

## Episode 39: Previewing the Counterterrorism in Israel Course & Trip - November 2021

Speaker 1:

Saint Leo 360, a 360 degree overview of the Saint Leo University community.

Greg Lindberg:

Hello, and welcome to another episode of the Saint Leo 360 podcast. My name is Greg Lindbergh. On this episode of the podcast we are speaking about a counter-terrorism in Israel course and trip that we're offering. And this is something we've offered for many years here at Saint Leo University, primarily through our criminal justice program. And we're happy to say that as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, we're very excited to be offering this course and this trip in the fall of 2021. And to help us discuss this trip, we have a previous guest we've had on this podcast a few years ago now. His name is Dr. Robert Sullivan, and he is an assistant professor of criminal justice here at Saint Leo University, and is also the lead counter-terrorism professor here at Saint Leo. Dr. Sullivan, welcome.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

Thank you, Greg. It's an honor to be with you tonight.

Greg Lindberg:

Absolutely. As always, I think we're going to have a lot of fun. And in addition to provide a lot of great information here for everybody.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

Yes, sir. I hope so.

Greg Lindberg:

Definitely. So, first off, Dr. Sullivan, let's just speak about how the origins of this trip that I know started many years ago, and then we can get into just the logistics and how it was put together for this November.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

Sure. Well, my predecessor, Professor Barry Glover back in 2006, went to a counter-terrorism conference. It the largest counter-terrorism conference in the United States held annually in Orlando, and it was sponsored by a group called Security Solutions International and they are the largest counter-terrorism training organization, primarily training law enforcement officers and Homeland security professionals in the United States. He went to this conference, and he quickly, he's a very friendly guy, towards the end of the conference he ended up having dinner with Henry Morgenstern, who's the president of Security Solutions International.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

And Mr. Morgenstern talked about the trips that he took. He did two a year where he took police and Homeland security professionals to Israel, to study counter-terrorism tactics by the people who do it best. And arguably the Israelis are top shelf when it comes to a fighting terror because they've been doing it for a couple of 1,000 years. So, what we've seen kind of new here they've been dealing with for very long time. It's funny. A thing that the Israelis like to say is what we consider antiquity in the United States. They consider current events.

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Greg Lindberg:

Interesting.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

Because their history, oh yeah, they have buildings and cities there that are thousands of years old. But Henry Morgenstern invites Barry Glover to come on the next trip as a professional. And Barry went and his life was totally changed. His eyes were opened as to how advanced the Israelis are compared to some of the tactics that we use. And he was talking with Mr. Morgenstern while in Israel and he said, "You know what would really be neat if we could take students. Would you be willing to host students on this trip, that are studying criminal justice, Homeland security or counter-terrorism?"

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

And Mr. Morgenstern said, "Absolutely, no doubt about it." So, the very next trip in 2006 Barry put together a course, and then the corresponding trip was done by Mr. Morgenstern and Security Solutions International. And there were maybe four or five students on that trip. And they came back and again, their eyes were opened. A lot of them said it was a trip of a lifetime. It was the learning experience of a lifetime. They fell in love with our Israeli friends, and then it just kept growing from there, Greg, to the point where I believe 2018 was our largest contingency of folks. I think we took 30 over and it was just an incredible time. It's nine days that will not only open your eyes as a professional, and not only dealing with counter-terrorism, but just in dealing with people and how to spot threats and situational awareness.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

But it's also a deep cultural experience as well. I mean, a lot of folks just don't know ... They don't understand the fact that Israel is our greatest ally in the middle east, but they get to go over there and they get to see how much Israel is like a smaller version of the United States and how our Israeli brothers and sisters just really, really love and care for their American guests over there.

Greg Lindberg:

Absolutely. And I've always said, immersion is the best form of education. It's just, you really can't actually being somewhere to learn a culture, to learn laws, to learn the people.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

Yes. And it is totally immersion. But what's unique, what I've found my first trip actually was 2013. Because unfortunately Barry passed away in 2013 and before he did, he handed the trip over to me to continue it. And my first trip I took my daughter. She was a freshman at Saint Leo. And she was a criminal justice student. And it was just amazing at the fact that pretty much everybody in Israel speaks English and you'll hear a lot of Hebrew. And since then, I've learned Hebrew. I call it a survival Hebrew that I can speak simply because I'm trying to learn the language, because it's the oldest language in the world. What's really unique and that my daughter found this interesting, there were two young teenage girls in a bakery that we went in and they were speaking Hebrew.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

And we were right behind them in line. They turned around, they looked at us and they smiled and then they immediately switched into English and I've tapped one on the shoulder. And I said, "Let me ask you

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a question. Why did you start speaking English when you saw us?" And they said, "Well, you're Americans, aren't you?" And we said, "Well, yeah, we are." They said, "You don't speak Hebrew, do you?" We said, "No, we don't." And they said, "Well, it would be rude for us to be speaking a language that you don't understand." And that's just meant to show how they are so sensitive to wanting to seem like they're just very friendly and open to their American friends.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. That's a great little story. And I would imagine microcosm of the country in general, like you said.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

It is. Yeah. They're very, very hospitable. Incredibly hospitable.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. Very interesting. So, then in terms of this upcoming trip and course, what are the dates? I think you had said it was November 12th, as far as when you guys would actually be leaving. Is that right?

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

Yes. November 12th through the 20th. We fly out of the Newark International because it's got a sweet non-stop flight on a 777 that a lot of different airlines and a lot of different airports, they'll connect you through Frankfurt or whatever. But this goes directly from Newark to Tel Aviv. It's a nice little nine to 10 hour flight, depending on the headwind or tailwind. And then we get there actually on Saturday, we leave on Friday night, we get there on Saturday. There's a seven hour time difference.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

They're seven hours ahead of us. The jet lag is a little interesting going and coming. But we have all kinds of neat ways to help people adapt to that. And we're there for a solid week. And then we fly back out on Saturday. We travel on Saturdays, but that's by design, because Christianity and Judaism aside, it is agreed upon that Saturday is actually the Sabbath. And the Israelis just don't move on a Saturday. It's incredible. The streets are bare, the stores are bare. The airport is very easy to navigate, because most of the Jewish folks are just doing the Sabbath and not doing anything that resembles work on Saturday.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. Wow. Just once again, a very, very unique aspect of that culture there.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

Yes. They shut down from Friday night, actually the Sabbath, I'm sorry, is from Friday night at 06:00 PM till Saturday night at 06:00 PM. And then Saturday night, believe me, the towns open back up and the people are back out on the street. Not unlike any nice city that we would have in the United States would be enjoying a Saturday night with the exception of the fact, and this sounds counterintuitive to a lot of people haven't been there, there is very, very little crime in Israel. Very little crime, especially violent crime. They've had their trouble with terrorism in the past. So, I would say that, that's probably the only real violent crime that the Israelis have to deal with.

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Dr. Robert Sullivan:

And thank God it's been pretty quiet over there. I know we'll remember back in the 80s and the 90s when buses were being blown up and discotheques were being blown up. Those things just aren't really happening. Those are the things we're going to be studying over there as to why they're not happening anymore and how the Israelis got in front of this problem and enacted countermeasures and learned how to counter these threats. And the folks that go are going to see a very peaceful and loving country. Don't get me wrong. They have continual threats, but they are very, very adept to dealing with those.

Greg Lindberg:

Sure. That's a great point. Let's dive a little further deeper into the itinerary, the schedule would kind of activities. What kind of events can students expect on this trip?

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

Okay. Now this isn't necessarily an order because sometimes Security Solutions changes them up. I just want to let it be known that the trip is totally under the control and hospices of Security Solutions International. So, students that will be going will be students of SSI. I will be going, there will be representatives that will be going from Saint Leo, obviously, because we're in partnership with SSI. And then of course, when the students get back, they'll be enrolled in the online class, terrorism in Israel, if they choose to want to get college credits. But the itinerary typically looks like, again, not an order, but we will go to Jerusalem, because Jerusalem is again, one of the oldest cities in the world. And it is also a hotspot, because you have a couple of disputed areas over there. One being the Dome of the Rock or the Al-Aqsa Mosque, depending on whether you're talking to a Muslim or a Jew.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

And that is a hotly disputed area. And if anybody knows anything about the geopolitics, Jerusalem is kind of cut in half with a good section of it being in the West Bank and the other being in Israel. So, we go to Jerusalem to look at the security apparatus that they have in place to talk to some of the soldiers that work there, to look at their CCTV cameras, and to look at some will call it a fence, some will call it a wall. It is a partition that separates Israel from the West Bank. And here's another little biblical lesson. What we call the West Bank back in biblical days, they called that Judea and Samaria. Those areas are all under a Palestinian control by the Palestinian Government. They are not technically part of Israel. There have been many terrorist attacks in that area over the past decade, centuries, et cetera.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

And we'll look at all of the, again, the security apparatus that they have in place there. Talk to local police, talk to soldiers, actually view that partition, that wall, that fence, whichever you would like to refer to it as. Then, we also shoot up to the port of Ashdod, which is another ancient city on some say, and there is a grave up there. It's believed that Jonah, you remember the Old Testament when it was swallowed by the great fish, his grave is in Ashdod. We will go and take a look at the largest port that Israel has. And they do have two ports, one in Hafen, one in Ashdod. But Ashdod is a little bit more sketchy as far as security. The security is super, super tight. It'll be interesting for the students to see how they do port security.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

When three miles down from the port of Ashdod is a place called the Gaza Strip, which a lot of folks that might have been listening to the news, whenever you hear of an attack on Israel or rockets being

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launched into Israel, it's typically from that Southern area in Southern Israel called the Gaza Strip where the Gazans live. It's a very densely populated small area. There are no Israelis that live in Gaza, because the Gazans are highly, highly violent against Israelis. But that's where those rockets are usually launched from when they are launched. But it's interesting to take a look at just the incredible measures that they used for the security of their ports. We also will take a trip to numerous [models 00:14:50] that were the sites of terrorist attacks. And we will see what happened during the terrorist attacks, because there's a lot of pictures and videos to where we can see the before and the after and talk to the officers and soldiers that work those tragedies and see how they responded.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

There was an attack at this model. What did the officers do? How did they respond and how are they preventing these attacks from happening in the future? We also go to a school, which is in the Northern section of Israel, where a terrible tragedy occurred, where terrorists came in from the Lebanon border and they took over this school and demanded hostages be released. Hostages, meaning folks that were in jail, in prison, in Israel that were terrorists, they wanted them released. And it went bad quick and 23 students were killed. And that right there is what defined how Israel deals with school security. You might think that we deal with it pretty well in the United States, but taking a look at Israeli school security. Everything from kindergarten up through universities was pretty much defined by that tragedy that happened at that school.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

We actually go to the school, they have monuments commemorating or not commemorating, but memorializing what happened and pictures of all of the victims. And we'll receive a lecture as to how Israel is making sure that doesn't happen again. We'll go to the Northern border. We go to the border with Lebanon. And we stand up on a mountain and take a look down into Lebanon. And we receive instruction on what it occurred during the war with Lebanon and how porous that border up there was. And what Israel has done to strengthen that border. And likewise, we'll go to the Golan Heights, which is the border with Syria. And we'll take a look at that border and how it's secured. And what's really unique about this trip is how open the Israelis are with the students.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

It's almost like we're getting intelligence briefings and I wonder sometimes, wow, in the United States, I'm not sure we would be this open with our tactics and the things that we have. But again, I cannot overemphasize, Israel is our number one ally, and everyone that we come in contact with it speaks with us, the experts in the field they'd recognize that, and they want to learn from each other, because they ask us a lot of questions as well. We also go to a place called Mike's Place, which is a very Westernized or I guess you might be able to compare it to maybe like a Beef O'Brady's type establishment. And it's right on the Mediterranean in Tel Aviv. And they had a terrorist attack there, a couple of knucklehead terrorists didn't do their planning. And they thought they were going to blow up the United States embassy, which at the time was in Tel Aviv, right next door to Mike's Place.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

They got there, they hadn't done their homework. And they didn't realize that the US Embassy is heavily guarded by Israeli soldiers. So, they said, oh, we can't do that. Let's go over to this bar and blow it up. So, they went to Mike's place and ignited a suicide vest and killed a number of people, including some band members that were playing. And there's a memorial set up there. And we actually, we hear how

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that attack happened. We'll also go up from Mike's Place and look at the, what they call the Dolphinarium, which was a very famous place for kids to go, kind of like what we know in the United States as like the 70s style disco. That's what it was. And that place was attacked and many Israelis and tourists were killed. And they'll take a look at how that has been hardened and the lessons learned from that.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

And another thing that's pretty neat that we do is we go to visit the national ambulance service and fire departments of Israel. It's national, just like the police. There's not city police and state police. It's a national police, fire rescue and the ambulance service is also national. And we actually speak to the director of the national emergency response system in Israel. And he gives us a lecture and he shows us their ambulance and all of their rescue vehicles and shows us how they're fortified to where they can withstand bomb attacks. And he'll take us into dispatch and show us how they dispatch and let the students listen to some of the actual calls that are coming in during the shift. And that is actually called Magen David Adom. That's the name of the national ambulance service, which means the red star of David.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

And it's just incredible. I mean, and this is subject to change. A lot of times we'll throw new stuff in. On one trip, we went to the site where Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated. And he was assassinated a fellow Jew that didn't approve of his politics. And they talk about that. They talk about how they do secret service, how they do dignitary protection in Israel. So it is, let me tell you, I got to be honest with you. It is high speed, low drag. We are busy. The first thing that happens every morning is there's a lecture in the theater hall of the very nice hotel that we stay in. And then there's lunch. And then after lunch, the person that gave us the lecture hops on the tour bus, and we go out and we actually take a look at these sites that the person lectured about in the morning. So, from almost 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM, it's full days. To say this itinerary is packed, would be an understatement.

Greg Lindberg:

Wow, that's amazing. And I just keep thinking, how in the past, how journalists have been embedded with troops in the military. And this is almost analogous to that, just the level and the scope that our students get to experience. It's really something.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

It really is. And again, I have to say that today I still will say that we are the only university in the United States that goes to Israel, or that has students go with Security Solutions International to Israel and study counter terrorism, which is unique. That's, again, my predecessor, Barry Glover. That's because of his contact and that partnership that he made with Henry Morgenstern. I mean, there's a lot of students that go there don't get me wrong. There's a lot of universities that go to study religion, agriculture, psychology, sociology. We are the only university that I'm aware of that's involved in the counter-terrorism function of Israel.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. Very interesting. And then just to clarify this trip. This course is open to both undergrads, grads, online students, campus students, education center students, correct?

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Dr. Robert Sullivan:

Yes. And doctoral students as well.

Greg Lindberg:

That's right.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

Two years ago, we opened it up because we have our doctorate in criminal justice. And we have doctoral students that are welcome to attend for doctoral credit as well. Now, again, they don't have to go on the trip to get college credit. Remember this trip is sponsored by Security Solutions International. [inaudible 00:23:27] students of Security Solution international, and then they will be enrolled. Now, here's the thing. You don't even have to be a student. People can just sign up a Security Solutions International and go on the trip. And they will receive a certification in Israeli counter-terrorism from Security Solutions International. They can just do that. They don't have to be interested in college credit. But for those that are interested in college credit, they will be enrolled in the fall in one of two terrorism and Israel online courses, one of the tracks will be for students that attended the trip to Israel.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

And that course will be designed to be more reflective on what they learned while they were in Israel. If a student wants to take the course and not go to Israel, they would be enrolled in the track that would be, it would involve more new content and more instructive learning, because obviously they didn't see the things that the students that went to Israel. So, they wouldn't be able to, it wouldn't work to be a reflective course, if that makes sense.

Greg Lindberg:

Sure. I see.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

So, we've got students that are interested in college credit, and then we also have students that are just going to learn and get a certification from Security Solutions International. Now, the double bonus is if let's say we have a undergraduate student that decides to go with Security Solutions International and they come back and they're enrolled in the undergraduate online course. They will not only receive the college credit. They will also receive that certification for studying terrorism in Israel, from Security Solutions International.

Greg Lindberg:

Interesting. And I would imagine that certification in addition to the course credit can certainly benefit students in their careers, whatnot.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

Oh, let me tell you it is a resume builder. I can't tell you the number of folks that have gone. And they've said that when they were sitting down at that job interview, either the police department, public safety agency, or the federal government, or state government, and they're having that interview, and they're asked, we'll talk about your experiences a little bit. They say, well, I studied counter-terrorism in Israel

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on a study abroad trip. And that definitely raises eyebrows with employers. I would say that it is a huge resume builder.

Greg Lindberg:

Absolutely. No doubt about that. That's great. Obviously there is a cost associated with the trip and let's break that down just to be clear on that cost.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

Sure. The cost for Security Solutions International is \$3,100. And that covers everything in Israel, everything in Israel. All of your meals, all of the tours, all of the lectures, the hotel, pretty much tax, tag, and title. If you're going to spend any extra money, it would just be on souvenirs. And if those folks that are so inclined want to have some adult beverages on the Mediterranean, they'd have to bring their money for those adult beverages. So, like I said, that's tax, tag and title. Let me just talk real quick about the hotel. The hotel is ... people will not be disappointed by the hotel. Henry Morgenstern does this up right. It's a beautiful hotel. I believe it's like eight stories high. The food is incredible, all throughout Israel, the food I never realized that Israelis are foodies, they really are. The tastes and the smells are totally unique.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

It's kind of a Mediterranean mixed with middle Eastern fare that is just unbelievable. The hotel is great. It's got the dining facility is up on top of the hotel. There's glass walls to where you're looking out over the skyline of Tel Aviv. There's a deck on top of that restaurant where you can just go chill out under the umbrellas and watch the sunset over the Mediterranean. It is definitely a hotel you won't forget. It's called Hotel Gil Gal, G-I-L G-A-L. That's \$3,100 to Security Solutions International covers all of that. Now the airfare is interesting. It ranges, the years that I've gone, it's been as low as 800 and as high as 1200, round trip. That's on the student also, the airfare. I have found that in a lot of people have traveled to Europe, have found that airfare to be pretty reasonable.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

They say, I've never flown to Paris or Germany, but they say that round trip to Paris or Germany is much more expensive than that. And so I guess probably to go all the way to the middle east, a \$1,000 really isn't bad. That is it, Greg. That's the cost of breakdown. The other thing is, if you want to, of course, if you're a student and you're seeking the credit, it would just be a regular tuition charge for the online class that would give you the accompanying credit for the course. So, if you're a student, you pay tuition, you pay your flight and you pay Security Solutions International. Pretty much, if you're not seeking tuition, it'd be somewhere around \$4,100. If you're seeking tuition, or if you're seeking the college credit, it'd be about \$4,100, plus your tuition. And if you have financial aid or whatever, financial aid would also apply to the tuition, just like it would any other course that you would take or scholarships, it would.

Greg Lindberg:

Again, just thinking about the depth of this trip, the opportunity. I mean, it's almost tough to put a price tag on this type of experience. So, really if you look at it and like you said, meals and everything, I mean, it's quite a value.

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Dr. Robert Sullivan:

Oh, yeah. I can say I've never had ... And altogether, I've I guess I've probably had, well over a 100 students go over there with me and I've never had anyone say, well, this was a rip off or this wasn't worth the money. As a matter of fact, the vast majority of them, they start getting a little bit depressed a couple of nights before we leave, because they say they just want to stay longer.

Greg Lindberg:

Hmm. Wow. That says a lot right there.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

Yes. It's a wonderful experience.

Greg Lindberg:

No doubt. Let's wrap up with just as far as feedback that you have gotten from other students, perhaps examples of how this experience has benefited them in their careers.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

Oh, I've had students that were working at local police departments who always wanted to get that job with the federal government and within a year or two, coming back from Israel, they landed that job. Now, whether that is directly related to Israel or whether it was that resume builder, that helped. I've had chiefs of police that were students getting their graduate degrees that have gone back to their police departments and rewritten policies in how to deal with certain threats and provided new training to their officers about situational awareness, about behavioral analysis. We've got a lot of folks that are going from their master's degrees and their doctoral programs and they're seeking to do deep research into what of the Israeli tactics can we adopt here in the United States?

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

We've had some students that have totally changed tracks. They were majoring in criminal justice with a specialization in forensics, which is a great specialization I may add. But they said, oh, no, no, no. I want to get involved in Homeland security. So they'll switch their major. And then we've had a lot of them. Our Homeland security specialization is a very large contingency cohort of students. And I think a lot of that has to do with this trip to Israel because you get a taste of how deep this topic is and how counter-terrorism tactics that you learn there can also be used in so many areas of public service, and public safety, and policing that it all just melds together. So we have a lot of people that just want to dig deeper. Like I said, a lot of it, they just get a taste and they want the full meal when they get back.

Greg Lindberg:

And I did want to mention that we will certainly link to all the information on how to register for this trip, this course in the show notes for this podcast episode, so that everyone will have that.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

Sure. And it's really, just real quick. It's really one stop shopping. They contact Security Solutions International to register for the trip and Security Solutions International will walk them through everything they have to do. And then they just, if they want the college credit, they just literally sign up for the course in fall two of 2021.

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Greg Lindberg:

Wow. Can't beat it. It's easy enough, right?

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

It is. Yes.

Greg Lindberg:

Definitely. Alrighty. Any final words here, Dr. Sullivan before I let you go?

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

No. Other than this is a trip that if somebody is on the fence, wondering, should I go, just go ahead and tip it, tip the scales over to, yeah, I need to go. Because all I can guarantee you is you will not be disappointed and you will make friends that lasts a lifetime in Israel. I'm constantly in contact with my friends over there and they care about us. We care about them. As the former prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu used to like to say, you are us and we are you. I'm talking about Israel and the United States and the relationship. And that might not make sense, but it'll make sense to you when you go over there and you meet these wonderful people.

Greg Lindberg:

Okay. Again, we've been visiting with Dr. Robert Sullivan here on the Saint Leo 360 podcast. And Dr. Sullivan, thank you so much for your time. Really appreciate it.

Dr. Robert Sullivan:

Oh, it was my pleasure. Thank you so much, Greg, for having me.

Greg Lindberg:

Absolutely. You're very welcome.

Speaker 1:

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