

## **A Deadly Exchange: United States and Israel Security Forces Exchange Programs**

by Erika Levy

Each year, law enforcement agencies from across the United States send officers to train with the Israeli military, national police, and other security personnel. Israel touts itself as the global leader in “counterterrorism,” and annually trains these U.S. police personnel in the latest surveillance and border security technology and protocol. The itineraries for these exchange programs include: lectures from top security officials in the Israeli government; meetings with former IDF soldiers and members of the Israeli National Police; visits to checkpoints and discussions with border patrol agents; as well as visits to Israeli prisons, where Palestinians often suffer horrific human rights abuses.

Given their history, it is not surprising that United States police forces would choose to train with an occupying army. The foundations of U.S. policing can be found in the formation of bands of slave catchers in the South, as well as in militias that captured and killed Native Americans in the North in the 19th century. Today, black and brown neighborhoods are overpoliced, black and brown people are disproportionately incarcerated, and Native American and black people are more likely to be shot and killed by police officers than any other demographic.

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U.S. policing has *always* operated specifically to protect settler colonialism and white supremacy. Israel, and the Zionist principles upon which it was founded, is a settler colonial, white supremacist state. In the late 1800s, as European colonial powers expanded their empires, they sought new markets in the Middle East and Asia, and Palestine offered a strategic geographic location between the East and the West. With anti-Semitism on the rise, the global elite saw the colonization of Palestine with European Jews and the establishment of Israel as a Jewish-only state as the ideal way to rid Europe of its poorest Jewish population, while ensuring access to new markets and political influence.

As the Zionist project unfolded, thousands of Palestine’s inhabitants – the Muslims, Christians, and even Jews who had been living there for centuries – were violently expelled from their homeland and barred from returning. Generations of Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons are still prevented from returning home. Present-day political boundaries substantially divide Palestinian land, with some Palestinians living in the West Bank, some in Jerusalem, and some effectively blockaded in the Gaza Strip. Continued expansion into and colonization of Palestinian land has given the state of Israel near total control of water, sea, airspace, and electric resources as well as control of Palestinian fields, orchards, and pastures on which Palestinian livelihoods depend. The Israeli occupation restricts Palestinian movement throughout the West Bank and criminalizes all forms of protest. And ultimately, as U.S. police departments train with an occupying army, they bring home with them the worst possible tactics that they then employ in their own communities.

These worst practices include dehumanization, predictive policing, increased surveillance, threats to social movements, police militarization, and lethal shoot-to-kill policies. Dehumanization of and surveillance of “undesirable” communities in the United States is not new. Black, brown, indigenous, immigrant, refugee and Muslim communities are routinely surveilled and harassed, and experience disproportionate violence at the hands of the police. Training with an occupying army bolsters these practices, further justifies, and ultimately normalizes these practices as an inevitable outcome of policing.

While training with Israeli security forces is not the sole contributor to the militarization of U.S. police forces, Israeli counterterrorism and weapon technology has heavily influenced the rise in police militarization in the U.S. and worldwide, particularly as social justice movements challenge the status quo. Currently in the United States, the federal 1033 Program allows local police departments to purchase excess military-grade weapons at a significant discount. Because officers train with a foreign army to respond to civilian crises as terrorist threats,

police departments will often formulate militarized responses to protests and social justice advocacy, and use these military weapons to respond to unarmed protesters.

These police exchanges between the U.S. and Israel have devastating effects on Palestinians and people of color inside Israel. Palestinians are routinely harassed and frisked by Israeli military and police officers. Checkpoints inside the West Bank restrict Palestinian movement, and the biometric ID cards they are required to carry with them contain private information easily accessed by the occupation authorities. Palestinian children as young as seven years old are arrested and jailed for throwing stones or marching for their rights. African refugees inside Israel are at this very moment being rounded up and deported. Under the guidelines of the \$38 billion aid package to be doled out over 10 years which the U.S. gave Israel in 2016, Israel is required to purchase U.S.-made weapons only; these weapons are then used in the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, and in the lethal policing of people of color inside Israel proper. The police exchanges solidify this deadly partnership. Not surprisingly, U.S. racist policing of black and Native American people, and ICE raids on undocumented Mexican and Central American immigrants are comparable with IDF raids on Palestinians and the deportation of African refugees by the Israeli government.

U.S. police exchanges with Israel are mostly funded through support from major Zionist organizations in the United States: The Anti-Defamation League (ADL),<sup>2</sup> the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA), the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), and the Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange (GILEE). One of the largest of these programs is the ADL Counter-Terrorism Seminar. A 2017 ADL report stated that since 2004, the seminars have brought 200 law enforcement executives, representing nearly 100 different federal, state, and local agencies across the U.S., to Israel for law enforcement exchanges. During these exchanges, officers, whether they are Jewish or not, are groomed to feel a deep emotional connection with Israel and to see Israel as a leader in rooting out terrorist threats and in creating “safety” for its people. Ultimately, these exchanges further the false narrative that certain communities can only be safe if others are in danger.

Jewish Voice for Peace, an American advocacy group working toward self-determination for Palestinians, and seeking an end to the occupation, is currently conducting a national campaign called the Deadly Exchange to educate people about the exchanges, and their practices and sources of funding. In addition, the campaign is introducing local legislation to ban police exchanges between the U.S. or any foreign army. In the Twin Cities specifically, the local campaign has uncovered at least two trips taken by Hennepin County Sheriff Richard Stanek, in 2011 and 2012. In Saint Paul, Police Chief Todd Axtell participated in an exchange as recently as 2016. The local Twin Cities campaign has been organizing educational events to spread the word about the exchanges and what communities can do to end them.

As resistance movements against police brutality and police militarization gain ground in the United States, activists are looking to continue the struggle globally. While ending these exchanges will not necessarily overhaul American policing practices or eliminate police brutality, pulling the funding streams that enable exchanges will be a concrete step in the right direction.

*Erika Levy describes herself as Ashkenazi Jewish and is an organizer in the Twin Cities as a member of the Jewish Voice for Peace -Twin Cities coordinating committee. She is part of the Deadly Exchange committee to end police exchanges between the United States and Israel.*

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#### **ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> Lind, Dana. “There are huge racial disparities in how U.S. police use force.” [vox.com/cards/police-brutality-shootings-us/us-police-racism](https://www.vox.com/cards/police-brutality-shootings-us/us-police-racism); Roetman, Sheena. “Number of Native Americans Killed by Police Could

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Double by the End of 2016.” [indiancountrymedianetwork.com/news/native-news/number-of-native-americans-killed-by-police-could-double-by-end-of-2016](http://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/news/native-news/number-of-native-americans-killed-by-police-could-double-by-end-of-2016)

<sup>2</sup> Anti-Defamation League. "Anti-Defamation League, National Counter-Terrorism Seminars (NCTS).” September 9-17, Israel

**Resources/Actions:**

**Deadly Exchange** [deadlyexchange.org](http://deadlyexchange.org)

National campaign with education, news updates, a petition to sign, actions to take to end deadly exchanges between U.S. and Israeli law enforcement

**Jewish Voice for Peace**

National organization dedicated to U.S. foreign policy based on peace, human rights, and respect for international law. [Jewishvoiceforpeace.org](http://Jewishvoiceforpeace.org) Check for local JVP in your community. In Minnesota, see Jewish Voice for Peace Minnesota on Facebook

**Communities United Against Police Brutality**, a Twin-Cities empowerment organization that works to change structure and individual cases to end police brutality [cuapb.org](http://cuapb.org)