

## Militarizing Police in U.S. was Inspired by Israel

By Gary Fields

In 2019, seven high-ranking law enforcement officials from five San Diego County agencies [participated](#) in a police training seminar in Israel. Normally, such an event would elicit very little public notice, but it's worth revisiting in the aftermath of the unspeakable killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis.

The knee of officer Derek Chauvin on Floyd's neck is uncomfortably similar to what is a daily routine in Israel — violent Israeli police applying the same tactic to the necks of innumerable Palestinians. I have witnessed this tactic against Palestinians on numerous trips to the Palestinian West Bank.

The sad fact is that Blacks in America and Palestinians under the control of Israel share a similar fate at the hands of police in both countries. For this reason, the city of Durham, North Carolina, [terminated](#) the relationship between its police force and the state of Israel, and the Vermont State Police and the Northampton Police Department in Massachusetts have [canceled trips](#) to Israel in recent years.

Since its inception, the state of Israel has adopted a militaristic approach to policing its Palestinian population. During its first 18 years as a nation from 1948 to 1966, Israel placed all of its Palestinian citizens under military rule and since that time has kept them as an institutionalized underclass. Since 1967, the state of Israel has imposed military rule on Palestinians in the territories it occupies in the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza.

The 18-year period of martial law imposed on its Palestinian citizens and the 53 years of military occupation in the West Bank and Gaza have enabled Israel to represent itself as one of the world's foremost experts in policing restive civilian populations. After 9/11, Israel, with its decades-long experience suppressing what it described as "Palestinian terrorism," presented itself to the world as the leading expert globally in the fight against terror. At the initiative of organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League, police officials throughout the U.S. began to travel to Israel for training in so-called counterterrorism and counterinsurgency. At the same time, Israeli military and police officials visited their counterparts in the U.S. and so began two decades of close cooperation between the two.

In the present moment, when the nation is looking at itself in the mirror and asking how it is that there are so many George Floyds while at the same time the country's jails are filled with people of color, why is this relationship between police forces in Israel and America so critical for Americans of conscience?



Israeli riot police officers operate in the Arab neighborhood of Issawiyeh in East Jerusalem (AP Photo/Ariel Schalit).

It is critical because the most salient attribute of the police environment in Israel is the fact that the police and military are more intimately intertwined than almost any other country. The Israeli police are highly militarized, and the Israeli military is often involved in police operations. Such operations are directed primarily against the Palestinian community. Consequently, when American police officials learn from their Israeli counterparts, they are observing a fully militarized environment for law enforcement directed against a community of color. This is precisely what Americans are rejecting as they watch police actions across the country.

Arguably, the most visible example of Israeli military policing in action has occurred during the past two years. Since 2018, the Israeli military and police have killed [more than 270](#) Gazan protesters at the border fence separating Israel from the Gaza Strip. For the two-year period from 2018-19, Israeli security forces killed a total of 423 Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank.

Owing to this record of savagery, it is hardly coincidental that during the current protests, Palestinian organizations are sending messages to groups such as Black Lives Matter with suggestions on how to deal with tear gas, rubber bullets and live fire.

It's no secret that American police and Israeli police are among the most violent in the world. In 2019, American police forces killed over 1,000 people, a disproportionate number being African Americans. In England for the same year, the figure was three.

While the influence of Israeli policing in American police killings is something to study more carefully, what is undeniable is that Blacks and Palestinians are killed by American and Israeli police forces, respectively, at staggering rates.

Events in recent weeks suggest that the time has come for Americans to tell their police forces that they no longer want the kind of militarized policing that prevails in Israel. In terminating its relationship with the state of Israel, the city of Durham has provided an example to cities across the U.S.

San Diego would do well to take up the cause.

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Of the 5000 dunums of land taken from Husan by the settlement, 30 dunums belonged to Mr. Sabatin. On these 30 dunums now stand apartment blocks housing Israelis. In a way, Mr. Sabatin might be considered "lucky." After all, the settlement did not take all of his land. He still has 50 dunums remaining which now lie in the shadow of the settlement, only meters away from the buildings that occupy the land confiscated from him. As we walked through his fields, we could see people from the settlement watching us the entire time.

Mr. Sabatin told me how the settlers burn and vandalize his remaining olive and fruit trees on a daily basis. Just as he was describing this to me, we came upon several olive trees apparently burned just that morning. The ashes were still smoldering from this deliberate act of destruction when we came into his fields. He just stares at the blackened limbs and burnt ground in silence.

As we go through his groves, other trees, almond and fig, revealed branches torn off and scattered on the ground, the trees bending and disfigured. "I love these trees," he tells me. "They are part of my family."

Mr. Sabatin then told me a story of his father, a very proud and honorable individual, when they were building the settlement. His father tried to prevent the bulldozers from uprooting the trees on his land confiscated for settlement construction. He stood in the path of the bulldozer, refusing to move, and then the army came to arrest him. They demanded his ID. The elder Sabatin picked up a handful of dirt from his land now being taken from him and screamed at the soldier, "this is my ID."

After wandering for some time through the olive, fig, and almond groves, the security man from the main gate at the settlement entrance intercepted us in the field. He had a call from one of the settlers about us and came to question us as to what we were doing. Mr. Sabatin told the security person about the fires and vandalism and asked him why nothing was done to prevent settlers from destroying his livelihood. "The settlers are tending the land," the security person retorted. "You see, what can I do?" Mr. Sabatin asks me.

If these difficulties weren't enough, now Mr. Sabatin has something else to worry about. In another part of Husan, he owns a beautiful piece of land, roughly 20 dunums where he grows vegetables. This land is irrigated with numerous natural aquifers typical of land near the border with Israel but inside Palestinian territory. Israel has always coveted these natural water sources.

For this reason, Israel has built the Wall *inside* Palestine at key locations in order to annex many of these natural aquifers. Recently, the Israeli authorities informed Mr. Sabatin, along with others in the village, that this land is in the pathway planned for The Wall. When built, the Wall will confiscate an additional 400 dunums of land from Husan, including the 20 dunums from Mr. Sabatin. Dunum by dunum, more and more Palestinian land is changing hands. Little wonder that so many people here are so angry.

We spent close to 3 hours in Mr. Sabatin's fields during which time he described how desperate he is to keep what he still has. I don't know how he can go on. I felt compassion for his resilience. As an American, I was uneasy wondering what he might think of me and the policies of my government. Then, of course, at the end of the tour, he invited me to his home for dinner, a feast in fact, breads just baked from the ovens, the freshest vegetables, olives from his trees. He kept telling me how welcome I was.

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