
BREAKING NEWS

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COMMENTARY

Commentary: Militarizing of police in U.S. was inspired by Israel



Israeli riot police officers operate in the Arab neighborhood of Issawiye in Jerusalem, Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2015. (AP Photo/Ariel Schalit)



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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



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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 anceled 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

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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?

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.

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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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For more perspectives on the Israeli connection to U.S. policing, please see:

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