

## BOOK REVIEW

SHIR HEVER. *The Privatization of Israeli Security* (London: Pluto Press, 2017). Pp. 256. \$25.00 paper. ISBN 9780745337197.

Since the onset of the Oslo Accords, Israel has steadily privatized its security apparatus. Rather than deny this process, the government has boasted of it, pointing to the accuracy of its intelligence services, the precision of its weapons, and the efficiency of its military tactics. Israel has also yielded handsome profits from its global arms trade, seemingly impervious to the criticism surrounding it. In 2018, the Small Arms Trade Transparency Barometer categorized Israel as one of the least transparent exporters of authorized small arms trade in the world next to Iran, North Korea, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia.

In his recent book, political economist Shir Hever explains why Israeli security elites embraced privatization and how they have turned violence into a commodity in order to preserve their status and privilege. He shows how Israel has outsourced its military occupation and subcontracted repression, and how its military-security-industrial complex interacts with the international domains of security privatization through international security companies, arms trade, and U.S. military aid. Hever is interested in how Israel is “turning blood into money” through arms deals (13). He argues that Israel exports not just technology, armaments, and experience, but also “the logic of the oppressor and a certain frame of mind” (134).

Following the book’s introduction and an elaboration on its theoretical framework, the journey to privatization is contextualized in chapter 3 through an analysis of Israel’s political economy of security. Hever highlights how the shift from a highly state-controlled security apparatus to a privatized one was neither a straightforward nor an uncontentious process. Alongside Israel’s broad turn toward neoliberalism in the mid 1980s, the privatization of security was motivated by a crisis stemming from three interconnected changes: a reduction of state resources allocated to the security establishment due to a prolonged period without conventional warfare; a corresponding drop in the prestige of the security elite, and a decline in the military conscription rate. Privatization was further facilitated by the reconceptualization of security as a package of

commodified professional skills and expertise rather than simply a function of state sovereignty.

Chapters 4 and 5 break down the process of commodification into three components: sales (mainly in the arms industry), outsourcing (such as in consultancy), and privatization by default (by encouraging individuals and private agents to participate in the production and maintenance of security as a result of the state's withdrawal from undertaking conventional security responsibilities). When Ehud Barak served as the commander in chief between 1991 and 1995, he explained these dynamics and argued that "everything which doesn't shoot or directly helps to shoot – will be cut [outsourced/privatized]" (99). Indeed, these "cuts" were not limited to logistical, food, and laundry matters – seen largely as "peripheral" functions – but rather gradually extended to the military's "core" functions, such as operating checkpoints in the West Bank. As Hever recounts, the privatization of Israeli security broke the IDF's monopoly on the use of force in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). This process occurred through the recruitment of private military and security companies (PMSCs) to maintain the occupation as well as the creation of the Palestinian Authority (PA) as Israel's indigenous subcontractor. At the time, these steps were consistent with Israel's longstanding aspiration to render the occupation invisible. More recently, the outsourcing of the occupation has also served the defense establishment's attempt to characterize its maintenance as a peripheral task, in comparison to Israel's "core" security challenges, such as the Iranian nuclear threat. Hever describes the government's current approach to the OPTs as a strategy of "willful ignorance." In the meantime, he notes, "the more [Israeli security] privatization progresses, the more it turns the Israeli occupation of the OPT into a question of money" (176).

The global dimension to Israel's journey to security privatization has been closely linked with the set of principles and policy prescriptions that accompany U.S. military aid to the country. Israeli security policies have become tethered to U.S. security policies to imitate the U.S. model of purely private ownership of arms production and high levels of privatization of the military and security. Therefore, as in the United States, private military and security companies have developed an outsized role in Israel's domestic economy as well as its foreign policy. In particular, Israel has carved a niche in the global arms sector as a specialist in homeland security products, such as surveillance equipment and riot gear, and in services intended to pacify social unrest. According to Hever, Israeli security elites are becoming increasingly globalized, and

thus the interaction between their role inside and outside Israel continues to bring its own privatization landscape closer to the American model.

The book ends with a useful appendix that summarizes the forces in Israel that have pushed for, and resisted, privatization and offers a detailed timeline of the process between 1993 and 2017. ✂

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