The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel uses Palestine as guinea-pig for industry of occupation

Book Club 7 min read

Marc Martorell Junyent | 21 June, 2023

Book Club: Israel's infrastructure of occupation has been exported worldwide. Experts in the 'architecture of control', Israel's military-industrial complex has used the destruction of the West Bank and Gaza as selling points for autocratic regimes.

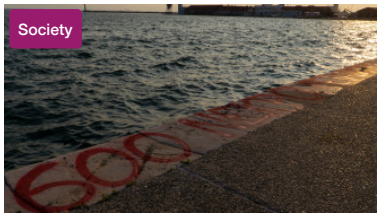
Palestine has become the perfect laboratory for the Israeli military-techno complex: surveillance, home demolitions, indefinite incarceration and brutality to the hi-tech tools that drive the 'Start-Up Nation' [Verso Books]

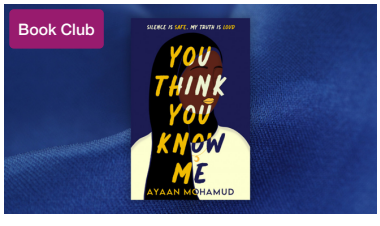
Israeli weapons companies often promote their products for export by emphasising that they are "battle-tested." Marketing weapons in such a way is misleading, to say the least.

Ever since the end of the 1973 October War, Israel has not participated in any battle if by "battle" we understand, as the Cambridge Dictionary does, "a fight between armed forces."

This lack of battle has been offset by an abundance of testing. The laboratory has been no other than the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

More In Features


Society
Pakistani migrant's final call home foretold Greek tragedy
The New Arab



Book Club
The fraught self-discovery of a young Somali woman in London
Aisha Yusuff

Society
Sacred Hajj pilgrimage a distant dream in NW Syria
Hadia Al Mansour

Most Viewed

1 Algeria president visits Russia despite international outcry

> "The links between the occupation and military submission of Palestine and the success of Israel's weapons and surveillance industries are easily traceable and the examples are manifold"

In his book *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation around the World*, Antony Loewenstein argues that the occupation of Palestine has provided Israel with an incomparable testing ground in the development of its weapons and surveillance technology.

At the same time, Palestine has also served as a display room for the effects of these weapons, which are then exported around the world generating both considerable revenue and valuable political influence for Israel.

As Loewenstein, an independent journalist, author, and filmmaker, writes, "The Palestine laboratory is a signature Israeli selling point."

Tested in Palestine, used in Kashmir: Israel's technology of oppression has gone global [Getty]

The author explains how Israel's path to becoming "a military powerhouse" began after the 1967 War and the country's growing alignment with Washington in the context of the Cold War.

Israel soon accumulated unsavoury buyers of its weaponry, such as the Shah's Iran in the 1970s and the Guatemalan military junta in the early 1980s.

By the 1990s, the Israeli government wanted its military industry to become more autonomous from the United States.

This coincided with the privatisation of the sector, which nonetheless continued to receive significant economic support from the state.

The so-called 'War on Terror' that followed the 9/11 attacks came at a complicated moment for the country's high-tech industry and proved highly profitable for Israeli weapons companies.

RELATED

Israel's Gaza blockade: An indefinite cage for Palestinians

Analysis Muhammad Shehada

Israel had long considered any kind of Palestinian resistance as terrorism. Thus, it was naturally well-positioned when governments around the world jumped at the occasion of labelling political opponents of all sorts as terrorists. As Lowenstein writes, Israel was given a great opportunity "to monetise the occupation."

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research (SIPRI), Israel has been among the world's ten main exporters of weapons since at least 2004, and in the 2016-2020 period, it was the eighth largest exporter.

To understand the economic relevance of the weapons industry in Israel,

2 For Morocco's Ultras, it's Palestine first, football second

3 No recognition, no rights: Palestinians in Egypt

4 Did UAE ban Spider-Man 2 movie over transgender Gwen Stacy?

5 Netflix's Cleopatra and Hollywood's problem with colourism

6 Riyadh wants nuclear programme for 'Israel ties': report

it is important to keep in mind that Israel has a smaller population than Portugal or the US State of Michigan.

> "As Loewenstein documents in his book, Israel has not only paid any price for its occupation of Palestine but has economically profited from it through the success of its weapons exports"

The links between the occupation and military submission of Palestine and the success of Israel's weapons and surveillance industries are easily traceable and the examples are manifold.

During Israel's military operation against the Gaza Strip in 2014, known as Operation Protective Edge, the CEO of the weapons firm Meprolight explained that "after every campaign of the kind that is now taking place in Gaza, we see an increase in the number of customers from abroad."

Meanwhile, and especially after the massive influx of migrants in 2015, the European Union and its borders agency Frontex have increasingly relied on Israeli drones, tested over Gaza and the West Bank, to police Europe's borders. Lowenstein describes Israel as a key player in the EU's efforts "to both militarise its borders and deter new arrivals."

"The roots of Britain's interference in the region stretch much further back, deep into the nineteenth century, with consequences that reverberate today."

Gabriel Polley on how Britain's colonial legacy is still felt in Palestine today⬇ https://t.co/dNGVcbfsm1

The official private status of Israeli weapons companies provides the Israeli government with the advantage of certain plausible deniability in case of scandal.

This is particularly important when it comes to the cyber-arms industry, which is nominally independent but connected through revolving doors to the Israeli army's Unit 8200, the military corps responsible for cyberwarfare and surveillance. The Israeli company NSO Group, with close ties to Unit 8200, developed the spyware Pegasus.

According to a recent report, the Mexican government was the first one to buy the technology in 2011. It was soon used by government agencies worldwide to infiltrate private mobile phones. Such varied people as a Dominican investigative journalist, an Indian activist, and an Egyptian dissident were victims of the Pegasus spyware.

Despite the effort to keep up appearances, cyber-arms firms, as well as traditional weapons companies, "act as an extension of Israel's foreign policy agenda, supporting its goals and pro-occupation ideology," argues Loewenstein. This could be seen with the use of NSO Group's Pegasus to open diplomatic doors for Israel in the Gulf.

According to an investigation by *The New York Times*, "sales of Pegasus played an unseen but critical role in securing the support of Arab nations in Israel's campaign against Iran and even in negotiating the Abraham Accords." The agreements established official relations between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain in 2020.

In the hands of the UAE long before the normalisation of relations, Pegasus was used by Abu Dhabi to target, among many others, the private mobile phone of Hanan Elatr, the wife of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, assassinated in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018.

RELATED

Israel's Pride pinkwashing can't mask its occupation

Perspectives Alainna Liloia

When we jointly consider the economic success of Israel's weapons exports and the country's poor track in terms of human rights, the US support for the Israeli army and the funding of its national weapons industry becomes all the more unsettling.

Washington provides Foreign Military Funding (FMF) to allied countries to buy US weapons. In 2021, $3.3 billion in FMF funds, 59% of the total, went to Israel.

Moreover, since the 1980s Israel has been the only country to benefit from the "offshore procurement" clause, which allows Israel to spend part of the FMF funds on the domestic development and production of weapons.

For decades, Israel spent 25% of the FMF funds in the domestic market. Under the terms of the 2016 US-Israel Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), this percentage is currently decreasing, and the "offshore procurement" clause is set to expire by 2028.

The change, however, was compensated by an increase of $800 million per year in FMF funds in comparison to the previous MOU, signed in 2007.

> "According to the Stockholm International Peace Research (SIPRI), Israel has been among the world's ten main exporters of weapons since at least 2004, and in the 2016-2020 period, it was the eighth largest exporter"

Loewenstein predicts that Israel's privatized military-industrial complex "will only grow in the coming decades." There are powerful arguments to support this assessment.

Israeli weapons exports rose by 55% between 2020 and 2022, and the Israeli Defense Ministry recently announced that the list of products that can be marketed without a license will be dramatically increased. The priorities are clear.

In the words of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in 2019, Israel has "to take the risk, and it's a considerable risk, of regulating less in order to grow more."

India, with increasingly strong ties to Israel under the rule of ethno-nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is now the recipient of more than a third of Israel's weapons exports.

Meanwhile, the Arab countries that have normalised ties with Israel, as well as Saudi Arabia which seems likely to do so when crown prince Mohammad bin Salman becomes king, have expensive defence programmes that Israeli companies may soon supply.

The global rise of Israel's military-industrial complex was never unavoidable. There are measures that could have prevented the use of Palestine as a laboratory that fuels Israel's weapons exports.

What is lacking, as is so often the case, is international political will.

In 2021, for instance, a Finnish member of Parliament Anna Kontula failed to pass an innovative bill that would have prevented weapons imports from countries that, like Israel, have used the weapons they produce to violate human rights.

RELATED

How Smotrich's West Bank plan actualises a second Nakba

Analysis Benjamin Ashraf

As Loewenstein documents in his book, Israel has not only paid any price for its occupation of Palestine but has economically profited from it through the success of its weapons exports.

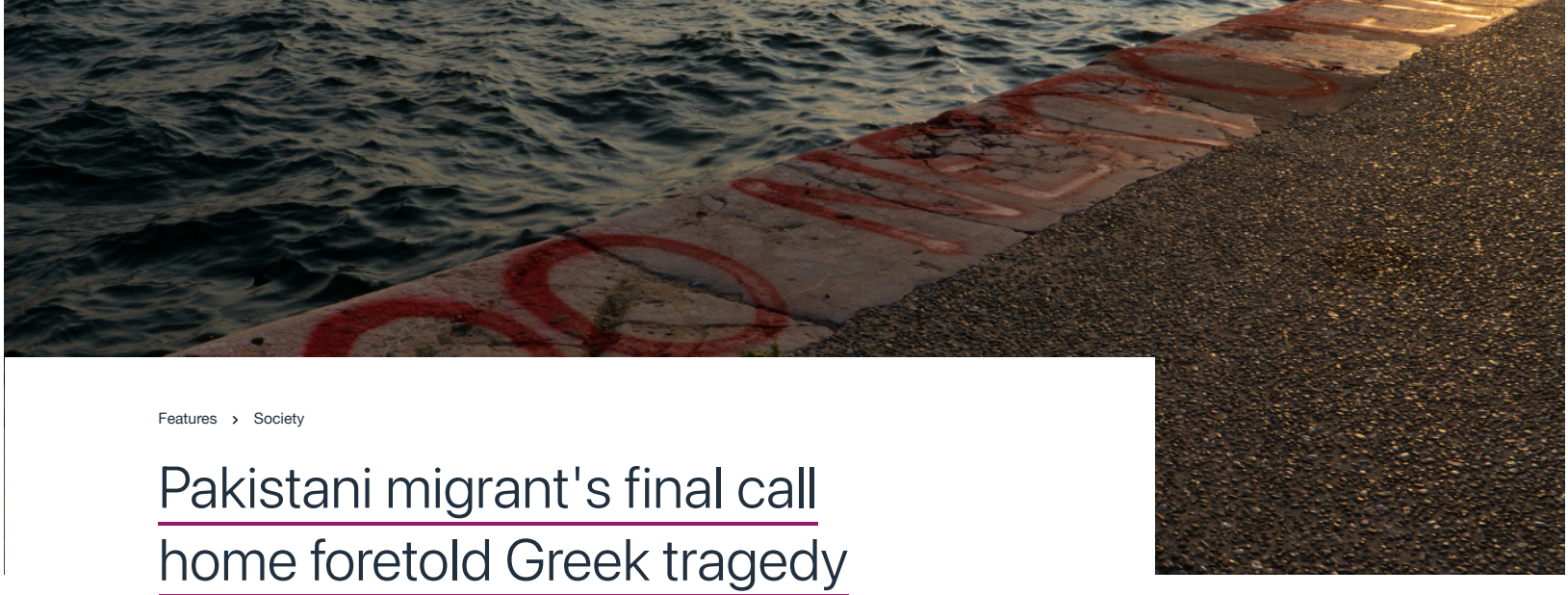
In *The Palestine Laboratory*, Loewenstein sometimes struggles to find his own voice as he often resorts to quotations and references to other authors' works. However, when he finds it, it turns out to be a convincing and powerful voice.

Marc Martorell Junyent is a graduate of International Relations and holds an MA in Comparative and Middle East Politics and Society from the University of Tübingen (Germany). He has been published in the London School of Economics Middle East Blog, Middle East Monitor, Inside Arabia, Responsible Statecraft and Global Policy.

Follow him on Twitter: @MarcMartorell3

Tags:

Palestine | Israel | occupation | Israeli occupation | Kashmir | NSO Group | The New Arab Book Club



Pakistani migrant's final call home foretold Greek tragedy

Society 3 min read

The New Arab | 21 June, 2023

Authorities in Europe still have no clear idea how many people were aboard the boat when it sank — estimates range from 400 to over 700 — but likely hundreds came from Pakistan, and many from Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

Before 21-year-old Pakistani Muhammad Akash boarded a rickety fishing trawler in Libya on a journey he hoped would take him to a brighter future in Europe, he contacted his family one last time.

"He made a heartfelt phone call to his brother, urging the family to pray for him as he embarked on what he acknowledged to be a perilous journey," his uncle Amanat Ali told *AFP on* Sunday after learning Akash was one of the hundreds who drowned off the coast of Greece on Wednesday.

RELATED

Migrant children face torture in Libya's detention centres

In-depth The New Arab (From the Arabic Edition)

Authorities in Europe still have no clear idea how many people were aboard the boat when it sank — estimates range from 400 to over 700 — but likely hundreds came from Pakistan, and many from Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

Four of Akash's friends from the town of Khuiratta were also aboard, but only two survived. They had the grim task of breaking the news to his family.

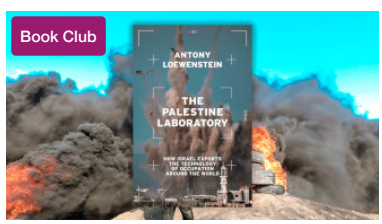
The uncle told *AFP* that Akash started his journey three months ago. He had been in regular contact with two other friends who had already made their way to Italy by similar means, and he wanted to follow them.

Thousands of Pakistanis attempt to reach Europe illegally each year in search of a better life abroad, and there is an established network of people smugglers capitalising on their dreams.

More In Features

The fraught self-discovery of a young Somali woman in London

Aisha Yusuff



Palestine is Israel's laboratory for industry of occupation

Marc Martorell Junyent

Sacred Hajj pilgrimage a distant dream in NW Syria

Hadia Al Mansour

Most Viewed

1 Egypt 'killer' shark to be preserved, displayed at museum

RELATED

Starved, beaten, tortured: Migrants in Libya face calamities

Society Nino Orto

'Severe punishment'

On Sunday Pakistan officials said 10 suspected human traffickers had been arrested, and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif vowed "severe punishment" for those involved in the trade.

Pakistan is in economic freefall. A dire downturn — caused by decades of mismanagement and political instability — has drained dollar reserves, spurred runaway inflation and caused widespread factory closures.

The desperate situation is creating an incentive for Pakistanis to take perilous, illegal routes to Europe.

Akash's father passed away 12 years ago, leaving him to assist his older brother in managing the family-owned catering business in Khuiratta.

"He became fascinated by the enhanced living standards of the local residents whose families had established roots in Europe," said Ali. "The family isn't impoverished, rather it is the lack of faith in the system among the youth in the area that is leading them to consider leaving the country."

Ali said the family got together to pay an agent two million rupees (around $7,000) to organise his journey, which started with a flight to Dubai, onwards to Egypt, and finally to Libya.

Then on Monday came the call when he shared fears of the boat journey ahead.

"Despite our attempts to dissuade him, he remained adamant," Ali said.

RELATED

Pakistan arrests 10 trafficking suspects after Greek boat tragedy

World The New Arab Staff & Agencies

On Sunday Prime Minister Sharif announced a national day of mourning for those who perished — local media say as many as 300 Pakistanis could have been aboard.

"The devastating news has left us in deep sorrow," said Ali. "He had a special place as the dearest among the siblings to his mother, so we made the difficult decision not to immediately inform her of his passing.

"Instead, we have conveyed to her that he has sustained injuries. We simply can't muster enough courage to speak the truth to her."

Tags:

migrant deaths | Pakistan | Greek border | Greek coast guard | Syria | Libya | migrant crisis

2 Is the early twilight of the Iran-Taliban honeymoon over?

3 Algeria president visits Russia despite international outcry

4 For Morocco's Ultras, it's Palestine first, football second

5 No recognition, no rights: Palestinians in Egypt

6 Did UAE ban Spider-Man 2 movie over transgender Gwen Stacy?

Get The New Arab's newsletters straight to your inbox

Enter Your E-mail

Sign up