



Memphis Police Chief Cerelyn Davis speaks during an interview with The Associated Press in Memphis, Tenn., on Jan. 27, 2023. Photo: Gerald Herbert/AP

MEMPHIS POLICE CHIEF TRAINED WITH ISRAEL SECURITY FORCES

Chief Cerelyn Davis also led the first police department in the U.S. that swore off the exchanges.



Alice Speri

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THE DEATH OF 29-year-old Tyre Nichols at the hands of Memphis police officers last month once again ignited outrage over the violent, militarized nature of U.S. law enforcement and placed scrutiny on police departments' [bloated budgets](#).

Among the objections to policing that are being revived are criticisms of a controversial series of trainings and [exchange programs](#) for U.S. police in Israel. Scores of American law enforcement leaders have attended the programs, where they learned from Israeli police and security forces known for systemically abusing the human rights of Palestinians.

Some of the Memphis Police Department's top brass, including current Chief Cerelyn Davis, participated in the programs. Davis, who previously helmed the police department in Durham, North Carolina, completed a [leadership training](#) with the Israel National Police in 2013. While an officer with the Atlanta Police Department, Davis also established an international exchange program with Israeli police and coordinated department leaders delegations to Israel, according to an [old résumé](#).

"We know, without a shadow of a doubt, that what takes place during

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US-Israel police exchanges does nothing to keep our communities safe,” Eran Efrati, director of campaigns and partnerships for the progressive group Jewish Voice for Peace. “But the exchanges refine and enhance the militarization rooted in American policing with Israeli tactics and technology of occupation and apartheid that are being tested on Palestinians on a daily basis.”

By the time she became chief in Durham, Davis seems to have changed her tune on such programs. The apparent coolness on the police-Israeli relationships came following pressure from [local activists](#) and a [national campaign](#) to end U.S.-Israel police exchanges.

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In 2018, Durham became the [first city](#) in the U.S. to ban police trainings and exchanges involving Israel’s military. At the time, Davis wrote in a memo that she had “no intention to participate or initiate an exchange with Israel,” which prompted two Israeli volunteer police officers to sue her and the Durham police department for discrimination.

A spokesperson for the Memphis police department did not immediately respond to a request to explain the chief’s changed position on the exchanges with Israel.



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Davis wasn’t the only top cop in Memphis to have participated in the exchanges with Israel. One of her predecessors, Larry Godwin, also trained there as part of a Homeland Security International Conference.

Godwin, who is known for having introduced the [Blue CRUSH](#) predictive policing technology to the city, spoke about wanting to adopt some of the techniques he learned about in Israel in Memphis. As The Intercept previously [reported](#), the Memphis Police Department has a long history of surveillance, particularly of Black activists.

“We’re going to try to incorporate some things here,” Godwin [told reporters](#) at the time. “We’re doing a lot of it, but there’s still some other things we can do, technology-wise. I picked up some very good information.”



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Critics of the exchanges with Israeli security forces point out that the partnerships allow for a swap of “worst practices.”

“During these trainings in Israel, U.S. and Israeli officials visit checkpoints, prisons, airports – sites of well-documented human rights abuses against Palestinians,” said Efrati, of Jewish Voice for Peace. “Participants witness real-life examples of repressive violence, watching the Israeli military repress protests in the occupied West Bank, and joining Israeli police patrols in East Jerusalem and along the militarized fence blockading Gaza.”

Training – whether in Israel or at home – has done little to address the underlying problems of U.S. policing, or to prevent violent police killings like that of Nichols.

“Most people who call for more training as a response to abusive policing have little idea what that really involves,” Alex Vitale, a professor of sociology and author of [“The End of Policing,”](#) told The Intercept. “The kinds of training police are given in Israel is actually part of the problem because it encourages a warrior mindset in police and exposes them to practices that would be unconstitutional in the U.S.”

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