

Nationalist Militants, Police Collusion, and “Less Than Lethal” Weapons

Salish Sea Black Autonomists

August 8, 2018

On August 4th an assortment of militant, far-right groups comprised of Patriot Prayer, Proud Boys, and various white supremacists and neo-nazis from 13 different states converged in Portland, Oregon. They came armed to the teeth, no doubt still high off the blood spilled on June 30th and called to holy war by Patriot Prayer leader Joey Gibson, who declared Portland a city “...filled with so-much hate, so much darkness, so much deception...” that, “...freedom loving Americans, people who love this country, people who respect god...” must go into to “cleanse”¹. In response, a coalition of antifascists, political groups, churches, and unions came out 1000+ strong to kick the nationalist militants out of their city.

Unlike June 30th, when the Portland Police Bureau gave the nationalists free reign to attack an equally sized anti-fascist resistance with sporadic police intervention aimed only at the antifascists², the police took it upon themselves to keep the two groups separated. They, as per usual, had a handful of officers facing the nationalists while the majority focused³. Most of the day was a mellow shouting match with a few unlucky nationalists either coming over to the antifascists or, having attempted to “infiltrate”, getting violently ejected and escorted by police to the rest of the nationalists⁴. At **3:54PM, PPB attacked** the antifascists unprovoked^{5,6}, launching a barrage of “less than lethal” munitions. PPB released a statement acknowledging that they deployed the following⁷;

- Defense Technology Stinger® 60-Caliber Rubber Balls w/Safety Clip

¹ itsgoingdown.org

² crimethinc.com

³ twitter.com

⁴ twitter.com

⁵ twitter.com

⁶ *We recognize that this particular demo really was attacked unprovoked, but in the long run we want to stress that it really doesn't matter. We are antifascist, but first and foremost we are anarchists which means we are anti-police. We think victim narratives are both disempowering and will come to bite us in the ass in the future and the police are going to say what they want about us anyway. We should strive to be more aggressive and uncontrollable than they think we are.*

⁷ www.kxl.com

- Defense Technology Stinger® 40 mm 60-Caliber Rubber Balls Round
- Defense Technology eXact iImpact™ 40 mm Sponge Round
- Defense Technology First Defense® .4% MK-9 Stream OC Aerosol
- Defense Technology 40 mm Warning/Signaling Munition, 50 Meter

It is that last one, the 40 mm Warning/Signaling Munition, that found itself lodged in the helmet and opened the skull of one antifascist, sending them to the hospital⁸. In keeping with the long police tradition of shooting people in the back, it was lodged in the back of the head. It was only a few centimeters of skateboard helmet that prevented this from being a death sentence. Luckily, this person will be okay, but many others who are attacked with so called “less than lethal” munitions aren’t so lucky.

A 2016 report by International Network of Civil Liberties Organizations and Physicians for Human Rights titled *Lethal In Disguise*⁹ on “less than lethal” weapons reports what many who take to the streets have known for a long time; that “less than lethal” weapons often inflict serious injuries or death. The report states that many of these weapons are unregulated and used indiscriminately because many police organizations rely on the manufacturers’ recommendations. In the specific case of “Disorientation Devices”, of which the *Defense Technology 40 mm Warning/Signaling Munition* is, the report says of them:

“Despite their frequent use in civilian police operations, stun grenades carry a high risk of injury. They are primarily used to disorient and incapacitate groups. The results of this review suggest that these weapons are often used in conjunction with chemical irritant canisters, presumably to accelerate crowd dispersal, but they typically result in panic and serious injuries. Recent reports document more than 50 cases of severe injuries and deaths from the use of these weapons, and highlight the risks of indoor use and use in dense crowds.

As with all explosives, stun grenades carry the risk of blast injury. These injuries are complex and result from the pressure waves created by the blast. The weapons are made of both metal and plastic parts that may fragment during the explosion and act as shrapnel. Blast injuries from close proximity explosions can lead to amputation, fractures, and degloving injuries (extensive skin removal that exposes underlying tissue), while secondary injuries produced from fires include asphyxiation, heart attacks, and internal bleeding. Defective and poorly designed weapons may play a role in injury severity.”

We must note that the injury of the person in Portland wasn’t due to the “Disorientation Device” itself, but because it was shot directly at their head rather than above the crowd. We will get to this point, and talk more broadly about so called “Kinetic Impact Projectiles”, but with how widely used “Disorientation Devices” are, we think it’s important to touch on this.

A 2015 report by Pro-Publica on “Disorientation Devices” sheds a little more light on these weapons¹⁰. The report states:

⁸ www.rawstory.com

⁹ www.aclu.org

¹⁰ www.propublica.org

“Police argue that flashbangs save lives because they stun criminals who might otherwise shoot. But flashbangs have also severed hands and fingers, induced heart attacks, burned down homes and killed pets. A ProPublica investigation has found that at least 50 Americans, including police officers, have been seriously injured, maimed or killed by flashbangs since 2000. That is likely a fraction of the total since there are few records kept on flashbang deployment.”

Indeed, we can see some of the injuries that are talked about with the case of Sophia Wilansky, a water protector at Standing Rock whose arm was struck by a concussion grenade and torn apart. An article about it in the New York Post¹¹ states:

“The explosion had ripped out the radius bone, muscle, nerves and arteries of her left arm, and her hand was hanging by a few threads of flesh. “

We could also look to the violent attempted eviction of La ZAD, a long held autonomous zone in Notre-Dame-des-Landes, France, where thousands of police unloaded flash balls and tear gas on the defenders. The ZAD medic collective notes that¹²:

“The majority of injuries have been caused by sting grenades’ shrapnel received especially in the face or in the thorax, LBD (ed. Flash-Ball) shots in the thorax, and flat trajectory shots of tear gas canisters...”

Of particular interest is a defender who has their hand completely blown off by a flash ball¹³. Even indirect hits can do damage, as Sam Levine found while he was reporting on May Day 2016 when he got an inch of shrapnel from a blast ball lodged in his face¹⁴. Or how about March 7th, 2012 when a student protester in Montreal permanently lost vision in their right eye when the shrapnel from a stun grenade hit it¹⁵.

The joint report by the International Network of Civil Liberties Organizations and Physicians for Human Rights lays out clearly the effects of “Disorientation Devices” by breaking down the 4 types of injuries they see caused by them. There are Primary Blast Injuries caused by “supersonic pressure shock waves from the blast” which result in “internal injuries, especially of delicate membranes like the eardrum and the lung membranes.” Then, there are Secondary Blast Injuries caused by “explosion and fragmentation of objects” which result in “blunt and penetrating trauma from explosive devices.” There are Tertiary Blast Injuries when “displacement of air causes blast wind that can push people into solid objects” which result in “blunt and penetrating trauma, including fractures and head trauma.” Finally, there are Quaternary Blast Injuries which are “miscellaneous injuries caused by other parts of the explosion” which can be “burns, respiratory injuries from flames and smoke, crush injuries, eye injuries, psychiatric trauma(PTSD).” The damage these weapons do is no surprise considering they were developed for and are still used in military operations¹⁶.

¹¹ nypost.com

¹² www.lemonde.fr

¹³ twitter.com

¹⁴ q13fox.com

¹⁵ www.aclu.org

¹⁶ www.aclu.org

Now we are going to take a look at “Kinetic Impact Projectiles”. Looking at these is important because of their wide use, but also because many other “less than lethal” weapons are in the form of 40mm launcher rounds which gives them the potential to cause the same damage as the injury of the Portland antifascist shows. The *Lethal In Disguise* report says of “Kinetic Impact Projectiles”:

“There is little or no published research on the safety of KIPs, how they were designed, or the type of safety testing they have undergone and under what conditions. Overall, there is a lack of transparency by the manufacturers. There are dozens of weapon types on the market, including projectiles and launchers, each with their own safety features and requirements. This variety of weapon types can generate considerable confusion about their proper use. Lack of transparency on the part of manufacturers also limits information that health care providers can use in assessing injuries. KIPs are marketed to military, police, and private security forces in nearly every country, with little or no regulatory oversight or accountability. Guidelines on the use of KIPs, from police and military or by manufacturers, are not usually publicly available. Use-of-force guidelines that are available generally recommend that KIPs be used only for individual force-control rather than on groups of people. They also indicate that when KIPs are used, they should not target vital areas of the body, and, instead, should be aimed at the legs. Firing these weapons in the air or at the ground should also be avoided, as this could result in ricochet and lead to injuries. Evidence from photographs, video cameras, and testimonials in many countries identifies the frequent violation of these guidelines. There are examples of KIPs being aimed at the upper body or face, being fired from very short distances, being used against non-threatening individuals, and being fired indiscriminately at crowds.”

The report goes on to say:

“The findings of a systematic review of medical literature indicate that KIPs cause serious injury, disability, and death. In the 26 studies selected for analysis, we identified 1,925 people with injuries, 53 of whom died as a result of their injuries (3 percent), and 294 individuals who suffered permanent disabilities (15 percent), the vast majority of which consisted of permanent vision loss (84 percent of eye injuries resulted in permanent blindness, usually requiring complete removal of the eye). Of those injured, 70 percent had injuries that were considered severe. Permanent disability and severe injuries often resulted from strikes to the head and neck (49 percent of deaths and 84 percent of permanent disabilities). Those with injuries to the torso were also at risk of severe injury. Specifically, one of every five people with abdominal injuries suffered a permanent disability. In addition, firing distance and timely access to medical care were correlated with injury severity and risk of disability. While these findings do not enable estimates of the prevalence of morbidity and mortality associated with KIPs, they indicate that KIPs have resulted in significant morbidity and mortality despite their status as “less lethal weapons.””

While the horrific injury rate of “Disorientation Devices” is much higher due to their explosive nature, the death rate of “Kinetic Impact Projectiles” is certainly no laughing matter. As was

previously stated, it was only the one or two inch thick bike helmet that saved the life of the Portland antifascist. The fact of the matter is the label “less than lethal” is a PR platitude to give the public a sense of safety, and perhaps to ease the ragged conscience of police officers. One can scour the *Lethal In Disguise* report or even just google “deaths by less than lethal weapons” and find case after case of death or permanent injury.

Police have never been our friends, whether we are antifascists or anarchists, and they never will be, so many of us are very well acquainted with these “less than lethal” weapons. However, we find ourselves in a different terrain than what many of us are used to. For a long time in the territories dominated by the United States fighting fascists and overt white supremacists and fighting the police have remained mostly separate, except in sporadic instances where fascists would try to have a rally and there would be a riot¹⁷. Today, every confrontation with fascists is a confrontation with police.

In 2006 the FBI released a report about white supremacists “infiltrating” police departments to get training and to recruit within them.¹⁸ Setting aside the irony of white supremacists “infiltrating” a white supremacist institution, we can see today the fruits of this “infiltration” with the very open collusion between police and white supremacists. After the 2016 brawl in Sacramento, California where antifascists fought the Traditionalist Workers Party and Golden State Skinheads, it was revealed that the police were working with the neo-nazis to prosecute antifascists, and even directly sympathizing with their politics¹⁹. Fusion centers are actively taking information from far right and alt-right sources as fact to declare “ANTIFA” and “anarchist extremists” as the number one public threat^{20,21}, despite the body count white supremacists have been racking up²².

A report released by Shadowproof regarding Unite the Right says that²³

“Leading up to the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia on August 12, numerous foot soldiers of the “alt-right” openly broadcast their intention to create bloodshed in the genteel southern town.

A white supremacist group in California posted online videos glorifying physical assaults they had perpetrated on their ideological opponents. A post by the neo-Nazi Daily Stormer called for “military guys” to “crack skulls” of black people.

Many of the white supremacists traveling to Charlottesville had violent criminal histories and were well-known to law enforcement. They included: a former Green Beret and Ku Klux Klansman who went to prison for stealing weapons and explosives, a former Marine who went to prison for assaulting a cab driver he thought was Iraqi and participated in violence at the Berkeley protests before coming to Charlottesville, and a Baltimore Klansman who was charged with three separate assaults and a rape (but not convicted).

¹⁷ en.wikipedia.org

¹⁸ s3.documentcloud.org

¹⁹ www.theguardian.com

²⁰ www.muckrock.com

²¹ www.muckrock.com

²² www.splcenter.org

²³ shadowproof.com

But an August 9 assessment by federal and local law enforcement officers of the potential for “domestic terrorist violence” at the August 12 rally mainly focused on the possibility that violence would emanate from anti-racists, who were described as “anarchist extremists.””

The fact is that there are numerous examples of active state and police collusion with white supremacists, neo-nazis, and nationalist militants²⁴²⁵²⁶²⁷²⁸²⁹³⁰³¹. The most recent examples, however, are the most worrying and are signs of escalations to come. The pattern that has been established seems to be, except recently rare insurgent far right that positions itself against the interests of the state³², that the police and the far right and going to directly support each other.

In situations where numbers permit like April 15, 2017 in Berkeley³³ or June 30, 2018 in Portland³⁴, the police will step back and let the nationalists do as they please. When numbers don't favor them like on June 4, 2017 in Portland³⁵, April 21, 2018 in Newnan, Georgia³⁶, or most recently August 4, 2018 in Portland³⁷, the police will step in and do the heavy hitting for them. The nationalists have also begun to establish themselves as an auxiliary to the police, whether its 3%ers helping police carry out arrests³⁸, Proud Boys doing citizens arrests and handing people over to police³⁹, or Patriot Prayer getting the mayor of Portland to evict the OccupyIcePDX camp because of the threat of them showing up⁴⁰.

Much like anarchists and antifascists in Greece⁴¹ we find ourselves caught between the “less than lethal” munitions of the police and the fists, bats, and crosshairs of fascists and nationalists. There is no doubt that as these ties between the militant right and the police warp and solidify that the violence against us will increase, and on more fronts than just the streets. Every confrontation with the fascists is a confrontation with the police, and more and more we are going to find that our confrontations with the police or even capitalism more generally will also become confrontations with fascists and nationalists⁴²⁴³. We must prepare accordingly.

Without falling into the trap of militarization⁴⁴ or endless escalation⁴⁵, we must practice keeping each other safe. Learning how to move in groups, how to fight in groups. Learning to make

²⁴ patch.com

²⁵ itsgoingdown.org

²⁶ www.huffingtonpost.com

²⁷ itsgoingdown.org

²⁸ sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com

²⁹ itsgoingdown.org

³⁰ www.aljazeera.com

³¹ crimethinc.com

³² www.hcn.org

³³ crimethinc.com

³⁴ crimethinc.com

³⁵ crimethinc.com

³⁶ crimethinc.com

³⁷ itsgoingdown.org

³⁸ www.theguardian.com

³⁹ twitter.com

⁴⁰ www.wweek.com

⁴¹ www.aljazeera.com

⁴² www.vice.com

⁴³ www.splcenter.org

⁴⁴ libcom.org

⁴⁵ crimethinc.com

shields and armor⁴⁶, and making this knowledge accessible and easily reproducible. Knowing the weapons and tactics of our enemies⁴⁷⁴⁸.

But as our capacity for violence increases, so too must our capacity for care. More and more often we are going to find ourselves needing to know how to deal with stab wounds and gunshots, how to safely remove someone who was just shot in the head with a “less than lethal” round from a street brawl and care for them. Trauma and after action care is going to become more and more important as the violence becomes more and more traumatizing. Knowing how to care for ourselves⁴⁹ and each other⁵⁰ is going to become one of our most powerful tools if we are going to not only survive this, but build our power to determine our own futures outside the bleak options offered to us: the death cult of capitalism or the death cult of ethno-nationalism.

We must never forget who our enemies are and what they want. Whether they are the police upholding the white supremacist, capitalist status quo and the militant nationalists who support them, or the insurgent white supremacists who want explicit authoritarianism, genocide, and ethnostates. Their futures offer nothing to us but “less than lethal” weapons that they dream of turning into bullets. We must be antifascists, but we cannot only be antifascists. We must be anarchists and carry on as anarchists first and foremost, knowing that building our power and our future as anarchists is inherently antifascist.

When we think about what it means to act as anarchists in these confrontations two specific things come to mind. The first, whether due to a watered down antifascist populism or just different priorities the police are often left out of antifascist analysis and strategy. As anarchists we are against the police as much as we are against the fascists because we understand that the police are the enforcers of institutionalized white supremacist violence and terror on a scale the insurgent right only dreams of. This isn't to say that antifascists are misguided for focusing on the insurgent right or that we think it should stop, it is just an acknowledgment that once the white supremacists are back underground we will still have to grapple with the white supremacist project of so called “America” and the police that uphold it.

What this also means is thinking about the discourses we put forward and support. We think the more populist antifascists are ill equip to not only take on the police but to take on the more “american nationalist” groups that are gaining traction, particularly the Proud Boys. It is a strategic mistake, as well as a white-washing of history, to play up american nationalism as being antifascist. The so-called United States has always been a white supremacist terror project. The fact of the matter is nationalism is one of the strongest breeding grounds for white supremacists, other ethno-nationalists, and civic nationalists because it's their game, and not one that the “left” has ever won, and as anarchists a game we should even try to play. When we talk about antifascism we must also talk about being anti-nationalist, about being anti-police. We must think about the quality of our antifascist resistance and how that works in tandem with our larger struggle against the state. Without falling into an easily isolated, anti-social stance, we can't be stuck worrying about the quantity of big antifascist confrontations lest we find ourselves stuck in a position of getting bigger, but going nowhere fast.

See you in the streets, and don't forget your helmet.

⁴⁶ www.sproutdistro.com

⁴⁷ www.sproutdistro.com

⁴⁸ suntzusaid.com

⁴⁹ ia801504.us.archive.org

⁵⁰ cloudfront.crimethinc.com

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