

OPINION

Opinions | Israel-Palestine conflict

When it comes to the Israeli-led 'war on terror', follow the money

Israel is embarking on a 'war on terror' that will benefit its military industrial complex, but will have devastating consequences.

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Israeli troops deployed in the Gaza Strip in a handout image released on November 19, 2023 by the Israeli army (Handout via Reuters)

It is easy to get distracted by US officials pledging to rally support for a "humanitarian pause" and reducing the number of civilian casualties in Israel's bombardment of Gaza.

But what matters is the actions of the Biden administration, not empty platitudes. In early November, the US State Department approved a \$320m sale of guided bomb kits, reportedly assisting Israel to more precisely hit targets in Gaza. According to The New York Times, "Modern militaries generally add the guidance systems on their bombs with the goal of minimizing civilian casualties, although the damage can still be devastating, especially in urban areas."

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The United Nations and every major human rights group in the world have routinely condemned Israeli actions in Gaza, along with the Hamas barbarism on October 7, and accused the Israeli army of potentially committing war crimes. Human Rights Watch has rightly called for a [suspension](#) of all weapons transfers to Israel and Hamas.

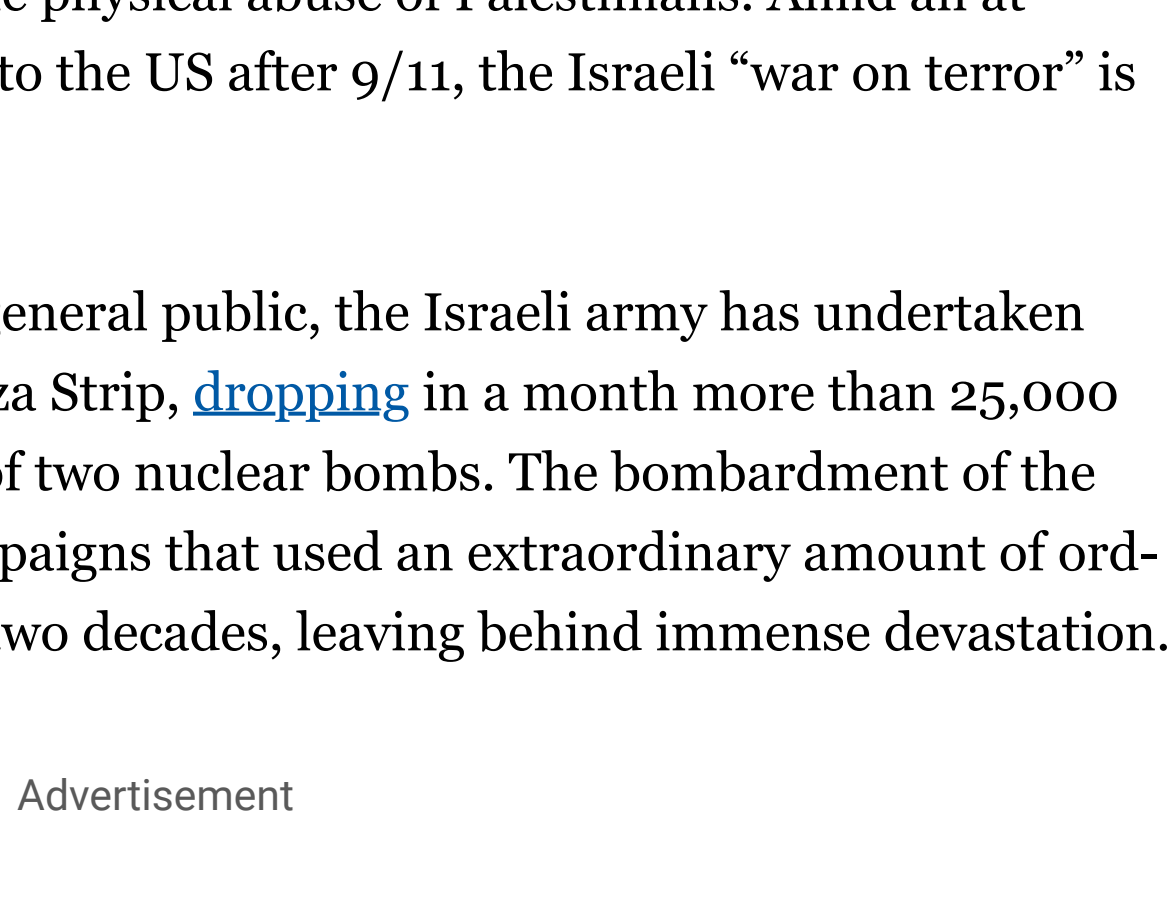
The spectre of 9/11 and the catastrophic response by the US after that fateful September day 22 years ago hangs over Israeli actions in the last month.

US President Joe Biden, in remarks in Israel on October 18, said, "After 9/11, we were enraged in the United States. And while we sought justice and got justice, we also made mistakes."

Calling some US actions after 9/11 "mistakes" is the height of imperial arrogance. During the Bush administration and beyond, inarguably the most destructive US presidency in the 21st century, there was a worldwide torture campaign, the creation and expansion of the detention centre in Guantanamo Bay, the illegal invasion of Iraq, the use of black sites for extraordinary rendition and the death of nearly five million people, according to Brown University's Cost of War Project.

Today, Israel is also filled with anger and vengeance and does not care one iota about the death of Palestinian civilians. Many in the Netanyahu-led government have expressed genocidal intent towards the entire Palestinian population. Most in the Israeli military and public are celebrating the physical abuse of Palestinians. Amid an atmosphere that is remarkably similar to the US after 9/11, the Israeli "war on terror" is taking shape.

With resounding approval from the general public, the Israeli army has undertaken systematic carpet bombing of the Gaza Strip, [dropping](#) in a month more than 25,000 tonnes of explosives, the equivalent of two nuclear bombs. The bombardment of the small enclave mirrors the US air campaigns that used an extraordinary amount of ordnance on Iraq and Afghanistan over two decades, leaving behind immense devastation.



There are already reports that Israel is also stepping up the use of torture against detainees. Since October 7, its forces have rounded up thousands of Palestinians, [including children](#), in the occupied West Bank. Many allege serious physical abuse and arbitrary detention. Palestinians from Gaza, who had worked in Israel, were also [arrested and tortured](#) before being released back to Gaza.

Violence by Israeli settlers and soldiers has also surged in the occupied West Bank. More than 200 Palestinians have been murdered, many by live ammunition, as far-right Israeli settlers are taking the opportunity to terrorise the Palestinian population while the world's attention is fixed on Gaza.

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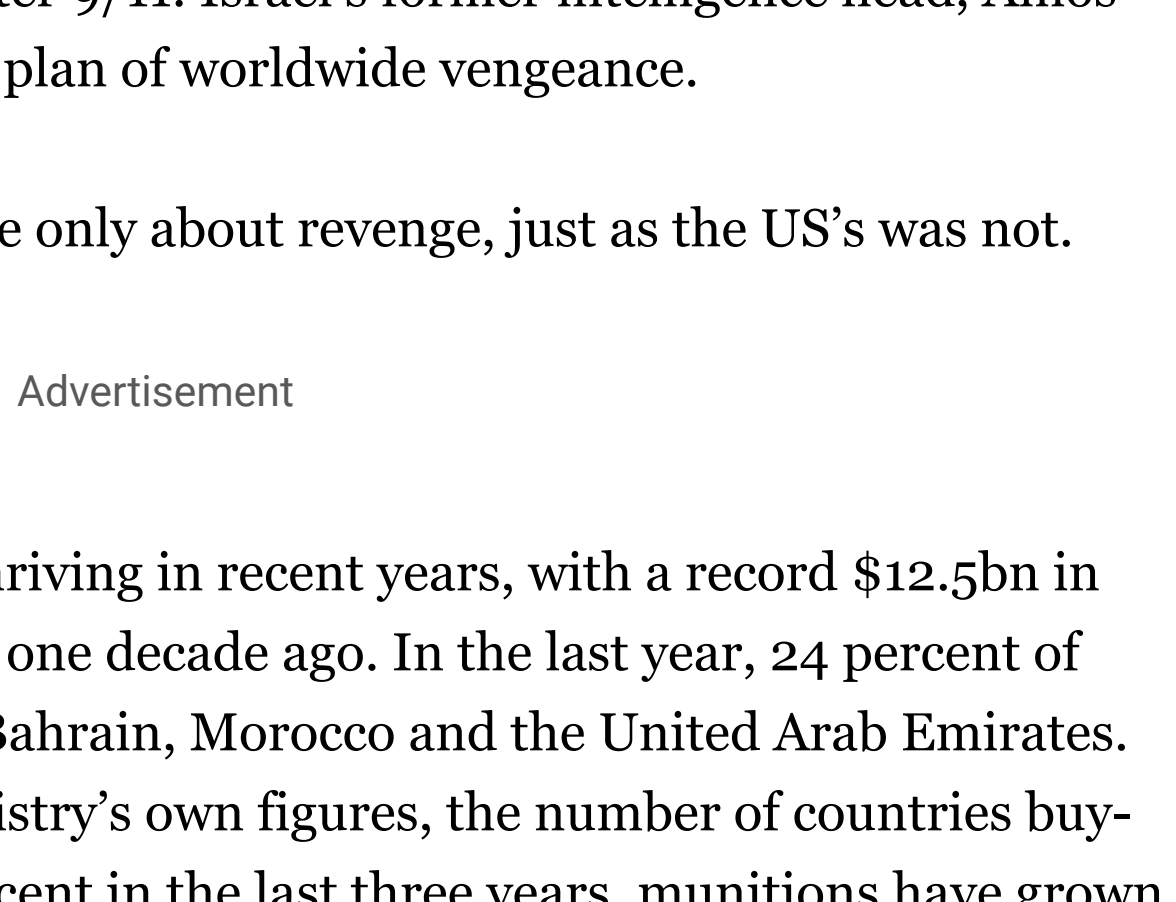
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The Israeli government has handed out thousands of weapons to settlers, with more potentially on the way, leaving Palestinians even more exposed than before to deadly violence, with no legitimate authority able to protect them.

In the months and years ahead, Israel will likely launch a global assassination drive to track, target and kill Hamas leaders and key backers, reminiscent of the US's own campaign of so-called targeted killings after 9/11. Israel's former intelligence head, Amos Yadlin, has confirmed this inevitable plan of worldwide vengeance.

But Israel's "war on terror" will not be only about revenge, just as the US's was not.



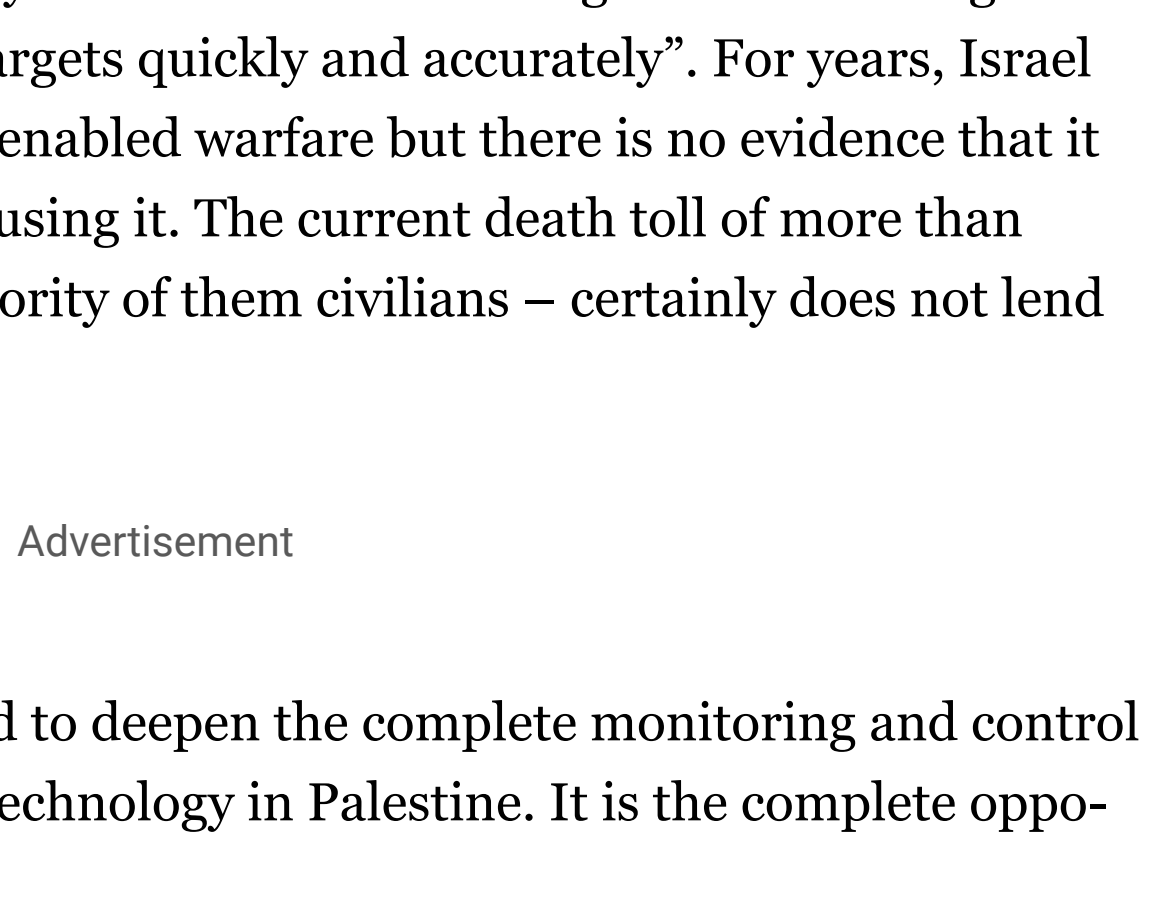
The Israeli arms industry has been thriving in recent years, with a record \$12.5bn in sales in 2022, double the figure from one decade ago. In the last year, 24 percent of arms went to Arab states, including Bahrain, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates. According to the Israeli Defence Ministry's own figures, the number of countries buying Israeli drones has jumped 40 percent in the last three years, munitions have grown by 45 percent and spyware and related cyber-equipment soared from 67 to 83 countries in 2022.

As I write in my book, The Palestine Laboratory, Israel has used both the endless occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, along with the siege on Gaza, to "battle-test" ever-evolving new forms of repression and surveillance. These offensive tools are then marketed and sold to the majority of nations on the planet.

In this context, the current war on Gaza will certainly be good for business. The Israeli army's social media team is already proudly promoting the first time in battle use of the Elbit-made Iron Sling, a mortar designed to hit Hamas rocket launching sites. This is a war for a local and global public audience as well as potential foreign buyers looking to build up their arsenal.

Israel is also likely hoping to expand the sale of its high-tech military and intelligence tools. Even Israeli spyware company, NSO Group, mired in scandals for years, is looking to get in on the action, pitching themselves to Washington as an essential part of this new "war on terror".

In its assault on Gaza, the Israeli army has boasted about using artificial intelligence (AI) in combat to "produce reliable targets quickly and accurately". For years, Israel has claimed that it is a pioneer in AI-enabled warfare but there is no evidence that it has reduced civilian casualties while using it. The current death toll of more than 12,000 people in Gaza – the vast majority of them civilians – certainly does not lend credence to this claim.



In the occupied West Bank, AI is used to deepen the complete monitoring and control of Palestinians. It is not a liberating technology in Palestine. It is the complete opposite.

Israel's pursuit of an ethno-nationalist agenda endangers both Palestinians and critical Jews within the country and across the world. Israel remains an inspiration for huge swaths of the global right and far right, from India to Hungary, in building a loose global coalition of nations opposed to immigration, multiculturalism and abiding by human rights norms.

With Israel claiming that it is fighting a war between so-called Western values and "barbarism", the decimation of Palestinians' lives and livelihoods in Gaza is a sign of an increasingly erratic and wild Israeli state. And yet, as it embarks on a dark and bloody "war on terror", the Western world is supporting it every step of the way.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera's editorial stance.

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