



A LAB AND A SHOWROOM

ISRAELI MILITARY INDUSTRIES
AND THE OPPRESSION OF THE
GREAT MARCH OF RETURN
IN GAZA



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June 2018



About Us

Coalition of Women for Peace (CWP) is a feminist organization active in the struggle to end the Israeli occupation of Palestine, for the liberation of the Palestinian people from oppression, for the creation of a society based on principles of justice and equality, and for securing life in dignity for all the inhabitants of Israel/Palestine. Women from all walks of life, Jewish and Palestinian, partake in CWP out of commitment to struggle against all forms of racism, oppression and discrimination.

Coalition of Women for Peace initiates political campaigns and promotes feminist discourse and values. Coalition of Women for Peace strives to promote discourse and awareness about the Economy of the Occupation, the involvement and financial interests of Israeli and global companies that profit from the Occupation. We make information on this issue accessible in Arabic, Hebrew and English. At the CWP activity center, we hold public meetings, trainings for activists, and offer support for Women Human Rights Defenders. We also provide consultation and workshops for NGOs and activist groups on gender, feminism and safe(r) spaces.

Hamushim is CWP's project that works to expose the true human price of the Israeli military industry and arms trade, as well as to mobilize actions against it.

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“Gaza has become a showroom for the company’s ‘smart fences,’ as customers appreciate that the products are battle-tested.”

Magal’s former CEO Saar Koursh

This spring, marking the 70th anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba, tens of thousands of Palestinians took to demonstrating at the barrier fence in the Great Return March. Their demands? The right of return to their lands, an end to the siege and to Israeli military occupation, and [to be able to live in dignity and fulfill their human rights](#). Thousands set up tents half a kilometer away from the fence and assembled in protest. The organizers of the March were clear about their nonviolent motives, and planned events, speeches, sit-ins, sporting events, and artistic performances. Additionally, there were attempts to damage the barrier fence that separates the Gaza Strip and denies its population freedom of movement.

The demonstration began on Land Day (March 30) and was planned to end officially on Nakba Day (May 15). Yet the six weeks of protests were disrupted by the Israeli Security Forces (ISF) and to date, the demonstrations have loosely continued. In those first six weeks, [at least](#) 112 protesters were killed and 13,190 injured, 7,618 of them by live ammunition. Videos and eyewitness testimonies documented the deaths of unarmed civilians hundreds of meters from the fence, including medics, journalists, women and children, and protestors moving away from the fence – shot in their backs.

Israeli military operations in Gaza in the past decade have been especially profitable for the country’s military industries. Both private companies and the Israeli government alike use Gaza as an opportunity to test new weapons, technologies and methods to be marketed based on their new operational success.

The Israeli military industry exploits the occupation of Palestine, and specifically the siege on Gaza, as an arena to battle-test, invest in, and innovate military technology to later be marketed to the international community based on their effectiveness on Palestinian Civilians. This method, thoroughly explained in Yotam Feldman’s 2013 film “The Lab”, has been especially beneficial to Israeli military industries during the 2008-9, 2012 and 2014 attacks on Gaza.

The 2014 war on Gaza, also known as “Operation Protective Edge,” is one such example. Throughout the operation, the ISF introduced new weapons to different defense media outlets, while said weapons were being used against the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza. Advancements in technology were celebrated by both mainstream Israeli and international defense media during Protective Edge and ultimately resulted in large profits due to their demonstrated “success.” Weapons showcased by the ISF in Protective Edge included the

[Hermes 900 drones](#), [Hatzav tank shells](#), [MPR- 500 bombs](#), and the Iron Dome, [among others](#). Once the offensive concluded, many companies featured their new products in a prestigious UAV conference in Tel Aviv.

The Great Return March revealed two newly developing ISF strategies: the increased use of snipers in “eliminating threats” and of drones in controlling—and dispersing—crowds. Israeli media focused on the combat advantages of both in the military preparation for the Great March of Return and during the march itself. Throughout , we shall examine the ISF’s conduct, focusing on details that received considerable Israeli media attention, and that were largely unusual until the Great March of Return began. **We seek to shed a light not only on the military’s tactics, but the arms developed, used, and essentially advertised to prospective international clients during the recent massacre of civilians in Gaza. All of the information was gathered by Hamushim activists, by local and international media, and by testimonies on the ground.**

“Sea of Tears”, “Shocko” and other drones

The Great March of Return provided an opportunity for Israel to present its advanced UAV technology in a new setting. Israel has long been a major drone exporter; in the last ten years, it has cemented its place among the world’s top drone sellers. Israeli authorities routinely use drones as a means of population control in both the West Bank and in Gaza. The domestic mainstream media has reported considerably—and excitedly—on the development of crowd dispersal UAVs. However, it seems that the large-scale use of drones was indeed a day-to-day decision; much of the military “solutions” were largely improvised. For example, slight changes made to existing civilian drones were presented as new technological advancements in Israeli media. Nonetheless, the expanded use of drones during the Great March of Return is significant.

First, a new tear gas drone, “**Sea of Tears**”, named after a famous hit song, [was introduced](#). It has been reportedly designed specifically for use in Gaza, to be used on the protesters as a crowd dispersal tool. The “Sea of Tears” is an alternation of an existing DJI or Aeronautics drone for the use of carrying and dropping tear-gas canisters. The Da Jiang Innovations (DJI) Matrice 600 was [redesigned by Israeli Border Police](#), who substituted the camera in a tear-gas shooting device, connected to the DJI drone by an Actuonix system. According to an Israeli Police spokesperson, this modification is a recently developed one that was tested in Gaza protests for a few weeks before the start of the Great March of Return, and as a result of its success, was [implemented more fully](#) once the March began.

These new UAVs were featured in Israeli media in the days leading up to the March, and again on the first Friday of the March. In an interview with the Israeli newspaper Mako, Kobi Shabtay, head of the Border Police and the man reportedly behind the strategy, [asserted](#): *“Beyond the fact that this means neutralize any danger to the combatants, it also allows us to reach places that*

we have not been able to reach before". Although the ISF has repeatedly claimed that tear gas released by drones is most effective and accurate in disbanding crowds, video footage from the March showed a drone dropping tear gas directly above a tent full of women and children a ways away from the fence. There are [similar videos](#) of the UAVs targeting journalists.

Because they proved 'successful' from the beginning, Maf'at purchased hundreds of additional drones the night after the first large-scale demonstrations in Gaza at the end of March. Maf'at is the Administration for the Development of Weapons and Technological Infrastructure, a joint coordinating body of the Ministry of Defense, the ISF, and other state-owned security industries. A Maf'at executive [told Ynet News](#), *"we acted fast and purchased drones from abroad. During combat, we learned how to improve our response. Our first aim was to learn how to use drones as a platform for non-lethal weapons. We carried out tests on the ground around the clock and developed a combat doctrine"*.

As mentioned above, throughout the Great March of Return, drones manufactured by the Chinese company DJI, both the Matrice 600 and Phantom 3, were [spotted on scene](#). The company's drones were first used in 2014 by the Jerusalem Municipality to [monitor the city's light rail](#) during Palestinian protests after the murder of 16-year-old Muhammad Abu Khedir. The municipality protected the light rail, a racist and divisive Jerusalem symbol, more than it protects Palestinian kids in its jurisdiction. Then, in May of this year, the Ministry of Defense [issued a tender](#) for Israeli military companies to develop a drone to replace the 1000 DJI drones currently in use, as the ISF seeks to use Israeli drones for higher security missions.

In addition to DJI, drones by the Israeli company Aeronautics [have also been used](#) for crowd dispersal. The company reportedly worked with the ISF in adapting their drones for tear-gas or skunk water solutions, like they did with the ["Pegasus 120"](#). Aeronautics drones were also used to shoot down incendiary kites (kites with Molotov cocktails hanging from them, often referred to as arson kites) flying from Gaza to Israel's side of the fence. Meanwhile, Aeronautics has been [under criminal investigation](#) for bombing the Armenian military on behalf of Azerbaijan as part of a demonstration of UAV technologies.

The skunk water drone, **"Shocko"** or "Shocko Velahmaniya" (chocolate milk) was also introduced during the initial weeks of protests. Skunk water is a liquid shot from a water cannon that smells foul and lingers on the body and clothes for extensive periods of time. On May 16, the Israeli Ministry of Defense [published a short video on Twitter](#) showcasing the new development by its R&D unit: "Shocko Drone"- a UAV that is able to release bags containing skunk water. Israeli newspaper Calcalist [confirmed](#) the drone was indeed manufactured by Aeronautics. One day before the Twitter update, the company [signed a contract](#) with the Croatian Ministry of Agriculture valued at 4.87m Euros.

Both skunk water and tear gas have been used by the ISF in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well. Intended to push away protestors, both methods have been used in demonstrations; however, they have both [also been used](#) as more routine means of population control alongside

stun grenades, rubber bullets, and the scream (high-pitch crowd control machine making unbearable noise).

The ISF's use of drones fits into a worldwide pattern: though today aimed primarily against Palestinians, similar technology will likely be marketed and sold to oppress others worldwide. The ISF maintains that such tactics ultimately hurt fewer people, yet they indeed are more unpredictable. While those means and tactics proclaim to be more precise, therefore more humane, their use by the ISF in the past and through the latest event show this is not the case and that those means are dangerous. Though crowd control tactics are common at demonstrations, they are used disproportionately—and randomly—by the ISF in the West Bank and Gaza. Indeed, by June it [was reported](#) that the tear gas drone was being used against Palestinian “rioters” in the West Bank. The new ISF tenders to replace DJI UAVs suggest this is only the beginning of the use of drones.

Drones shooting down kites and people

The UAVs used by the ISF in the Great March of Return were not only used to disperse crowds with tear gas or skunk water, or to shoot down incendiary kites, but also were used directly against Palestinian civilians. Though the ISF has been denying the use of armed drones for years, [testimonies](#) indicate UAVs have been used in the extrajudicial killings of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza throughout the twenty-first century in ‘special’ missions the ISF consistently rebuts.

By June, numerous reports in Israeli and Palestinian media documented the ISF's use of UAVs to fire at groups of Palestinians as they organized to defend themselves against Israeli aggression. [In one instance](#), UAVs fired a series of warning shots at a group of Palestinians making burning balloons to launch at Israeli fields; [in other instances](#), drones fired at kite-makers, and the shots [were not simply warning shots](#). Such reports are particularly noteworthy because while the ISF continues to deny its use of killer drones, it takes pride in the advancements of their ever-growing fleet of UAVs.

Prior to killing 62 protesters in the deadliest day of the Great March of Return on May 14th, [the ISF set fire](#) to piles of tires—that they expected Palestinians to burn during the demonstrations—with drones and incendiary bombs. However, the smoke of the tires obstructed the snipers' ability to shoot clearly, so measures were taken again by the ISF to improve visibility.

As weeks progressed, the ISF developed new means to counter the incendiary kite strategy employed by an increasing number of Palestinian protestors. In June, the Ministry of Defense tested a new radar system by ELTA (IAI)—originally used to detect drones—adapted to detect kites and arson balloons from Gaza. Interestingly, on June 10, ISF technological units invited the public to a brainstorming session about addressing the threat of incendiary kites using drones and other “out of the box” technologies. [Two hundred Israeli civilians attended](#)—some engineers,

some drone enthusiasts, some start-up leaders with an interest in aerospace technology. It was [announced](#) at the conference that the ISF is now recruiting volunteers to join the reserve units to shoot down kites from Gaza with drones.

Notably, IAI tested an additional drone in June in the south of Israel in front of a foreign client, [according to press reports](#). The IAI "Rotem L" UAV is a small hovercraft with a spray grenade attached to it, so lightweight that soldiers can carry up to three of them to attack different targets. That same week, [IAI signed](#) a \$600m deal to supply combat UAVs to the German military.

The use of drones to attack is a dangerous strategy that can be used in the future against protestors and passerby civilians in Palestine, without any accountability. They have the power to re-shape the reality in the occupied territories. Today, Israel already sells those drones, for example, to five different armies using them in Afghanistan. However, use in Gaza and in the West Bank are new developments. In April, 35 Israeli human rights activists filed a request to the court to learn of the ISF's policy regarding killer drones, after the ISF denied having any such rules. On April 17, the ISF was ordered by the Court to reveal some of their guidelines and policies regarding the use of killer drones and their status under international law. [Two months later](#) and the ISF still has yet to fulfill the Court order.

The Ammunition

More than anything else, the Great March of Return was controlled by ISF snipers, who claimed time and time again to be very precise in accuracy and deliberate in their use of weapons, while only shooting live ammunition to protect the border and save Israeli lives. However, the number of casualties, as well as the choice of rifles, tells a far different story. As of May 21, 7,618 protestors in Gaza received medical care for injuries caused by live ammunition. [Reports from April 22](#) alone indicate 1700 were injured by live fire on that day. Meanwhile, [reports on May 14](#) suggest there were 1400 injured then. Yet Israeli media elevated the sniper units as the heroes of the Great March of Return, frequently lauding their precision, long-term focus, and elite skills. Photos of sniper units covered the front pages of nearly every major Israeli newspaper during the first weeks of the March. On the other hand, reports and photos revealing the Palestinian victims of gunfire, and of abnormally large exit wounds, left many to question the ammunition used by the ISF.

Contrary to official ISF [media claims](#) that supposedly encouraged shooting Palestinians in the legs only after exhausting all crowd dispersal options and only in the case of a threat to Israel, testimonies on the ground painted a vastly different picture. That a [majority of injuries](#) were to the upper torso, in addition to the large number of fatalities, suggest the shootings were not acts of precision and deliberation, but rather were repeated cases of reckless shooting at best, and a deliberate policy at worse. The strategy was executed with the snipers knowing surely that both

the ISF and the Israeli media would not hold them accountable, and that the atrocities would send a message to Palestinians in the West Bank to intimidate them as well.

According to Hamushim's research, as well as information published by Israeli media, the weapon of choice in the Great March of Return was in fact the American Remington M24 rifle, which is known to shoot targets up to 800m away. [Amnesty International forensic pathologists](#) and military experts also identified wounds caused by Israeli Weapons Industries (IWI) Tavor rifles, with 5.56mm caliber ammunition. Those bullets [often leave exit wounds](#) expanding up to 15 cm to inflict maximal tissue damage. Another used was the [SR25](#), which is "*used in situations in which a relatively fast rate of fire and accuracy is needed*".

In early April, Palestinian activists and officials claimed that the ISF was using expanding (dumdum) bullets, a unique type that opens up after penetrating the skin, destroying tissue and internal organs, and causing more severe injuries for faster incapacitation. In an [interview](#) with Al-Jazeera, Ashraf al-Qedra, Gaza's Health Ministry Spokesperson noted that such bullets are the deadliest the ISF has ever used. Additionally, Israeli human rights lawyer Eitay Mack filed a FOI request on behalf of 29 human rights activists, demanding that the ISF reveal its use of live ammunition against Palestinian protesters starting March 30—specifically the types and numbers of ammunition in use. To date, the request [has not been answered](#). It is possible that the petitioners will turn to the court to obtain the information.

The Israeli IWI is a privatized branch of the Israeli Military Industries LTDs. Its Tavor rifle is celebrated as the ISF's chosen combat rifle; it was [presented](#) by the IWI as its key product at DEFEXPO in India on April 11-14. Several days after expo, [it was disclosed](#) that IWI would compete for an Indian Army tender with its Tavor rifles. Tavor is [already used](#) by the Indian Special Forces. In 2014, Eli Gold, an executive at IWI, [told The Marker](#), "*After every operation of the kind taking place in Gaza right now, we are seeing a big leap in the number of foreign customers. We market aggressively abroad as it is, but the IDF's actions definitely effect our work*". They continue to do just that.

Two petitions on the matter to the Supreme Court were denied in May. On April 15, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), Yesh Din, Gisha – Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, and HaMoked – Center for the Defense of the Individual, submitted [an urgent petition](#), demanding that the Court order the ISF to revoke the rules of engagement that permit live fire at Palestinian protesters not posing a threat to human life. Similarly, on April 23, Adalah and Al Mezan filed an [urgent petition](#) demanding that the Court order the Israeli military to stop using snipers and live ammunition to disperse Palestinian protesters. They argued the open-fire policy to be "*patently illegal and excessive, as evidenced by the high number of deaths and injuries*". One month later, three Supreme Court judges unanimously [rejected](#) the petitions, explaining that they trust the government's claims that open-fire was used as a last resort. On March 31, the ISF [tweeted](#) (and then later deleted the tweet): "*Yesterday we saw 30,000 people; we arrived*

prepared and with precise reinforcements. Nothing was carried out uncontrolled; everything was accurate and measured, and we know where every bullet landed”.

Support for the sniper strategy of non-discriminatory firing on protestors highlights Israel's systemic dehumanization of Palestinian life. One video in particular published on April 9 made headlines: from the scope of a sniper, it shows the shooting of a Palestinian protester. The clip captures a Palestinian simply standing near the fence, his random shooting by the sniper, and the evacuation of his body by other protesters, followed by the soldiers celebrating the hit and the fact it was [caught on camera](#). Immediately after the shot, the soldiers scream “yay! what a video! take that you son of bitch”. “What a legendary video,” one soldier cheers, while the other jokes about how the Palestinian flew up in the air with his foot high. Ironically, on March 23, a new bill [was discussed](#) in the Knesset forbidding the filming and photographing of on-duty ISF officers in an attempt to silence left-wing activists from documenting the criminal acts of the military.

The Fence

Finally, we must assess the validity of framing the Great March of Return internationally as simply a series of border protests. Because the March took place near the fence between Gaza and Israel, the international media rushed to celebrate the elaborate and ‘effective’ fence system Israel built to imprison Gaza and its residents, and to then advocate for similar, new ‘border’ barriers. Unlike the voices of Israeli Hasbara claim, the border at point is not a border between two sovereign states but rather a border between a country and its occupied besieged territory.

Magal Security Systems constructed the fence surrounding Gaza to enforce the brutal siege. In a [Bloomberg interview](#) published April 11, Magal's then-CEO Saar Koursh gushed, “Gaza has become a showroom for the company’s ‘smart fences,’ as customers appreciate that the products are battle-tested.” He described the 40 km fence as an elaborate system of both low- and high-tech components, designed to “deter, delay and detect” infiltration, though not aimed to stop a large-scale riot. Magal is also a key provider of border systems for the West Bank apartheid wall. Following Trump’s election, and his declaration of the construction a stronger border wall with Mexico, Magal’s stocks [surged](#) by 19-25% on [NASDAQ](#).

The Ministry of Defense typically chooses when to announce big spending projects or when to ask the government for additional funds rather deliberately. The Ministry’s timing is crucial. In October 2017, it was [announced](#) that Solel Boneh, a subsidiary of Shikun & Binui, won the Ministry of Defense’s tender to construct new Gaza barriers, valued at 880m NIS. The new contract is a combination of underground water barriers and a new 6m-high fence system. On March 27, [Israeli media reported](#) the construction of the new fence would finish in the following months, and would supposedly “Change the reality on the ground”. The following day, the Ministry of Defense [announced](#) it began building the aforementioned underwater barrier. By taking

advantage of the media coverage focused on the Great March of Return to unveil ambitious military projects without much debate, the Israeli government manipulated the public's distorted sense of safety—as it so often does—to advance their hidden economic and political agendas.

End Note- Business as Usual

On May 15, one day after the deadliest day of the Great March of Return, an annual arms conference hosted by the IsraelDefense magazine titled “Fire, Maneuvering, and Intelligence in a Complex Environment” [was held in the Tel Aviv Convention Center](#). In attendance were about one thousand ISF officials and members of the Israeli military industries. Among the keynote speakers were Yoav Galant (in command during the 2008-9 Gaza War), former Minister of Defense Moshe Ya’alon, Major Gen Kobi Barak (ISF’s Commander of Army), Minister of Intelligence Israel Katz, and head of the ISF’s Depth Corps Tal Russo. In addition, many foreign representatives attended the conference and its fancy cocktail party, learned about the new developments at the Gaza ‘border,’ and the future of combat. Sponsors of the event—whose respective booths were [also featured](#) at the expo—were Elbit Systems, IMI, IWI, Aeronautics, CTI, and others. Interestingly, [Barak declared](#) that the ISF’s ground forces were preparing for an operation similar to Mosul, Iraq, which is similar to Gaza in its demography. More interestingly, Barak was the commander [in charge of testing](#) the new “Sea of Tears” drones on the ground, and who approved the speedy acquisition of additional drones to be used against the protestors in Gaza once they were deemed ‘successful’.

The elaborate expo reveals that in times of conflicts, as Palestinians grieve, the Israeli military industry continues their business as usual, aggressively marketing their products, signing new deals, and mingling with government officials. In May and June, similar expos occurred, where they again provided businesses with opportunities to boom based on the technological advancements and strategic developments from the ISF’s massacre in Gaza.

The violent response to the Great March of Return, in which the ISF made deliberate choices to kill and permanently injure considerable numbers of Palestinian civilians, also provided the military with a platform to introduce and showcase the use of drones as the strategic choice of the present and future. The Israeli leadership and public alike celebrated the ‘effectiveness’ of the UAVs in combat. The use of both tear gas and skunk drones were also new tactics lauded by ISF supporters. As a result, they will now be further developed and deployed by the ISF in the West Bank. Furthermore, it has become increasingly clear that the offensive was indeed premeditated: the ISF was not merely acting to protect the fence, but rather planned in advance to intimidate and kill protestors. Their new combat doctrine can have dangerous consequences for civilians worldwide, as weapons and strategies tested in Gaza are traded and shared—by the profit-driven Israeli military machine—across borders.

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 - This is What Happened: testimonials of Women Human Rights Defenders Resisting the Israeli Occupation (2016).
 - The Gendered Aspect of Israeli Checkpoints in the OPT (2016)
 - The Economy of the Occupation (2014)
 - Voices from the Negev\Naqab (2014)
 - Guide for Activists Before and during Demonstrations and during Detention (2014)
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