-human actors, such as the robot and ‘elements’ or ‘targets’, severely sanitising and dehumanising the marketing narrative.

In other descriptions that are part of PR material for non- and less-than-lethal weaponry, policing actors seem to face ‘mobs’ or ‘unruly crowds’ and ‘only’ use non-violent methods to

<sup>23</sup> [https://defense-update.com/20101018\\_isdef-2010-first-day.html](https://defense-update.com/20101018_isdef-2010-first-day.html) accessed 09-09-2021.

disperse them and bring back peace and quiet to the city. Framing protests as riots categorizes them as threatening to societal order and as illicit. It legitimises the often violent push back by the state, which in many instances is perceived as illegitimate by the protestors in the first place. Many companies very bluntly use the 'riot' narrative as they categorise their technologies under 'riot control' systems. The short introduction to policing equipment in TAR ideal's brochure is also insightful here. The reason given for the need of suppression of protests (riots according to the company, which even has its own 'riot control unit') is the fact that 'Throughout the 20th century, anti-government protests have led to the deaths of civilians and in some cases to a change in regime' (sic).<sup>24</sup> Such marketing re-arranges and in fact turns upside down the realities on the city streets; because there are protests there are deaths and hence the need for tools to repress such protest, which (of course) have to be non-lethal so as not to make the state look inhumane.

The reality of these weapons and their level of lethality is, as mentioned above, very different: bodies are bruised, people are made to vomit, people are maimed and killed with these weapons. This shows something significant; namely, that all these weapons and technologies have in common is that they attack the senses and the body. They inflict pain, blind people, smell terrible and/or work on the neurological systems of the body. I believe the ways the body and the senses are repressed and hurt here correlates with the sanitised language that is used by companies selling these weapons. For example, a product called 'sponge grenade', which looks like an oversized bullet, is described as follows: a 'non-lethal 40 mm crowd dispersal grenade intended for direct fire. Low hazard, non-shrapnel-producing device with a non-lethal effect upon impact' (TAR ideal catalogue). From reports of human rights organisations in Israel/Palestine and from testimonies, we know that such a grenade, when shot directly and at (too) close range, can be lethal or at least leave someone severely wounded.<sup>25</sup>

## CRIMINALISING CITY PROTESTORS AND THEIR DEMOCRATIC TOOLS

I started this article by describing a novel figure I encountered during my research. This figure, the city dweller who goes out onto the streets to protest, is collapsed into an already existing entity, that of the terrorist-criminal figure. While in this case reference is made to protesting and critical citizens, it also includes other civilians who have reason to be seen as 'unruly' or a threat by the state, such as refugees or migrants. All are often framed as 'uncontrollable' and (potentially) violent, and as such in need of being subdued. Above I already mentioned that featuring this figure of the civilian, urban protestor in the marketing of weapons is a strongly normalising strategy. However, it also has the potential to criminalise this figure and his/her democratic tools for voicing dissent. Once we see protesting citizens being suppressed time and again through marketing, these same citizens become legitimate subjects to use weapons against.

The figure on the PowerPoint presentation with a purple shirt, hoodie, and scarf, mentioned earlier, clearly suggests a civilian protestor (as opposed to a 'terrorist' other). I encountered another example at a large security fair in Tel Aviv. Amidst stalls selling cybertechnology and weapons, a demonstration was given by a company specialised in what it called 'nonviolent methods' for achieving security. This method, the Shadow Method, is a self-defence method that was demonstrated to the fair visitors. Interestingly, besides showing situations of personal attacks that could be countered, one example involved a group of protesters who one could recognise as non-violent protestors performing a 'sit in'; several people were sitting closely together with their arms interlinked. These peaceful protestors were then removed from the site with the use of this 'nonviolent' martial method, which consists of martial arts moves, such as twisting arms and 'neutralising' someone through carefully directed blows to the body. Thus again, protesting civilians, clearly non-violent in this case, are portrayed unproblematically as legitimate targets for (violent) measures of dispersal.

Within these marketing strategies, civilians' democratic rights to protest in the city are delegitimised and often subsequently criminalised. Their existence in the urban public sphere is

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.tarideal.com/solutions/law-enforcement-solution/> accessed 17-11-2021.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, <https://mondoweiss.net/2017/08/bullets-israels-munitions/> and the research by Who Profits <https://www.whoprofits.org/report/proven-effective-crowd-control-weapons-in-the-occupied-palestinian-territories/>.



deemed illicit not only by the government they are criticising (as can be seen by the weapons used against protestors worldwide) but is backed by (public and/or private) security companies who sell those states the methods to suppress them. These citizens are framed as polluting the orderly streets. Their bodies and voices, everything that makes them human, need to be stopped and chased off the city streets, influencing the city's political reality. These ideas are used in international marketing, exported globally alongside the new, non-lethal or less-than-lethal weapons the Israeli security industry is promoting. In this way, different regimes, states and non-state actors not only buy weapons to suppress those who criticise them, but they are also provided with a language to legitimise and normalise their use.

## CONCLUSION

While we know increasingly more about the policing of different groups of people by both state and non-state groups, in this article I have investigated the tools used in this policing and the marketing of this weaponry. In order to sell such weapons, I showed that one needs a proper narrative. Included in this narrative is the enemy who needs to be suppressed or 'neutralised'. Within the marketing of non-lethal, less-than-lethal and less lethal weaponry and technologies, I have argued, this new enemy is increasingly a civilian, internal other who goes out on the streets to demonstrate. Such construction of a new enemy through marketing, has the potential to influence the use of non-lethal weapons—especially legitimising their use against urban protestors worldwide, and delegitimising protest in the process.

By using the Israeli security industry as case in point, I have shown how the 'face of the enemy' has shifted and widened its scope over time. Whereas it was first the obvious orientalist figure of the 'Muslim terrorist', the protesting civilian has become included in the image of the (urban) enemy today. Through marketing strategies comprised of images of civilian protestors in marketing material for non-lethal weapons, sanitising language and discursive tricks (such as speaking of 'riots' instead of protests), protestors are portrayed repeatedly and steadfastly as a threat to urban order and are increasingly conflated with illicit actors. Their modes of operation, protesting and critiquing the government they live under, are reframed by manufacturers of non- and less-than-lethal weapons as illicit and even subversive activities that endanger law and order in the city. In this way we see the face of the classical enemy within the security industry shift to include protesting civilians, turning them into a legitimate target for suppression.


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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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