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## Making a killing

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The full spectrum of light introduces ambiguity and multiplicity into the monochromatic and linear world of the Necromancer. It reminds us that the visible is incomplete – only a fraction of the whole spectrum can be perceived by our sensory systems. This creates the condition of radical openness towards what the future holds, provoking a desire to build and inhabit better worlds and organizations. It is also not a coincidence that the rainbow, generated by the prism, is the symbol of the LGBTQI+ movement which is about acceptance, diversity, individuality, and equal rights (things that the Necromancer is deeply afraid of).

A strong theme in organization studies has always been the importance of sensemaking and imagining new futures and organizations, especially in light of the grand challenges and wicked problems (Kostera, 2020). We need to remember that our pragmatic solutions to these big problems always exist in relation to some sort of a standard of what a good and just society should look like. We should not be afraid to dream big and imagine things differently from what they currently are. As scholars, we cannot simply be left to judiciously studying and interpreting realities that are imposed on us. Our duty is to disturb and to distress the reality of the Necromancer, to make it stutter. This process starts by coming up with templates, blueprints, and symbols for a better world, requiring us to be more normative and bold as researchers – to lead more and to follow less. Perhaps, this is the time when more radical imagination is needed as well as disciplined one (disciplined by what exactly?). In the face of the challenges that are upon us, the role of ‘theoretical guns’ and prisms should be to enhance our critical capacity and agency as citizens and to foster our collective responsibility to look at the world afresh, to liberate and to heal.

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## Making a Killing: Israel’s Military-Innovation Ecosystem and the Globalization of Violence

**Samer Abdelnour\***

On 2 October 2018, journalist Jamal Khashoggi visited the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on the pretext of receiving wedding papers. It was a set-up. Once inside, Saudi assassins strangled Khashoggi then dismembered and dissolved his body in acid. Soon after, it was revealed that the mobile phones of Khashoggi’s wife and close friend were targeted using Pegasus, a military-grade spyware developed by Israeli cyber-weapons company NSO Group, which allegedly facilitated the assassination. The surveillance of Khashoggi is not an isolated incident. As reported in *The Guardian*,

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an investigation by global media outlets reveals how dozens of governments and intelligence agencies used Pegasus spyware as a weapon to monitor tens of thousands of activists, journalists and politicians globally.

Using the example of Israel, I examine how military technologies like Pegasus are developed within military-innovation ecosystems in contexts of extreme violence, how violence is essential for weapons development and sales, and how this in turn facilitates the global proliferation of violence and complicity in crimes against humanity. By ‘military-innovation ecosystem’, I refer to the constellation of industries, infrastructures and organizations involved in weapons development, testing and sales. They include military and state agencies, tech start-ups and private companies, universities and research institutes, as well as banks and venture financing. As Chandler (2022) shows, they also enrol actors not conventionally involved in weapons development, such as public research funding agencies, via ‘dual-use’ technologies with civil and military application.

In the case of Israel, often celebrated as a ‘start-up nation’, the development and monetization of military technologies is deeply tied to violence it enacts upon a captive, subjugated native population, the Palestinians. The title, ‘making a killing’, thus has double meaning: to generate large profits in short duration, as the idiom suggests, and killing in the literal. I hope to draw attention to the multiple ways entrepreneurial-innovation ecosystems are tied to organized violence and what it might take to challenge these. I also hope to encourage colleagues to reconsider how they understand Israel-Palestine, not as an intractable two-thousand-year-old conflict as the myth suggests, but as a settler-colonial industry that profits immensely from incessant ethnic cleansing, military occupation and Apartheid.

### Israel’s Military-Innovation Ecosystem

In my view, three factors give Israel’s military-innovation ecosystem a unique capacity to develop and sell weapons. First, Israel receives unprecedented subsidies in the form of US military aid, which according to a recent US Congressional Report amounts to almost four billion USD annually, totalling over two hundred and fifty billion USD since Israel’s founding (Sharp, 2022, p. 2). This is coupled with political protection giving Israel complete impunity for crimes against humanity and carte blanche opportunities to innovate and monetize violence. Second, mandatory military conscription for the majority of Israeli citizens has militarized its society, blurring lines between Israel’s military and other sectors. For example, in a recent *New York Times Magazine* article, Ronan Bergman and Mark Mazzetti detail how military officers serving Israel’s elite cyber-surveillance unit often end up working for weapons companies and start-ups. Another example is close collaboration among Israel’s military, police forces and extremist settlers, the latter representing a significant and growing percentage of Israel’s population.

Third, Israel’s regime of Apartheid and military occupation subjects six million Palestinians to extreme levels of surveillance and violence, and this acts as a laboratory for developing, experimenting with, and testing weapons later sold to the global arms market as ‘field tested’. This frightening phenomenon is captured in Yotam Feldman’s film *The Lab*, and in Antony Loewenstein’s book *The Palestine Laboratory*. Taken together, these factors have engineered large parts of Israel’s economy towards the production and maintenance of violence. For instance, in a 1986 *New York Times* article, Thomas Friedman wrote that an estimated ten percent of Israel’s national workforce was employed in weapons manufacturing and sales, a figure that has likely increased since.

Of course, Israel is not the only example of how organized violence inflicted upon colonized, subjugated peoples fuels the development, experimentation and globalization of technologies for control, surveillance and violence. British violence in Ireland influenced patterns of British

colonial violence across Africa, Asia and the Americas. Techniques used in the genocide of the Herero, Nama and San peoples by Germany were later advanced and used at scale in the Holocaust. Afrikaners who established Apartheid in Africa learned from Canada's subjugation of First Nations peoples, just as Israel looked to Apartheid South Africa as a model for the 'bantustanization' (separation, segregation and control) of Palestinian people, lands and resources.

The links between Israel's violent subjugation of Palestinians and its arms trade stretch back to before its establishment as a state in 1948. European Zionist settlers in Palestine produced weapons used for terrorist attacks against British forces and Palestinians during the 1938–47 Zionist insurgency, the most famous event being the 1946 bombing of the King David Hotel by the extremist Irgun militia. Most significantly, the establishment of Israel was forged through a campaign of ethnic cleansing that saw 80 percent of Palestine's native population dispossessed. Palestinians refer to this as 'al-Nakba', meaning 'the catastrophe'. Yet, according to Naaz (2000), Israel's current military-innovation strategy wasn't cultivated until after 1967, when it expanded its occupation of Palestine and Syrian territory. When France imposed an arms ban on Israel in response to the 1967 occupation, Israel doubled down on its domestic arms industries. Israeli weapons companies, then mostly state-owned, focused on technologies relevant for maintaining the military occupation of Palestine and war with Lebanon, and targeted like-minded regimes for weapons sales. Chandler (2022) meticulously details how military drone technology was advanced by both South Africa and Israel in relation to Apartheid and border war violence. For Israel, this strategy was successful and by the 1980s it had established a global arms industry.

Israel's military-innovation ecosystem entered a new phase of growth after the 2007 blockade and siege of Gaza, a densely populated area where two million Palestinians are held captive in what organizations such as [Human Rights Watch](#) and [Oxfam](#) commonly refer to as 'the world's largest open-air prison'. This phase of violence subjects Palestinians in Gaza to severe restrictions on imports of essential foodstuffs, fuel and construction materials. It also involves intense surveillance and routine bombardment of residential areas and civilian infrastructure, including destruction and contamination of agricultural lands and livestock. Israeli attacks have killed thousands of people, children included, maimed tens of thousands, and displaced hundreds of thousands, leaving Palestinians in Gaza to suffer unthinkable levels of malnutrition, trauma, unemployment and hardship. For Israel, the violence it enacts upon Gaza is extremely profitable; in 2021 Israel's arms exports reached an all-time high of 11.2 billion USD, with further growth expected via US-brokered weapons-for-peace agreements with regional states like Saudi Arabia.

## **Globalization of Violence and Complicity**

As I argue above, Israel's unique capabilities to innovate and monetize violence creates an economic incentive to enact violence. However, understanding the breadth of Israel's military-innovation ecosystem requires looking beyond total arms sales or the 'success' of specific weapons (e.g. Uzi submachine guns, drone technologies, missile systems and military-grade spyware) to how it patterns violence globally. For instance, Israel's military-industrial footprint can be seen in armed violence across Africa, police violence across the US, UK and Europe, and as illustrated, cyber-surveillance attacks globally. Israel is of course not alone in this. The current top ten arms-producing countries as listed by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute are the US, Russia, France, China, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom, South Korea, Spain and Israel (Wezeman, Kuimova, & Wezeman, 2022). Almost all of these countries actively engage in warfare and armed conflict, offering insight into the global economy of organized violence.

Moreover, the rapid digitalization and use of AI for military purposes is deepening the globalization of violence and widening complicity with violence in horrifying ways, invisibilizing crimes against humanity within servers and code. This is exemplified by ‘Project Nimbus’, an Israeli initiative to integrate cloud computing and AI into the operations of its state agencies, including its military and police. In a recent [article in \*The Intercept\*](#), Sam Biddle reports that Israel enrolled US technology giants Google and Amazon into Project Nimbus with a 1.2 billion USD contract to build advanced cloud computing and AI capacity. According to this source, the contract includes clauses prohibiting Google and Amazon from any oversight over how their technology is used or from interrupting services, even in the case of human rights violations. Google and Amazon’s participation in building next generation digital infrastructures that will most certainly result in more violence is not lost on their stakeholders. As the same article reports, Google and Amazon employees are organizing around a [#NoTechForApartheid](#) campaign against contracts with Israel and other states that commit crimes against humanity, and they are being joined by human rights activists, shareholders and student groups.

The global significance of Google and Amazon’s engagement in Project Nimbus should give us all pause for thought. Google and Amazon touch the lives and work of more than half the world’s population. Google alone has an estimated 4.3 billion regular users globally, while Amazon’s operations reach an estimated 300 million customers in over 180 countries. This raises ethical and moral questions concerning our complicity with organized violence. Are we not morally compelled to act when companies whose services and technologies we use enable or enact crimes against humanity?

For Palestinians, the answer is unequivocally ‘yes’. Frustrated by the failed peace process and lack of recourse to hold Israel accountable, in 2005 a coalition representing the full spectrum of Palestinian civil society launched a [global campaign](#), modelled on South Africa’s anti-Apartheid boycott movement, to target organizations complicit with Israeli Apartheid and military occupation. As Barghouti (2021) details, the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement is a global, anti-colonial and intersectional movement with the explicit goals of realizing Palestinian freedom, justice and return. Most Palestinians support BDS as a viable (perhaps only) non-violent means to hold Israel accountable for its regime of violence.

Those familiar with Apartheid in Africa know that dismantling it took decades of anti-Apartheid, anti-colonial action, including boycotts and sanctions. Yet Israel’s regime of Apartheid and military occupation is far more bureaucratically entrenched, technologically advanced, and globally embedded than African Apartheid ever was. Moreover, Israel’s largest trading partners—Europe, the USA, China, India and the UK—show no interest in holding Israel accountable for violence; rather, there is evidence to suggest that they look to Israel’s military-innovation ecosystem as an example to replicate (Chandler, 2022). It seems Israel, and its global partners, will continue to operate with unprecedented impunity to enact, innovate and monetize violence. As academics concerned about societal issues, including organized violence, we should find this unacceptable. But what can we do?

In my view, we lack neither the analytical tools nor methods to investigate global infrastructures and technologies of violence. What we require is courage and political will to break the almost total silence within management and organization studies about military-innovation ecosystems and violence profiteering. Courage to expose the many connections that the corporations and institutes we celebrate, partner with, and work for have with military-innovation ecosystems and crimes against humanity. Political will to use our platforms and privileged positions as researchers and teachers to speak out and support initiatives seeking to end complicity with the production and global proliferation of violence.

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## Call of Duty: When Scholars Organize in Extreme Contexts

Lina Daouk-Öyry\*

On August 4 2020, one of the biggest non-nuclear explosions in documented history rocked the city of Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, killing more than 200 people, injuring more than 6,000, displacing more than 300,000 people, and wiping out major parts of the city. The explosion, which occurred in the midst of a major economic collapse and a global pandemic, only exacerbated a dire situation, pushing the multidimensional poverty rate in Lebanon from 42% in 2019 to 82% (approximately 4 million people) in 2021 (ESCWA, 2021). Destruction, poverty, unemployment, shortage of medicine, fuel and electricity crisis, and lack of access to basic services are a few examples that reflect the size of the recovery efforts Lebanon and its inhabitants require over many years to come.

This catastrophe was not an independent accident. It was a culmination of the Lebanese civil war and the amnesty of war crimes in 1989, which enabled sectarian warlords to transform into politicians (Geha, 2019). This led to the consolidation of a social contract in Lebanon based on sectarian clientelism (Hamzeh, 2001). Key governmental positions became filled based on sectarian power-sharing rather than job-skills match, and services and benefits for citizens became contingent on loyalties to sectarian political parties instead of the state. Corruption, incompetence, and mismanagement of the country ensued, and the war never really ended. Rather, it took shape in eruptive events such as armed conflicts, assassinations, and explosions over the years, in addition to sinking the country in debt, environmental crises, and geo-political tensions. To date, no one has been held accountable for the Beirut blast. Recovery efforts were mainly led by international and local humanitarian responders, and the ruling elite continue to fight for their personal interests at the expense of people's needs.

When living in such extreme contexts and time, with an absence of governmental support, effort, or direction, grassroots organizing is critical for the survival of many: people coming together to organize and engage in activism in the face of the major disruptions to their and others' lives (Basir, Ruebottom, & Auster, 2021). When war hits, it unsettles institutions, businesses, careers, and lives all together. As scholars, our lives and careers also get shaken. Universities' modus operandi gets disrupted. Research, student enrolment, and everyday academic life also experience major devastating disruptions. Funding gets halted and shortages in equipment leave

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