

Getting Away With It: Israel and Global Occupation



At the heart of Jeff Halper's *War Against the People: Israel, the Palestinians and Global Pacification* is the question "How does Israel get away with it?" In other words, how is Israel able to continually occupy Palestinian territory in contravention of international law?

Halper, an anthropologist and former director of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, brings a scholar's meticulous research skills and an activist's zeal to a subject that has not been thoroughly documented. Rather than delving into the internal nuances of the occupation, Halper suggests that we look outward at what the occupation allows Israel to do economically and politically. In order to do this, Halper argues that the military technology of Israel and its public, private, and semi-private companies must be analyzed in order to properly contextualize the situation. The primary sources the author relies upon for his analysis are defense industry and government documents. The reliance on these documents can be exhausting for the reader because some sections read like an instruction manual. However, Halper argues that they are necessary for understanding the depth of the occupation.

The occupation, argues Halper, has become indispensable for Israel as a veritable laboratory for its weapons and securities industries. It is in this way that Israel is able to find international legitimacy. Through arms deals and security "expertise," the state is able to play an international role that is disproportionate to its size. The

arms and security training that it disperses, through its public and private sectors, act to aid hegemonic actors globally. Beyond merely aiding states militarily, the Israeli model, or "matrix of control," has become widely used to pacify actors who pose threats to the hegemony of ruling parties. The Palestinians have become human test subjects for tactics and weapons that will be used in securitizing others across the globe. This also means that the occupation has become more valuable to Israel than reaching a peace settlement. Additionally Halper is right to point out that after Likud took power in 1977, the transition that was made from counterinsurgency to counterterrorism made it difficult domestically to argue against expansionist policies in the West Bank because they were rebranded as security measures.

Ruling cadres in developing as well as developed countries make use of Israel's weapons and security systems. The United States, as Halper points out, has allowed for many of its police forces to become militarized and hyperaggressive through counterterrorism training with Israeli counterparts. A couple of examples of this dispersal of knowledge are the installation of roadblocks like those of the West Bank in a dangerous neighborhood in Washington DC and, infamously, the Ferguson Police Department's violent response to its citizens after the killing of Michael Brown. The United States has also leaned upon Israel to arm those that the U.S. cannot be publicly seen arming. For instance, during the 1980s, the genocidal military dictatorship of Jose Rios Montt in Guatemala was supplied weapons by Israel when the American Congress began to oppose the United States providing them. Beyond arming dictatorships, Israel also has forged military- and police-oriented working relationships around the world, notably with many European Union members, Russia, Singapore, India, central Asian republics, some Gulf States, Colombia, Equatorial Guinea, Zimbabwe, and much to the chagrin of the United States, China.

Halper brings a fresh perspective to the topic of the Israeli occupation. Rather than a recounting of the history of the occupation, *War Against the People* seeks to put the occupation in a global context for the reader. Halper does not lean upon arguments that explain the Israeli occupation as purely a lobbying success or a pet project of evangelical Christians who see support for Israel as integral to their millennial world views. Rather, Halper sees the Israeli occupation model as one which global elites can seek to emulate, tailor to their needs, and replicate in local contexts. For the large majority who find themselves on the Palestinian side of the equation globally, this means that they will be facing increased surveillance, a militarized police force, and technology that seeks to pacify resistance.

One drawback of the book is the author's use of historical examples that are at times troublesome. For instance, the author jumps very quickly from the military culture of the Yishuv (pre-Israel Jewish community of Palestine) to the 1967 War and the beginning of the American-Israeli military relationship. When discussing the lasting importance of the Hashomer, the first Zionist paramilitary group, established in 1909, Halper does not cite the work of Anita Shapira, which would at least offer a counterargument to his assertion that the paramilitary group was created to simply evict Arab tenant farmers. This treatment of historical examples has the effect of creating a passive narrative of the developments that led to the contemporary situation.

Overall though, *War Against the People: Israel, the Palestinians and Global Pacification* contributes something new to Israel-Palestine literature. Jeff Halper has strayed away from many well-worn arguments on the subject and has provided readers with a new global perspective on the conflict. His argument is essentially a call against compartmentalizing Israel-Palestine as a local conflict and for seeing it in broader terms. For an American audience, the connections

between Israel and American police forces should raise eyebrows. Those with an interest in the Israel-Palestine conflict, global history, and contemporary international affairs will find this work of great interest.