



VISUALIZING **PALESTINE**

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For immediate release

New Report: O’odham-Palestinian Struggles Against Militarization

On July 28, 2020, the Arizona-Palestine Solidarity Alliance (APSA) will launch a new [report](#), “Facing Down Settler Colonialism: O’odham-Palestinian Struggles,” on the increasing militarization of Palestinian and U.S.–Mexico borderlands.

Visualizing Palestine, a multidisciplinary collective that creates data-led, visual stories to advance a factual, rights-based narrative of Palestine and Israel, joined APSA to co-create “[Watched](#),” an original infographic inspired by the report.

In an interview in the first section of the report, a senior Israeli military strategist tells APSA researchers that physical border walls are “just a symbol,” urging them to “understand the whole system.” In “Facing Down Settler Colonialism,” APSA’s goal is to unearth that system, down to its settler colonial roots.

“A member of Tohono O’odham Nation, a migrant in the Sonoran desert, a Palestinian at an Israeli checkpoint, or a resident of a segregated and over-policed U.S. neighborhood—all are increasingly subject to the same technologies of repression,” explains journalist and APSA member Gabe Schivone. Israel’s largest weapons company, Elbit Systems, is behind many of

those technologies, including surveillance towers that are occupying Tohono O'odham Nation, killing migrants, and repressing protest.

Occupying Tohono O'odham Nation

As part of the Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan, Elbit Systems of America (a subsidiary of Israel's Elbit Systems) was given a \$145 million U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) contract in 2014 to construct a network of 53 camera and radar-equipped Integrated Fixed Towers (IFTs) in Southern Arizona. This "virtual wall" pilot project has potential for expansion throughout the U.S.–Mexico borderlands.

Ten IFTs are situated on Tohono O'odham reservation, placing the community under round-the-clock surveillance with the same TORCH electronic system it first developed for Israel's annexation wall. Amy Juan, Co-Founder of Tohono O'odham Hemajkam Rights Network and Community Advocate, told APSA:

The Tohono O'odham Nation is one of the most heavily militarized Indigenous communities in the United States. Our daily lives are impacted by surveillance on the ground, in the air, and now day and night with the erection of Elbit System's Integrated Fixed Towers along the 75 mile stretch of US Mexico Border on O'odham lands. Our once peaceful existence is forever changed by the policies that are implemented to provide homeland security, but instead are causing more destruction to the natural movements of Peoples and Wildlife, such as the looming border wall. We continue to resist these harmful actions to our existence, and continue to live as we always have as People of the Desert.

Amnesty International [documents](#) that, even before the addition of the towers, CBP agents were committing rights violations against Tohono O'odham citizens, including physical and verbal abuse, racial profiling, and restricted freedom of movement.

Killing Migrants

As they occupy Tohono O'odham traditional lands, IFTs also make these lands a deadly zone for migrants.

The Arizona OpenGIS Initiative for Deceased Migrants [documents](#) the details of 3,270 people who have died trying to come to the U.S. via Arizona, a fraction of the total people dead or missing throughout the U.S.–Mexico borderlands. Many of these deaths can be attributed to the predecessor project of the IFT towers, SBInet, which included Elbit Systems as a subcontractor. The authors of a recent academic study, including an APSA researcher on this report, [conclude](#): “[O]ur findings affirm that surveillance programs like SBInet work not only to increase rates of detection or interdiction, but also operate in concert with the rugged desert climate and terrain to maximize the hardship and suffering inflicted on unauthorized migrants,” including “an increase in the rate of mortality among authorized border crossers over time.”

Isabel Garcia, of Coalición de Derechos Humanos, a grassroots organization that promotes the human and civil rights of all migrants, said on the release of the APSA report:

Nelson Mandela's words that our liberation is dependent on the freedom of the Palestinian people live dramatically along the US/Mexico border region where generations of my families have lived. Much like the Palestinian people, Indigenous and Mexican populations are subjected to highly militarized policing and constriction of rights, stand accused of being criminals for being who they are, and know the pain of statelessness and separation. With over 3,643 known deaths our organization has documented along the Arizona/Sonora border since 2000, we understand that the unprecedented allocation of resources to the construction of walls and policies of death are strategic foundational pieces of US policies towards the borderlands and the Palestinian people. The expensive, both human economic, collaborations to produce these militarized zones meant to protect capital and the powerful must be deconstructed to make room for a genuine collective struggle across our borderland to Palestine and other borders across the world. Until Palestinians are free, none of us are.

Scores of US law enforcement, including Border Patrol and homeland security agents, have been trained in Israel. In an interview with one of APSA's researchers, professor and dissident Angela Davis said:

This collaboration between U.S. police forces and Israeli police forces has a very long history. Not only does the Israeli police learn from U.S. police departments – and not primarily about community policing – but U.S. police have learned a great deal from the police in Israel. This is the nature of the repressive apparatuses of the state in the age of globalization.

A Military-Police Assemblage

“Facing Down Settler Colonialism” also comes as a renewed national conversation is taking place about the militarization of U.S. policing in the wake of the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. U.S. Border Patrol, which journalist Todd Miller [has shown](#) operates far afield in the Dominican Republic, Central America, Brazil, Mexico, Kenya, South Africa, Italy, and Canada, is also implicated in America's most segregated neighborhoods.

CBP has turned its surveillance technology inward, [lending](#) drones to police at Standing Rock, using surveillance towers to monitor the “emerging threat of demonstrations” against the wall in San Diego, and [flying](#) drones over Minneapolis Black Lives Matter protests “to provide live video to aid in situational awareness at the request of our federal law enforcement partners.”

Such collaborations illustrate what sociologists have [described](#) as a “military-police assemblage birthed by the War on Drugs, and intensified by the War on Terror.” Another manifestation of this assemblage is the Law Enforcement Exchange Program (LEEP), which brought more than

11,000 U.S. law enforcement officers to Israeli conferences since 2002, including former CBP commissioner Gil Kerlikowske.

Resistance to Settler Colonialism

In examining these interconnected impacts, “Facing Down Settler Colonialism” concludes that border militarization is not a goal unto itself, but a means to an end. For settler-colonial regimes, dictating the movement of people enables them to control access to essential resources such as land, water, and labor.

Through comparative case studies, APSA explores how Palestinian traditional knowledge of agriculture and pastoralism, and O’odham traditional cultural practices in arid lands, is a form of resistance and decolonization.

In the process of decolonization, many groups are also embracing joint struggle. For example, No Más Muertes/No More Deaths, a humanitarian organization in Arizona focused on the U.S.–Mexico borderlands, endorsed the Palestinian-led BDS movement in 2014, [saying](#) “our struggle against death and suffering here in the Arizona borderlands is deeply implicated in the struggle against US-funded war and occupation in Palestine.”

Palestinian organizers are using the framework of BDS to pressure Elbit Systems through a global “Stop Elbit” campaign that includes the experiences of other communities to whom the company is “exporting apartheid.”

The Movement for Black Lives embodies an internationalist approach, [calling](#) for an end to U.S. military aid to Israel and [noting](#) that “federal policies incentivize local law enforcement’s collaboration with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) with no oversight.”

Find previews of “Facing Down Settler Colonialism: O’odham-Palestinian Struggles” [Report] and “Watched” [infographic] below. The full report will be available on APSA’s website at launch time.

Links

1. [“Facing Down Settler Colonialism: O’odham-Palestinian Struggles.”](#) a report by the Arizona-Palestine Solidarity Alliance
2. [Watched](#), an infographic by Visualizing Palestine and APSA

WATCHED

ISRAEL'S ELBIT SYSTEMS ON THE U.S. SOUTHERN BORDER

In Southern Arizona, since 2014, Israeli weapons giant Elbit Systems has installed a network of 53 surveillance towers up to 160 feet tall. These instruments of human control expand a layered system of U.S. border militarization made up of physical barriers, high-tech security, and armored patrols that lead to serious human rights violations.



KILLING MIGRANTS
3,186 recovered human remains in Arizona, 2000-2019. Most common cause of death: exposure

53
TOWERS
in Southern
Arizona

10
TOWERS
on Tohono
O'odham land

7/24
SURVEIL-
LANCE

7.5
MI RADIUS
CAMERA

13
MI RADIUS
RADAR



**VIOLATING INDI-
GENOUS TOHONO
O'ODHAM & HIA CED
O'ODHAM RIGHTS**

Members and rights groups report restricted movement; disruption of cultural/religious practices; persistent surveillance; physical/verbal abuse by border agents



**REPRESSING
FREE EXPRESSION**

Border surveillance tech appropriated to monitor "emerging threat of demonstrations" in San Diego and surveil protesters at Standing Rock

SONORA
MEXICO

**US/Mexico
borderline**

Border zone extends 100 miles into the US and as far south as Guatemala and Honduras

Tohono
O'odham
Reservation

ARIZONA
USA

Traditional
Tohono
O'odham
lands



• Victoria
age: 20

• David
age: 3

• Jessica
age: 14

1,283 RECOVERED HUMAN REMAINS
of migrants found on Tohono O'odham Reservation, 2001-2019

• = one recovered human remain

• Jesus
age: 36

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