

# How a ‘mass assassination factory’ works

The book describes Israel’s control over the information flow relating to the Gaza conflict, its large-scale killings in the territory, and how AI-enabled weapons are being live-tested for the export market. **TALMIZ AHMAD**

**T**en months into the Gaza war, Israel’s war machine has killed 40,000 Palestinians; another 700 have been killed in the West Bank, and several thousands face abuse in Israel’s prisons. Seventy per cent of the dead in Gaza are women and children. These deaths, the product of wanton hate and cruelty, have been described as genocide, an ironical condemnation for a state that itself emerged from the horrors of the Holocaust.

Antony Loewenstein, a distinguished Australia-based Jewish commentator, has in this book set himself the task of discussing the various aspects of Israel’s security sector, its global outreach and influence, and the various instruments that Israel uses to ensure that its depredations in the occupied territories—the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem—are not exposed or, if they do come to public attention, the international community remains a mute spectator.

Israel has sought to achieve this through a misrepresentation of its place in the world. Although Jews in Europe had experienced discrimination and pogroms from their Christian neighbours over two millennia, Israel’s early Zionist votary, Theodore Herzl, justified the Jewish migration to Palestine by asserting that the new state of Israel would be “a sector of the wall of Europe against Asia, we shall serve as the outpost of civilisation against barbarism”. This assertion, which has no real basis in history, continues to be spouted to allure the untutored in the West.

## The Palestine Laboratory

How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Around the World



By Antony Loewenstein  
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As recently as 2017, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu justified the occupation and abuse in Palestine by rejecting the idea of the accommodation of diverse communities in a multicultural domestic order by saying: “We [Israel] are part of the European culture. Europe ends in Israel. East of Israel, there’s no more Europe.”

In the US, Netanyahu presented Israel as the US’ partner in the global war on terror by saying: “This [Israel] is the front line between the free and civilised world and radical Islam. We’re stopping the wave of radical Islam from flowing from Iran and Iraq all the way to Europe.” What Netanyahu failed to recall was that Israel’s violence and abuse in the occupied territories were the principal catalyst for inflaming and justifying the jihad against the West.

Loewenstein uses the term “politicide” to describe the Israeli policy of seeking “the dissolution of the Palestinian people’s existence as a legitimate social, political and economic entity”. But this is a tall order: the total population of non-Jews in Israel and the occupied territories exceeds the Jewish population, that is, 53 per cent versus 47 per cent. Israel has handled this challenge with the systematic “othering” of the Palestinians: through physical separation by constructing walls between the Israeli and Palestinian communities and psychological separation through a crude racist approach that views Palestinians as barbarous, irrational, inferior, and “terrorists”.

Thus, following the withdrawal of the last



Jewish settlers from Gaza in 2005, the enclave, with a population of over two million, has been encircled with high fencing and largely closed borders and subjected to continuous drone surveillance and regular military attacks.

These attacks on the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have enabled Israel to battle-test its weaponry to facilitate sales abroad. Loewenstein points out that, at the air show in Paris in 2009, Israel's marketing team showed visuals of actual killings of Palestinians in Gaza to promote the effectiveness of its weapons. In the latest war in Gaza, artificial intelligence-enabled weapons are being live-tested for the export market, making Israel a "mass-assassination factory".

**T**ODAY, ISRAEL IS one of the world's major weapons suppliers. It has about 300 corporations and over 6,000 startups in the defence sector, which employ nearly 1,40,000 Israelis, about 10 per cent of the working population. In 2021, Israeli defence exports were \$11.3 billion, rising 55 per cent in two years. Separately, in that year, its cybersecurity firms did 100 deals valued at \$8.8 billion. These companies work closely with US firms. Throughout the Cold War, the two countries collaborated to support the harsh dictatorships in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

Israel was a major partner of the apartheid regime in South Africa in developing conventional and even nuclear weapons to combat

▼ **Destruction at Deir el-balah** in the central Gaza Strip on August 7 following Israeli bombardment. At the air show in Paris in 2009, Israel's marketing team showed visuals of actual killings of Palestinians in Gaza to promote the effectiveness of its weapons. EYAD BABA/AFP

freedom movements in South Africa and its neighbourhood. Israel also picked up the idea of "Bantustans" from the apartheid regime so that now 165 Palestinian "enclaves" in the West Bank are surrounded by Israeli settlements and hostile settlers.

Loewenstein notes that the Israeli approach towards backing some of the world's most authoritarian regimes has continued after the Cold War: Israel is today a major security partner of Sri Lanka, Rwanda, Myanmar, Hungary, Morocco, Spain, and the Gulf Arab states of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain; in short, most states that are coping with domestic dissident movements.

Besides being a major weapons manufacturer, in recent years, Israel has emerged as an important presence in the global surveillance and cybersecurity sectors. Its technology relating to face recognition was first tested at the numerous checkpoints in the occupied territories. Information relating to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians was collected to facilitate air strikes on select Palestinian targets so that, as Loewenstein says, "killing or injuring Palestinians should be as easy as ordering pizza". This technology has now been successfully marketed to almost all of the world's authoritarian regimes in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Arms sales across the world have built powerful support bases for Israel.

To curb criticisms of its actions in the occupied territories, Israel uses diverse instruments—the most effective has been the charge of "anti-Semitism" directed at individuals and governments that go public with their unhappiness with Israeli actions. In the case of Germany, Loewenstein says, Israel has linked its "rehabilitation" by insisting on silence with regard to Israel's atrocities and purchase of increasing amounts of Israeli arms. This approach has been remarkably successful.

Similarly, global social media outlets remain under Israeli influence—minimising pro-Palestinian messages and ensuring that messages supporting Israel are not deleted even when they advocate mass expulsion of Palestinians or even genocide. Loewenstein calls this the "weaponisation of social media".

Loewenstein has discussed India-Israel ties in some detail. He points out that not only is India increasingly buying Israeli weaponry but it is also adopting some Israeli tactics to intimi-

date disgruntled sections of its population through “coercive mechanisms” such as the use of bulldozers to demolish homes of dissident elements, as also surveillance technology to monitor political critics through face recognition and phone hacking.

**I**N RESPONSE TO the violence and devastation in Gaza and Israel’s wanton cruelty, there has been greater global condemnation than ever before, with unprecedented strictures on Israel being passed by the UN General Assembly, the International Court of Justice, and the International Criminal Court. However, while US President Joe Biden has made some occasional noises expressing unhappiness about Israel’s conduct, the US remains Israel’s principal weapons supplier.

There have also been expressions of dissent within Israel itself. But Loewenstein notes that among most Israelis “extreme incitement and visions of mass expulsion of Arabs are an increasingly popular stance”. Hard-right politicians routinely threaten extreme violence and even ethnic cleansing. A senior editor has accepted that several Israelis are using “terminology borrowed from white supremacists in the US”.

Loewenstein belongs to that group of outstanding Jewish intellectuals, such as Noam

Chomsky, Ilan Pape, and Avi Shlaim, who are deeply concerned about the securitisation of Israel’s state order, the ascent of the hard right in its politics, its deepening affinity with the world’s autocrats, and the violence and coarseness that have come to define its approach to domestic dissent. All of this is a far cry from the ideals of some its first votaries who had conceived the Zionist entity as a “light unto the world”.

The appearance of this book during the ongoing war in Gaza is a well-timed and effective challenge to Israel’s domination of the information flows relating to the conflict and the impunity with which it has so far conducted mass murder in that godforsaken enclave. Sadly, Loewenstein concludes the book by pointing out that, in coming years, unless there are radical changes in Israel, there will be increasing Jewish-Palestinian violence in the occupied territories, and that Israel-style ethnonationalism will flourish in the fertile soil provided by the rising tide of right-wing populist politics in the US and in democracies in Latin America, Europe, and Asia.

The chances of such radical changes emerging in the Israeli order are remote. ■

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