

What's Next for Battlefield America? Israel's High-Tech Military Tactics Point the Way

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"I did not know Israel was capturing or recording my face. [But Israel has] been watching us for years from the sky with their drones. [They have been watching us gardening and going to schools and kissing our wives](#). I feel like I have been watched for so long."—Mosab Abu Toha, Palestinian poet

If you want a glimpse of the next stage of America's transformation into a police state, look no further than how Israel—a long-time recipient of [hundreds of billions of dollars in foreign aid](#) from the U.S.—uses its high-tech military tactics, surveillance and weaponry to advance its authoritarian agenda.

Military checkpoints. Wall-to-wall mass surveillance. [Predictive policing](#). Aerial surveillance that tracks your movements wherever you go and whatever you do. [AI-powered facial recognition and biometric programs](#) carried out with the knowledge or consent of those targeted by it. Cyber-intelligence. Detention centers. Brutal interrogation tactics. Weaponized drones. [Combat robots](#).

We've already seen many of these military tactics and technologies deployed on American soil and used against the populace, especially along the border regions, a testament to the [heavy influence Israel's military-industrial complex has had on U.S. policing](#).

Indeed, Israel has become [one of the largest developers and exporters of military weapons and technologies](#) of oppression worldwide.



Journalist Antony Loewenstein has warned that [Pegasus, one of Israel's most invasive pieces of spyware](#), which allows any government or military intelligence or police department to spy on someone's phone and get all the information from that phone, has become a favorite tool of oppressive regimes around the world. The [FBI and NYPD have also been recipients](#) of the surveillance technology which promises to turn any "[target's smartphone into an intelligence gold mine](#)."

Yet it's not just military weapons that Israel is exporting. They're also helping to transform local police agencies into extensions of the military.

According to *The Intercept*, thousands of American law enforcement officers frequently travel for training to Israel, "[one of the few countries where policing and militarism are even more deeply intertwined than they are here](#)," as part of an ongoing exchange program that largely flies under the radar of public scrutiny.

A 2018 investigative report concluded that imported military techniques by way of these exchange programs that allow police to study in Israel have changed American policing for the worse. "Upon their return, U.S. law enforcement delegates implement practices [learned from Israel's use of invasive surveillance, blatant racial profiling, and repressive force](#) against dissent," the report states. "Rather than promoting security for all, these programs facilitate an exchange of methods in state violence and control that endanger us all."

"At the very least," notes journalist Matthew Petti, "[visits to Israel have helped American police justify more snooping on citizens and stricter secrecy](#)." Critics also assert that Israeli training encourages excessive force."

Petti documents how [the NYPD set up a permanent liaison office in Israel](#) in the wake of 9/11, eventually implementing "one of the first post-9/11 counterterrorism programs that explicitly followed the Israeli model. In 2002, the NYPD tasked a secret 'Demographics Unit' with spying on Muslim-American communities. Dedicated 'mosque crawlers' infiltrated local Muslim congregations and attempted to bait worshippers with talk of violent revolution."

That was merely the start of American police forces being trained in martial law by foreign nations [under the guise of national security theater](#). It has all been downhill from there.

As Alex Vitale, a sociology professor who has studied the rise of global policing, explains, "[The focus of this training is on riot suppression, counterinsurgency, and counterterrorism](#)—all of which are essentially irrelevant or should be irrelevant to the vast majority of police departments. They shouldn't be suppressing protest, they shouldn't be engaging in counterinsurgency, and almost none of them face any real threat from terrorism."

This ongoing transformation of the American homeland into a techno-battlefield tracks unnervingly with the dystopian cinematic visions of Steven Spielberg's *Minority Report* and Neill Blomkamp's *Elysium*, both of which are set 30 years from now, in the year 2054.

In *Minority Report*, [police agencies harvest intelligence from widespread surveillance, behavior prediction technologies, data mining, precognitive technology, and neighborhood and family snitch programs](#) in order to capture would-be criminals before they can do any damage.

While Blomkamp's *Elysium* [acts as a vehicle to raise concerns about immigration, access to healthcare, worker's rights, and socioeconomic stratification](#), what was most striking was its eerie depiction of how the government will employ technologies such as drones, tasers and biometric scanners to track, target and control the populace, especially dissidents.

With Israel in the driver's seat and *Minority Report* and *Elysium* on the horizon, it's not so far-fetched to imagine how the American police state will use these emerging technologies to lock down the populace, root out dissidents, and ostensibly establish [an "open-air prison"](#) with disconcerting similarities to Israel's [technological occupation](#) of present-day Palestine.

For those who insist that such things are celluloid fantasies with no connection to the present, we offer the following as a warning of the totalitarian future at our doorsteps.



Israeli checkpoint outside the Palestinian city of Ramallah. August 2004 (From the Public Domain)

Facial Recognition

Fiction: One of the most jarring scenes in *Elysium* occurs towards the beginning of the film, when the protagonist Max Da Costa waits to board a bus on his way to work. While standing in line, Max is approached by two large robotic police officers, who quickly scan Max's biometrics, cross-check his data against government files, and identify him as a former convict in need of close inspection. They demand to search his bag, a request which Max

resists, insisting that there is nothing for them to see. The robotic cops respond by manhandling Max, throwing him to the ground, and breaking his arm with a police baton. After determining that Max poses no threat, they leave him on the ground and continue their patrol. Likewise, in *Minority Report*, police use holographic data screens, city-wide surveillance cameras, dimensional maps and database feeds to monitor the movements of its citizens and preemptively target suspects for interrogation and containment.

Fact: We now find ourselves in the unenviable position of being [monitored, managed, corralled and controlled by technologies](#) that answer to government and corporate rulers. This is exactly how Palestinian poet and *New Yorker* contributor Mosab Abu Toha found himself, within minutes of passing through an Israeli military checkpoint in Gaza with his wife and children in tow, asked to step out line, only to be blindfolded, handcuffed, interrogated, then imprisoned in an Israeli detention center for two days, beaten and further interrogated. Toha was finally released in what Israeli soldiers chalked up to a “mistake,” yet there was no mistaking the [AI-powered facial recognition technology that was used to pull him out of line, identify him, and label him \(erroneously\) as a person of interest](#).

Drones

Fiction: In another *Elysium* scene, Max is hunted by four drones while attempting to elude the authorities. The drones, equipped with x-ray cameras, biometric readers, scanners and weapons, are able to scan whole neighborhoods, identify individuals from a distance—even through buildings, report their findings back to police handlers, pursue a suspect, and target them with tasers and an array of lethal weapons.

Fact: Drones, some deceptively small and yet powerful enough to capture the facial expressions of people hundreds of feet below them, have ushered in a new age of surveillance. Not even those indoors, in the privacy of their homes, will be safe from these aerial spies, which can be equipped with technology capable of peering through walls. In addition to their surveillance capabilities, drones can also be equipped with automatic weapons, grenade launchers, tear gas, and tasers.

Biometric Scanners and National IDs

Fiction: Throughout *Elysium*, citizens are identified, sorted and dealt with by way of various scanning devices that read their biometrics—irises, DNA, etc.—as well as their national ID numbers, imprinted by a laser into their skin. In this way, citizens are tracked, counted, and classified. Likewise, in *Minority Report*, tiny sensory-guided spider robots converge on a suspected would-be criminal, scan his biometric data and feed it into a central government database. The end result is that there is nowhere to run and nowhere to hide to escape the government’s all-seeing eyes.

Fact: Given the [vast troves of data](#) that various world governments, including Israel and the U.S., is collecting on its citizens and non-citizens alike, we are not far from a future where there is nowhere to run and nowhere to hide. In fact, between the facial recognition technology being handed out to law enforcement, license plate readers being installed on police cruisers, local police creating DNA databases by extracting DNA from non-criminals, including the victims of crimes, and police collecting more and more biometric data such as iris scans, we are approaching the end of anonymity. It won’t be long before police officers will be able to pull up a full biography on any given person instantaneously, including their family and medical history, bank accounts, and personal peccadilloes. It’s already moving in

that direction in more authoritarian regimes.

Predictive Policing

Fiction: In *Minority Report*, John Anderton, Chief of the Department of Pre-Crime, finds himself identified as the next would-be criminal and targeted for preemptive measures by the very technology that he relies on for his predictive policing. Consequently, Anderton finds himself not only attempting to prove his innocence but forced to take drastic measures in order to avoid capture in a surveillance state that uses biometric data and sophisticated computer networks to track its citizens.

Fact: Precrime, which aims to prevent crimes before they happen, has justified the use of widespread surveillance, behavior prediction technologies, data mining, precognitive technology, and snitch programs. As political science professor Anwar Mhajne documents, Israel has used all of these tools in its military engagements with Palestine: deploying AI surveillance and [predictive policing systems](#) in Palestinian territories; utilizing facial recognition technology to monitor and regulate the movement of Palestinians; subjecting Palestinians to facial recognition scans at checkpoints, with a color-coded mechanism to dictate who should be allowed to proceed, subjected to further questioning, or detained.

Making the Leap from Fiction to Reality

When Aldous Huxley wrote *Brave New World* in 1931, he was convinced that there was “still plenty of time” before his dystopian vision became a nightmare reality. It wasn’t long, however, before he realized that his prophecies were coming true far sooner than he had imagined.

Israel’s military influence on the United States, its advances in technological weaponry, and its rigid demand for compliance are pushing us towards a world in chains.

Through its oppressive use of surveillance technology, Israel has erected the world’s first open-air prison, and in the process, has [made itself a model for the United States](#).

What we cannot afford to overlook, however, is the extent to which the American Police State is taking its cues from Israel.

As I make clear in my book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#) and in its fictional counterpart [The Erik Blair Diaries](#), we may not be an occupied territory, but that does not make the electronic concentration camp being erected around us any less of a prison.

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