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A Movement to Expose Role of Big Tech Companies in Promoting Israeli Occupation and Apartheid

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Hundreds of tech employees have been protesting against Google and Amazon signing a deal with the Israeli government to develop artificial intelligence tools under the so-called Nimbus project which will be used to trace and control Palestinian movements

Hundreds of employees of the world's biggest tech companies have joined together to prevent their employers' collaboration with the state of Israel. The movement called 'No Tech for Apartheid' raises questions related to big tech companies such as Google and Amazon's disregard for ethical standards and their growing complicity with the Israeli occupation and apartheid in the occupied Palestinian territories.

A joint statement issued with the consent of over 1,000 Google and Amazon employees on the dedicated website of the movement asserts that "technology should be used to bring people together, not enable apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and settler colonialism." The movement claims to be inspired by the successful fight against apartheid in South Africa.

The movement has pointed that Google and Amazon's joint project with the state of Israel, called project Nimbus, is nothing new but part of a long list of similar previous collaborations like with the US Department of Defense, Immigrants and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and various State and local police departments to provide different types of data and processing tools. These technologies have sharpened the effectiveness of the state's repressive capacities by making it easier for organizations such as ICE to target vulnerable groups like immigrants.

A dangerous project

The Israeli Finance Ministry announced last year that it has signed a USD 1.2 billion deal with these companies to jointly develop an advanced cloud computing system, Project Nimbus, to provide artificial intelligence tools to the Israeli government and military.

Google and Amazon went ahead with the deal with Israel despite reports of Blue Wolf facial recognition technology and the [Pegasus](#) spyware grabbing global headlines amid last year's deadly assaults on Gaza, which led to over 250 deaths.

A [report](#) published in July in *The Intercept* details the dangerous role project Nimbus could play in the persecution of Palestinians. It notes that the project will be used for carrying out surveillance and control of Palestinians activities and to sustain the Israeli occupation. It also talks about how the cloud system, once completed, will allow the Israeli authorities to pool and analyze data on a very large scale.

The No Tech for Apartheid campaign acknowledges that the project is "dangerous" and underlines that "when technology is used to harm communities, they make the world less safe for us all." The movement declares that these tech companies are "helping to make Israeli apartheid more efficient, more violent, and even deadlier for Palestinians."

Gabriel Schubiner, part of the Alphabet Workers Union, [said](#) in an interview to *Democracy Now* that "cloud technology is extremely powerful and providing that power to a violent military and to an apartheid government is not a neutral act," as claimed by these companies.

Such campaigns have had a mixed impact so far. Microsoft, another technology giant, was forced to pull out all its funding from Israeli facial recognition firm AnyVision in 2020 under popular pressure. Google was also forced to stop its so-called "[project Maven](#)" with the US Ministry of Defense for similar reasons in 2018. Project Maven used to provide the US Department of Defense artificial intelligence technology to help detect targets captured by drone images. However, there are no other major examples to show that tech companies are ready to respond to concerns raised by their employees or the general public. On the contrary, big corporations often try to silence opposition.

Culture of retaliation

Google is accused of a culture of retaliation against its employees. Workers raising questions of ethics are oppressed and forced to go quiet or leave, according to several former employees. The recent example of Ariel Koren, a product marketing manager at Google who was forced to resign, is a case in point. Koren was critical of project Nimbus and had played a significant role in mobilizing her colleagues to raise the issue. She [resigned](#) in July claiming that she was transferred without consent from her current location in San Francisco to Brazil, as retaliation to her activism.

Most of the signatories of a statement issued by the No Tech for Apartheid campaign last year have remained anonymous, fearing retaliation from their employer and the prospect of losing their job.

Nevertheless, a large number of tech workers have come out in public and participated in a couple of nationwide [demonstrations](#) held last year in cities in the US. They proudly held the banners declaring 'No tech for apartheid' and demanding that Google and Amazon drop the project with Israel.

It is clear that movements such as No Tech for Apartheid have created some [pressure](#) on these companies and their collaborators. The Israeli government has also been forced to seek additional safeguards to protect the project from eventual shut down.

Talking about the significance of No Tech of Apartheid, Apoorva Gautam, South Asia and Asia Pacific coordinator of the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, notes that "it is an intersectional campaign" which responds to the concerns raised by the "Palestinian civil society, tech workers, students, teachers, digital rights and Palestine solidarity activists," asking tech companies to end "their complicity in apartheid." She asserts that "apart from defending Palestinian human rights, this campaign also stands with struggles against digital colonialism and militarization of our societies through technology."

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