

REVIEWS

The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel expands the technology of occupation around the world

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Antony Loewenstein's book, *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel exports the technology of occupation around the world* (Verso Books, 2023), is a timely read at any given moment, but the unfolding ethnic cleansing in Gaza and the complicit response of the international community make this book a necessity, particularly as there is a strong history of diplomatic and military links behind the current show of support for Israel's recent atrocities. As the author points out, "Israel is admired as a nation that stands on its own and is unashamed in using extreme force to maintain it."

Noting how Israel is dependent upon commercialising its military occupation, Loewenstein delves into the diplomacy that allowed the settler-colonial enterprise to take centre stage with its military technology and surveillance. Historically, Israel has supported dictatorships across the world, and it is still lauded as an example worthy of emulation. One such example of the latter came from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, whose vision for Ukraine would be **modelled on Israel**. In 2022, the then Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked described Israel as having "unprecedented opportunities" in terms of profiting from violence. With such a historical trajectory, it is little wonder.

Even before Israel was founded, Loewenstein notes, the Zionist movement had already established an arms trade dating back the 1930s during the years of the League of Nations British Mandate over Palestine. By the 1950s, Israel was exporting weapons, and arms manufacturer Elbit was established in 1966.

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The Guatemalan genocide was carried out with the aid of Israeli weapons

Loewenstein opens his discussion on Israeli exports of weapons with Chile, a subject which Israel is determined to hide from scrutiny by keeping relevant documents classified. However, US documents show that Israel was one of right-wing dictator Augusto Pinochet's main arms suppliers and note that even a change of government in Israel was unlikely to alter the status quo in that regard. Discussing the case of David Silbermann, a Jewish friend of President Salvador Allende who was disappeared by the Pinochet dictatorship, Loewenstein writes about how Israel refused to disclose relevant information to Silbermann's relatives. Chile is just one example of Israeli arms sales to dictatorships; others in the same era such as Guatemala, Paraguay, Argentina and Honduras also benefited from Israeli military technology. The Guatemalan genocide was carried out with the aid of Israeli weapons. This was nothing novel for Israel as Zionist paramilitary terror groups had already carried out the ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Palestinian population, paving the way for the settler-colonial state.

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Noting that the US was the only remaining superpower after the Cold War, Loewenstein expounds upon the impunity that the US reserves for Israel and how this ties into the settler-colonial enterprise as a whole. Israel reaped the benefits particularly after 11 September 2001, when it marketed its technology for use in the so-called war on terror. "We are benefiting from one thing, and that is the attack on the Twin Towers and Pentagon; and the American struggle in Iraq," said Benjamin Netanyahu in 2008 at Bar Ilan University.

"The post-9/11 war on terror reinforced Israel's decades-long practice of helping other states fight their own battles against unwanted populations," writes Loewenstein. "It was done with arguably less embarrassment because now the world's only superpower was doing exactly the same thing, regardless of whether it was led by a Democrat or Republican president."

As befits colonial violence, Israel has also conducted its arms exports and diplomacy in a way that would not pose any contradiction between what it supports one nation for doing, and what it does to the Palestinian people. Loewenstein notes that Israel participated in the Myanmar genocide through its arms sales with no restrictions, while also opposing the right of return for Rohingya refugees to prevent any scrutiny of its own refusal to adhere to the legitimate Palestinian **right of return**.

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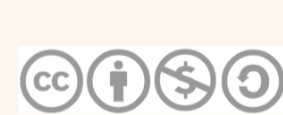
Surveillance technology is another dehumanising export which Israel tested upon Palestinians and which earns it billions of dollars. Facial recognition technology is used extensively in occupied Hebron. Notably, Israel plays a major role in Frontex, which monitors the Mediterranean to prevent migration towards Europe, by supplying the agency with Heron drones. Again, the surveillance technology is used against unwanted populations; thus, Israel is extending its own surveillance systems used against the Palestinian people. In Hungary and Bulgaria, the concept of building walls to keep refugees out was modelled on Israel's border fence with Egypt to keep out Ethiopian refugees.

What stands out in Loewenstein's book is Israel's global reach in terms of weapons and surveillance technology exports, which stands in contradiction to Israel's frequent assertion that it is a solitary state surrounded by hostile neighbours. On the contrary, Israeli military technology lies behind a multitude of human rights violations and crimes against humanity around the world. Its spyware, for example, has aided governments in tracking down and killing dissidents, the most recent notorious case triggering global attention was that of Saudi Arabian journalist **Jamal Khashoggi** in October 2018.

Loewenstein quotes the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security: "The growth of Israel's defence industries is a story of success inseparable from the history of the State of Israel and the entire Zionist project. Israel's defence industries are a source of national pride – and rightfully so."

There is little that ruptures this image, the author states. He also lists a possibility of mass forced displacement of Palestinians with no possibility of return, a scenario which is likely to unfold in Gaza. Loewenstein traces the international community's complicity with Israel in much detail. What is happening in Gaza now needs to be also considered from a global perspective to understand how, as the author writes, "Israel's Palestine laboratory thrives on global disruption and violence."

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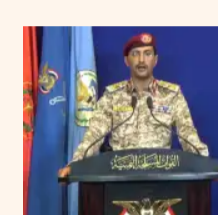
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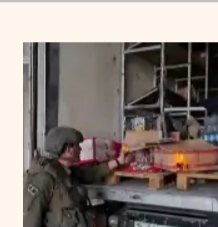
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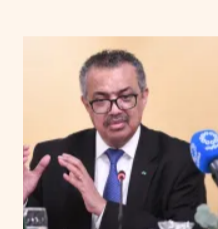
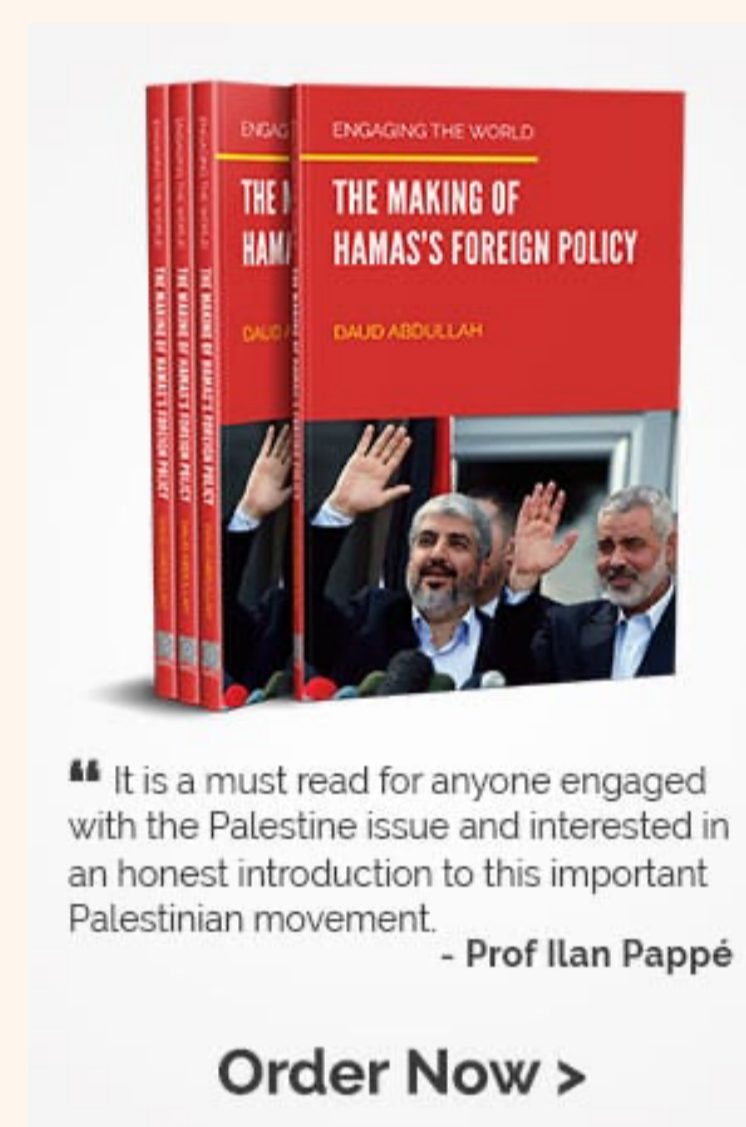
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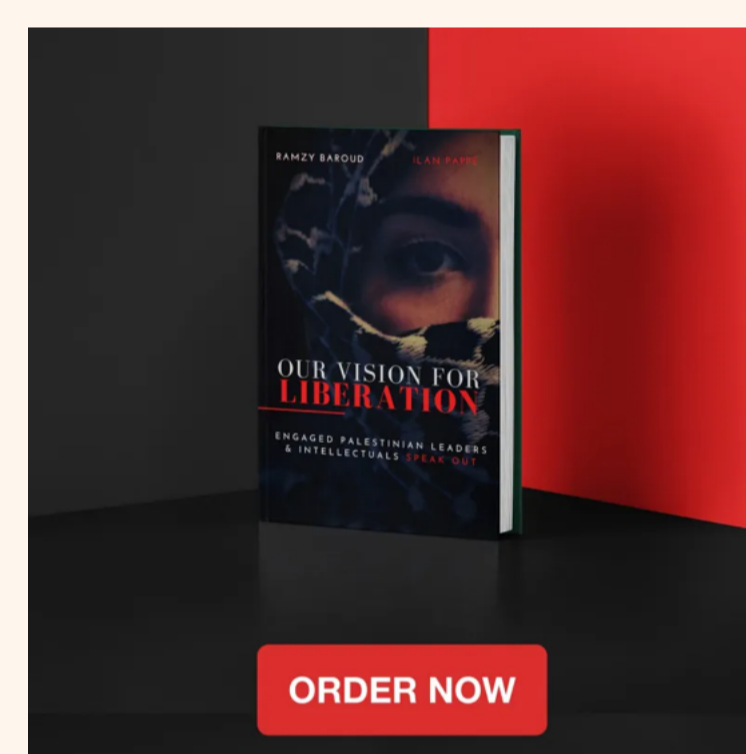


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