

Report documents last year's Los Angeles police crackdown

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On March 10, the Los Angeles City Council released a 101-page report commissioned in the wake of mass protests against police violence following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota that documents the violent, heavy-handed crackdown on lawful demonstrators by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD).

Independent Counsel Gerald Chaleff concluded that the LAPD again responded violently to demonstrations, despite having been slammed for its responses to mass protests that occurred at the Democratic National Convention in 2000, the MacArthur Park May Day rallies in 2007, the Occupy Los Angeles encampment in 2011, and in response to Michael Brown's murder in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014.

The report made milquetoast recommendations about "seven thematic areas" where there were "opportunities for improvement: (1) planning, (2) command and control, (3) public order policing, (4) less lethal tools, (5) mass arrests, (6) preparedness and training, and (7) wellness."

The report documents there was virtually no planning or preparation for a response to mass protests. George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020, and protests began to emerge around the United States on May 26. But there were no protests in Los Angeles until May 27, giving the LAPD at least 24 hours to prepare.

The report found that the LAPD infringed on the rights of citizens to peacefully protest by sweeping up lawful demonstrators, purportedly to apprehend a few engaged in criminal behavior.

The report found that during the protests, which lasted from May 27 to June 7, the LAPD authorized the use of four different so-called "less lethal tools," including the "40mm Launcher deploying the 40mm

eXact iMPact Sponge Round," the "37mm Launcher deploying the 37mm Foam Baton Black Powder Round," the "Beanbag Shotgun," and the "Hornets Nest Sting Grenade, .60 Caliber Rubber Balls."

The 40mm launcher "fires a single foam projectile that weighs 0.96 oz and travels at 325 feet per second." LAPD policy states that its use is "only permissible when an officer reasonably believes that a suspect or subject is violently resisting arrest or poses an immediate threat of violence or physical harm" and that it "shall not be used to target the head, neck, face, eyes, or spine unless lethal force is authorized." Additionally, the weapon is designated for use only "as a target-specific less lethal option," meaning that it cannot be "used to disperse a crowd."

The 37mm foam baton round "consists of five foam rubber projectiles that are discharged at once." The LAPD uses it "as a non-target specific impact tool." The foam baton rounds are supposed to be skip fired off the ground prior to impact on a person.

The beanbag shotgun is a reconfigured Remington 870 shotgun with a colored slide handle and stock that deploys a "super-sock round," which is "a 12-gauge cartridge containing a shot-filled fabric bag" full of BBs, "designed to be non-penetrating" and to "distribute energy of a broad surface area" when striking a target. Much like the 40 mm launcher, LAPD policy states the beanbag shotgun is "a target-specific less-lethal option" with the same rules for use.

Lastly, the Hornets Nest Sting Grenade is a "diversionary device that produces approximately 130 decibels at five feet," the volume of a jackhammer, "and emits 1-2 million candelas," a blinding flash of light. Additionally, "the device disperses 25, .60 caliber, rubber balls in a 360-degree pattern." According to the LAPD, only the Special Weapons and

Tactics (SWAT) team has access to this weapon, which was used to target demonstrators on May 30 at the Pan-Pacific Park in the Fairfax District of Los Angeles.

According to the report, the LAPD could not provide the number of less lethal munitions fired at demonstrators between May 27 and June 7. According to inventory records, however, “over 3,500 rounds of 40mm and over 6,200 rounds of 37mm munitions were not returned to the Department armory.” Each 40mm round costs roughly \$25, while each 37mm round costs nearly \$15, meaning that the total cost of the munitions was \$180,500.

The report added that there are at least six serious use-of-force investigations stemming from the LAPD’s use of the above weapons underway by an investigative team assigned to the Department’s Professional Standards Bureau.

The report criticized the LAPD for certifying officers on the 40mm launcher after only a single “two-hour block of instruction.” The last training session for officers, other than for those going through the police academy, was in 2018 and involved only static targets.

The report described how the deployment of less lethal weapons was “not always done at the direction of a supervisor or officer” and “in some instances, officers were directed to be in front of a skirmish line and left to deploy less lethal tools, including the 40 mm, with no direction or coordination.”

In other words, the majority of LAPD officers were barely trained on the use of these potentially deadly weapons and deployed them without serious supervision. The use of such target-specific weapons against large crowds as a dispersion tactic undoubtedly resulted in several serious injuries among the protesters.

The report also criticized the LAPD’s “uncoordinated effort to manage the arrests of more than 4,000 individuals.” Many were charged with violating Los Angeles Municipal Code (LAMC) Section 80.02 (failure to obey a lawful order of a police officer), an infraction similar to a traffic ticket. Individuals cited for infractions cannot be arrested if they show identification and sign a promise to appear in court.

Hundreds of protesters charged with violating LAMC Section 80.02 were held for hours without access to water or bathrooms. Protesters were confined in field

jails miles away from where the arrests occurred. Demonstrators were “released late in the evening and early morning hours during the curfew period, placing them again in violation of the curfew declaration. Further, there was no public transportation available, and people were not able to call for someone to pick them up without also placing that individual in jeopardy of being arrested for a curfew violation.”

The report concluded with nearly two dozen recommendations, including proposals such as implementing an inventory system to track the use of less lethal munitions, increased protocols regarding the training, certification, and use of 40mm launchers, the operation of field jails, and better preparation and training of LAPD officers for future responses to mass events or emergencies.

Considering the LAPD’s track record and the fact that many of the problems identified in this report have been identified in the past after the conclusion of prior mass protests and through several lawsuits, it is highly unlikely that any meaningful changes will be implemented this time. LAPD officers, and more broadly, police officers globally, are “the special bodies of armed men” whom Frederick Engels characterized as tasked with defending capitalist property.

Despite its mealy-mouthed call for cosmetic changes that will never be fully implemented, this recent report highlights once more the inherent violence of the state whenever its fundamental interests, and those of the bourgeoisie it protects, are threatened by a movement of workers and youth.



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