

Israeli War Crimes: 'In An Endless War on Terror, We Are All Doomed to Become Palestinians'

Review of Jeff Halper's Book

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Halper's new book sheds light on the arms industry, arguing that Israel is now the go-to nation for armies and police forces around the world

For 18 years Jeff Halper has been on the front lines of the Israel-Palestine conflict, helping to rebuild Palestinian homes in the occupied territories demolished by Israel. As he prepares to step down as head of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), he is publishing a new book on Israel.

Halper's main conclusion is disturbing. Israel, he says, is globalising Palestine.

The former anthropology professor's wide-ranging research has forced him into an expertise he is not entirely comfortable with: the global arms industry.

Halper argues that Israel is cashing in – both financially and diplomatically – on systems of control it has developed in the occupied territories. It is exporting its know-how to global elites keen to protect their privileges from both external and internal challengers.

In a world supposedly mired in an endless war on terror, we may all be facing a future as Palestinians.

Halper's book, entitled *War Against the People*, [due out next month](#), suggests that Israel provides a unique window on some of the most important recent developments in what he terms "securocratic warfare".

The book's central thesis emerged as he tried to understand why tiny Israel hits way beyond its weight economically, politically and militarily. How does Israel have so much clout – not only in the US and Europe but, more surprisingly, in countries as diverse as India, Brazil and China?

None of the usual explanations – Holocaust guilt, the power of lobbies, even the growth in Christian fundamentalism – seemed to provide a complete answer.

Global pacification

Zeev Maoz, an Israeli political science professor based in California, set Halper on a different track. "He has observed that one of the Zionist movement's fundamental tenets was to tie its wagon to a hegemon, serving it," Halper says.

The Zionists did that early on by cultivating British support in Palestine. Once established as a state, Israel helped the French and British at Suez in 1956, and after 1967 Israel served as a US surrogate in the Middle East during the Cold War.

Today, Israel's growing influence, Halper claims, reflects its positioning of itself at the heart of the rapidly burgeoning "global pacification" industry, advising and assisting militaries, police forces and homeland security agencies around the world.

In the post-9/11 world, Israel is security king - or "securityland", as a leading Israeli analyst recently [described](#) it.

And significantly, Israel is starting to parlay this usefulness into wider political and diplomatic support, says Halper, even as the international community grows exasperated by nearly 50 years of occupation. Such backing, including from much of the Arab world, often remains hidden from view.

US president Dwight Eisenhower's grim warning from the 1950s that a rampant "military-industrial complex" was threatening to become the real power behind the façade of popular democracy needs updating, says Halper.

He describes the emergence of what he calls the MISSILE complex: full-spectrum dominance by the US and its allies through the joint activity of the military, internal security, surveillance, intelligence and law enforcement.

After decades of controlling Palestinians under occupation, he notes, Israel is unrivalled in all these spheres. It uses the occupied territories as a giant laboratory for developing and testing new ideas, technology, tactics and weaponry.

An arms superpower

As we meet at his home in West Jerusalem, Halper is keen to stress that he is only sketching the outlines of the new US-led global pacification industry. He has entered largely uncharted waters. Journalists, analysts and academics have shied away from the necessary research, he claims, preferring to keep within their narrow specialisations.

Halper is interested in "big-picture" analysis, joining up the dots. And doing so has forced him to explore unfamiliar territory, reading up on key texts in security studies, poring over the works of terrorism experts, and meeting decorated generals.

Halper points out that Israel spends about 8 percent of its GDP a year on the military, about twice the per capita expenditure of the United States. Despite its size, Israel has more military aircraft than any European country.

Israel has four of the world's top 100 arms manufacturers, and is ranked among the top 10 arms dealing countries, in some [assessments](#) as high as fourth place. The Global Militarisation Index has [crowned](#) Israel the most militarised nation on the planet every year since 2007.

In May Israel [won a new accolade](#), becoming a "cyber superpower", its companies selling about a tenth of the world's computer and network security technology.

That focus on the military and weapons systems has led Israel into official military relations with 130 countries, many of them dictatorships known for their human rights violations. Reports suggest that Israel engages in more dubious and secretive deals with additional regimes.

This month the United Nations [disclosed](#) that Israel was breaking a western arms embargo on selling weapons to South Sudan, fuelling the civil war there. Critics have [suggested](#) that Israel also has advisers and trainers operating clandestinely in South Sudan.

End of conventional wars

But Israel's real talent, says Halper, has been to exploit a new emphasis on "securocratic warfare".

"Wars between states are largely a thing of the past," he observes. "In the new kind of warfare, F-35 jets and nuclear weapons are far less useful. What is needed now are the skills Israel has developed after a century of 'counter-insurgency' against the Palestinians. Israel is the go-to country when it comes to securocratic warfare."

The need for this kind of warfare was highlighted following the US attack on Iraq in 2003, he notes. Conventional wars between states have traditionally involved three phases: operational preparations, the actual attack, and the outcome.

But Iraq – as well as Afghanistan before it – showed a fourth stage: the need for stabilisation and peace-keeping following regime change.

The pacification industry that has boomed post-9/11, Halper notes, is spreading back to the West. As the military takes on many of the duties of a police force in external wars like Iraq and Afghanistan, back home the police become ever more militarised. Police in Ferguson look indistinguishable from their compatriots in the US army in Iraq.

What we are seeing is the rise of the human-security state – endless 'war on terror', the world in a permanent state of emergency. The traditional hard walls between the police and the military, between domestic and overseas intelligence agencies – between the FBI and the CIA, if you like – crumble.

Warrior cops

For elites who see danger lurking around every corner, Israel has the answer: what he calls the "warrior cop". For decades Israel has been operating paramilitary forces like the Border Police, as well as intelligence services like the Shin Bet, whose area of operational responsibility is not constrained by distinctions between Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.

"Israel created the model long ago of the military and police working together, and now it is well-placed to train the world," Halper concludes.

That point was underscored this week when the Israeli government [announced](#) that a long-time army officer, Gal Hirsch, would become the head of Israel's national police force.

What is at stake? Are the US and Europe not trying to defend themselves against real terror

threats?

Halper believes it is important to examine these developments within a larger framework: the capitalist world system.

It is no coincidence, he believes, that the US is talking up global terror threats at the same time as wealth and power have de-territorialised, creating an archipelago of elite interests that stretch from parts of the US and Europe to Singapore and the Virgin Islands.

Transnational corporations need secure corridors for the flow of capital and labour, he argues, as the much of the rest of the world turns into wastelands or slums.

The concern is how to maintain a social order conducive to capitalism as great swaths of the globe are impoverished and migrants try to escape their desperate plight.

This is where Israel has stepped in. The place where Israel has developed its ideas and tested them is the occupied territories, says Halper.

The control of Gaza, for example, offers a blueprint for other states concerned about domestic surveillance, border security, urban warfare, migration threats, and much more.

The Palestinians, in this sense, are an important resource for Israel. Without the occupied territories, Israel would be New Zealand. It would be a tourist destination, not a regional hegemon.

A place at NATO's table

Israel's arms industry isn't just aimed at making money. "It puts Israel at the table with NATO countries." Israel conducts military exercises with NATO, and helps develop Watchkeeper drones for the Europeans.

It also has increasingly close ties, says Halper, with regimes that are ostensibly its enemy, such as Saudi Arabia. "The Saudis are funding ISIS [Islamic State], so how does one explain their alliance with Israel? The common denominator is 'security politics'. No two countries have interests more alike than Israel and Saudi Arabia."

When the Saudis unveiled the Arab Peace Initiative in 2002, Halper argues, they offered, in return for an end to the occupation, the Arab world's recognition of Israel as the regional hegemon.

Is Israel's usefulness paying off diplomatically?

There are indications that increasingly it is. The Economist recently [noted](#) that India, which has long track record of supporting the Palestinians, was among five countries abstaining at the UN Human Rights Council last month on a resolution criticising Israel for its conduct in Gaza last summer in a 51-day attack that killed more than 500 children.

The magazine added that Israeli officials believe the international community's growing dependence on its arms will reduce its vulnerability over the long term to the boycott (BDS) movement.

Halper points out that Nigeria, another country that has become reliant on Israeli arms, recently also betrayed its traditional support for the Palestinians.

Nigeria saved Israel and the US great embarrassment last December when it [voted](#) in the UN Security Council against a Palestinian resolution demanding an end to the occupation. The US had feared that it would have to cast its veto.

Halper emphasises that the US is still the world's largest arms dealer by some margin. But in its scramble to fill the niches, Israel helps shine a light on the arms industry's true purpose: not security, but pacification.

When you call it 'security', you shut down the debate. Who doesn't want security? But when you reframe it is as 'pacification', the real goals become much clearer.

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