As the unrest continues, the St. Louis Police Collaboration with Israel Underscores Connected Struggles

By Kristian Davis Bailey

Photo courtesy of Jeff Roberson/AP

The St. Louis County Police Department that killed Michael Brown and initially placed Ferguson on siege has trained with the Israeli military. Former County Police Chief Timothy Fitch was one of 15 American officials to participate in a weeklong training in Israel three years ago.

The April 2011 National Counter-Terrorism Seminar (NCTS) was sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). It brought together leaders from the largest American police departments, the FBI and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) with members of the Israeli National Police, Israel Defense Forces and other intelligence organizations.

"NCTS enables Israel's counterterrorism experts to share their knowledge and lessons learned, to help American law enforcement better protect America, and prevent us from having to learn the same lessons the hard way," an ADL press release said.

A spokesperson for the police department was unable to provide information about the trip's influence on subsequent operations in the county. The ADL was unavailable for immediate comment.

Over 9,000 American officials have trained with Israeli police and military units on responding to civilian protests and terrorism. These operations reflect failure to distinguish between the apparent duty of police to protect civilians and military responses to war. This fusion has had life-costing implications for Americans, specifically black, Muslim and Arab people.

In 2006, 92-year-old Kathryn Johnson was shot and killed by Atlanta police, who had participated in an exchange program with Israeli soldiers on counterterrorism and drug enforcement. The Oakland police who used tear gas and rubber bullets against Occupy Oakland protesters in 2010 were fresh off a joint
training exercise with Israeli and Bahraini police forces. An NYPD official reported that the department's now-disbanded "Demographics Unit," which spied on Muslim and Arab citizens, was modeled on Israel's practices in the West Bank.

LAPD executives took a trip to Israel in 2013 to learn about drones and other surveillance mechanisms.

"We are much more alike than dis-alike," said the LAPD's head IT person during the trip. "As civilized nations, we are all confronted with, in many cases, the same enemy: The ever-growing threat of terrorism and other major criminal elements."

The LAPD added drones to its cache of equipment in May.

While the Los Angeles drones are not Israeli-made, Israel is the world's largest drone exporter. Outside of the US, the drones have been used by governments from Canada to Australia and Brazil, where their intended purpose is for internal security and the war on crime.

Israel sold weapons to apartheid South Africa as late as 1988 and also gave arms to US-backed repressive regimes in Nicaragua, Argentina, and Honduras among many others.

Israeli companies currently expect significant growth in arms sales following the ongoing Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip.

"After every campaign of the kind that is now taking place in Gaza, we see an increase in the number of customers from abroad," Meprolight CEO Eli Gold said in a Haaretz report.

Israel's operations have killed over 2,000 Palestinians. The UN estimates at least 72 percent were civilians. Missiles from Palestinian factions killed three Israeli civilians and one Thai migrant worker, while 64 Israeli soldiers have died in the fighting.

The US sends $3 billion annually in military aid to Israel, while American companies like Boeing, Raytheon and Hewlett-Packard make millions more off contracts with the Israeli military.

While Israel has played a role in the militarization of US police, this trend has been an ongoing practice in American society since the 1960s and exists beyond Israel's participation. Police responses to black political action grew more militarized during the "law and order" mandate following the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements.

Today, surplus homeland security funding has given police departments over $75 billion in military equipment. The Pentagon currently offers hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of surplus military weapons to St. Louis County Police.

For some, the very public repressive events this summer represent a critical moment for global awareness and action.

"The interconnected events of the summer of 2014 have brought a collective moment of clarity. #Ferguson #Gaza #USBorder #MakeTheConnections" tweeted H. Samy Alim.

Activists in Oakland, who have blocked the unloading of an Israeli cargo ship three days in a row, have carried signs reading 'Global Intifada from Oakland to Ferguson to Palestine.' On Monday night, protesters shouted "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" to county and city police as they picketed at the port.

Others have insisted that analogies are not necessary to express support for either location and flatten differences between military occupation in Palestine and anti-black racism in the US.
"The people of Ferguson aren’t being treated like a foreign army. They’re being treated like black people in America," Mychal Denzel Smith tweeted.

A group of Palestinian individuals and organizations circulated a statement of support to Mike Brown’s family and the residents of Ferguson last week.

"The disregard and disrespect for black bodies and black life is endemic to the white supremacist system that rules the land. Your struggles through the ages have been an inspiration to us as we fight daily for the most basic human dignities in our own homeland against the racist Zionist regime that considers us less human," part of the statement read.

An organization representing the rights of Palestinian prisoners also published a statement of solidarity.

"Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network salutes the people of Ferguson, joins their call for justice for Michael Brown and for an end to police oppression, mass incarceration and militarization, and stands in solidarity with Black movements struggling for justice and liberation."

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