

## **Decision making processes lethal and non-lethal capacities**

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### **Keywords**

Non-Lethal Weapons

Decision making processes

Psychological factors

Situational factors

Rules of Engagement

### **Abstract**

The Armed Forces are exploring the possibilities to use non-lethal capacities as valuable substitutes or supplements to lethal capacities. Under the auspices of the Dutch Defense Research program on non-lethal weapons, the present project was carried out in order to gain insight in the decision making processes that underlie the choice between lethal or non-lethal capacities.

The choice between lethal and non-lethal capacities depends upon doctrines, rules of engagement, procedures and other directions of the commander that apply to a specific military operation. These directions have to result in a *rational* choice. However, the choice often must be made under time pressure and threatening circumstances. As a result, more or less *irrational* aspects of the decision making process may also play a part. For example, in stressful situations people are inclined to rely on their habitual behaviour, without assessing how appropriate it is.

The objective of the present project was to examine the discrepancies between the assigned rules of engagement and procedures on the one hand, and the actual individual decision making process on the other hand. The focus is on the psychological factors, such as expectations and uncertainty, and situational factors, such as complexity and ambiguity, that cause these discrepancies.

The results of this project are used to examine whether preparatory courses for the military, such as education and mission-specific training, take sufficiently into account the psychological and situational factors that come into play when the military are equipped with lethal as well as non lethal weapons.