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Inside GILEE, the US-Israel law enforcement training program seeking to redefine terrorism

[Anna Simonton](#) on January 5, 2016 [21 Comments](#)



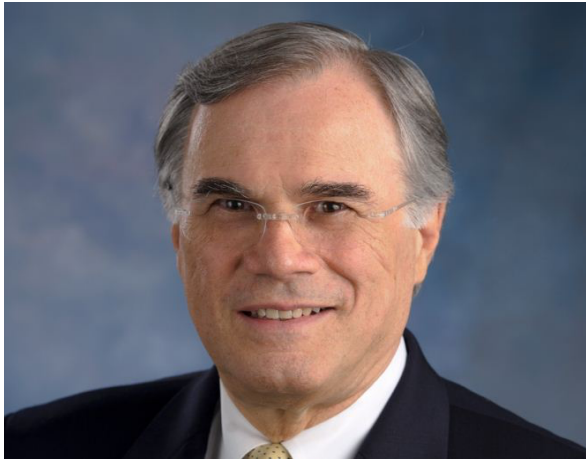
A delegation of Israeli law enforcement officials taking part in a 2012 GILEE training. (Photo: Lockheed Martin)

The recent wave of heightened Islamophobia in the U.S. is not limited to the [violent rhetoric](#) and [cruel policies](#) of conservative politicians; it's also being drummed into police through a Georgia-based program that has sent thousands of American law enforcement officials to Israel for counter-terrorism training.

In an unusually candid discussion about the [Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange](#) (GILEE), program director Robert Friedmann recently declared that, "There is no Islamophobia. There is knife-o-phobia," as he presented decontextualized video clips of Arabs stabbing Israeli police officers.

Friedmann's audience was not his usual group of high-ranking police, military, and government officials. Rather, he was speaking to a small number of civilians at a December 7th, 2015 luncheon held by the Atlanta chapter of the American Jewish Committee (AJC). The talk, titled "How Safe Is America from ISIS?" offered a glimpse into the racist ideology underpinning the trainings that police nationwide have undergone.

Robert Friedmann's Zionist advocacy



Robert Friedmann (Photo: Israeli Embassy to the United States)

Friedmann, who emigrated from Romania to Israel as a child in 1950, came to the U.S. in the 1970s to study sociology, and found his niche in researching [community policing](#) as a professor of criminology at Georgia State University (GSU). He founded GILEE in 1992, initially to train local law enforcement in Israeli counterterrorism tactics he believed were necessary to ensure security for the 1996 Olympics. The program has grown by leaps and bounds, and now serves as a foreign exchange program for U.S. and Israeli police; in multiple delegations throughout the year, law enforcement officials from the U.S. travel to Israel for counterterrorism training, and Israeli police come to Georgia to learn about community policing and drug interdiction. According to Friedmann's AJC presentation, 24,000 participants have engaged in 330 programs and 180 delegations during GILEE's 23-year life.

Following its inception, GILEE quickly became a vehicle for Friedmann's Zionist advocacy, which has gained considerable clout over the years. He served on the board of the southeast region's American-Israel Chamber of Commerce, is on the professional advisory board of the Israel-based International Institute for Counterterrorism, and is included in the Israeli embassy's speaker's bureau. He also authored an e-newsletter during the Second Intifada, through which he shared his analyses of "Palestinian terrorism" with 400,000 subscribers. Friedmann later published a collection of the newsletters in [two books](#).

Friedmann has simultaneously gained stature within law enforcement and academia, serving on the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Georgia Security Council. In 2007, GSU awarded Friedmann an endowed chair worth \$1 million and created specifically to support GILEE, which is listed as a research center within the university's Andrew Young School of Policy Studies.. The same year, the Georgia General Assembly passed two resolutions commending the program. Georgia Governor Nathan Deal [hosted](#) GILEE's 20-year anniversary in the governor's mansion.

The heraldry is surprising, even in a state like Georgia, given how blatantly Friedmann's ideology hews to the extreme. The GILEE website features [StandWithUs propaganda](#), articles

by Alan Dershowitz (along with some penned by Friedmann who blasts Hamas for alleged war crimes while mentioning nothing of Israel's innumerable breaches of international law), and a [bizarre tract](#) on the importance of including Holocaust education in police training.

Secrecy surrounding GILEE funding

GILEE's rabid brand of Zionism is as transparent as its operations are secretive. In 2011, GSU students sought information to determine how the program impacts policing in the United States. Their public records request was denied and met with unexpectedly intense backlash. State Attorney General Sam Olens told a local news station (whose parent company sponsors GILEE) that the students were [aiding terrorists](#).

Olens also introduced a [sweeping revision](#) of Georgia's Open Records Act, including new exemptions that covered some of the information students had requested. The General Assembly passed Olens' bill shortly after his TV interview in which he slandered the students.

That was enough to derail public scrutiny of GILEE for a while. But over the past year, as the movement for Black lives has forced the problem of police brutality into a national spotlight, journalists and activists have [questioned](#) how [programs](#) like GILEE serve to militarize U.S. law enforcement.

Mondoweiss requested public records pertaining to GILEE and met with similar roadblocks that GSU students did in 2011.

GSU told Mondoweiss that no school funds are allocated to the program; it's funded entirely by private donors. But GSU refused to disclose who those donors are, citing an exemption to the Open Records Act that covers the personal information of donors to institutions of higher education. GSU interpreted "personal information" to mean not only the names of individuals, but of corporations and foundations as well.

However, GSU did disclose donation amounts, which show that GILEE has raised \$4.4 million since 1992. This seemingly low figure may be explained by the fact that some, if not all, of the exchange trips are paid for in part by public funds.

A 2009 [letter](#) from Friedmann to an employee of the Rockdale County, Georgia, Sheriff's Office shows that only 25 percent of the employee's \$6,000 trip to Israel was covered by GILEE. The rest was funded by a [grant](#) from the Department of Justice that Friedmann apparently helped to secure.

Pro-Israel donors support for GILEE

As for GILEE's coffers, a separate look at the tax records of The Marcus Foundation, the personal charity of Home Depot founder Bernie Marcus, proved it to be a major GILEE funder.

Marcus (who served with Friedman on the American-Israel Chamber of Commerce board) donated \$720,000 to GILEE between 2008 and 2013. If the numbers provided by GSU are comprehensive, his contributions constitute 38 percent of GILEE's total funds raised for those years.

Marcus also gives generously to the pro-Israel lobby group, CAMERA, along with Friends of the Israel Defense Forces, and is active with the [Zionist Organization of America](#).

Both [GSU](#) and [GILEE](#) have publicly acknowledged other donors in the past, including UPS, Georgia Power, Equifax, and The Intercontinental Hotels Group. They both named Jim Davis, CEO of National Distributing Company—a wholesale alcohol distributor—as a top contributor, though his donations are harder to trace. His personal charity, The Covenant Foundation, has donated large sums to the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta, with the stipulation that a portion go to GILEE. GILEE received at least \$12,000 in this roundabout way in 2012.

GILEE participants reveal corporate-state partnerships

Corporations have also participated in GILEE's programs, which are not limited to law enforcement officials. GSU would not disclose the names of participants, but provided a list of the organizations they represented.

Some companies would seem to be a natural fit, like security consultants Fortress Consulting LLC. But some unlikely participants call into question the scope of the program and its impact not only on policing, but on corporate-state partnerships in the surveillance and control of everyday life.

[GILEE Participants and List of Agencies and Institutions](#) by [Mondoweiss](#)

For example, Central Atlanta Progress (CAP), an elite business association that has held undue sway over Atlanta politics since the 1950s, [sent a vice president](#) on a GILEE delegation to Israel in 2011.

In an effort to gentrify downtown Atlanta, CAP has funded a [network of thousands of surveillance cameras](#) shared by police and private businesses, deputized an "[ambassador force](#)," and allegedly [conspired](#) to shut down the city's largest homeless shelter.

What lessons has CAP learned from the Israeli surveillance state? It's hard to say. GSU refused to disclose GILEE training materials, and instead offered a list of 28 "topics covered in training." The list ranges from the concrete: "Border Policing," to the abstract: "New Economy and its Effects on Public Safety."

But it's topics like "Urban Policing," "Community Policing," and "Drug Interdiction," that touch on GILEE's true impact. Not only do U.S. law enforcement agents travel to Israel to learn from an occupying force how to control a population subjected to apartheid, Israeli police come to the U.S. to learn what control of marginalized peoples—communities of color, immigrants, targets of the Drug Wars—looks like here.

[List of GILEE Training Topics](#) by [Mondoweiss](#)

These communities are seemingly viewed as interchangeable by GILEE proponents, otherwise, what would Israeli and American police have to learn from one another? The existence of GILEE affirms what leaders in the U.S. have historically denied: that communities of color are treated as enemies of the state within their own country.

As people mobilize to change this, GILEE participants share innovations in maintaining control.

GILEE and the expanding definition of terrorism



An Israeli delegation visits the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) in 2014. (Photo: Georgia State University)

During his presentation at the American Jewish Committee Luncheon, Friedmann advocated for expanding the definition of terrorism. (This is not a new position for Friedmann—in 2010 he [equated academic boycotts with terrorism](#).)

“Counterterrorism means disrupting the ecosystem of extremism,” he said. “Terrorism begins with rhetoric...we need a counterterrorism agenda to address incitement.”

Part of that agenda, he said, should be prosecuting people for YouTube videos that “incite” terrorism.

He described a video of an imam in Israel saying, “You need to understand the plight of the Palestinians,” as an example.

“You know what direction it’s going,” Friedmann explained. “Incitement is not always violent. Sometimes it’s quite sophisticated.”

Maybe it’s no coincidence, then, that Clayton County police—whose deputy chief went to Israel with GILEE earlier this year—recently arrested [Latausha Nedd](#), a local activist, on charges of

making terroristic threats and criminal solicitation for online videos in which she expressed anger over police brutality against Black people.

It turns out that several of the videos in question were private video chats that were hacked by a white supremacist group called No Thiefs Allowed, which emailed edited clips to the Clayton County Police Department. Nedd is awaiting trial on bond.

Another GILEE graduate made a unilateral decision to illegally [blockade a public road](#) in a gentrifying neighborhood to prevent black teenagers from using it as a route to and from school after a white neighbor complained of “gang members” on the street.

These cases may or may not be the direct result of GILEE’s influence. But as long as GSU refuses to disclose comprehensive data about the program’s participants and funders, we are left to piece together what information we can about an organization that is shaping how police treat perceived threats in the U.S. and Israel alike.

As Friedmann wrapped up his talk at the AJC luncheon, he contended that civil liberties stand in the way of combatting terrorism, implying, as he had all along, that only Muslims commit terrorist acts.

“The problem is, because of the First Amendment, the FBI won’t go into mosques,” he said.

During the Q and A, a lone dissenting voice questioned the overwhelmingly anti-Muslim tone of the presentation.

“If we demonize every Muslim, we encourage radicalism,” a man said.

Friedmann deftly redirected the statement, saying that it’s the job of the Muslim community to discourage radicalism.

“To date, there is not a single, unequivocal condemnation of the September 11 attacks [from the Muslim community]” he said.

In the wake of Ferguson and police killings of unarmed Black people nationwide, demands have arisen for better police training, training that challenges racial and cultural bias. GILEE, it’s clear, is doing the opposite.

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