

MIDDLE EAST A DAY AGO

# Israel's deadly weapons laboratory aimed at Palestinians

Israeli state uses a range of tools and technologies to “battle-test” its weapons on the besieged Palestinians.

 **ANTONY LOEWENSTEIN**



REUTERS

General strike following the killing of three Palestinian gunmen by Israeli drone strike in Jenin / Photo: Reuters

How many Israeli Jews are opposed to the country's surging weapons industry, [tested and perfected](#) on occupied Palestinians?

Israel is the [10th biggest arms dealer](#) on the planet, selling to over 130 nations, both democracies and dictatorships.

Tel Aviv has used decades of experience controlling an occupied population, the Palestinians, and monetised it by proving its drones, facial recognition tools, biometric gathering infrastructure and counter-insurgency techniques as an exportable business.

A large number of states are desperate to gain Israeli knowledge to repress their own people and surveil unwanted dissidents, journalists or human rights activists.

From Rwanda to [Myanmar](#) and Bangladesh, Israeli repressive tech has become ubiquitous in the 21st century.

This is the subject of my new book, [The Palestine Laboratory](#), where I take a global view of Israel's arms industry and show, through interviews, declassified documents and on-the-ground reporting, how the longest occupation in modern times hasn't been an impediment to the survival of Israel but, in fact, allowed it to profit handsomely.

In 2022, Israel [recorded](#) its biggest arms sales ever, at US\$12.5 billion, 24 percent of which were sold to Arab countries.

Since the Russian offensive in Ukraine in February 2022, European countries have [flocked to Israel](#) to buy huge amounts of defence equipment, including missile-defence systems.

## Targeting Palestinians

Within Israel itself, public opponents of Israel's arms trade are rare. Human rights lawyer [Eitay Mack](#) is a notable exception. One of the other more vocal critics is the opposite of who you'd expect. Israel uses a range of tools and technologies to “battle-test” its weapons on Palestinians.

Across the occupied territories, Israel [deploys](#) a sophisticated facial recognition tool, Red Wolf, to document every single Palestinian without their consent

Israel has [installed](#) an AI-machine gun in occupied Hebron. Drones that Israel has deployed over Gaza during its many assaults against the besieged territory in the last 15 years are [now used](#) by the European Union in its war against refugees in the Mediterranean.

That's just a small picture of Israel's comprehensive control of Palestine and the ways in which it dominates the more than five million Palestinians in occupied East Jerusalem, occupied West Bank and Gaza.

All this has occurred while Israel's popularity in many Western states, including [the United States](#), has plummeted (though many Republican voters still [strongly](#) support Israel).

Jewish critics of Israel are also growing in number and [stridency](#) across the Western world as Israel accelerates its path towards a potential full-blown theocracy.

[Avidan Freedman](#) is an Orthodox rabbi living in an illegal West Bank settlement, Efrat. He's organised against the Netanyahu government's so-called judicial reforms, a mechanism to [strengthen](#) Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and peoples, and is the founder of the group, [Yanshoof](#), an advocacy entity that aims to build Israeli support to set “moral limits on weapons exports”.

According to its website, Yanshoof is “the only organisation in Israel dedicated to promoting legal action to end Israeli weapons sales to murderous regimes.

“We believe that Israel needs to be a source of good and blessing for the world, and that a moral policy, like that which already exists in many other countries, will only serve to strengthen Israel.”

There's a lot to like about these sentiments though they're myopic.

## The usual suspects

The global weapons industry is amoral, by definition, no matter which country is selling arms.

The US is the biggest weapons seller [by far](#), around 40 percent of the global total, and there's nothing clean about it.

The world's most brutal leaders routinely purchase the deadliest armaments from many [self-described democracies](#) (I'm looking at you, Washington, Paris, Berlin and London).

Freedman may be sincere in his opposition to the Israeli arms trade, but it's hard to fully trust his credibility when he's living in an illegal settlement with a [history](#) of settler violence against Palestinians.

It's as if he cares more about the rights of foreigners suffering under Israeli weapons than Palestinians who live down the road from his house.

Perhaps we should be grateful for his rational and clearly passionate voice against Israeli weapons, but he's careful not to oppose the Palestinian laboratory and how it dehumanises Palestinians under occupation.

Israel's ever-expanding weapons industry is an insurance policy against any potential future pressure against Israeli state.

So many states now rely on Israeli [spyware](#), defence equipment and weapons that Israel believes they're less likely to condemn its permanent occupation of Palestine. They're right, at least for the moment, but that clock is ticking as [Israeli messianism](#) looks to take complete control of Israel.

In decades to come, the international community will have to face the presence of a “proud [apartheid state](#)” in the heart of the Middle East, with millions of Palestinians treated as second-class citizens, and choose to either accept it or act decisively to create a [true democracy](#) for all of its citizens.

### Antony Loewenstein

Antony Loewenstein is an independent journalist and filmmaker. He's written for The Guardian, The New York Times and other publications. His books include Pills, Powder and Smoke: Inside the Bloody War on Drugs, Disaster Capitalism: Making A Killing Out Of Catastrophe, The Blogging Revolution and My Israel Question. He was based in East Jerusalem between 2016–2020.

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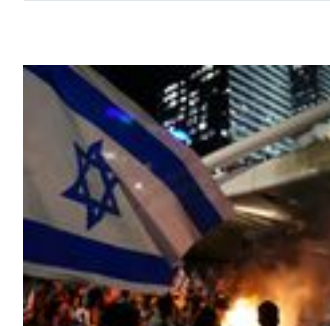
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