

Technologies of Death and Oppression

Halper, Jeff. *War against the People: Israel, the Palestinians, and Global Pacification*. London: Pluto Press, 2015. xi + 280 pages, notes to 324, online resources to 325, index to 340.

Book Review by
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In the first lines of *War against the People*, Jeff Halper poses the question that has long imposed itself on those who stand in opposition to the Israeli occupation: “How does Israel get away with it?” In the post-colonial age, “how is Israel able to sustain a half-century occupation over the Palestinians, a people it violently displaced in 1948, in the face of almost unanimous international opposition [to the occupation of 1967]?” (1). Over the course of the book, Halper sets about answering this question by unveiling the methods employed by the Israeli state to develop its military, security, and technological capabilities. He demonstrates how Israel builds a wide network of international relationships based on transferring its experiences and technologies of repression and occupation to other countries. These relationships, and the mutual interests that are born of them, contribute to making Israel unaccountable for its continuous violation of international law and human rights and its ongoing disregard of numerous resolutions issued by various United Nations bodies.

Halper, who was born in the United States and holds both American and Israeli citizenship, is best known as one of the founders and leaders of the Israeli Committee against House Demolitions (ICAHD). ICAHD, established in 1997, monitors and confronts the home demolitions carried out by successive governments in the territories occupied since 1967. It has documented over 47,000 homes and buildings demolished by the Israeli authorities since 1967, under various pretexts and conditions. ICAHD also seeks, in cooperation with local and international volunteers, to rebuild some of these destroyed Palestinian homes and structures.

In *War against the People*, Halper details the evolution of the state of Israel, from its formative years, in building its military and

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security capabilities to become a power of regional, even international, significance. This includes the manufacture of arms – conventional and unconventional, light and heavy – using the latest scientific and technological developments. Israel has manufactured all kinds of weaponry and tools to kill, oppress, and exert “total domination” in the context of what the author calls the policies of “pacification,” which target the Palestinian people in particular. These tools are not restricted to conventional military operations and warfare, but are increasingly turned against popular movements inside Israeli-controlled territories, whether those taken in 1948 or in 1967, and especially in the occupied Palestinian territories (the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip).

Of course, Israel would not have succeeded in developing its military capabilities without the support of major external powers: European countries (such as France, Britain, and West Germany) during the 1950s and most of the 1960s; then, after the 1967 war, the backing of United States on a much larger scale. Early direct U.S. military support – which began in the early 1960s when the Kennedy administration provided Israel with the Hawk surface-to-air missile system (40–41) – evolved into massive U.S. support for military development projects after the Israeli Army proved itself “worthy” by confronting several Arab armies in the 1967 war. In this war, Israel struck a significant blow against the most important Arab “allies” of the Soviet Union, the United States’ main adversary during the Cold War, especially the independent nationalist regime of Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasir in Egypt.

Since 1967, U.S. arms have flowed to Israel with great rapidity, with even the most sophisticated weaponry sometimes arriving in Israel before it reaches Washington’s European allies in NATO. Since 1970, under the Nixon administration and the influence of Henry Kissinger, agreements were signed to transfer U.S. military technologies directly to Israel, which contributed to the rapid advancement of Israeli military production (whose roots, it may be noted, preceded the establishment of the state) in all kinds of weaponry and allowed Israel to become one of the foremost arms exporters worldwide. Since 1981, for example, Israel ranks seventh among world arms exporters (41).

In total, U.S. aid to Israel since 1949, overwhelmingly military, has exceeded 120 billion dollars (92). Since 1982, U.S. funding has comprised more than one-third of the Israeli military budget (42). All of this has allowed Israel to continue to develop its own military industries, to increase its exports of various kinds of weaponry, and to widen the scope of its international relations based on these military capabilities and the support it has been able to provide in this regard to states, regimes, and groups across the world. Israel’s official and declared military trade (that is, excluding its clandestine trade) involves more than 130 countries (67), with military sales revenues soaring from around one billion U.S. dollars in the early 1980s to almost nine billion dollars at present (193).

As mentioned above, Israeli military manufacturing includes not only light weaponry, but also heavy machinery such as tanks, airplanes, ships, and missile systems of various ranges (including nuclear-equipped long-range missiles). Israel’s nuclear capabilities, established with French assistance in the late 1950s, are now an “open secret.” Halper, citing *Jane’s Defense Weekly* and the International Institute for Strategic Studies, estimates that Israel currently possesses between one hundred and three hundred nuclear warheads

(113). The Israeli military industry also includes various advanced high-tech products such as unmanned aerial drones with both surveillance and offensive capacities, crewless self-propelled naval vehicles, and unmanned tanks and armored combat vehicles. All of these are capable of simultaneously collecting data, destroying targets, and killing people (128). In this context, Israel has been at the forefront of rapid development of multi-tasked military robotics. Halper cites Charles Levinson who estimates that in ten to fifteen years, one-third of Israel's military machines will be self-propelled, meaning that they will not rely on direct human involvement, thus reducing losses among combat troops (128).

Aside from robotics, Israeli military industries have focused on the militarization and weaponization of research in scientific fields including genetics, nanotechnology, and biotechnology (109). As early as 1973, when Israel's military elite came to believe that the United States had withheld crucial satellite information regarding Egyptian and Syrian military build-ups on the eve of the October 1973 war, Israel began developing military technology in space (98). In 1982, Israel inaugurated a space agency and it launched its first satellite (Ofeq) in 1988. Since then, Israel has launched ten Ofeq satellites, mainly with spying objectives. In 2014, Israel launched Ofeq-10, which is aimed at the Middle East and the southern half of the globe (99). Israeli satellites now survey the Middle East more thoroughly than those of any other country in the world, including the United States. As a result, Israel now provides (and sells) data and information collected by its satellites to other Middle East regimes (101). Ofeq-11 was launched in September 2016.

Jeff Halper's most important contribution in *War against the People* is the detailed treatment of Israel's developments in the realm of "internal security" – the collection of information and imposition of internal control inside Israel and in the occupied territories. Israel has been a pioneer in this domain, not only with regard to developing instruments of internal control and repression to serve its occupation, but also in the export of these tools and techniques. This is based in part on the fact that these methods have been "field tested" in the occupied territories, "experience" that Israel believes distinguishes these weapons among potential customers. Israel has accumulated "security-state structures, tactics, and weaponry," especially in its attempts to quell Palestinian popular movements and resistance to the occupation, making it an internationally advanced state in what Halper calls "securocratic" war (84). Israel's exports of internally oriented information technology security tools reach \$1.5 billion annually; meanwhile, Israeli experts train "army units, elite presidential guards and security agencies, national and local police" in countries the world over (67). Halper quotes Israeli psychologist Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, who notes: "Israeli advisers have much to offer in the technology of death and oppression, and that is why they are so much in demand" (64). Thus, Israel's "internal security" industry and expertise has become a desirable commodity among various repressive regimes the world over interested in confronting and quashing national liberation movements and popular domestic movements more generally.

The attacks of 11 September 2001 had a particularly significant impact on the growth of this sector of the repressive internal military – or "homeland security" – industry. Halper cites Canadian author and scholar Naomi Klein who has shown that the "global homeland security industry" was limited before 2001, but was worth two hundred billion

dollars by 2007 and more than four hundred billion dollars by 2013 (26). Halper brings up to date Beit-Hallahmi's Cold War analysis: "What is exported is not just technology, armaments, and experience, not just expertise, but a certain frame of mind, a feeling that the Third World can be controlled and dominated, that radical movements in the Third World can be stopped, that modern Crusaders still have a future" (64).

This context has produced an increasingly militarized police and led to the overlapping of domestic and foreign security domains. Israel has integrated the military function with internal security contrary to the model considered typical of "liberal democracies." Halper points out that in 2014, Israel was ranked (for the seventh straight year) the most militarized country according to the Global Militarization Index (38). This integration of foreign military and domestic security arenas has been copied in countries around the world, throwing a number of dictatorships in the Global South into competition to benefit from Israeli experience in this area (167) and leading to an all-out attack on civil liberties under the pretext of combating terrorism (80–81).

This boom, and the spread of Israeli experience, has not been confined to the Global South, however. Even the United States, itself historically a pioneer in the field of arms and security, is now benefiting from Israel's "expertise." The United States has adopted Israeli methods during its post-2003 military occupation of Iraq (44–45, 90). The U.S. military participated in trainings to occupy (Arab) cities and towns in maneuvers held in the Negev desert, where Israel constructed a virtual Arab city to field test methods of storming homes and buildings and population control (188–89). Halper believes that U.S.-Israeli coordination increasingly reflects U.S. adoption and exploitation of Israeli experience in the arena of internal security, particularly after the attacks of 11 September 2011, but also before them (250–51).

Halper also writes of "the deep penetration of Israeli security doctrines into U.S. law enforcement" (252). In the largest U.S. city, for example, the New York Police Department has applied Israeli "security" methods developed and practiced in the occupied West Bank (261). Halper cites Max Blumenthal on the "Israelification of America's security apparatus," particularly evident in the U.S. police reaction to the Occupy Wall Street movement – a social movement that flourished briefly in the United States after the Egyptian popular revolution of 2011 and took as a model the popular mobilization in Cairo's Tahrir Square (262). Whereas the American school of policing was, in the past, more cautious in dealing with what it considered violations in U.S. neighborhoods and streets, the Israeli model (as defined in the occupied Palestinian territories) is violently aggressive and oppressive (264). Perhaps U.S. police officers' swift recourse to deadly force toward those stopped for various offences (many of them African-Americans), rather than attempting to arrest or detain them, can be seen as one of the "lessons learned" from the Israeli "experience." In the same context, Halper finds on both sides, in Israel and the United States, the tendency to integrate the domestic security industrial complex with the military industrial complex. This is accompanied by the tendency to integrate the security sectors of the two allies, producing what Stephen Graham calls "a single diversified, transnational entity" (253).

Israeli-U.S. cooperation also extends into cyberspace. Israel has become the second largest global exporter of internet-related products – behind only the United States – with the value of its exports reaching approximately \$3 billion in 2012 (92, 266). Halper discusses the joint U.S.-Israeli Stuxnet cyber-attack that targeted Iranian uranium enrichment infrastructure in 2010 (106–7). This was, it should be mentioned, combined with more “old fashioned” methods, such as an assassination campaign planned by the United States and Israel to target Iranian nuclear scientists (107).

One-fifth of Israeli military exports, Halper notes, go to the United States. The remainder of its military-security exports goes to a number of countries, at the forefront of which are India, China, Poland, South Korea, Australia, Thailand, Colombia, Brazil, and Chile (92). Israel has also worked to develop its relations with former Soviet Central Asian countries, particularly Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan (204). Azerbaijan alone purchased four billion dollars’ worth of weapons from Israel between 2011 and 2014 (206). Israel has taken advantage of its relationship with Azerbaijan, which borders Iran, to intensify its surveillance of Iranian territory (207). As for Israel’s relationship with Singapore, since the latter’s independence in the 1960s, Israel has helped build up its military, including the army and the Singapore Guards (213). It is no coincidence that Singapore ranks second, after Israel, on the list of the world’s most militarized countries (38).

In its marketing, Israel stresses the “efficiency” of its weapons, especially those relating to domestic or internal security, as a result of its experience and “achievements,” particularly its “success” in maintaining long-term control over the Palestinian population in the occupied territories. Israel has turned the occupied Palestinian territories “into probably the most monitored, controlled, and militarized place on earth” (143). Given that Israel, Halper argues, has no desire to offer the Palestinians what is required to end the conflict – either political independence or equal civil rights within a single political entity – the “only alternative is therefore pacification with all that entails: intimidation, isolation, confrontation, and the use of disproportionate force, all intended to induce despair over attaining national rights and breaking the Palestinians’ resistance” (145). Further, Israel has transformed its inability – or lack of desire – to resolve its conflict with the Palestinians “into a marketing advantage, for its failure to come to terms with the Palestinians is not presented as a failure at all, but as a successful case of pacification” that can be applied by other regimes facing internal challenges (144). Israel has become what Graham refers to as the “ultimate source of ‘combat-proven’ techniques and technology” (250). The spread of these mechanisms and technologies of repressive control across the world thus produces a global “Palestinianization,” in terms of how counter-hegemonic movements for rights, justice, and liberation are treated as security subjects (253–54).

Halper concludes from this diagnosis the necessity for an international response to this global repressive process. The staggering development of Israel’s military, technological, and scientific capabilities (and those of its allies among advanced industrialized countries, foremost among them the United States) does not nullify the possibility of confronting and resisting its policies, indeed all policies of repression and pacification in the world, nor of the victory of the people in this confrontation. Halper points to the Lebanese

resistance's success in destroying and damaging more than fifty sophisticated Merkava tanks during Israel's 2006 war on Lebanon (124). Halper calls for a global response to the campaign of "pacification" and this project of global hegemony in order to increase coordination and activity among all activists and concerned parties and to challenge the "war against the people" that is being fought worldwide.

The vast trove of rich information covered by Halper in this book – all the more remarkable given that Halper is not an expert in military affairs, as he himself admits – will certainly be useful for those forces and peoples affected by Israeli aggression, as well as other imperialist powers' global wars, aggressions, and violations. The tremendous development of military and internal repression sectors must not push progressive people and liberation movements into frustration and fear; on the contrary, it should spur them to arm themselves with a clearer vision of the nature of wars and modern "pacification" operations waged by a settler-colonial state, even a regional imperial power, such as Israel, as well as other states that adopt the same methods and use the same tools. Popular confrontation is possible, but its efficacy is linked to a clear reading of the data and devising the appropriate and most effective means to deal with it. From this angle, *War against the People* is an important contribution, allowing the peoples and liberatory movements in the Middle East in particular to advance their knowledge of the challenges that they face. Its title is significant and telling.

One side note, however, seems worth making: Halper speaks more than once of the states that might emerge as counter-hegemony, and suggests the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and MINT (Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Turkey) states as possible candidates (16, 195–96). However, elsewhere in the book he notes that Israel was the fourth-largest supplier of arms to India in 2013, and in some years has been its second-largest supplier. Israel has sold ten billion dollars' worth of weaponry to India in the twenty-first century (214). Halper also notes that Brazil is the fifth-largest importer of Israeli weapons in the world (221), despite the fact that there are popular movements there that actively oppose this military relationship and have even succeeded at times in disrupting some joint projects with Israel (223). We can, of course, expect closer ties between Israel and Brazil after the summer 2016 overthrow of the left-wing government of Dilma Rousseff and her succession by the right-wing presidency of Michel Temer – although we should also expect growing popular opposition in Brazil to the entire right-wing agenda of the new government. Meanwhile, Mexico, the second most populous country in Latin America after Brazil, is (as Halper also notes) among the American states most tightly woven into Israel's web of military/arms relations and alliances (195–96). Nigeria is the largest African importer of Israeli weaponry, accounting for nearly half of Israeli arms exports to sub-Saharan Africa (212). It seems clear, then, that the BRICS bloc is not homogenous in terms of a position toward the states of "global hegemony" and their repressive projects of pacification, nor in terms of their subordination to and dependence on these hubs of domination. This is even more pronounced with regard to MINT, at least in terms of independence, despite these countries' large populations.

This is a note of secondary importance, however, and does not impact the overall importance of this book and the great effort made by the author to gather information and

contextualize it in an overarching global vision of confronting the forces of oppression, exploitation, and tyranny in the world, Israel prominent among them. Halper has provided indispensable facts and data for those in the region interested in addressing Israel's methods and tools of dominance with a clear-sighted vision. As Israeli hegemony develops constantly on multiple levels, any strategy to confront this "war against the people" cannot be effective without serious knowledge of the mechanisms that have allowed Israel to sustain its occupation and its oppression of the Palestinian people; to stymie their aspirations for liberation; to launch attacks on the peoples of the surrounding areas; and to instrumentalize its manifold and widespread relations with other regimes around the world, using its military capabilities and experience in oppression and "pacification" and its superiority in various advanced technologies that it has acquired or developed in order to reinforce and cement these relationships. These – along with the expansive protection provided by the United States – have helped and continue to help Israel evade accountability for its actions and its ongoing violations of international law and resolutions, which Israel treats as mere ink on paper and which produce no change in the reality on the ground.

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