

# Why Cop City Is A Global Issue

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## ABSTRACT

*Activists and Forest Defenders in the Stop Cop City/Defend Atlanta Forest movement assert that “this is not a local struggle.” Considering global security exchange programs such as the Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange, the construction of Cop City would fit into a global security regime that undergirds authoritarian and imperial practices in the United States and abroad. This is why the struggle against police militarization in the United States demands a global perspective and must continue to build connections with global struggles against war and empire around the world.*

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## 1 Why Cop City Is A Global Issue

Activists in the Stop Cop City and Defend Atlanta-Weelaunee Forest movement assert that their struggle against the construction of Cop City and the ecological devastation that it would entail is [“not a local struggle.” Cop City](#)—the name activists have given to a proposed 85-acre police training compound whose \$90 million plans include a mock city for police to train in urban warfare and protest suppression—has emerged at the forefront of two important contemporary movements: the fight against police brutality and the climate movement. Their struggle articulates an alternative vision of society, one that rejects the racist militarism and surveillance pushed by the city’s political and economic elites in their attempt to maintain power in an increasingly uncertain future. The vision expressed by the movement calls for an ecologically sustainable world, grounded in collective care, mutual aid, and solidarity—free from the violence of extractivism, property, and the police and prisons they require. The struggle for this world, activists assert, is bigger than Atlanta.

One reason this struggle transcends Atlanta city limits is that police departments around the country would travel to Cop City to be trained. Reported by the Atlanta Community Press Collective, Atlanta Police Department documents detail [a proposed 43% of police trainees](#) at Cop City would be from out of state. The political and economic elites backing Cop City envision Atlanta as a hub for police departments nationwide to master militarized tactics for policing large crowds in urban settings—a plan that must be understood in relation to the massive, Black-led multiracial anti-police brutality protests that shook cities across the country only three years ago.

The array of ruling class forces behind Cop City—the [Atlanta Police Foundation](#), the mayors’ office, real estate lobbies, and many wealthy suburbanites—support Cop City because they believe a hyper-policed and militarized Atlanta (and United States) best serves their interests, especially in a context where incipient economic and ecological crises, worsened by austerity, promise intensified social unrest and a greater challenge to their power and social position. The Atlanta Police Foundation, the leading force behind the project, is a corporate funded multi-million-dollar nonprofit that provides money and support to Atlanta Police Department (despite that institution already receiving [the lion’s share of the city budget](#), coming out at \$236 million for 2023 alone). As Atlanta activist Micah Herskind [writes](#):

Making sense of the drive to build Cop City requires understanding the shifting dynamics of class and racial domination in Atlanta, marked by organized abandonment: the state’s retreat from the provision of social welfare and the interrelated build-up of policing and imprisonment to manage inequality’s outcomes.

The opportunity for Atlanta police to train in urban warfare scenarios in Cop City is directly linked to their capacity to control the city’s exploited and displaced Black community. It is also a training ground to better repress future protests, not only those that explicitly challenge racist police violence (such as in 2020) but all those that

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challenge the pervasive racialized, gendered, and classed relations of inequality and domination that policing maintains and protects. Considering the [investment in Cop City](#) by Atlanta-based corporations such as Delta Airlines, The Home Depot, and UPS as well as other major multinational corporations such as Amazon, JP Morgan Chase, and Wells Fargo through the Atlanta Police Foundation, Cop City's reach speaks to ruling class interest in a project of intensified counterinsurgency and militarized securitization as the United States begins to enter a renewed period of popular challenge to racial and class inequality. One major investor, Axon, is a weapons and technology corporation that [“produces electroshock weapons, body cameras and other policing equipment that is widely used by police departments across the country.”](#) New police weapons and technologies have been widely used by law enforcement in the suppression of protests and activism from Standing Rock to Minneapolis. Reported by journalist Tia Brown, “[Axon] states that its Tasers are ‘non-lethal,’ but Reuters has documented how police have killed over 1000 people with Tasers since 2000.”

The threat to progressive movements posed by Cop City is even more clear when we consider the intense repression already felt by activists opposing its construction. Stop Cop City activists and Forest Defenders have been heavily [surveilled](#), raided, beaten, [unconstitutionally imprisoned](#), denied bond, and charged with domestic terrorism for daring to march in the streets and forest in opposition to the destructive project. Dozens now fight to survive as [political prisoners](#) in Georgia's [brutal and inhumane jails](#). On January 18th, 2023 Georgia State Patrol killed one activist, the twenty-six-year-old [Manuel “Tortugueta” Estaban Paez Terán](#), during a violent police raid of the Stop Cop City public park encampment in the Weelaunee Forest. The intense repression meted out to resistance groups recalls [the state war](#) on Black radical social movements of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. Today, these attacks on Forest Defenders and Stop Cop City activists explicitly challenge the right to protest and organize for progressive causes in Atlanta and across the United States.

The relevance of Cop City is not only national, but global. If built, the massive police training compound would be integrated into what sociologist Stuart Schrader has termed the [“police-military continuum”](#) that shapes a global, United States-led security regime. [Schrader's work](#) documents how US foreign policy has long centered relations of “security assistance,” where US police forces provide training to the security forces of allied states, shaping domestic law enforcement around the world to align with US state and corporate interests. For Schrader, the promise of security assistance as a hallmark of US foreign policy authorizes the United States as the “global policeman.” As he [describes](#):

Each day the global policeman assembles itself anew through the work of hundreds of global policemen (and policewomen): current and former US police officers who train, equip, and advise other countries' police. Cops have become frontline US diplomats. Policing today is a triumph of globalization.

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The United States' global political and economic power is shaped and reproduced by US influence over law enforcement and security practices the world over. US military and police officers train with military and police forces globally in a colossal network of force and violence that traverses the traditional boundaries between military and law enforcement, domestic and foreign policy, and national versus international space. This coalition serves a globe-trotting regime of counterinsurgency that targets the daily life and resistance of the masses of people marked for exploitation, extraction, dispossession, and death by the racialized calculus of United States empire on either side of its colonial borders.

Consider the [Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange](#) (GILEE): a prime example of this global security assistance. Started in 1992, GILEE is a privately funded police exchange program that facilitates law enforcement officials as well as “corporate security executives” from the US state of Georgia to build mutually strengthening relationships with foreign governments and their security forces. The police exchanges arranged by GILEE have been condemned by activists and human rights organizations in the United States and around the world.

According to the Council on American-Islamic Relations' (CAIR) [2020 report](#), GILEE “perpetuates police militarization and brutality” by encouraging fear-based and violent policing, especially of minoritized and racialized communities. Further, GILEE has a history of collaborating with foreign governments who “use their law enforcement agencies to restrict civil liberties, commit human rights violations, and/or promote bigotry, including sexism, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia” such as Hungary's autocratic regime. GILEE's security exchanges with the state of Israel have been especially condemned by activists who draw parallels between Israel's militarized police repression of Palestinians, and the Georgia police department's history of brutality toward its Black population.

Yet, according to CAIR, “at least 1,600 participants have engaged in its training programs, including officers from the Atlanta Police Department.” Indeed, if built, the urban counterinsurgency training provided to Atlanta Police Department and others by Cop City would have repercussions along the global police-military continuum. The struggle over the future of the Weelaunee Forest is of global import. Cop City would become a node in an international system of repression that functions to secure US imperial interests at home and abroad—producing insecurity for imperialized, colonized, and marginalized communities around the world.

The proliferation of comparable police militarization projects alongside Cop City—such as President Biden's [plan](#) to invest \$35 billion into law enforcement and hire 100,000 new police officers despite the 2020 protesters' call to defund police in the wake of the routine police killing of Black Americans—speaks to the class interests of the wealthy political and economic elites in charge of US policy. As the world is rapidly entering a period of intensified social unrest driven by permanent war, worsening economic

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inequality, widespread precarity, and anthropogenic climate change, the ruling classes are pursuing a policy of violence, militarism, austerity, and force in order to lock down their position in the very hierarchies that have catalyzed this emergent crisis. To be secure, the ruling class requires the insecurity of the vast majority of people on the planet, and that of the planet itself and the interdependent human and more-than-human lifeworlds it supports.

The struggle to Stop Cop City is one of many fronts in the struggle to imagine and realize a world premised not on militarism and violence but on peace, cooperation, ecological sustainability, and life-affirming values. Its international relevance speaks to the reach of a violent US-dominated global security regime, and also to the urgency of solidarity between the climate movement, the call to reform US law enforcement and criminal justice systems, and global struggles against colonialism, imperialism, and war that are fought by people around the world. The crisis is global: as must be our vision and strategy.

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