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Book Review

The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Around the World

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At a time when surveillance technologies and the authoritarian practices in which they are employed are increasingly sought after in different parts of the world, it is of great importance to understand why and how these technologies are developed, tested, and extended into regional and global spheres of influence. Antony Loewenstein's book *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Around the World* explores Israel's policies and actions in the field of surveillance and military technology, drawing attention to previously unexplored aspects of this domain. The study, which emerges as a combination of field reports, interviews, archival documents, and expert opinions, is based on Loewenstein's long-standing experience on the Israel-Palestine issue and is to be expected from his background as an investigative journalist. The book addresses the issue through seven main chapters: *Selling Weapons to Anybody Who Wants Them*, *September 11 Was Good for Business*, *Preventing an Outbreak of Peace*, *Selling Israeli Occupation to the World*, *The Enduring Appeal of Israeli Domination*, *Israeli Mass Surveillance in the Brain of Your Phone*, and *Social Media Companies Don't Like Palestinians*. The central argument of the book authored by Antony Loewenstein is that Israel uses Palestine as a "laboratory" for testing advanced surveillance, control, and warfare tools. Based on the experiences and data gathered from this context, Israel then sells these armed forces equipments to countries both within and outside the region. Loewenstein employs the concept of

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a "laboratory"—typically associated with the natural sciences—in a metaphorical sense, aligning it with Palestinian territories to portray them as a testing ground for Israeli military and surveillance technologies.

In this context, Palestinians, under prolonged Israeli occupation, are subjected to technologies such as drones, facial recognition, biometric data collection, and advanced monitoring systems. The book provides detailed accounts of how Israeli companies employ intelligence gathering systems that track Palestinians' movements, monitor their communications, and even attempt to predict their behavior. It draws attention to the critical role of Israeli companies in this process. For instance, firms like Elbit Systems and NSO Group play a pivotal role in the development and global sale of these technologies. Thanks to close ties between the Israeli government and private companies, these firms profit significantly from the occupation of Palestine and the international export of these tools.

As a result, the ongoing and seemingly endless occupation leads to the 'dehumanization' of Palestinians—and likewise, civilians in countries where such weapons and technologies are exported. This dehumanization is further reflected in the attitudes of senior Israeli military personnel who, working with such technologies, describe launching operations against civilians as being as "easy" as ordering a book on Amazon or a pizza on a smartphone—completely disregarding the human cost of such actions.

One of the most striking points here is undoubtedly how Israel, which today hosts more than 300 multinational companies and over 6,000 start-ups, has reached this level. The author points out that this was made possible by the foresight of David Ben-Gurion, the country's first Prime Minister during its founding years, who believed that establishing a weapons manufacturing industry would benefit the "Jewish state." In 1952, the substantial reparations paid by West Germany to Israel—motivated in part by a political acknowledgment of responsibility for the Holocaust—became a crucial financial foundation for Israel's investments in this sector. How Israel utilized this compensation significantly explains its status: channelling a large portion of the reparations secretly into weapons development and effective nuclear weapons research. Loewenstein further notes that aid from France and the United States also contributed to making the defence industry Israel's number one export sector. According to the book, the rise of Israel's defence industry to this level constitutes a major reason for not resolving the ongoing conflict with the Palestinians, as moving toward peace would harm both the founding ideology of the state and its long-term economic plans.

One of the strengths of Loewenstein's book is that it does not solely focus on the Palestinian territories; rather, it enriches the discussion with concrete examples that illustrate the interest of both regional and non-regional countries in these technologies. This indicates that the technologies produced by Israel have not only regional but also global consequences. This might be one of the reasons the book was awarded Australia's most prestigious journalism prize, the Walkley Book Award. According to Loewenstein, countries both within and outside the region have different motivations for acquiring these military technologies. While targeting journalists, human rights defenders, and political dissidents is seen as the primary motivation for both groups, other key reasons include suppressing and controlling their own populations under the guise of ensuring internal security and strengthening military capabilities by diversifying the sources of imported security technologies. For instance, Loewenstein notes that the Pegasus software developed by Israel has been used in countries like Saudi Arabia, India, and Hungary not only to control the population but also to install fear and exert pressure to prevent dissent and opposition in the future. On the other hand, Israel's border control technologies have been adopted by countries such as the United States, Mexico, and Australia to reinforce their borders and enhance surveillance systems.

The global acceptance of Israel's strategies of war, surveillance, and occupation indicates that the Gaza Strip and the West Bank have become symbols of modern occupation and of how warfare technologies and monitoring collaborations are integrated into global capitalism. At this point, Loewenstein finds it noteworthy that Israel's rapidly increasing sales, particularly in the defence sector—which reached a historic peak in 2021—saw exports rise to \$11.3 billion, marking a 55% increase within two years. The fact that Israeli cybersecurity firms, through dozens of recent deals, have generated a total of \$8.8 billion and expanded their global market share by more than 40%, illustrates how deeply this process is intertwined with global capitalism. According to the author, this has led Israel to adopt foreign policy behaviours like those of great powers, establishing global relations in a comparable manner, and ultimately pursuing an “opportunistic and morally detached foreign policy.” This, in turn, raises renewed ethical and humanitarian questions about the role of technology in modern conflicts.

While the book is praised for many aspects, it should be noted that, being written by a journalist, it lacks a theoretical and methodological framework—something the author does not claim to provide. Nonetheless, the fact that the issues discussed in the book are not categorized in a systematic way leads to repetition in certain parts and may make it difficult for readers to evaluate the content within an analytical framework. In conclusion, Antony Loewenstein's *The Palestine*

Laboratory stands out as an illuminating work examining the intersection of security technology, occupation, and global power. Through his years of experience in journalism, Loewenstein presents extensive research and compelling case studies that not only encourage critical thinking about the role of technology in modern warfare but also draw attention to the ethical responsibilities involved in the international transfer of military technologies. Ultimately, *The Palestine Laboratory* issues a warning about the potentially dangerous world order that could emerge if Israel's model of ethnic nationalism—imposed on Palestinians and exported globally—continues to spread. It is also a call to action. As Loewenstein himself states, “as a human being and as a Jew,” his goal is to expose the covert methods and technologies that sustain decades-long discrimination. In this context, the book calls on all of humanity to resist the normalization of militarized technologies by governments and to recognize that the fight for global justice must transcend national and regional boundaries in defence of individual freedoms.

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