

The Weapons Israel Tests on Palestinians Will be Used Against All of Us

As Antony Loewenstein explains, Palestine has been a testing ground for repressive technologies exported around the world, from spy software to killer drones.

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Whether it's drone technology or the infamous Pegasus spy software, Israel has long developed and refined repressive technologies used by governments around the world by testing them on Palestinians.

[Antony Loewenstein](#), journalist and author of [The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Around the World](#), joins The Chris Hedges Report for a deep dive into the disturbing links between Israeli Apartheid, the arms industry, and global repression of civilian populations.

Transcript

Chris Hedges: The Palestinians are human laboratory rats to the Israeli military intelligence services and arms and technology industries. Israel's drones, surveillance technology including spyware, facial recognition software, and biometric gathering infrastructure, along with smart fences, experimental bombs, and AI-controlled machine guns are all tried out on the captive population in Gaza, often with lethal results. These weapons and technologies are then certified as "battle-tested" and sold around the world.

Israel is the tenth largest arms dealer on the planet and sells its technology and weapons to an estimated 130 nations, including military dictatorships in Asia and Latin America. Israeli weapons sales totaled \$12.5 billion last year. Its close relationship with these military internal security surveillance, intelligence gathering, and law enforcement agencies explains the fulsome support Israel's allies give to its genocidal campaign in Gaza.

When Colombian president, Gustavo Petro refused to condemn the October 7 attack by Palestinian resistance groups as a terrorist attack and said, “Terrorism is killing innocent children in Palestine,” Israel immediately halted all sales of defense and security equipment to Colombia. This global cabal dedicated to permanent war and keeping its populations monitored and controlled has hundreds of billions of dollars a year in sales.

These technologies are cementing into place a supernational, corporate totalitarianism: A world where populations are enslaved in ways that past totalitarian regimes could only imagine. It is not a far cry from Gaza to the camps and detention centers set up for migrants fleeing to Europe from Africa and the Middle East. It is not a far cry from the carpet bombing in Gaza to the endless wars in the Middle East and the global south. It is not a far cry from the anti-terrorism laws used to criminalize dissent in Israel to the anti-terrorism laws introduced in Europe and the US. Joining me to discuss this use of Palestinians as human guinea pigs for the Israeli weapons and technology industry is Antony Loewenstein, author of *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Around the World*.



So your book, which is a great read, lays out the rise of this arms industry, which originally was a state industry and then privatized. One of the points you made at the end of the book, which is very fascinating, is how much of the apparatus to keep the Palestinians under control is essentially now handed over to private firms. I want to quote Elliott Abrams, whom I’ve interviewed, “The role of Israel is to serve as a model, an example in military might, in innovation, in encouraging childbirth.” This is one of the themes of your book that much of Israel’s support and power derives from its connection to this global arms network. So let’s lay out some of the innovations that Israel has pioneered. We can begin with Pegasus and drones. They’re at the forefront of some of the most advanced technologies and weapon systems that are used to control subject populations.

Antony Loewenstein: In some ways, the genesis of the book was partly due to some of the reporting around Pegasus a few years ago. Listeners or viewers will be aware that Pegasus is a spyware tool that is made by NSO Group, which is an Israeli company and it was started to be used about 15 or so years ago by a range of countries. The country that it was first mostly used in was Mexico as various governments there were desperate to fight a failed drug war, and it only made the violence worse. But what’s interesting back then and also

now is Mexico remains, Chris, to this day, the world's biggest and most obsessive user of Pegasus. Obsessed.

Whether it's the right-wing government or nominally left-wing government, Pegasus is now in dozens of countries. I don't even know how many, I think about 70, 80, or 90. In some ways, the reason I partly wrote the book was to say that the media was obsessed with Pegasus. Pegasus is an important investigation; It's a tool that is put on the phones of activists and human rights workers in countless countries. And it breaches human rights. That's terrible. But the problem was that it was too often framed as this rogue Israeli company doing terrible things. As I show in the book, it's not that: It's an arm of the state as Lockheed Martin and Raytheon are arms of the US government. Now, Lockheed Martin is a private company. It has a board, sure, and it makes profits or not. But essentially it's an arm of the state. Right? It's used by the government in various foreign policy agendas or goals.

Pegasus is the same. I started looking at that issue by saying that now probably, Israel is number one or two in the world for spyware, and Pegasus and NSO Group in some ways are a smokescreen. Because there are so many other companies that are doing the same thing. So if NSO Group goes bust tomorrow – And it's in a bit of financial trouble at the moment – It's not going to make any difference. There are so many other companies doing the same thing using that whole allure of being able to spy on pretty much anybody, which is why to this day no country wants to regulate this, no country. They're all obsessed with it. That's been the fundamental problem at the moment.

Chris Hedges: Explain how Pegasus works. We should note that it was also used on Jamal Khashoggi's fiancée, Jamal, who I knew being a Saudi journalist who was dismembered in the Saudi embassy and a consulate in Turkey. But explain how it works.

Antony Loewenstein: Pegasus is a silent tool. It can be installed on your iPhone or Android. It doesn't matter what phone you have. Years ago, a lot of us used to get random text messages. You'd click on the link, you'd forget about it, and you'd move on. That was the way it used to work. So country X or intelligence agency Y would have this tool, let's say, in India, in some other country. They would then send a message to the phone of an activist, human rights worker, or a lawyer, that person would click on a link, their phone would be infected, and they wouldn't know.

There's no way to know yourself without it being forensically checked. These days it doesn't even require a text message. All it requires is someone knowing your number. That's it. And it can access all your information. It can even access your phone and microphone when the phone is off. So it can be used as a weapon against you. As I show in the book, I interviewed huge amounts of people in Mexico, India, and elsewhere. These are people often lawyers who are challenging the state.

In Mexico, I interviewed a woman whose husband was murdered by, almost certainly, Narcos. Then after his death, her phone was being surveilled by the Mexican state. It's never entirely clear even to this day why in her case it was surveilled. But it shows that there is this utter obsession with various intelligence services to get access to all this personal information. It's important to note that one thing that was clear in researching this particular tool is that Pegasus and tools like this have become – And it was said to be in *The New York Times* a few years ago, and I questioned some of this in the book but two journalists wrote – The most powerful weapon in the world since the invention of the nuclear bomb.

Now, I would question that because nuclear bombs clearly can cause carnage, to put it mildly. Pegasus doesn't directly kill anybody per se, but what it does is it means that privacy is close to dead. At the moment there is this massive proliferation of these tools. Israel of course – This is the key point – Uses Pegasus and other tools as a key foreign policy agenda. I show in the book Netanyahu and Mossad, over the last decade, would go to countries where Israel had no close relations: Rwanda and India when Modi came in, and others: Saudi, UAE. They hold Pegasus up as a diplomatic carrot saying, we will sell you this amazing tool which you can surveil your citizens, whatever you want. But in return, we would like you to vote in a certain way in the UN or buy certain weapons. That's how it works. I show a timeline when Netanyahu goes to Hungary to visit Orban or Modi in India, and 6-12 months later, Pegasus is in use. This is not accidental. This is a key part of Israeli foreign policy now.

Chris Hedges: Let's talk about the drone program. They pioneered drones. As I remember from the book, India is maybe their largest drone customer. These drones are used against migrants fleeing towards Europe, particularly Greece as well as the US-Mexico border.

Antony Loewenstein: I have some interesting declassified documents from the '80s where Israel was using drones in its war in Lebanon. When Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, it was before the digital era, but Israel was using drones. In this amazing document that I have in the book from the CIA, they're shocked and amazed at how incredible – That's their words – These drones are, how effective they are, and they wonder – Back in the '80s – How Israel will be a global pioneer of drones. Fast forward to the last decade or so, and as I show in the book, I have spent a lot of time in Gaza as a reporter in the last 15 or so years there has been a proliferation of testing of drones, particularly around Gaza.

I'm putting aside what's happened since October 7, although it's happening since then too. But in the last 15 years huge amounts of drones are being tested above Gaza, some armed, some not, used in the various Israeli invasions, incursions, or whatever you want to call it in Gaza. Those drones are then called "battle-tested" and then they're sold to huge amounts of nations around the world. The part that shocked me the most was the use by the EU. The EU is buying Israeli drones. They're unarmed, yes. And viewers will be aware that in the last 10 or so years, there's been a huge influx of migrants coming from Africa and the Middle East, after 2015 when the Europeans said they didn't want to repeat that huge influx of people coming. Of course, if you're Ukrainian and white, they'll welcome you in. And I have no problem with Ukrainians being welcomed in. But clearly, if you're Black or Brown it's not going to be the same.

EU created this fortress, and European and Israeli drones are part of that. Frontex, which is the European border force, uses Israeli drones 24/7 in the Mediterranean, circling the Mediterranean, sending back real-time images to Frontex, which is based in Warsaw, Poland of what's happening. The EU has made a clear decision to let people drown; That is obvious. They barely issue rescue boats and they criminalize people who are trying to rescue migrants. Israeli drones are a key part of that infrastructure and eye in the sky and Israeli drones have appeared in India and various other countries. In the last years, Israel remains one of the key drone makers of the world, and increasingly, so is Turkey. Turkey makes a cheaper version of what Israel has been developing and therefore Turkish drones are now also appearing in many nations around the world in many conflicts.

Chris Hedges: Let's talk about who Israel sells to. It's easier to tick off the list of who they don't sell to. I covered the conflicts in Guatemala and El Salvador in the 1980s. Israel was

supplying weapons, including napalm, to the Salvadorans and the Guatemalans. They were one of the most fervent supporters of the apartheid regime in South Africa, they worked with Pinochet's Chile, and the Rwandan genocide was perpetrated with Israeli weapons. They will provide military equipment to the most heinous regimes, including the latest ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh. You mentioned three countries: Iran, North Korea, and I don't know who the other one was.

Antony Loewenstein: I think I say Syria.

Chris Hedges: Maybe Syria

Antony Loewenstein: As far as we're aware.

Chris Hedges: Right. As far as we're aware.

Antony Loewenstein: As far as we're aware. It's interesting to note though, that before 1979 and the Islamic Revolution, Israel and Iran were incredibly close. The fact that Iran was run by a dictator did not impede the selling of weapons. They were worried that the rise of the Islamic Revolution would impede their sales, which it did. On the one hand, I shouldn't have been that surprised. It's important to note America remains the world's biggest arms dealer. 45% of the world's arms come from America, so they are leaders by far. Israel is tenth. One of the things that shouldn't have shocked me but did was Myanmar, in the last years, has been committing genocide against its Rohingya population – Many of them have been killed and many have been kicked out into Bangladesh – Even after the UN found that Myanmar was committing genocide, Israel was still selling surveillance and weapons to the Myanmar regime.

As you say, it's hard to list. There are so many of them. It's also worth saying that India – And India is a big focus of the book because India is now the world's biggest country population-wise, the world's biggest self-described democracy. Although I would very much question that. A key ally of the US and certainly my country, Australia, and most Western nations, because it's not China – India is building a Hindu fundamental estate under Modi, a proudly chauvinist nation where Muslims are discriminated against openly. There are pogroms against Muslims. Now, India and Israel didn't have a great relationship before Modi came in. There was a relationship in decades past. Modi comes in 2014 as Prime Minister and there's a love affair between Netanyahu and Modi. There's this image that some viewers may have seen of the two of them stepping onto the beach, getting their feet wet, talking about how much they love each other, who knows, no audio was recorded.

But this relationship is central to why I wrote the book. There is a growing global ethno-nationalist surge, India being the most obvious example, of nations that proudly discriminate against non-majority populations. In India, it's against Hindus, against Muslims. In Israel, it's Jews against anyone who's not Jewish. And I say this as someone Jewish myself, that the whole alliance between Israel and India reminds me very much of Israel and South Africa: Nations that proudly discriminate against non-so-called acceptable populations and are therefore inspiring others. Israel has become the inspiration to so many countries and far-right and rightists around the world, putting aside liberal Zionists for a minute, who over the years have had a love for Israel. I'm talking about India, Hungary, and various other nations, not selling weapons but selling the idea of getting away with it.

That's something I talk about a lot in the book, that the idea that Israel can get away with it,

each being occupation, endless colonization, brutalizing Palestinians, selling weapons to God knows who and God knows where, goes to the heart of why Israel is, to me, a danger. Not only to Palestinians, which is bad enough, but a model. Finally, Chris, I say in the book that you often go to far-right rallies – And I go there for work, to be clear. For work purposes – In the US, Australia, and elsewhere, the Israeli flag is a constant presence. It's not unusual and these are not groups that traditionally like Jews. They don't. I quote in the book Richard Spencer, that hideous alt-right leader in America who said a few years ago, I'm a white Zionist. He doesn't like Jewish people but he loves the idea of creating, for him and many like him, a Christian ethno-nationalist state.

You've written a lot of incredibly important work on Christian theocracy in the US and its potential growth and rise in domination. Israel is a touchpoint, as you would well know, for many of these groups. Not all, but many. And it's not because lobbyist groups like Jews; Many of them do not. But they like what Israel is doing to Palestinians to unbelievably dominate and control them. And they're proudly Jewish chauvinists. They're Jewish supremacists. That's what they want to create for Christians in America or Hindus in India. That to me is the danger.

Chris Hedges: This is from your book according to Netanyahu, Jewish writer Peter Beinart explained, "The future belonged not to liberalism as Obama defined it – Tolerance, equal rights, and the rule of law – But to authoritarian capitalism: governments that combined aggressive and often racist nationalism with economic and technological might. The future, Netanyahu implied, would produce leaders who resembled not Obama, but him." It fits in with what you said. And unfortunately, I fear – I don't know what you think – That he's right.

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Featured image: Israeli soldiers around Gaza Strip on Oct. 7. (IDF Spokesperson's Unit, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0)

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