

Colonialism Turned Inward: Importing U.S. Militarism into Local Police Departments

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Policing in the United States has become increasingly militarized, partly due to the transfer of military equipment to local police departments. Many law enforcement agencies throughout the United States have also received training in population-control tactics from Israel. Armed with these tools and tactics, police agencies often use excessive force against grassroots protesters resisting state repression. Across the country, proposals for urban warfare training centers, commonly known as Cop Cities, are on the rise. At the same time, the federal legal code for terrorism drafted to suppress domestic solidarity with Palestinian liberation has been weaponized, increasing the opportunities for police to victimize protesters. The struggle against increasingly militarized state force is intimately related to the Palestinian fight against settler colonialism. Awareness of this international connection is essential to combatting the offenses led or supported by Western imperialism.

Aimé Césaire observed that the colonialism of Western Europe, surpassed in his view by that of the United States, tends to return to the motherland “by a terrific boomerang effect.” The “colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as *an animal* . . . tends objectively to transform *himself* into an animal.”¹ U.S. imperial expansionism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries required local policing in the colonized areas. This led to developments in domestic policing.²

From their inception as slave patrols, U.S. police have fundamentally served to enforce a domestic colonial order and white supremacy. Since the 1990s, U.S. military resources developed for combat and police tactics imported from abroad have been deployed by local law enforcement agencies (LEAs).³ These militarized practices have disproportionately targeted Black communities.⁴ Further, as associate professor of criminology, law, and justice A. Naomi Paik asserts, “racism is central to the U.S. settler colonial project that seeks to exclude and remove anyone who does not fit the ideal settler community – one based not only in a white racial identity, but also property ownership, patriarchal gender norms, and health and

ability, among multiple factors.”⁵ The most heavily militarized policing, charges of domestic terrorism, and surveillance have been deployed against the Black Lives Matter movement, people who have supported Palestinians, and protestors against the militarization of police.

In line with Robert Jay Lifton’s argument in this volume, we contend that U.S. wars not only beget other wars but foster human rights violations and the militarization of policing at home and abroad. The police killing of Michael Brown in 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri, drew national attention to the fear and anger of a Black community facing militarized LEAs and the deaths of hundreds of Black lives each year. Democratic Congresswoman Cori Bush of Missouri stated on the floor of the U.S. Congress in 2021 that “the same equipment that they used to brutalize us is the same equipment that we send to the Israeli military to police and brutalize Palestinians.”⁶ As the movement for Black lives evolved into the 2020 uprisings following the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, protestors nationwide experienced police repression.

The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) 1033 Program is a prime instance of U.S. military power intruding into local life.⁷ Named after section 1033 of the 1997 National Defense Authorization Act, the Clinton-era program authorizes the U.S. Secretary of Defense to transfer DOD property to state and local LEAs for “law enforcement activities,” preferably “counter-drug and counter-terrorism activities” in alignment with the ongoing wars on drugs and crime.⁸

As of the early 2020s, the DOD had transferred over \$7 billion worth of supplies to almost ten thousand LEAs, including local and university police.⁹ LEAs must submit a justification for their requests, typically offering such generic reasons as “‘FOR ACTIVE SHOOTERS,’ ‘FOR HIGH RISK OPERATIONS,’ ‘HIGH RISK WAR RANTS,’ and ‘COUNTER DRUG.’” Even towns with only a few thousand residents have LEAs armed with mine-resistant vehicles, sniper equipment, and sound cannons. The supplies range from office goods to “controlled property,” including military weaponry, aircraft, and armored vehicles.¹⁰

These weapons are routinely used for Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) raids against civilians – subverting the purported purpose of SWAT to specifically combat extremism – and have featured in the police crackdowns at Occupy Wall Street in 2011, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in 2014, the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2017, and the nationwide uprisings against anti-Black police brutality in 2020.¹¹ Some LEAs have amassed such a vast arsenal that they have donated their surplus to the armed forces in Ukraine.¹² Former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg once bragged about having “the seventh biggest army in the world” in the New York City Police Department (NYPD).¹³

Moreover, the militarization of LEAs countrywide disrupts and threatens not only protest-related activities but the lives and livelihoods of marginalized communities. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has documented various ways

in which LEAs victimize community members with unjustifiable violence: a SWAT raid burning a baby in his crib in the course of trying to stop a \$50 narcotics transaction; an officer accidentally shooting and killing a grandfather in his own home while pursuing a man domiciled elsewhere; a widespread trend to shoot household pets.¹⁴ These incidents reflect how police militarization “against (perceived/potential) threats . . . increases the amount of threat perceived by the police [and] their capacity to respond to those threats violently.”¹⁵

The first major attempt to limit the transfer of military equipment to local LEAs was Executive Order (EO) 13688, signed by President Obama in early 2015. This action came as a result of the militarized police response to the 2014 Ferguson uprising, which followed the murder of eighteen-year-old Michael Brown by a Ferguson Police Department (FPD) officer.¹⁶ Military veterans were shocked that the FPD was more heavily armed than they had been in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁷ The militarized repression was broadcast worldwide, revealing the alarming capabilities of the U.S. police.¹⁸ EO 13688 created the Law Enforcement Equipment Working Group – which included officials from the DOD, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) – that advocated banning transfers of grenade launchers, tracked armored vehicles and other equipment, and recommended increased oversight for certain items.¹⁹

Before President Trump revoked it in 2017, community advocates had criticized the limited effectiveness of EO 13688.²⁰ The ACLU determined that the restrictions “were too narrow in scope,” such as covering vehicles that were tracked, armored, and manned but excluding vehicles that met only one or two of these criteria. In fact, EO 13688 applied to less than 0.5 percent of controlled equipment. Some prohibited equipment continued to be issued, and some banned items already in circulation were not recalled. Overall, no more than 0.1 percent of all equipment transfers was actually recalled.²¹

The most substantial restriction on the 1033 Program to date was President Biden’s EO 14074, which gave executive officials the authority to grant or prohibit transfers of select items including grenades, grenade launchers, and weapons and ammunition exceeding .50 caliber.²² But EO 14074 ultimately failed to meaningfully curb the dangers of the 1033 Program, and would share a fate with its predecessor, Obama’s EO 13688: Trump revoked the order on the day of his second inauguration, January 20, 2025.

Further, for local LEAs, the 1033 Program is sometimes not even the primary source of military-grade supplies.²³ Its benefit lies in its expediency, delivering in months the same equipment that it would take years for other sources to provide.²⁴ If the 1033 Program were eliminated, agencies could still purchase supplies from private vendors using funds from their own budgets or funds from private police foundations, the DOD’s 1122 Program, the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant, the DHS Urban Areas Strategy Initiative, and civil forfeitures.²⁵ In fact, at least one agency

has boasted that it has successfully replaced all its 1033 equipment via alternative sources after ending its participation in the program.²⁶

During the Cold War, foreign military and police departments in Latin America that were notorious for violence, torture, and disappearances were often trained by the U.S. military at the Army School of the Americas (later renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation).²⁷ The United States continues to fund and train foreign police forces and militaries in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency.²⁸ But this is a two-way street. The U.S. government offers hundreds of thousands of dollars in Homeland Security grants for foreign police exchange programs. In this way, U.S. LEAs are trained by, and alongside, foreign military and police partners who themselves routinely engage in human rights abuses.

These exchange programs can take various forms. We focus here on exchanges with Israel, which account for 80 percent of the total. Since the first George W. Bush administration, organizations like the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA) have administered police exchange programs for thousands of law enforcement officers (LEOs), both hosting U.S. officers in Israel and bringing Israeli instructors to the United States, for extremism and counterterrorism seminars.²⁹ Over half of U.S. states participate in such exchanges with Israel, with New York and Georgia among the most prominent participants.³⁰ The NYPD even operates a permanent branch in Israel.³¹

By arrangement with the United States, Israel has armed and trained repressive military forces the world over, prominently in Central America and Colombia, to neutralize resistance movements seeking to undermine U.S. hegemony over the region.³² Critics argue that the Israeli military industry can offer an assurance: “that its products [have already been] ‘field-proven’ on Palestinians” by the time of purchase.³³

Since the end of the Second Intifada in 2005, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have used the Urban Warfare Training Center in the Negev Desert, financed with \$45 million provided by the United States, to train in counterinsurgency tactics.³⁴ The facility, dubbed *Mini Gaza* by trainees, simulates Gazan urban infrastructure across 7.4 square miles of “narrow streets and around 600 structures that include storefronts, schools, apartments and mosques.”³⁵

Israel’s continuous “state of emergency” (in effect since May 1948) permits it to forgo civil liberties by (among other things) detaining people, including journalists, for indefinite periods of time without informing them of the charge, blocking their access to courts, and preventing those detained from challenging their incarceration.³⁶ Geographer Omar Jabary Salamanca, political scientist Mezna Qato, anthropologist Kareem Rabie, and economist Sobhi Samour describe Israeli police and military using these emergency powers to conduct “aerial and maritime

bombardment, massacre and invasion, home demolitions, land theft, identity card confiscation, racist laws and loyalty tests, the wall, the siege on Gaza, cultural appropriation, [and] dependence on willing (or unwilling) native collaboration regarding security.”³⁷

The Israeli military framework regards Palestinians within Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories as inherently suspect of terrorism to justify disproportionate searches and interrogations. Palestinian participation in political spaces serves to justify surveillance and detentions. Palestinian protests for self-determination are “categorically forbid[den],” and the IDF often responds with lethal militarized force.³⁸ LEOs returning to the United States after receiving instruction within this paradigm have adopted similar levels of suspicion, arguing that intrinsic racial characteristics can serve as markers of latent terroristic tendencies. Moreover, in addition to these tactics, LEAs across the country have deployed Israeli-manufactured weapons like Skunk gas alongside other military capabilities during various protests for Black lives in the United States throughout the past decade.³⁹

Among the most well-known of the police exchange programs is the Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange (GILEE), founded within the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University in 1992 by Robert Friedmann, professor emeritus of criminal justice.⁴⁰ GILEE hosts partnerships with foreign states in the Americas, North Africa, and various regions of Asia, Europe, and Australia, but its first and by far most meaningful partner has historically been Israel.⁴¹ GILEE has trained over eleven hundred officials across two hundred ninety programs in partnership with the Atlanta Police Department (APD) and the Atlanta Police Foundation (APF), the biggest police foundation in the United States.⁴² The specific topics of study are undisclosed to the public, but advocates have discovered they involve at least twenty-eight disciplines such as “urban policing, community policing, and border policing.”⁴³ The number of fatal shootings by Georgia law enforcement has increased during the course of exchange programs with Israel.⁴⁴

Much of the work of GILEE is characterized by anti-Muslim bias. In 2017, for example, Friedmann gave a presentation relying on a map depicting a world conquered by Islam, sourced from anti-Muslim websites.⁴⁵ He baselessly asserted that the “silent majority” of Muslims failed to disavow anti-West terrorism; he condemned the United Nations for scrutinizing the pretenses for the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq; he lamented that the First Amendment protects mosques from FBI targeting; and he denied the very existence and nature of Islamophobia by referring to it as “knife-o-phobia.”⁴⁶ GILEE perpetuates anti-Muslim sentiment through partnerships with organizations like the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, whose founder Boaz Ganor infamously stated that World War III has already commenced and is a “religious war ... within the religion of Is-

lam” that, if not contained, will spill over throughout the world.⁴⁷ This indoctrination permeates LEAs; former Georgia Bureau of Investigations (GBI) Director Vernon Keenan, for example, said he learned from a GILEE partner that “the primary threat to democratic countries was terrorism by radical Islam.”⁴⁸

Surveillance is another area in which collaboration with Israel has influenced U.S. policing. Israeli surveillance technology trickles down to U.S. LEAs. According to Friedmann, much of Atlanta’s surveillance system – the largest in the United States – is inspired by Israel’s own.⁴⁹ The Atlanta surveillance network includes the Atlanta Police Foundation’s Operation Shield: a network of more than twenty thousand “public and private sector cameras” that monitors “Atlanta’s neighborhoods, business centers, major public spaces, and thoroughfares” and feeds video to the APD, which provides “real-time monitoring and dispatching of police to trouble spots.”⁵⁰ The APD, largely through its “Homeland Security Unit,” also monitors hundreds of social media posts of perceived political opponents including invitations to study groups on abortion rights, pizza nights about community safety, and information on the proposed Atlanta Public Safety Training Center, colloquially dubbed “Cop City.”⁵¹ The NYPD utilized similar technology in its now inoperative Demographics Unit, designed after Israeli surveillance tactics in the West Bank, to profile, track, and infiltrate Muslim communities in New York and surrounding states.⁵² U.S. Customs and Border Protection has collaborated with Israeli contractors to set up technologies including “blimps outfitted with high-powered radar, underground sensors, and facial recognition software,” as are used in Palestine.⁵³ The entirety of the U.S. policing apparatus, from federal crime and immigration agencies to state and local LEAs, then aggregates the data in at least seventy-nine fusion centers to produce a national surveillance colossus.⁵⁴

The surveillance data are used, among other things, in preemptive prosecutions that criminalize the lawful expressions of Black, migrant, and Muslim people.⁵⁵ One report found that from the onset of the war on terror in 2001 through December 2015, 93 percent of the 608 “terrorism” convictions by the U.S. Department of Justice were either purely preemptive or involved elements of preemptive prosecutions.⁵⁶

Two organizations, Researching the American-Israeli Alliance (RAIA) and Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), jointly produced a fuller review of the many ways in which these police exchanges undermine the civil and human rights of vulnerable communities, including undue racial profiling and use of force.⁵⁷ At a minimum, argues JVP chapter coleader Connie Sosnoff, the exchange programs with Israel lend credibility to the atrocious practices of U.S. LEOs even independent of the exchanges.⁵⁸ This scheme has inspired religious leaders, academics, and other advocates of Black and Muslim civil liberties to demand the abolition of GILEE.⁵⁹

Cop City, the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center being built across eighty-five acres of the Weelaunee Forest, is set to become the largest police training facility nationwide. It also has links to the police exchanges.⁶⁰ The center is to host “military-style training facilities, designated explosives testing areas, and shooting ranges” plus “a ‘vehicle skills pad,’ a ‘burn building,’” and “a mock city, complete with greenery and a replica of an Atlanta city block” for training in “urban warfare.”⁶¹ The proposal projects that 43 percent of trainees will come from outside Atlanta, presumably including Israeli forces through the GILEE and other exchange programs.⁶² GILEE already brings some Israeli LEOs to Georgia to train in various disciplines, prominently “community policing.”⁶³ In the United States, almost all cities report holding community policing – which the U.S. Department of Justice defines as “a collaboration between the police and the community that identifies and solves community problems” – as central to their governance, but positive outcomes have proven elusive to measure and police misconduct remains rampant across the country, often to lethal effects.⁶⁴ Justin Hansford, law professor at Howard University and executive director of the Thurgood Marshall Civil Rights Center, argues that community policing further entrenches the colonial violence of the United States upon its marginalized Black communities.⁶⁵

Cop City’s approximately \$90 million funding has come from the City of Atlanta (near \$30 million) and funds raised privately by the Atlanta Police Foundation. The APF receives significant funding from some of the same billionaires who finance the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). This includes Home Depot CEO Bernie Marcus, who likely contributed about 38 percent of GILEE’s funding between 2008 and 2013 – donating \$350,000 to GILEE since 2022 and \$500,000 to the APF over the past decade – and who in the 2024 election cycle was the fourth highest contributor to the AIPAC super PAC United Democracy Project.⁶⁶ The board of the APF itself includes the CEO of Waffle House and the Atlanta Hawks as well as the vice presidents of Home Depot and Delta Air Lines.⁶⁷ Another major APF donor is Cox Enterprises, an Atlanta media conglomerate and owner of *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, the city’s top newspaper and source of various editorials supporting Cop City.⁶⁸ Notably, corporate donations to police foundations circumvent the oversight that accompanies public funding of LEAs.⁶⁹

Since the proposal for Cop City was announced, protesters have attempted to shut down the project with actions that have ranged from peaceful marches and canvassing to property damage. In response to their efforts, protestors have faced arrest, surveillance, and intimidation. The violent response included the killing of twenty-six-year-old forest defender Manuel Esteban “Tortuguita” Paez Terán by state troopers and local police in January 2023 about a mile away from the Cop City site.⁷⁰ In 2023, the Georgia Attorney General indicted sixty-one people, from organizers to passersby to bail-fund liaisons, on racketeering charges.⁷¹ Forty-two were additionally charged with domestic terrorism.⁷² The expansion of the defi-

inition of terrorism to increase the penalties of those convicted is also discussed in Shirin Sinnar's contribution to this volume, and is a practice that the Trump administration has embraced.⁷³ In this instance, the bulk of those arrested were apprehended at the South River Music Festival, located nearly a mile away from the Stop Cop City protests and organized purely in support of the movement.⁷⁴

Since February 2024, the APD has been waging a campaign of surveillance and intimidation of protesters.⁷⁵ It started with raids on three homes of Stop Cop City organizers, searching for evidence of arson of police and construction machinery.⁷⁶ LEOs have since "follow[ed] people in cars, blast[ed] sirens outside bedroom windows and sh[one] headlights into houses at night," targeting roughly a dozen homes across four neighborhoods.⁷⁷ A resident of a raided home once awoke at 3 a.m. to find a flare igniting his porch's wooden railing.⁷⁸ Moreover, the Brennan Center has acquired thousands of pages in internal communications detailing the breadth of the APD's surveillance of Stop Cop City activists.⁷⁹ This neighborhood surveillance and harassment seem redundant when the city already possesses the most intrusive digital surveillance network in the country. It is likely intended to intimidate, as much as the law permits, the dissenters of Cop City.⁸⁰ If that was the goal, it seems to have worked: city residents have since reported that they are avoiding related organizing out of fear of the police response.⁸¹

The Atlanta arrests of Cop City opponents and others are highly questionable. The arrest warrants mention no specific incident giving rise to the arrests, but rather center on circumstantial conduct, like having worn muddied clothes or having shared a hammock with someone who was also arrested.⁸² A number of the warrants falsely alleged that DHS had classified Stop Cop City as a "domestic violent extremist" group, a claim that DHS itself refuted as it only so classifies *individuals* (not groups) "who seek to further social or political goals, wholly or in part, through unlawful acts of force or violence."⁸³ Georgia Bureau of Investigations' public affairs director Nelly Miles nevertheless defended this fabrication by claiming that individual Stop Cop City protesters fall within DHS's description and, therefore, it can be extended to the group as a whole.⁸⁴ For its part, the DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis accused the protesters of being violent antipolice domestic extremists, a claim that the State of Georgia cited, alongside social media posts by the group inviting the public to join the protests, to frame the protesters as "an organized criminal gang" culpable of racketeering.⁸⁵ None of those charged with domestic terrorism were accused of injuring anyone: some were accused of arson and vandalism; others of activities including canvassing, distributing flyers, and setting up town halls; and nine were accused of misdemeanor trespass.⁸⁶

The domestic terrorism charges rely on a 2017 state law reportedly drafted in response to the 2015 white-supremacist massacre that took the lives of nine people at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina.⁸⁷ The law amended the state definition of terrorism to include damage to

property.⁸⁸ The law has now been used to prosecute Stop Cop City protesters for their political activities and festivalgoers caught in the government's crosshairs. Those accused of damaging construction equipment face a mandatory minimum sentence of five to thirty-five years behind bars.⁸⁹

Justifying the charges, APD Assistant Police Chief Carven Tyrus mischaracterized the indictees as outside agitators "from Los Angeles, California."⁹⁰ This rationale perpetuates a historical pattern of characterizing local resistance as imported. Segregationists infamously accused Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., of being an outside agitator bringing an insurrectionary mindset to a Black Southern population otherwise content with their oppression, and public officials are now pushing this line against students in Georgia protesting their colleges' complicity with the Israeli genocide of Palestinian people.⁹¹ Meanwhile, the LEAs that are silencing local grievances have themselves adopted suppressive tactics developed and perfected by outside local, state, federal, and foreign agencies through exchange programs like GILEE.

Police have similarly designated protesters for Palestinian liberation as threats to national security – a practice that has now become common during the Trump administration. Georgia State University students experienced it firsthand in 2011 when they filed Open Records Requests to access public records on GILEE.⁹² Robert Friedmann, the organization's founder, accused the students of having "ties to known terrorists" and insisted the information must remain secret to prevent "mak[ing GILEE] a target" because "the working assumption should be that people are conspiring to cause harm."⁹³ Georgia attorney general Sam Olens suggested the students were operating not of their own accord but under outsider influences, and that complying with the request might "aid terrorists."⁹⁴ Georgia state legislators then enacted House Bill 261, restricting the disclosures of records that may "compromise security against sabotage or criminal or terrorist acts."⁹⁵

Labels have legal consequences. Environmentalists, Black liberation advocates, and antifascists have sometimes been branded "extremists" and "terrorists."⁹⁶ Anthropologist Darryl Li argues that "early U.S. antiterrorism legislation evolved specifically to oppose Palestinian liberation struggles."⁹⁷ The U.S. Congress responded by codifying an antiterrorism framework to diminish their voices.⁹⁸ This series of congressional initiatives is suggestive:

- The 1969 Foreign Assistance Act referenced "terrorism" in the federal code for the first time to curtail funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).
- The 1979 Export Administration Act vested authority in the U.S. Secretary of State to classify foreign states as State Sponsors of Acts of International Terrorism, which disproportionately involved countries in Southwest Asia and North Africa deemed sympathetic to Palestine.

- After the largely nonviolent First Intifada, a series of protests involving civil disobedience in Palestine, Congress enacted the 1987 Antiterrorism Act, producing the federal Foreign Terrorist Organizations list and denoting the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the internationally recognized political representative of Palestine, as a terrorist organization – the only time Congress had so targeted a named group.
- The 1990 Immigration and Nationality Act was amended to add “terrorism” to the grounds for deportation, particularly of PLO members.
- The 1992 Antiterrorism Act, enacted in reaction to the Palestine Liberation Front’s execution of Jewish American Leon Klinghoffer during the hijacking of the MS *Achille Lauro* cruise ship, introduced civil liability for acts of international terrorism.
- And, following the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing by white antigovernment domestic terrorists, organizations including the ADL lobbied Congress to enact the 1996 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act to criminalize “material support” of *international* terrorist organizations – by now the most common charge in terrorism prosecutions.⁹⁹

In October 2023, the Biden administration compared pro-Palestine protesters to the white supremacist Unite the Right rallygoers who in 2017 chanted “Jews will not replace us” in the streets of Charlottesville, Virginia.¹⁰⁰ It further called on federal agencies to monitor protesters as “domestic threats,” fostering a rise in FBI presence at U.S. mosques and increased DHS abuses of Palestinian migrants.¹⁰¹ In November 2023, U.S. Congressman Ryan Zinke introduced the “Safeguarding Americans From Extremism Act” to “expel Palestinians from the United States.” The bill included provisions to strip Palestinians in the United States of their visas, refugee status, asylum, and temporary protected status granted on or after October 2023 and to prohibit Palestinians abroad from entering the United States.¹⁰² Among the most notorious proposals was H.R. 6090, titled the “Antisemitism Awareness Act,” which sought to render criticisms of Israel indistinguishable from legally actionable antisemitism.¹⁰³ The 2024 Republican platform listed, among its twenty policy promises, to “deport pro-Hamas Radicals and Make Our College Campuses Safe and Patriotic Again,” seemingly referring to the students participating in Palestine solidarity encampments nationwide.¹⁰⁴ Much of this agenda is now being carried out by the Trump administration.

Police crackdowns were on full display in 2024 as law enforcement agencies assaulted peaceful Gaza solidarity encampments nationwide, subjecting thousands of protesters – students, professors, and staff – to physical, chemical, and legal attacks.¹⁰⁵ The disproportionate use of force against protestors at Columbia University was replicated on campuses across the country.¹⁰⁶ At Indiana University, po-

lice snipers were stationed on university rooftops.¹⁰⁷ In contrast, acts of force by counterprotesters saw significantly less retaliation; in one instance, nonstudent Zionists assaulted pro-Palestine student protesters with “pepper spray, wooden planks, and fireworks” at the University of California, Los Angeles, while LEOs stood by for hours. Thousands of students were arrested by midsummer, and some universities revised their policies to limit protest areas, prohibit tents, and otherwise penalize students and student organizations decrying the genocide.¹⁰⁸

At the state level, antiprotest legislation and enforcement have been underway for years. Between 2017 and August 2024, forty-five states cumulatively considered over three hundred antiprotest bills, with twenty-four states collectively enacting fifty-six, imposing new or augmented charges against protestors for disorderly assembly, public nuisance, demonstrating in front of residential property, and even wearing a facemask in public.¹⁰⁹ Conspicuously, some states are reviving age-old anti-mask statutes against protesters wearing masks, regardless of reason, whether as COVID-19 precautions or protection from mass government surveillance or simply as part of their religious expression.¹¹⁰ Inescapably, the growing criminalization of protest activities heightens the likelihood that protesters will face further victimization by militarized LEOs.

Victims of unconstitutional police abuse often have no redress. Nominally, they may invoke Section 1983 of the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1871, but over half a century of qualified immunity jurisprudence has effectively elevated police misconduct above judicial reproach.¹¹¹ Since the 2020 uprisings, several states considered bills to restrict qualified immunity, but police lobbying defeated or critically altered nearly all of them by arguing that the threat of financial ruin would paralyze officers into inaction and thrust society into anarchy.¹¹² Of the bills that were enacted, the overwhelming majority avoided abridging qualified immunity and some even reinforced it, such as the New Mexico version that dropped the mechanism for suing individual officers and instead shifted the financial burden of civil lawsuits from the police to local budgets and, by extension, taxpayers.¹¹³

On June 9, 2020, as the Black Lives Matter protests following the killing of George Floyd ramped up, ADL senior vice president George Selim and vice president for law enforcement and analysis Greg Ehrie questioned, in a draft memo, whether the ADL should continue its support of trips by U.S. law enforcement to meet Israel National Police. Selim and Ehrie wrote,

in light of the very real police brutality at the hands of militarized police forces in the U.S., we must ask ourselves difficult questions, like whether we are contributing to the problem. That is, we must ask ourselves why it is necessary for American police, enforcing American laws, [to] meet with members of the Israeli military. We must ask ourselves if, upon returning home, those we train are more likely to use force.¹¹⁴

The ADL has since disavowed this memo, though its police exchange program was later paused reportedly for COVID-19 concerns.¹¹⁵ Still, the legacy of the exchanges continued. On the night of June 12, 2020, for example, Atlanta local police murdered Rayshard Brooks. Protestors of Brooks's killing were met with kettling, flashbangs, and tear gas by police in riot gear, all known tactics of escalation previously used by Israeli forces in the West Bank.¹¹⁶

The proposal for Atlanta's Cop City and the harsh reaction against those protesting it are alarming, and even more so is the push since for dozens of such facilities from coast to coast. As of July 31, 2024, over eighty such centers have been proposed or begun construction in every state in the country except Wyoming, with dimensions of up to eight hundred acres.¹¹⁷ The temporal proximity to the 2020 uprisings indicates an intention to supply militarized LEOs anywhere at any time to crack down on civilian discontent. Journalist Radley Balko has explained that "a disproportionate amount" of police training is already "about use of force, and there's too little emphasis on de-escalation and negotiation."¹¹⁸ The American Bar Association has noted that de-escalation as a component of police training has inevitably "ebbed" as militarization grows.¹¹⁹

As this militarization of the government's legal monopoly on violence continues to escalate, grassroots organizers mobilizing against a colonial status quo must ready themselves to respond to it. Campaigns including JVP's Deadly Exchange have existed since 2017 to end law enforcement exchange programs with Israel, and they have succeeded in pressuring localities like Durham, North Carolina, to ban such participation by LEAs within their jurisdictions.¹²⁰ Diligent examination of such successes will doubtlessly prove invaluable to advocates fighting to keep themselves and their communities safe from the persistent threat of state repression.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (Monthly Review Press, 2000), 36, 41, https://files.libcom.org/files/zz_aime_cesaire_robin_d.g_kelley_discourse_on_colbook4me.org_.pdf.
- ² See Julian Go, “The Imperial Origins of American Policing: Militarization and Imperial Feedback in the Early 20th Century,” *American Journal of Sociology* 125 (5) (2020): 1237–1241, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/epdfplus/10.1086/708464>.
- ³ Derek S. Denman, “The Logistics of Police Power: Armored Vehicles, Colonial Boomerangs, and Strategies of Circulation,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38 (6) (2020): 4–7, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775820929698>. For a brief overview of the history of U.S. policing as an enforcer of white supremacy and an exploration of the repressive mentality ingrained in the militarization of U.S. policing, see Wayne McElrath and Sarah Turberville, “Poisoning Our Police: How the Militarization Mindset Threatens Constitutional Rights and Public Safety,” Project on Government Oversight, June 9, 2020, <https://www.pogo.org/analysis/poisoning-our-police-how-the-militarization-mindset-threatens-constitutional-rights-and-public-safety>.
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