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# Israeli Repression of the Palestinian May Uprising: Suppliers of Crowd Control Weapons

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## December 2021

From May to June 2021, Palestinians in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and within Israel took to the streets in protest against Israel's ongoing occupation, dispossession, and repression of the Palestinians. The spark for this popular uprising were Israel's policies of forced displacement in occupied East Jerusalem, particularly those aimed at Palestinian families in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, together with attacks on the al-Aqsa mosque compound and Bab al Amood<sup>1</sup> — centers of Palestinian economic, political and cultural life in the city, as well as the brutal 11-day onslaught on besieged Gaza.<sup>2</sup>

In response, the Israeli government swiftly mobilized its security apparatus which acted with brutal force, leading to the deaths and injuries

of many, as well as extensive mass arrests. For example, in the West Bank alone 26 Palestinians were killed and about 6,900 were injured between May 10<sup>th</sup> and May 21<sup>st</sup>.<sup>3</sup> In Jerusalem, 840 Palestinians were injured during four days of protests in May.<sup>4</sup> In particular, on May 7<sup>th</sup> more than 170 Palestinians were injured as Israeli forces brutally stormed the al-Aqsa mosque compound to disperse worshippers and protesters.<sup>5</sup>

In its suppression of Palestinian protests, Israel used lethal weaponry and heavily relied on so-called non-lethal crowd control weapons. For example, over 59 days in 2021 (between March 31<sup>st</sup> - May 28<sup>th</sup>), the Israeli police used about

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1 The Arabic term for Damascus Gate

2 The Israeli assault on Gaza during May 2021 left at least 248 dead and 1,900 injured.

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3 OCHA. [Protection of Civilians Report 24-31 May](#). 04 June 2021.

4 Amnesty International. [Israel\OPT: End Brutal Repression of Palestinians Protesting Forced Displacement in Occupied East Jerusalem](#). 10 May 2021.

5 Ibid.

6,885 stun grenades, 9,083 rubber coated bullets and 6,823 tear gas grenades in the vicinity of the Old City of Jerusalem alone.<sup>6</sup>

As delineated in this update, Israel's crowd control weapons can cause long term and life-changing injuries. While attending protests and making hospital visits in May 2021, the Who Profits team witnessed injuries caused by rubber bullets, many of which were fired at the upper body and head, causing people to lose their eyes and suffer concussions. As will be detailed below, some of this weaponry can be deadly, even though described as "non-lethal."<sup>7</sup>

The events of May - June 2021 represent the ongoing reality of Israel's violent repression of the Palestinian people, and their resistance to it. As detailed here, the form of repression described above is carried out with the help of Israeli and multinational companies manufacturing crowd control weapons, which reap enormous profits from their complicity with Israel's attack on Palestinian life and basic rights. Below, Who Profits profiles three of these companies—Combined Systems Inc. (CSI), Odortec, and Ruger - who supply Israel's security apparatus with weapons such as tear gas, rubber bullets and so-called skunk water.

The profiles outlined here shed light on these companies supplying equipment to the Israeli security forces during and in the aftermath of the May - June 2021 mass Palestinian protests. The case of Odortec also exemplifies how, for the suppliers of Israel's security apparatus, in-

stances of repression are a marketing opportunity.<sup>8</sup>

Prior to publication, Who Profits contacted all companies profiled as part of this update to share the information presented here and request a response. None were received.

## Combined Systems (CSI)

Based in the US, the company designs, manufactures and markets security products. According to the company's website, its clients include: the U.S. Army; U.S. Marine Corps; U.S. Navy, and other security forces worldwide.<sup>9</sup> The company's Israeli distributor is M.R. Hunter.<sup>10</sup>

On 24<sup>th</sup> May 2021, the Israeli police purchased NIS 13,300 million worth of CSI demonstration dispersion equipment from M.R Hunter.<sup>11</sup> In the body of the tender the Israeli police clearly noted its need to restock CSI equipment due to its widespread use during the repression of the uprising, stating; "In the past month, acts of violence were spreading across the country, especially in the mixed cities."<sup>12</sup> For this reason, there was an increased use of "crowd control weapons." The tender notes that the company was exempt from a tender as it already supplied the Israeli police with this equipment.<sup>13</sup>

In September 2021, the company was awarded an additional contract with the Israeli police for the supply of tear gas bullets worth NIS 4

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6 Tamari, Liran. [24,657 Stun, Gas and Rubber Bullets- This is how Two Months of Violence Look in Jerusalem](#). *Mynet*. 26 October 2021 (last accessed on 11 November 2021).

7 Who Profits. [Proven Effective: Crowd Control Weapon in the Occupied Palestinian Territories](#). May 2014.

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8 Who Profits. [Proven Effective: Crowd Control Weapon in the Occupied Palestinian Territories](#). May 2014.

9 CSI's About page [www.combinedsystems.com/](http://www.combinedsystems.com/)

10 Evidence on file with Who Profits.

11 Tender on file with Who Profits.

12 This term refers to Palestinian's cities occupied during the Nakba in 1948, where now reside both Palestinians and Israelis.

13 Evidence on file with Who Profits.

million.<sup>14</sup> The contract noted that these tear gas bullets require a special launcher that is manufactured by the company and is already in police use.<sup>15</sup>

In 2019, the company was also awarded a Ministry of Interior contract worth NIS 2,600 million to supply Israeli police with VENOM gas and launchers.<sup>16</sup> The VENOM grenade launcher delivers flash and sound, smoke obscuration, irritant, and blunt trauma effects.<sup>17</sup>

CSI equipment is also used by the Israeli military. In May 2013, VENOM grenades were documented being shot from an Israeli army vehicle in the Palestinian city of Beitunia in the occupied West Bank.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, in response to a Freedom of Information request from March 2020, the Israeli military confirmed their use of several types of CSI manufactured tear gas in the West Bank, including CS 400 grenades and CSI 40 mm that is shot from a launcher. These were both used against Palestinians in the Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem.<sup>19</sup>

On several occasions CSI equipment led to the death of Palestinians.<sup>20</sup> In 2009, Bassem Abu Rahmah was shot in the chest during a weekly protest in Bil'in by a CSI tear gas canister fired at close range by an Israeli soldier. He died the same day from his wounds. Two years later, his

sister, Jawaher Abu Rahmah died after inhaling large quantities of tear gas.<sup>21</sup>

#### Supplying other oppressive systems:

CSI is one of the largest suppliers of the tear gas used to suppress protests globally. In 2019, Hong Kong police fired 800 CSI canisters at protestors in one day.<sup>22</sup> In 2021, CSI tear gas canisters were fired at protestors in Colombia.<sup>23</sup> CSI tear gas was exported to Egypt through Israel during the Egyptian revolution of 2011 — Amnesty International documented three such shipments of CSI tear gas to Egypt.<sup>24</sup> CSI tear gas was also used by US police during the Ferguson uprising, and is used by prison authorities there.<sup>25</sup>

#### Corporate info:

**General info:** Head office: 388 Kinsman Rd, Jamestown, PA, 16134-9540 USA

Tel: (724) 932-2177

Website: [www.combinedsystems.com](http://www.combinedsystems.com)

**Ownership:** The company is owned by Point Lookout Capital

**Partners:** Company clients include: the U.S. Army, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Navy, and Israeli army and police.

**Global presence:** Egypt | Bahrain | Tunisia | Chile | Bolivia | Guatemala | Germany | Netherlands | India | East Timor | Hong Kong | Argentina | Thailand | Trinidad | Tobago |

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14 Tender on file with Who Profits.

15 Ibid.

16 Tender on file with Who Profits.

17 VENOM description in CSI website. [VENOM® - Combined System \(combinedsystems.com\)](http://www.combinedsystems.com)

18 B'tselem. [Crowd Control in the West Bank](https://www.btselem.org/press/2013050101). January 2013.

19 Freedom of Information response on file with Who Profits.

20 Who Profits. [Proven Effective: Crowd Control Weapon in the Occupied Palestinian Territories](https://www.whoprofits.com/2014/05/01/proven-effective-crowd-control-weapon-in-the-occupied-palestinian-territories/). May 2014.

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21 Ibid.

22 Business and Human Rights Resource Center. [Police in Hong Kong are Launching Tear Gas Canisters Made in Pennsylvania](https://www.bhrcenter.org/2019/08/10/police-in-hong-kong-are-launching-tear-gas-canisters-made-in-pennsylvania/). 10 August 2019.

23 War Resisters International. [Who Arms the National Police of Colombia](https://www.warresisters.org/2021/05/14/who-arms-the-national-police-of-colombia/). 14 May 2021.

24 Ibid.

25 +972 Magazine. [Photos: Tear Gas not the Only Thing Connecting Ferguson and Palestine](https://www.972mag.com/photos-tear-gas-not-the-only-thing-connecting-ferguson-and-palestine/). 18 August 2014. (Last accessed on 11 November 2021).



Tear gas canisters found in the town of Majd al-Kuroom inside the Green Line during a protest | Photo taken by an activist from the town

### Odortec - Skunk water manufacturer:

A private Israeli company specializing in the research and development of advanced non-toxic and non-lethal scent-based repellents for law enforcement.

The company, in collaboration with the Technological Development Department of the Israel Police, developed skunk water from a combination of water, yeasts and sodium bicarbonate.<sup>26</sup> Classified as a scent-based non-lethal weapon, it was designed to be sprayed from a distance in order to disperse crowds.<sup>27</sup> The skunk mist, which is fired from a water cannon, is usually yellow and leaves a stench of sewage in the mouths, hair and clothes of the people

26 Who Profits. [Proven Effective: Crowd Control Weapon in the Occupied Palestinian Territories](#). May 2014.

27 Ibid.

sprayed— a stench that is very difficult to remove.<sup>28</sup> Skunk water’s safety data sheet indicates that the liquid can cause skin irritation, eye pain or redness, and abdominal pain. According to the data sheet, inhalation of the liquid may also cause breathing difficulties.<sup>29</sup>

Skunk water was used for the first time in 2008 in the West Bank by the Israeli military.<sup>30</sup> Since then it has been used on a regular basis and as a punitive measure against Palestinians in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and within Israel.<sup>31</sup> Skunk water is not only sprayed on people, but also on homes and the surrounding areas of the protests, leaving a smell that stays for days.

In 2019, 2020 and 2021, the company won tenders to supply the Israeli police with NIS 500,000 worth of skunk water.<sup>32</sup> On several occasions during the months of May and June 2021, Who Profits’ team documented the use of skunk water in occupied Jerusalem, mainly in Sheikh Jarrah and the Damascus Gate area.

On May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021, a Colombian company contacted Who Profits information center, expressing interest in buying the liquid and selling it to the Colombian Police forces<sup>33</sup>, at a time when Colombians were also protesting. In previous years, St. Louis police bought the skunk water after the Ferguson uprising.<sup>34</sup>

### Corporate info:

**General info:** Head office: Nesher Industrial

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Odortec company profile. Who Profits. [www.whoprofits.org/company/odortec/](http://www.whoprofits.org/company/odortec/)

32 Tenders on file with Who Profits.

33 Information request on file with Who Profits.

34 Khalek, Rania. [St. Louis Police Bought Israeli Skunk Spray after Ferguson Uprising](#). *Electronic Intifada*. 13 August 2015 (last accessed on 14 November 2021).



Zone 5\A, Bet Shemesh, 99000

Tel: +972-3-5363330

Secondary office: 1\2 Hapikus St., Modi'in, 71700

**Ownership:** The company is privately owned and directed by Dividian Haim, Igal Zafrir and Ehud Zafrir through Dan Mishurim Management and Consulting Ltd, and Yikuel Arieah through Tvunot 5766 Ltd.



Activestills, Skunk water trucks in Sheikh Jarrah on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021



Skunk water truck documented by Who Profits team on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2021

### Ruger - ToTo bullets manufacturer:

A publicly-traded US-based manufacturer of firearms with an annual revenue of US\$14.6 million (in 2020).<sup>35</sup> The company operates in Is-

35 Company's annual reporting for the year 2020

rael through its Israeli distributor, L.H.B.<sup>36</sup>

Ruger is the manufacturer of the Suppressed 10\22 Ruger rifle which contains 0.22-inch caliber metal bullets, or what Palestinians call the ToTo bullet. Put to use for the first time in the first Palestinian *Intifada* (uprising) in 1987, the Ruger rifles came as a more "powerful" option to replace the rubber coated bullets used to shoot protestors in their legs.<sup>37</sup> Since then, Ruger bullets have been widely used in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza, and in Israel.<sup>38</sup>

Although the ToTo bullets are described as "non-lethal," a number of Palestinians have been shot dead by these bullets and others badly injured. Between 2016 and 2021, 12 Palestinians were killed by Ruger rifles in the occupied West Bank,<sup>39</sup> including 15 year old Ali Abu Alia who was killed by a Ruger bullet as he watched a protest in the village of al-Mugahyer in the West Bank.<sup>40</sup> Between October and December 2019 alone, 20 Palestinians were wounded by Ruger fire while trying to cross the fence.<sup>41</sup> During 2021, eight Palestinians died from Ruger bullets fired by the Israeli military

36 International Customers in Ruger website, [www.ruger.com/service/international.html](http://www.ruger.com/service/international.html)

37 Weiss, Philip. [Israeli Use of U.S. Rifle to Kill Boy Protester Sparkes Calls for Investigation](#). *Mondoweiss*. 08 December 2020.

38 Shezaf, Hagar. [IDF Increases Use in Live Ammunition Considered "Non-Lethal", at least 4 Palestinians Killed since May](#). *Haaretz*. 30 June 2021 (. In Hebrew. Last accessed on 14 November 2021).

39 Shezaf, Hagar. [Israeli Army's Riot Control Rifle Killed Eight Palestinians in 2021, Eight Times Last Year's Tally](#). *Haaretz*. 07 November 2021. (last accessed on 15 November 2021).

40 Klein, Jeff. [Ruger Profits from Selling Murder Weapons in Israel, and the U.S.](#) *Mondoweiss*. 29 March 2021 (last accessed on 15 November 2021).

41 Shezaf, Hagar. [Major Increase in Palestinians Killed by Ruger Rifle](#). *Haaretz*. 07 November 2021. (In Hebrew. Last accessed on 15 November 2021).

in the occupied West Bank.<sup>42</sup> These statistics do not include the Palestinians killed by Israel's border police, or by the military along the border besieging Gaza.<sup>43</sup>

In 2015, Abdelrahman Obeidalla, a 13-year-old from Aida refugee camp, was also shot dead by a Ruger rifle.<sup>44</sup> In 2014, a border police officer was documented pointing a Ruger rifle at protestors in the village of Turmusaya in the West Bank.<sup>45</sup>

In the village of Beita in the West Bank, where daily protests have been taking place against the construction of "Evyatar" settlement outpost on the village's land for the past year, at least two protestors have been shot by Ruger bullets.<sup>46</sup>

On 20<sup>th</sup> March 2018, the police contracted the company's Israeli distributor L.H.B. for the supply of Ruger parts worth NIS 150,000.<sup>47</sup>

#### Corporate info

**General info:** Head office: 1 Lacey Place, Southport, Connecticut, Delaware, USA

Tel: +1(203) 259-7843

Website: [www.ruger.com](http://www.ruger.com)

**Revenues:** US\$14.6M (in 2020)

**Ownership:** The company is Publicly traded in NYSE under the ticker symbol RGR

Major shareholders: BlackRock Fund Advisors (15.06%); The Vanguard Group, Inc. (10.39%);

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42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 [Immediately Halt the Use of Ruger Rifles and ToTo Bullets](#). *B'tselem*. 06 October 2015.

46 Shezaf, Hagar. [IDF Increases Use in Live Ammunition Considered "Non-Lethal", at least 4 Palestinians Killed since May](#). *Haaretz*. 30 June 2021 (In Hebrew. Last accessed on 15 November 2021).

47 Tender on file with Who Profits.

Renaissance Technologies LLC (6.32%); SSgA Funds Management Inc. (3.04%), LSV Asset Management (2.79%)

CEO - Christopher J. Killoy

**Subsidiaries:** Marlin Firearms

**Global presence:** Argentina | Australia | Austria | Belgium | Belize | Bosnia & Herzegovina | Bulgaria | Canada | Chile | Costa Rica | Croatia | Czech Republic | Denmark | Faroe Islands | Finland | France | Germany | Greenland | Hungary | Iceland | Ireland | Israel | Italy | Luxemburg | Malta | Montenegro | Namibia | Netherlands | New Caledonia | New Zealand | Norway | Panama | Paraguay | Peru | Philippines | Poland | Serbia | Slovakia | Slovenia | South Africa | Sweden | Switzerland | Thailand | UK | Ukraine | Zambia



Photo from the Israeli army's "Gear Review"