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## Interview

# Interview: 'Israel's partnering with anti-semites endangers all of us'

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EU & the World

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Antony Loewenstein, the author of *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Around the World: 'The Israeli government aims to make Gaza unliveable - and it's an unbelievable success'* (Photo: Antony Loewenstein)

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### Author Bio

Wester is a journalist from the Netherlands with a focus on the green economy. He joined EUobserver in September 2021. Previously he worked for *the Guardian*, *Motherboard*, and *the New York Times* on climate and climate economy.

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The past months have seen increasingly desperate calls for a ceasefire in Gaza. Polls show that **large majorities** in Europe and around the world support banning arms trade with Israel to force negotiations.

Some Western capitals have issued stern warnings, often due to fierce protests from their own populations. But formal relations between Western governments and Israel have, for the most part, continued much as before.

Why have so few countries, including those in Europe, intervened despite the killing of over 40,000 Palestinians, many of them civilians? To get a better understanding of this, EUobserver spoke to Antony Loewenstein, a Jewish Australian-German investigative journalist and author of several books on Israel, including his most recent best-selling book titled *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Around the World*.

In it, he describes how, for decades, Israel's defence industry has used the Occupied Palestinian Territories as a testing ground for weaponry and surveillance technology, later selling these innovations to other powers that have grown increasingly reliant on them.

### Europeans are happy to use Israeli drones that have been tested in Gaza to keep refugees out of Fortress Europe.

Published shortly before the Hamas attack on October 7 and Israel's subsequent military response, the book sheds light on why so few foreign powers, keen to maintain access to state-of-the-art military equipment, have severed ties with Israel.

But far from being a "beacon of freedom" in the global battle for democracy, as former Israeli prime minister Naftali Bennett claimed, Loewenstein argues that Israel's militarism is driving it further into authoritarianism, making it a model for far-right ethnonationalists in Europe and around the world.

**The EU is a large buyer of Israeli weapon systems and continues to collaborate with Israel through its various research programmes, including EU Horizon. The EU claims it doesn't fund technology that is used militarily. But some of the EU-funded technologies have made their way to the battlefield and have been used against Palestinians. What to make of this?**

It's obfuscation. I see no indication that the European Union is going to sever ties with Israel over its conduct in Gaza. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the new cold war between the West and China will only strengthen Israel's hand.

Europe is begging for defence equipment, and as you know, many European states have been using Israeli spyware for years. There's no indication that it will stop, despite some criticism from countries like Spain, Ireland, and Belgium.

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Israeli drones that have been tested in Gaza to keep refugees out of Fortress Europe.

In fact, Israel's ministry of defence just weeks ago published the arms sales figures for 2023, and they were the **highest on record at \$13.1bn**. Europe was one of the biggest customers.

**You quote Yotam Feldman, the Israeli movie director, who said that Israel offers an "entire political model" for asymmetric warfare, inspiring other governments in how to deal with unwanted people.**

Israel, particularly following [the Six Day War in] 1967, has found a way to show other countries that you can occupy and oppress unwanted minorities and get away with it. Several countries, including in Europe, were initially opposed to what Israel was doing. But Israel was able to offset a lot of that criticism by very cleverly and very quickly – within a matter of years – spending tremendous amounts of money to develop new forms of repression, occupation, tools, and weapons that were then marketed as 'battle tested' in Palestine. And it works. A lot of the surveillance and repressive tech that Israel has been using and testing in Palestine is desired by nations that want to enact similar policies. Israel is probably the world leader in spyware and among the top ten biggest arms dealers globally. Virtually every single European Intelligence Service and police department use some form of Israeli spyware.

**Looking at the 7 October attack and the destruction of Gaza isn't necessarily an advertisement for the Israeli security industry.**

Rational people might look at Israel and Palestine and conclude that it isn't working. Israel spent billions of dollars on surveillance, artificial intelligence and sophisticated walls, and a bunch of guerrillas were able to breach all that. But there is no desire to find a solution. If you listen to [Israeli cabinet ministers] Ben Givir and Bezalel Smotrich, they have a vision. This consists of three pillars: If you're a Palestinian willing to live under Jewish supremacy rule, you can stay. If not, you leave. The third option is: we will kill you. The point is that they get away with it.

**In your book, you worry about a growing ideological alignment between Israel and the global far-right. What is driving this?**

Israel needs friends because, frankly, they don't have that many. And there is an increasing willingness within the Israeli government, and parts of the global Jewish diaspora, to partner with political groups and parties who are traditionally racist, anti-semitic, and neo-Nazi aligned.

They're doing that because of the mutual hatred of migrants and Muslims. And far-right groups, of course, are eager to partner with Israel because it launders their image. It becomes harder to criticise their anti-semitism if they're partnering with the world's only Jewish state.

But almost weekly, there are scandals. [Italian prime minister Giorgia] Meloni's government is very pro-Israel on paper. Still, just **recently**, senior members of her party were [Sign in or Register for 3 free articles.](#)

**I was struck by rightwing settler Eli Yosef, whom you quote in the book as saying, "If you think he can sow evil and not reap evil, you must be blind." He criticises Israeli exports to dictatorships. If such counter-arguments exist within settler communities, why don't more people realise the risk of Israel's entanglement with authoritarianism?**

A tiny minority on the right and a shrinking left are critical of this. I think many Western countries are reluctant, including in Europe, to acknowledge that Israeli society over the last 20 years has become radicalised.

We're used to talking about Muslim and Christian extremists, but we still don't feel comfortable saying there is Israeli and Jewish extremism. But I would argue that a sizable majority in Israel hold extremist views today.

**Will a change in government after Netanyahu make much of a difference?**

No. The mistake many people in the West make is that things will improve if Netanyahu gets replaced by a more centrist, rational government. But this is misplaced.

Netanyahu himself is not hugely popular anymore, but what he's advocating has been very popular for years. Opinion polls show that most people support the continuation of the war. Even before 7 October, polls show that people supported forcibly removing or ethnically cleansing Palestinians in Gaza.



▲ Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's vision for Gaza in 2035, released by his office.

**Netanyahu presented his vision for Gaza after the 'crisis,' envisioning it as a hyper-financialised 2035 version of Singapore or Dubai on the Mediterranean coast. Is this a likely future?**

It's delusional. It's never going to happen. Jared Kushner expressed interest in creating beachside properties. And there may be more people like him who might want to build high-rise hotels on the Gaza shore. But the sheer amount of capital you would need to transform Gaza, which has been totally destroyed, into something like that is just never going to happen. The more realistic fear is that Gaza will be [Sign in or Register for 3 free articles.](#)

desperate for a ceasefire. But the government aims to make Gaza unlivable. And in this, the war was an unbelievable success.

**In the book, you quote the late professor of sociology Baruch Kimmerling, who said that by "rendering them [Palestinians] unequal and the hope they might move elsewhere." Is Gaza the extreme endpoint of that way of thinking?**

It is the endpoint. To hope is that if Palestinian life has become so intolerable and brutal and bleak, people will leave. I'm not convinced Palestinians are going to do that. They haven't so far. The vast majority can't leave, and they won't.

**What can break the chain?**

With the growing influence of the far-right, I think Israel probably correctly feels that it will be protected against any criticism of its mass slaughter of Palestinians.

Ultimately, European elites do not view Palestinian lives as being equal to Israeli lives. Only with massive civil society pressure, such as sanctions, boycotts and divestment, like that which ended apartheid in South Africa, could this change.



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