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Behind the war on Gaza – how Israel profits globally from repression

The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel exports the technology of occupation around the world, by Antony Loewenstein. Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2023. 265 pages. ISBN 9781922310408.

JUST MONTHS before the outbreak of the genocidal Israeli war on Gaza after the deadly assault on southern Israel by Hamas resistance fighters on 7 October 2023, Australian-German investigative journalist and researcher Antony Loewenstein published an extraordinarily timely book, *The Palestine Laboratory*.

In it he warned that a worst-case scenario—‘long feared but never realised, is ethnic cleansing against occupied Palestinians or population transfer, forcible expulsion under the guise of national security’.

Also the claimed fig leaf of ‘self-defence’ was an obscene justification offered by beleaguered Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for his eight-month war of vengeance, death and destruction unleashed upon the people of Palestine, both in the Gaza



Strip and the Occupied West Bank, that has killed at least 36,000 Gazans—71 percent of them women and children—and more than 502 Palestinians in the occupied West Bank.

As Loewenstein had warned in his 265-page exposé on the Israeli armaments and surveillance industry and how the Zionist nation ‘exports the technology of occupation around the world’, a catastrophic war could trigger an overwhelming argument within Israel that Palestinians were ‘undermining the state’s integrity’.

That catastrophe has indeed arrived. But in the process, as part of growing worldwide protests in support of an immediate ceasefire and calls for a ‘free Palestine’ long-term solution, Israel has exposed itself as a cruel, ruthless and morally corrupt state pre-

pared to slaughter women and children, attack hospital and medical workers, kill journalists and shun international norms of military conflict to achieve its goal of destroying Hamas, the elected government of Gaza.

Interviewed by Al Jazeera after a four-day temporary truce (which was extended) between Israel and Hamas took effect, author Loewenstein described the conflict as ‘apocalyptic’ and the most devastating in almost 80 years since the Second World War.

He also blamed the death and destruction on Western countries that had allowed the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) to ‘get away with things that no other country could because of total global impunity’.

The United States, led by a feeble and increasingly lame duck President Joe Biden—‘genocide Joe’, as some US protesters have branded him—and several Western countries have lost credibility over any debate about global human rights.

As Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan says, the US and the West have enabled the ethnic cleansing and displayed a double standard by condemning Hamas for its atrocities on October 7 while giving Israel a blank cheque for its crimes against humanity and war crimes in both Gaza and the Occupied West Bank.

In fact, as Erdoğan has increasingly condemned the Zionists, he has branded Israel as a ‘terror state’ and says that Israeli leaders should be tried for war crimes at the International Criminal Court. Indeed, the International Court

of Justice at The Hague ruled in January 2024 that it was ‘plausible’ that Israel had committed genocide in Gaza in a case brought by South Africa and it ordered the Israel military not to take actions that violate the Genocide Convention (Al-Kassab, 2024).

It has also been disturbing that President Biden has publicly repeated Israeli lies in the conflict and Western media has often disseminated these falsehoods (Al Jazeera, 2023). Media analysts say there is systemic ‘bias in favour of Israel’ which is ‘irreparably damaging’ the credibility of some news agencies and outlets considered ‘mainstream’ in the eyes of Arabs and others (Nashed, 2023).

Loewenstein, who was awarded Australia’s 2023 Walkley Award in the journalism book category in November 2023 (Scribe, 2023), warned in *The Palestine Laboratory* that ‘an Israeli operation might be undertaken to ensure a mass exodus, with the prospect of Palestinians returning to their homes a remote possibility’ (p. 211).

Many critics fear the bottom line for Israel’s war on Palestine is not the elimination of Hamas—which was elected the government of Gaza in 2006—but the destruction of the enclave’s infrastructure, hence the savage assault on almost all of the Strip’s 32 hospitals (including the Indonesian Hospital) and bombing of 49 percent of the housing for 2.3 million people. Loewenstein reports:

In a 2016 poll conducted by [the] Pew Research Centre, nearly half of Israeli Jews supported the transfer or

expulsion of Arabs. And some 60 percent of Israeli Jews backed complete separation from Arabs, according to a study in 2022 by the Israeli Democracy Institute. The majority of Israeli Jews polled online in 2022 supported the expulsion of people accused of disloyalty to the state, a policy advocated by popular far-right politician Itamar Ben-Gvir (p. 211).

Dangerous escalation

Loewenstein saw the reelection in November 2022 of Netanyahu as Prime Minister and as head of the most right-wing coalition in the Israel's history as ushering in a dangerous escalation of existential threats facing Palestinians.

The author, who is himself of Jewish origin, cites liberal Israeli columnist and journalist Gideon Levy in *Haaretz* reminding his readers of 'an uncomfortable truth' after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Levy wrote that the long-held Israeli belief that military power 'was all that matters to stay alive, was a lie' (p. 206). Levy wrote:

The lesson Israel should be learning from Ukraine is the opposite. Military power is not enough, it is impossible to survive alone, we need true international support, which can't be bought just by developing drones and drop bombs.

Levy argued that the 'age of the Jewish state paralysing the world when it cries "anti-semitism"' was coming to a close.

The daily television scenes—especially on Al Jazeera and TRT World News, arguably offering some of the most balanced, comprehensive and nuanced coverage of the massacres

(in contrast to such media as BBC and CNN with journalists embedded with the Israeli Defence Force—have borne witness to the rogue status of Israel.

Turkey's President Erdoğan has been one of the strongest critics of Netanyahu's war machine, warning that Israel's leaders will be made accountable for their war crimes. His condemnation has been paralleled by multiple petitions and actions seeking International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutions against Israeli leaders, including demanding an arrest warrant for Netanyahu himself.

According to Loewenstein, Israel's 'Palestine laboratory' and its toxic ideology thrives on global disruption and violence. As he says:

The worsening climate crisis will benefit Israel's defence sector in a future where nation-states do not respond with active measures to reduce the impacts of surging temperatures but instead ghetto-ise themselves, Israeli-style. What this means in practice is higher walls and tighter borders, greater surveillance of refugees, facial recognition, drones, smart fences, and biometric databases (p. 207).

By 2025, Loewenstein points out, the border surveillance industrial complex is estimated to become worth US\$68 billion, and Israeli companies such as Elbit Systems are 'guaranteed to be among the main beneficiaries'.

Three years ago Israel spent US\$22 billion on its military and is the 12th biggest military supplier in the world, with sales of more than US\$345 million.

The potency of Palestine as a laboratory for methods of controlling ‘unwanted people’ and a separation of populations is the primary focus of Loewenstein’s book. The many case studies of Israeli apartheid with corporations showcasing and profiting from the suppression and persecution of Palestinians are featured.

The book is divided into seven chapters, with a conclusion, headed ‘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,’ ‘Israel mass surveillance in the brain of your phone,’ and ‘Social media companies don’t like Palestinians.’

How Israel has such influence over Silicon Valley—along with many Western governments—is ‘both obvious and ominous for the future of marginalised groups, because it is not just the Jewish state that has discovered the Achilles heel of big tech’.

Examples cited by Loewenstein include India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi successfully demanding that Facebook remove posts critical of his government’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, and evidence of Facebook posts causing ‘real harm against minorities’ in Myanmar and Russia as well as India and Palestine.

The company’s global policy team argued that they risked having the platform shut down completely if they did not comply with government requests.

Profits before human rights.

Loewenstein refers to social media calls for genocide against the Muslim minority having ‘moved from the fringes to the mainstream’. Condemning this, Loewenstein remarks: ‘Leaving these comments up, which routinely happens, is deeply irresponsible’ (p. 197).

He argues that his book is a warning that ‘despotism has never been so easily shareable with compact technology’. He explains:

The ethnonationalist ideas behind it are appealing to millions of people because democratic leaders have failed to deliver. A Pew Research Centre survey across 34 countries in 2020 found only 44 percent of those polled were content with democracy, while 52 percent were not. Ethnonationalist ideology grows when accountable democracy withers, Israel is the ultimate model and goal’ (p. 16).

The September 11, 2001, terror attacks on New York and Washington ‘turbocharged Israel’s defence sector and internationalised the war on terror that the Jewish state had been fighting for decades’ (p. 49).

Along with health workers (200 killed and the total climbing), journalists have suffered a heavy price for reporting Israel’s relentless bombardment with at least 142 dead in Gaza (Haboush, 2024; Robie, 2024)

The Paris-based media freedom watchdog Reporters without Borders has accused Israel of seeking to ‘eradicate journalism in Gaza’ by refusing to heed calls to protect media workers (RSF, 2023).

The situation is dire for Palestinian journalists trapped in the enclave, where ten have been killed in the past three days, bringing the total media death toll in Gaza since the start of the war to 48. The past weekend was the deadliest for the media since the war between Israel and Hamas began.

RSF also said Gaza from north to south had ‘become a cemetery for journalists’.

Of the 10 journalists killed between November 18-20, at least three were killed in the course of their work or because of it. They were: Hassouna Sleem, director of the Palestinian online news agency *Quds News*, and freelance photo-journalist Sary Mansour who were killed during an Israeli assault on the Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip on November 18.

According to RSF, they had received an online death threat in connection with their work 24 hours prior to them being killed.

Journalist Bilal Jadallah was killed by an Israeli strike that hit his car directly as he was trying to evacuate from Gaza City via the district of Zeitoun on the morning of November 19.

He was a prominent figure within the Palestinian media community and held several positions including chair of the board of Press House-Palestine, an organisation supporting independent media and journalists in Gaza.

Most of the journalists were killed with family members when Israeli strikes hit their homes, reports RSF (2023).

It is offensive that British and US news media should refer to Hamas

as ‘terrorists’ in their news bulletins, regardless of the fact that the US and UK governments have declared them as such. They are resistance fighters. As a former journalist with British and French news agencies for several years, I wonder what has happened to the maxim that had applied since the post-Second World War anticolonialism struggles—one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter. Thus ‘neutral’ descriptions were generally used.

As President Erdoğan, has already pointed out, Hamas are nationalists fighting against 76 years of Zionist Israeli colonialism and apartheid. Palestine is the occupied territory; Israel is the illegal occupier (Gavin, 2023).

Loewenstein argues in his book that Israel has sold so much defence equipment and surveillance technologies, such as the phone-hacking tool Pegasus, that it had hoped to ‘insulate itself’ from any political backlash to its endless occupation.

However, the tide has turned, with several countries such as South Africa, Brazil and Turkey closing Israeli embassies and recalling their diplomats. The UN General Assembly overwhelmingly voted 143-9 in May 2024 for Palestinian statehood (UN General Assembly votes, 2024); the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordering a halt to Israel’s assault on Rafah (defied by Tel Aviv) on the ongoing South African genocide case against Israel; and the separate International Criminal Court (ICC) chief prosecutor’s application for an arrest warrant against Netanyahu and other Israeli and Hamas leaders

for alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes are all evidence of this change.

There is a shift in global opinion in response to the massive price that the Palestinian people have been paying for Israeli apartheid and repression for 76 years. While Iran has long been portrayed by the West as a threat to regional peace, the relentless and ruthless bombardment of the Gaza Strip for eight months has demonstrated to the world that Israel is actually a threat.

However, Israel is on the wrong side of history, as demonstrated by *The Palestinian Laboratory*; it has become a global best seller and translated into multiple languages. Whatever Israel does, the Palestinians will remain defiant and resilient.

Palestine will become a free, sovereign state. It is essential that international community pressure ensures that this happens for a just and lasting peace.

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