

*The Palestine Laboratory:*  
*How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation around the World*  
Antony Loewenstein  
London: Verso, 2023, £11.39 (h/b)

**Colin Challen**

**T**he author describes himself as an atheist Jew and, judging by his book, he may be described as an anti-Zionist, too. Certainly some will see this book as feeding the so-called anti-Semitic agenda of the state of Israel's enemies. The book collates an abundance of evidence showing that the basis of the 'start-up nation's'<sup>1</sup> recent economic success is built upon its defence industries, tried and tested in war and particularly based on the technologies used in the subjugation of the Palestinian people. Most of this evidence is in the public domain and this book makes it accessible in a succinct, collated form. Seen in the round, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Israel could be described as a 'rogue state' – selling weapons and technologies to those kinds of countries which are commonly described as such. Having said which, other 'democratic' countries with significant arms industries do the same thing; but as we know, thanks to the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism, we're not supposed to criticise Israel for doing things which are considered acceptable elsewhere.

So this question arises from a reading of *The Palestine Laboratory*: does Israel go beyond accepted norms (however unpalatable those 'liberal' Western norms might be)? This is difficult. Recent history is littered with examples of 'enlightened democracies' feeding wars with their baleful technologies. Perhaps we need to consider what makes a 'rogue' nation. It could be that some country's behaviour is so egregious – think perhaps North Korea – that no other would want to touch it. Or perhaps our definition of rogue should simply be applied to all countries that behave in a rogueish sort of way at one time or another. In which case most countries on the planet might fit the bill. Or a rogue nation might be one that does another's bidding, since the other doesn't fancy getting its hands dirty. Loewenstein identifies Israel as the US's surrogate in this regard, a kind of sub-contractor, the reward for which is a continuing multi-billion dollar military subsidy and unswerving diplomatic protection. A third option in our search for a definition of a rogue state might be the number of times a nation has been in breach of UN

resolutions. In this context, Israel finds itself alongside the likes of North Korea, Russia and Iran, all of which may reasonably be described as rogue states.<sup>2</sup>

Loewenstein's book is clearly an indictment – the charge being that Israel unscrupulously peddles military hardware and cyber weapons to dodgy customers. It is useful to be reminded that this is so, but *The Palestine Laboratory* is hardly the first account of Israel's complicity in the arms trade. Jeff Halper's *War Against the People* (Pluto Press, 2015) goes into much more detail, although perhaps with less to say about cyber warfare.

What of the future? On the basis of his examination of Israel's development as a leading exporter of weapons and cyberware, Loewenstein writes:

Israel's Palestine laboratory thrives on global disruptions and violence. The worsening climate crisis will benefit Israel's defense sector in a future where nation-states do not respond with active measure to reduce the impacts of surging temperatures but instead ghettoize themselves, Israel-style. What this means in practice is higher walls and tighter borders, greater surveillance of refugees, facial recognition, drones, smart fences, and biometric databases. By 2025, the border surveillance industrial complex is estimated to be worth US\$68 billion, and Israeli companies like Elbit are guaranteed to be among the main beneficiaries. (pp. 207/8)

Might we all be captured in an Israeli laboratory as climate change worsens?

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase 'start-up nation' is a favourite of people who take pride in Israel's technological successes. Notable examples include *Start-Up Nation: The Story of Israel's Economic Miracle* by Dan Senor and Saul Singer (Council on Foreign Relations/Twelve, 2011) and *The Weapons Wizards: How Israel Became a High-Tech Military Superpower*, Yaakov Katz and Amir Bohbot (St Martin's Press, 2017). These titles suggest Israel's success is both miraculous and magical.

<sup>2</sup> I searched online using the term 'Top ten countries breaching UN resolutions' and Bing AI came up with this statement (15/8/23): 'There is no definitive ranking of the top 10 countries breaching UN resolutions, but some sources suggest that **Israel<sup>12</sup>, Russia<sup>34</sup>, China<sup>35</sup>, North Korea<sup>356</sup>, Iran<sup>36</sup>, Syria<sup>367</sup>, Iraq<sup>87</sup>, Libya<sup>87</sup>, Sudan<sup>87</sup> and Yemen<sup>5Z</sup>** are among the most frequently accused or sanctioned for violating UN resolutions.' Being in this company rather undermines an example in the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism which suggests that Israel should be treated like any other democracy.