

From Occupation to ‘Occupy’: The Israelification of American Domestic Security

One of the first comprehensive surveys of Israeli training of US local and federal law enforcement officials.

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In October, the Alameda County Sheriff’s Department turned parts of the campus of the University of California in Berkeley into an urban battlefield. The occasion was [Urban Shield 2011](#), an annual SWAT team exposition organized to promote “mutual response,” collaboration and competition between heavily militarized police strike forces representing law enforcement departments across the United States and foreign nations.

At the time, the Alameda County Sheriff’s Department was preparing for an imminent confrontation with the nascent “Occupy” movement that had set up camp in downtown Oakland, and would demonstrate the brunt of its repressive capacity against the demonstrators a month later when it [attacked](#) the encampment with teargas and rubber bullet rounds, leaving an Iraq war veteran in [critical condition](#) and dozens injured. According to [Police Magazine](#), a law enforcement trade publication, “Law enforcement agencies responding to...Occupy protesters in northern California credit Urban Shield for their effective teamwork.”

Training alongside the American police departments at Urban Shield was the [Yamam](#), an Israeli Border Police unit that claims to specialize in “counter-terror” operations but is better known for its [extra-judicial assassinations](#) of Palestinian militant leaders and long record of [repression](#) and [abuses](#) in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. Urban Shield also featured a unit from the military of Bahrain, which had just crushed a largely non-violent democratic uprising by [opening fire](#) on protest camps and [arresting](#) wounded demonstrators when they attempted to enter hospitals. While the involvement of Bahraini soldiers in the drills was a novel phenomenon, the presence of quasi-military Israeli police – whose participation in Urban Shield was not reported anywhere in US media – reflected a disturbing but all-too-common feature of the post-9/11 American security landscape.

The Israelification of America’s security apparatus, recently unleashed in full force against the Occupy Wall Street Movement, has taken place at every level of law enforcement, and in areas that have yet to be exposed. The phenomenon has been documented in bits and pieces, through occasional news reports that typically highlight Israel’s national security prowess without examining the problematic nature of working with a country accused of grave human rights abuses. But it has never been the subject of a national discussion. And collaboration between American and Israeli cops is just the tip of the iceberg.

Having been schooled in Israeli tactics perfected during a 63 year experience of controlling, dispossessing, and occupying an indigenous population, local police forces have adapted

them to monitor Muslim and immigrant neighborhoods in US cities. Meanwhile, former Israeli military officers have been hired to spearhead security operations at American airports and suburban shopping malls, leading to a wave of disturbing incidents of racial profiling, intimidation, and FBI interrogations of innocent, unsuspecting people. The New York Police Department's disclosure that it deployed "counter-terror" measures against Occupy protesters encamped in downtown Manhattan's Zuccotti Park raised serious questions about the extent to which Israeli-inspired tactics have been used to suppress the Occupy movement in general.

The process of Israelification began in the immediate wake of 9/11, when national panic led federal and municipal law enforcement officials to beseech Israeli security honchos for advice and training. America's Israel lobby exploited the climate of hysteria, providing thousands of top cops with all-expenses paid trips to Israel and stateside training sessions with Israeli military and intelligence officials. By now, police chiefs of major American cities who have not been on junkets to Israel are the exception.

"Israel is the Harvard of antiterrorism," [said](#) former US Capitol Police Chief Terrance W. Gainer, who now serves as the US Senate Sergeant-at-Arms. Cathy Lanier, the Chief of the Washington DC Metropolitan Police, [remarked](#), "No experience in my life has had more of an impact on doing my job than going to Israel." "One would say it is the front line," Barnett Jones, the police chief of Ann Arbor, Michigan, [said](#) of Israel. "We're in a global war."

Changing the way we do business

The [Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs](#) (JINSA) is at the heart of American-Israeli law enforcement collaboration. JINSA is a Jerusalem and Washington DC-based think tank known for stridently neoconservative policy positions on Israel's policy towards the Palestinians and its brinkmanship with Iran. The group's board of directors boasts a Who's Who of neocon ideologues. Two [former JINSA advisers](#) who have also consulted for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Douglas Feith and Richard Perle, went on to serve in the Department of Defense under President George W. Bush, playing influential roles in the push to invade and occupy Iraq.

Through its [Law Enforcement Education Program](#) (LEEP), JINSA claims to have arranged Israeli-led training sessions for over 9000 American law enforcement officials at the federal, state and municipal level. "The Israelis changed the way we do business regarding homeland security in New Jersey," Richard Fuentes, the NJ State Police Superintendent, [said](#) after attending a 2004 JINSA-sponsored Israel trip and a subsequent JINSA conference alongside 435 other law enforcement officers.

During a 2004 [LEEP trip](#), JINSA brought 14 senior American law enforcement officials to Israel to receive instruction from their counterparts. The Americans were trained in "how to secure large venues, such as shopping malls, sporting events and concerts," JINSA's website reported. Escorted by Brigadier General Simon Perry, an Israeli police attaché and former Mossad official, the group toured the Israeli separation wall, now a mandatory stop for American cops on junkets to Israel. "American officials learned about the mindset of a suicide bomber and how to spot trouble signs," according to JINSA. And they were schooled in Israeli killing methods. "Although the police are typically told to aim for the chest when shooting because it is the largest target, the Israelis are teaching [American] officers to aim

for a suspect's head so as not to detonate any explosives that might be strapped to his torso," the *New York Times* [reported](#).

Cathy Lanier, now the Chief of Washington DC's Metropolitan Police Department, was among the law enforcement officials junketed to Israel by JINSA. "I was with the bomb units and the SWAT team and all of those high profile specialized [Israeli] units and I learned a tremendous amount," Lanier [reflected](#). "I took 82 pages of notes while I was there which I later brought back and used to formulate a lot of what I later used to create and formulate the Homeland Security terrorism bureau in the DC Metropolitan Police department."

Some of the police chiefs who have taken part in JINSA's LEEP program have done so under the auspices of the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), a private non-governmental group with close ties to the Department of Homeland Security. Chuck Wexler, the executive director of PERF, was so enthusiastic about the program that by 2005 he had begun [organizing trips](#) to Israel sponsored by PERF, bringing numerous high-level American police officials to receive instruction from their Israeli counterparts.

PERF gained notoriety when Wexler [confirmed](#) that his group coordinated police raids in 16 cities across America against "Occupy" protest encampments. As many as 40 cities have [sought PERF advice](#) on suppressing the "Occupy" movement and other mass protest activities. Wexler did not respond to my requests for an interview.

Lessons from Israel to Auschwitz

Besides JINSA, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has positioned itself as an important liaison between American police forces and the Israeli security-intelligence apparatus. Though the ADL promotes itself as a Jewish civil rights group, it has [provoked controversy](#) by publishing a blacklist of organizations supporting Palestinian rights, and for condemning a proposal to construct an Islamic community center in downtown New York, several blocks from Ground Zero, on the basis that some opponents of the project were entitled to "positions that others would characterize as irrational or bigoted."

Through the ADL's [Advanced Training School](#) course on Extremist and Terrorist Threats, over 700 law enforcement personnel from 220 federal and local agencies including the FBI and CIA have been trained by Israeli police and intelligence commanders. This year, the ADL brought 15 high-level American police officials to Israel for instruction from the country's security apparatus. According to the ADL, over 115 federal, state and local law enforcement executives have undergone ADL-organized training sessions in Israel since the program began in 2003. "I can honestly say that the training offered by ADL is by far the most useful and current training course I have ever attended," Deputy Commissioner Thomas Wright of the Philadelphia Police Department [commented](#) after completing an ADL program this year. The ADL's relationship with the Washington DC Police Department is so cozy its members are invited to accompany DC cops on "ride along" patrols.

The ADL claims to have trained over 45,000 American law enforcement officials through its [Law Enforcement and Society program](#), which "draws on the history of the Holocaust to provide law enforcement professionals with an increased understanding of...their role as protectors of the Constitution," the group's website stated. All new FBI agents and intelligence analysts are required to attend the ADL program, which is incorporated into three FBI training programs. According to official [FBI recruitment material](#), "all new special

agents must visit the US Holocaust Memorial Museum to see firsthand what can happen when law enforcement fails to protect individuals.”

Fighting “criterror”

Among the most prominent Israeli government figure to have influenced the practices of American law enforcement officials is [Avi Dichter](#), a former head of Israel’s Shin Bet internal security service and current member of Knesset who recently introduced legislation widely criticized as [anti-democratic](#). During the Second Intifada, Dichter ordered several bombings on densely populated Palestinian civilian areas, including one on the al-Daraj neighborhood of Gaza that resulted in the death of 15 innocent people, including 8 children, and 150 injuries. “After each success, the only thought is, ‘Okay, who’s next?’” Dichter said of the “targeted” assassinations he has ordered.

Despite his dubious human rights record and apparently dim view of democratic values, or perhaps because of them, Dichter has been a key figure in fostering cooperation between Israeli security forces and American law enforcement. In 2006, while Dichter was serving as Israel’s Minister of Public Security, he spoke in Boston, Massachusetts before the annual convention of the International Association of Chiefs of Police. Seated beside FBI Director Robert Mueller and then-Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez, Dichter told the 10,000 police officers in the crowd that there was an “intimate connection between fighting criminals and fighting terrorists.” Dichter [declared](#) that American cops were actually “fighting criterrorists.” The *Jerusalem Post* reported that Dichter was “greeted by a hail of applause, as he was hugged by Mueller, who described Dichter as his mentor in anti-terror tactics.”

A year after Dichter’s speech, he and then-Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff [signed](#) a joint memorandum pledging security collaboration between America and Israel on issues ranging from airport security to emergency planning. In 2010, Homeland Security Secretary Napolitano [authorized](#) a new joint memorandum with Israeli Transport and Road Safety Minister Israel Katz shoring up cooperation between the US Transportation Security Agency – the agency in charge of day-to-day airport security – and Israel’s Security Department. The recent joint memorandum also consolidated the presence of US Homeland Security law enforcement personnel on Israeli soil. “The bond between the United States and Israel has never been stronger,” Napolitano [remarked](#) at a recent summit of AIPAC, the leading outfit of America’s Israel lobby, in Scottsdale, Arizona.

The Demographic Unit

For the New York Police Department, collaboration with Israel’s security and intelligence apparatus became a top priority after 9/11. Just months after the attacks on New York City, the NYPD assigned a permanent, taxpayer-funded [liaison officer](#) to Tel Aviv. Under the leadership of Police Commissioner Ray Kelly, ties between the NYPD and Israel have deepened by the day. Kelly embarked on his [first trip](#) to Israel in early 2009 to demonstrate his support for Israel’s ongoing assault on the Gaza Strip, a one-sided attack that left over 1400 Gaza residents dead in three weeks and led a United Nations fact-finding mission to conclude that Israeli military and government officials had committed war crimes.

Kelly returned to Israel the following year to [speak](#) at the Herziliya Conference, an annual gathering of neoconservative security and government officials who obsess over supposed “demographic threats.” After Kelly appeared on stage, the Herziliya crowd was addressed

by the pro-Israel academic Martin Kramer, who [claimed](#) that Israel's blockade of Gaza was helping to reduce the numbers of "superfluous young men of fighting age." Kramer added, "If a state can't control these young men, then someone else will."

Back in New York, the NYPD set up a secret ["Demographics Unit"](#) designed to spy on and monitor Muslim communities around the city. The unit was developed with input and intensive involvement by the CIA, which still refuses to name the former Middle East station chief it has posted in the senior ranks of the NYPD's intelligence division. Since 2002, the NYPD has dispatched undercover agents known as "rakers" and "mosque crawlers" into Pakistani-American bookstores and restaurants to gauge community anger over US drone strikes inside Pakistan, and into Palestinian hookah bars and mosques to search out signs of terror recruitment and clandestine funding. "If a raker noticed a customer looking at radical literature, he might chat up the store owner and see what he could learn," the *Associated Press* reported. "The bookstore, or even the customer, might get further scrutiny."

The Israeli imprimatur on the NYPD's Demographics Unit is unmistakable. As a former police official told the *Associated Press*, the Demographics Unit has attempted to "map the city's human terrain" through a program "modeled in part on how Israeli authorities operate in the West Bank."

Shop 'til you're stopped

At Israel's Ben Gurion International Airport, security personnel target non-Jewish and non-white passengers, especially Arabs, as a matter of policy. The most routinely harassed passengers are Palestinian citizens of Israel, who must [brace themselves](#) for five-hour interrogation sessions and strip searches before flying. Those singled out for extra screening by Shin Bet officers are sent to what many Palestinians from Israel call the "Arab room," where they are subjected to humiliating questioning sessions (former White House Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala encountered such [mistreatment](#) during a visit to Israel last year). Some Palestinians are forbidden from speaking to anyone until takeoff, and may be [menaced](#) by Israeli flight attendants during the flight. In one documented case, a six-month-old was awoken for a strip search by Israeli Shin Bet personnel. Instances of discrimination against Arabs at Ben Gurion International are too numerous to detail - several incidents occur each day - but a few of the more egregious instances were outlined in a 2007 [petition](#) the Association for Civil Rights in Israel filed with the country's Supreme Court.

Though the Israeli system of airline security contains dubious benefits and clearly deleterious implications for civil liberties, it is quietly and rapidly migrating into major American airports. Security personnel at Boston's Logan International Airport have undergone extensive [training](#) from Israeli intelligence personnel, learning to apply profiling and behavioral assessment techniques against American citizens that were initially tested on Palestinians. The new procedures began in August, when so-called Behavior Detection Officers were [placed](#) in security queues at Logan's heavily trafficked Terminal A. Though the procedures have added to traveler stress while netting exactly zero terrorists, they are likely to spread to other cities. "I would like to see a lot more profiling" in American airports, [said](#) Yossi Sheffi, an Israeli-born risk analyst at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Center for Transportation and Logistics.

Israeli techniques now dictate security procedures at the Mall of America, a gargantuan shopping mall in Bloomington, Minnesota that has become a major tourist attraction. The new methods took hold in 2005 when the mall hired a former Israeli army sergeant named

Mike Rozin to lead a special new security unit. Rozin, who once worked with a canine unit at Ben Gurion Airport in Israel, instructed his employees at the Mall of America to visually profile every shopper, examining their expressions for suspicious signs. His security team [accosts and interrogates](#) an average of 1200 shoppers a year, according to the Center for Investigative Reporting.

One of the thousands who fell into Rozin's dragnet was Najam Qureshi, a Pakistani-American mall vendor whose father accidentally left his cell phone on a table in the mall food court. A day after the incident, FBI agents appeared at Qureshi's doorstep to ask if he knew anyone seeking to harm the United States. An army veteran interrogated for two hours by Rozin's men for taking video inside the mall [sobbed openly](#) about his experience to reporters. Meanwhile, another man, Emile Khalil, was visited by FBI agents after mall security stopped him for taking photographs of the dazzling consumer haven.

"I think that the threat of terrorism in the United States is going to become an unfortunate part of American life," Rozin [remarked](#) to American Jewish World. And as long as the threat persists in the public's mind, Israeli securitocrats like Rozin will never have to worry about the next paycheck.

"Occupy" meets the occupation

When a riot squad from the New York Police Department destroyed and evicted the "Occupy Wall Street" protest encampment at Zuccotti Park in downtown Manhattan, department leadership drew on the anti-terror tactics they had refined since the 9/11 attacks. According to the New York Times, the NYPD [deployed "counterterrorism measures"](#) to mobilize large numbers of cops for the lightning raid on Zuccotti. The use of anti-terror techniques to suppress a civilian protest complemented harsh police measures demonstrated across the country against the nationwide "Occupy" movement, from firing tear gas canisters and rubber bullets into unarmed crowds to blasting demonstrators with the [LRAD sound cannon](#).

Given the amount of training the NYPD and so many other police forces have received from Israel's military-intelligence apparatus, and the profuse levels of gratitude American police chiefs have expressed to their Israeli mentors, it is worth asking how much Israeli instruction has influenced the way the police have attempted to suppress the Occupy movement, and how much they will inform police repression of future examples of street protest. What can be said for certain is that the Israelification of American law enforcement has intensified police fear and hostility towards the civilian population, blurring the lines between protesters, criminals, and terrorists. As Dichter said, they are all just "crimterrorists."

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