

Exporting Repression from Ulster to Palestine

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In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

Sectarianism with a smile: the late Ian Paisley claimed that Catholics “multiply like vermin.” ([DUP Photos](#))

Imagine that a police force is being developed for a future Palestinian state. Imagine that the chief advisers to that force had spent much of their professional lives with an institution that was synonymous with repression. Imagine that instead of bringing a downtrodden people closer to freedom, the advisers were really helping the Palestinians to oversee their own occupation.

It is not necessary to imagine any further. This scenario is being actually being played out.

For the past eight years, the [European Union](#) has [ran](#) a “security” operation in the occupied [West Bank](#).

Five different men have headed the [EU Coordinating Office for Palestinian Police Support](#) — or COPPS, as the operation is known — to date (excluding those who have led the office on an [interim](#) basis). Four of these officers had previously [served](#) with the [Royal Ulster Constabulary](#) (RUC) or its successor the [Police Service of Northern Ireland](#) (PSNI).

A short trip to [Belfast](#) should be enough to illustrate why the liberation of Palestine is unlikely to be the foremost concern of an ex-RUC member.

When I visited that city in August, I was struck by the abundance of Palestinian flags on the Falls Road, a largely Catholic neighborhood. By contrast, I saw a few Israeli flags fluttering alongside the ubiquitous Union Jacks in Protestant areas.

There are exceptions, of course. But it is a simple fact that Ulster Protestants have tended to identify more with Israelis than Palestinians.

“Inherently divisive”

The RUC was [dominated](#) by Protestants throughout its history.

In 1998 — three years before it was replaced by the PSNI — just 7 percent of its officers were Catholic. That was despite how Catholics [comprised](#) more than 40 percent of Northern Ireland’s population, according to a 2001 census.

That imbalance was compounded by the RUC’s behavior.

A 1994 [study](#) by the Committee on the Administration of Justice — a civil rights group —

found that almost half of all young Catholics experienced harassment by the security forces. “Arming one side of the population in [Northern Ireland](#) to police the other is inherently divisive,” that study notes.

Earlier this year, an Irish television [documentary](#) proved that the British government authorized [torture](#) by the RUC against people detained without trial in the 1970s. In 2004, a Canadian judge tasked by the British and Irish governments with investigating the murder of Belfast solicitor Pat Finucane [stated](#) there was “strong evidence” that the RUC had colluded with his killers.

During the 1980s, a probe by a senior Manchester policeman pointed to an “inclination, if not a policy” on the RUC’s part “to [shoot suspects dead](#) without warning, rather than to arrest them.”

I contacted COPPS, asking if its leaders have recommended that tactics tested in Northern Ireland should be replicated in Palestine. A spokesperson for the operation responded that it “does not give any preference to any specific model or methods” of policing.

That reply is in no way reassuring.

Paul Kernaghan, one of the men to [head](#) the EU’s operation in Palestine, has explicitly urged that the RUC model should be exported.

Four years ago, he [told](#) an inquiry into the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq that “at various stages in the RUC’s existence, it had a fairly high level capability and, indeed at one stage, a light armored capability.” He contended that “you need something like that” in [Iraq](#).

Brutal tactics

Baton guns were perhaps the RUC’s most contentious weapon. Three children were [killed](#) with the plastic bullets fired from these batons in 1981 alone. One of them, twelve-year-old Carol-Ann Kelly, was doing nothing more sinister than bringing a carton of milk home from the shops.

The [Palestinian Authority’s](#) security forces — the forces “mentored” by the EU — also make liberal use of batons. During demonstrations in the West Bank against Israel’s attack on [Gaza](#) in early 2009, those forces beat fellow Palestinians with batons, as [reported](#) by a UN team of investigators.

Similarly brutal tactics were [employed](#) by the PA’s forces when numerous Palestinian youths objected to how [Mahmoud Abbas](#), the authority’s president, invited [Shaul Mofaz](#), a former Israeli defense minister, to Ramallah in 2012 and during [protests](#) opposing the US-initiated “peace” talks last year.

Striking comparisons

Drawing analogies between different geographic regions and different periods of history can be problematic. The injustices endured by Catholics in the north of Ireland were severe. Those suffered by Palestinians are many times worse.

Still, there are some striking comparisons.

Both the Palestinians and Ulster Catholics have been suffered as a result of [settler colonialism](#).

The racist discourse of the Protestant establishment in the north of Ireland during the “Troubles” is almost identical to what Israeli politicians say about Arabs. [Ayelet Shaked](#), a member of Israel’s Knesset, [called](#) Palestinians “little snakes” in July; the recently-deceased Ian Paisley, a Free Presbyterian preacher and long-time leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, once [claimed](#) that Catholics “multiply like vermin.”

The RUC was subservient to the British Army; the PA’s security forces are subservient to Israel.

Aiding illegal wars

Colin Smith, another former head of COPPS, has [spoken](#) of how part of his work involved “facilitating contacts” between Israel and the PA police. Such liaison was “progressing,” even though the PA forces had to pass through Israeli military [checkpoints](#), he said in 2008.

Furthermore, the EU has [equipped](#) stations located in Area B of the West Bank. That zone (demarcated under the [Oslo accords](#)) is under Israeli [military control](#).

As well as serving in the RUC, Smith has been one of the top police officers [representing](#) Britain in Iraq since the 2003 invasion.

Smith, of course, is not the only one to have found that participating in an [illegal war](#) can enhance your career prospects. [Tony Blair](#) has not been short of [job offers](#) either.

Blair’s role as the Middle East “peace envoy” complements the work of the EU’s police operation. Together, they are trying to dupe the world into thinking that the Palestinians are being put in charge of their own destiny, while constantly kowtowing to the Israeli occupation.

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